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Seasonal Landscapes

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SEASONAL LANDSCAPES

by Talia Coker

Due to Covid, some people may have lost touch with the beauty of our environment and being outside. The use of observation and just simple looking has been neglected. My plein-air experience, which is painting from observation, has taught me to be able to look and admire the unique treasures within my environment, while allowing me to create my own. Taking photographs and being surrounded by unlimited compositions, my large scale oil paintings have been a way for me to translate the natural world around us into vibrant and serene landscapes through my own perspective. By looking and admiring the Upstate New York environment around me, I take reference pictures of nature that draw my eye in. The colorful foliage of fall and the reflections through water, to sunny snowy landscapes, the use of my bright color palette helps me bring out the secret and exciting parts of nature. Recreating these scenes of nature through oil paint and working on large scale canvases has allowed me to draw in the viewers as if they are in the spaces themselves. I include references to camera glares to connect my paintings to the fact that they are from photographs. The process of searching and looking for my compositions by capturing them through photographs plays an important role in how I create these landscapes.

My experiences and knowledge gained over the last four years have allowed me to grow exponentially as an artist. I have been engaged in many different mediums, like watercolor, sculpture, relief printmaking, life and narrative drawing, as well as oil paint. Once introduced to oil paint, I instantly loved working with it. With my charcoal drawings and painting I have always been interested in landscapes and nature. For a while, I was really interested in working with charcoal and playing with the medium. I loved being able to use an eraser and chamois cloth to pull out details in my drawings. I was able to be messy and playful with my compositions. Drawing is heavily incorporated into my work today and during my free time. I sketch constantly through my notes and sketchbook when traveling or just being home. What draws me into oil paint is the fact that it can also be messy and playful like charcoal, but with colors. I can scrape out details with a palette knife or wipe away things with a paper towel or rag. This connects to what I loved about charcoal drawings. There is always a way to redo things or change them.

When beginning my exploration and skills of oil paint, my compositions were mostly landscape. My beginning paintings were studies of works from landscape artists like American artist Georgia O'Keefe and Wilhelm Neusser. I was very interested in their creation of landscapes and how they create spaces. I was also very interested in playing with a dark color palette and being able to create dark landscapes. One of my first oil paintings was based off of a photograph I took of a sunset at a Lock near my house (Figure 1).



Figure 1) Talia Coker, *Study of Lock 8*, 2022, oil on canvas

The paintings I began with were more simplified landscapes that involved a dark color palette, like dark blues, different shades of black, and deeper warmer colors. I was really focused on the simplified versions of space. As I continued with oil painting, I learned how to paint by observation of nature and outdoors, also known as plein-air painting. The plein-air course had a huge impact on my skills and techniques within oil painting. I loved being within the environment I was painting as well as being directly involved with my composition. Due to the limited class time and weather, this allowed me to learn how to paint quickly and get the important components down first. Later, I was able to include more details if needed after the painting had some time to dry. Typically, I was working wet on wet and would only have 1-2 hour sessions on a specific composition. Ever since learning about plein-air, most of my work

has consisted of realistic landscapes. My paintings became more precise and had a brighter color palette. Each painting was a reflection of the environment and of the weather itself.



Figure 2) Talia Coker ,*Rainy Day*,2022, Oil on paper



Figure 3) Talia Coker, *Kaaterskill Falls*,2022, Oil on panel

When plein-air painting, being able to really capture the environment itself and the change of weather from observation was pretty difficult at first. I was painting during rain or shine. Due to the different types of weather, I was able to see how much the colors, highlights, shadows etc. change due to that type of weather. When it was raining, colors were more dull and dark, which made me have to play around with different types of colors and shades. For example, the shadows from the sun become less extreme and the colors of plants become less saturated. When it was super sunny, it was important to find the brightest brights of colors and make those areas really shine or pop out. For colors to look bright, it is important to use complimentary colors. Painting through observation can also have its negatives. It is important to paint pretty

quickly to be able to capture what type of composition you want because weather can change quickly and unexpectedly. When painting a sunny day, one cloud could alter all the colors in that scene. In my painting *Kaaterskill Falls* (Figure 3), I focused on painting water and the highlights and reflections through the water. If the sun changed, the water could completely change. Also the fact that the water is moving can create challenges when painting on-site.

My series *Seasonal Landscapes* are influenced by plein- air as well as incorporating similar color palettes and techniques from observation that relate to each composition. I have continued to rely on oil paint as my main source of medium for my work. Compared to all the mediums I have played with, oil paint has been my favorite and the one I use for my landscapes now. My compositions have grown to be less simplified and more realistic. Although my paintings are not painted directly from observation, my work is based on environments I have been exposed to many times and from photographs I have taken specifically for paintings.

There are many experiences and skills I have gained to strengthen and influence my current work. One of the sayings that has stuck with me by my thesis advisor and professor Laini Nemett was “You do not need to know how to draw to be able to paint”, I never realized until plein-air painting that it is true. Before really getting into oil painting, I would over-analyze and stress about drawing out my composition before adding paint. I felt like I really needed the pencil outline in order to organize my paintings. With plein-air, it was all about blocking in colors and shapes instead of drawing. There was no time to lay out an underdrawing before painting. This made me become more confident in organizing my paintings quicker and more efficiently. I was less worried about messing up because I knew with oil paint I could wipe it away and re-start. Since my thesis series of landscapes was not based on observation, I used reference photographs of the compositions I wanted to create through my perspective. My

paintings are based off of photographs taken by myself from around Schenectady/Rotterdam, New York. Since my plein-air course, I have been obsessed with painting fall foliage. During a fall hike, it was perfect for me to start capturing some of the fun colors of the trees throughout the woods. From the millions of fall photos, I took one with an up-close fence in the composition with tons of colors throughout the trees. This photo was a reference for my painting *Fenced in Fall*, 40" x 44". Connecting back to my painting *Kaaterskill Falls*, I had fun painting water. When walking through Plotter Kill Preserve in Rotterdam New York, I found a beautiful still pool of water which reflected a mass of yellow trees and the woods around it. I really wanted to capture the still reflection of the environment of the woods. This photo was a reference for my painting *Nature's Mirror* which is 42" x 44". In addition to the fall photographs I took, I wanted to also get some winter landscapes. I had never painted snow and was excited to experiment with it. My backyard has a lot of land and woods. One evening, the sun was shining through the woods making the shadows of the trees look blue. Since I was taking the photograph on my iphone, the sun created a red/green glare on the photo. I knew instantly I wanted to include the glare in my painting. This reference photo was used for my painting *Winter Glare*, 38" x 40". Finally, for my last composition, I captured another winter landscape. This one was different because it had a red/purple barn in this composition which I typically do not include in my paintings. The shadows on the snow were abstract and fun. This photograph was used as a reference for my last painting, *Magenta Sunset*, 44" x 46".

Since the landscapes were my largest works, being able to block in the composition compared to drawing it in was important. I was able to block in shapes and colors very quickly even when working large. Although these paintings are not plein-air, I applied that technique to my current work. Instead of painting from observation, I would go to the site I knew had

compositions I was interested in, capture them through photographs, and paint based on the photos. I also used my underpainting color as a tool to block in my paintings. With my first painting of this series, I used a bright yellow as an underpainting and used it to my advantage for most of the middleground/background for a huge mass of yellow trees and foliage. For my last painting, I used a magenta pink for my underpainting. This allowed for the pink to show throughout the snow and even the sky. I used to be very specific with using a deep orange or brownish color for my under paintings and never really used them to my advantage. Once I knew the type of palette and mood I wanted for the painting, the underpainting became crucial for my landscapes.

For my first painting *Nature's Mirror* (Figure 4), I wanted the viewer to really feel like they were in the painting. The rocks in the foreground are somewhat large and outline the bottom part of the canvas. Since the woods were closer than the mass of yellow trees, it was important to keep the woods in shadow and use darker colors. The water reflected the woods in the foreground and middle ground as well as the background with the yellow trees and the sky. To create depth, I needed to create an atmospheric perspective. I added less detail in the background and more detail to the middle ground and foreground of the landscape. The trees in the background were more a mass of trees instead of specific trees.



Figure 4) Talia Coker, *Nature's Mirror*, 2023, Oil on primed canvas

To create the reflection in the water, I worked mostly abstractly. The reflections of the woods and the branches were extremely abstract and complicated in the photo. To create that sort of wavy and messy movement through the reflection, I used a dark glaze and painted in quick motions without really focusing too much on the exact copy from the photograph. Once I had the layout of the dark parts of the reflection, I went back in and pulled out specific moments to replicate the water in the photo. With the reflection of the mass of yellow trees, I painted the reflection of them and the trees themselves back and forth. Whatever color I was using throughout the mass of trees, I would put the same color in the reflection, but less precise. The water looks more blurry than the trees themselves. The trees in the middle ground to the left are in shadow. I worked in layers and found specific shapes of colors to make them look realistic yet simplified. I used a dry brush of different shades of greens to bring out the texture of the leaves. I also included a centralized twisting tree in the middle that was also in the photo. The leaves on this tree were

extremely simplified in the painting and also were different types of leaves from the other trees. I wanted the tree in the middle to be simple so that it did not take up the whole painting especially since it was already centralized. I added a lot of details throughout the ground and the tree roots to the left of the centralized tree to help move the viewer's eye across the painting.

The second painting I worked on was the second fall painting *Fenced in Fall* (Figure 5). This painting consisted of a full color palette with bright colors. At first, I was very overwhelmed due to the many colors throughout the foliage of the trees. I blocked in the different colors and shapes of the trees based off of the photograph. I worked quickly and mostly wet on wet during the first painting session to create the trees. For the fence, I worked more precisely and specifically from the photograph. I wanted the fence to be up close to the viewer so they are able to feel like they are in that landscape themselves. The fence had dark and light browns throughout and details of wood grain and slits in the wood. By bringing out those specific details, the fence feels very realistic and somewhat “fences in” the landscape.



Figure 5) Talia Coker, *Fenced in Fall*, Oil on primed canvas, 40” x 44”

This landscape is very chaotic and has a variety of colors and shapes. Instead of painting every single leaf, they are painted as masses of color. To create space, along with the fence, I painted the foreground of the painting more specifically within the leaves, reflection of the puddle of water, plants etc. Towards the background, the trees and ground are less specific and have less detail. Since there were so many tree branches and tree trunks, I pulled them out throughout the leaves of the trees to the left and the right of the middle ground. Once everything was mostly laid in, I went back into the leaves of the trees and pulled out specific shapes to shape out the trees better.

For my third painting, I worked on a winter landscape called *Winter Glare* (Figure 6). This was my first winter landscape I had ever done. The color palette for this painting was more limited. These colors included mostly shades of blues, blacks, yellow ochre, and whites. For this painting, I was not only concerned with the landscape itself, but also the effects from the photograph. The photo captured a very bright glare from the sun as well as an oval red and green sun glare. To connect my painting to the photograph, I wanted to include the glares in my painting. I painted in the trees first as well as laying in the shadows in the snow. The shadows were more specific to where the trees were. The light from the sun back-lit the trees. In order to create that effect, I used yellow ochre in the back layer of the trees and then added highlights on the tree trunks that were closer to the middleground and in front of the sun glare. The shadow colors I used were mostly darker blues. To create more brightness from the sun, I added highlights on the snow to contrast with the blue shadows.



Figure 6) Talia Coker, *Winter Glare*, 2023, oil on primed canvas, 38" x 40"

To create texture throughout the trees, I used my palette knife to play around with the shapes of the silhouettes of the leaves. After that, I used a smaller brush and created more specific leaves. I also used a smaller brush to create sticks and dead plants towards the right of the middle ground. To create the sun glare, I used a glaze of white as well as blue. I used a thin and smaller amount of glaze to create thinner rays of light.

For my last painting, I did another winter landscape. This painting is called *Magenta Sunset* (Figure 7). This landscape was unique to me due to the fact that there was a barn, a glare from the sun and crazy shadows on the snow. I laid in everything pretty fast from the sky, to the shadows on the ground and where the trees would be etc. The landscape felt like it was missing something. Since I used a bright pink as my underpainting, the pink was coming through the snow which I really enjoyed and thought worked well. The rest of the painting was least exciting.

Thanks to my peers and advisor, I decided to go from a sunny day landscape to a magenta sunset. This changed the painting drastically. This allowed me to play with all the aspects of the composition in a different way. I used a magenta glaze and covered the entire painting. I used a rag to pull out the parts I did not want touched with pink. I left the sky and the snow covered in the pink glaze. I went back into the sky with more magenta as well as a bright coral color and yellow. The trees now had an orange glow from the sunset and the glare. I also added different shades of pink and orange to the sky and throughout the snow. The barn became more engulfed in shadow and had highlights of the sunset on the roof.

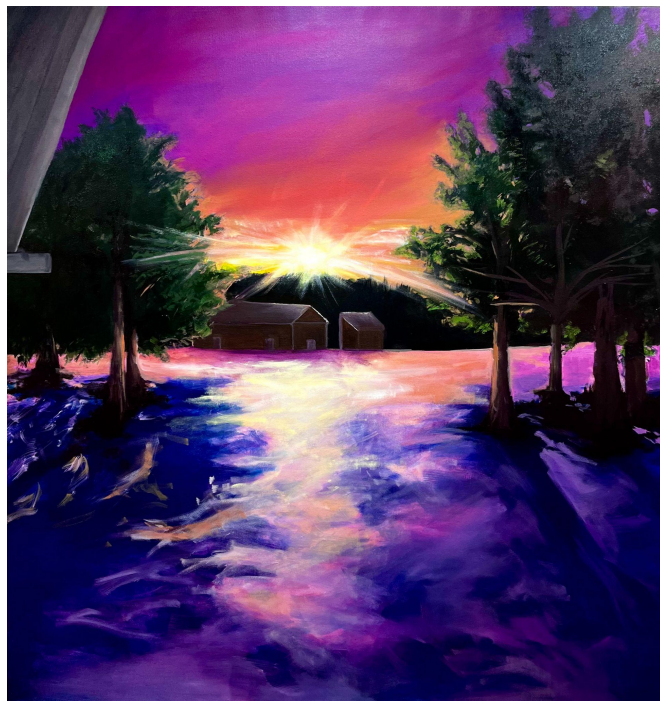


Figure 7) Talia Coker, *Magenta Sunset*, 2023, Oil on primed canvas, 44" x 46"

The trees in the background are silhouetted. The trees in the foreground were done with shades of greens and blacks. I used the different shades to create a glow on the trees as well as giving them specific shapes. The shadows underneath the tree trunks are in a dark blue and fade into light shades of purples and pinks. I used orange and yellow mixed with white to create highlights within the snow. In the left corner of the composition, I also included a part of the inner roof of the back patio in my backyard. This allowed me to create more depth within the painting.

Even though these paintings are based on photographs, I have added my own perspective and style to the landscapes. This includes the color palettes I used, textures or techniques I used to create parts of the landscape like trees or water, and even the compositions themselves. The compositions are determined by what I found interesting or unique throughout nature. By adding the references to a “photograph” like the glares the sun makes or the phone glare, it connects the landscape back to a photograph.

Landscape artists I have been influenced by throughout my thesis series are Contemporary artists Claire Sherman, Keiran Brennan Hinton and American painter Fairfield Porter. These artists have inspired me through their techniques of painting, compositions, and color palettes. All their works are similar in the fact that they are realistic landscapes.

Claire Sherman uses oil paint for her main medium within her landscapes. Her process is what inspired me a lot for my work. She creates paintings typically within a day. These sessions can be from 12-15 hours of painting and then she makes minor changes after. This influenced me to be able to work in longer sessions and lay in as much as I can in those sessions. I typically work faster and can connect to Claire Sherman for her process. A painting I am drawn to by her is called *Trees and Vines* (Figure 8).

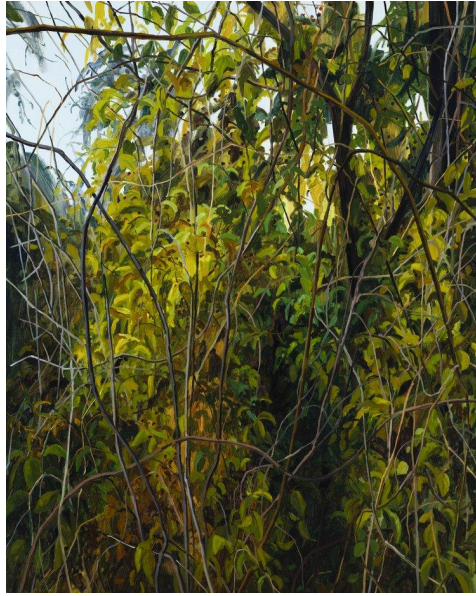


Figure 8) Claire Sherman, *Trees and Vines*, 2022, Oil on canvas, 72x60"

Claire Sherman's compositions are typically of a more zoomed in landscape. She focuses on a specific part of the landscape and dives into the extreme detail of it. The color palette she uses for this work is realistic to the type of landscape she is capturing. I also connect to this type of color palette throughout my own work. Even though the composition is zoomed in, she still is able to create distance in the background. She has slight moments of distant trees which help push back the space. It is interesting to see how much detail she can create within one long session of painting. She is specific about where she puts colors and paint to keep the painting looking fresh

Keiran Brennan Hinton is a plein-air painter who works based on observation. His palettes are limited to the specific scene he is painting. A lot of his paintings' compositions are of everyday scenes and landscapes. One of his works that inspired me is *Sun Shower* (Figure 9).



Figure 9) Keiran Brennan Hinton, *Sun Shower*; 2020, Oil on canvas, 56x48”

In *Sun Shower*, Keiran uses a bright yellow underpainting as a way to pull out the brights and highlights throughout his landscapes. He uses a rag to pull out these details throughout the grass and the bushes. This inspired me to use my underpainting as a tool for my painting and leave some of it showing. His landscapes are also very detailed and realistic. He also simplifies his trees down to different shades and shapes instead of painting every single detail.

Fairfield Porter has also influenced my work with his simplified way of painting landscapes.



Figure 10) Fairfield Porter, *Sunrise on South Main Street*, 1973, Oil on canvas, 43x55"

This work looks extremely detailed at first glance. However, when breaking down each section of the composition, the components seem simplified. For example, the trees in the middle of the canvas have a highlight and a shadow that creates the tree. There are negative shapes being pulled out to create the shapes of the bushes. The grass contains only a lighter and darker green, one for the shadows and one for the highlights. Porter is precise on which color goes next to another. Having two colors, one dark and one light, next to each other can create a tree. This technique inspired me in how to efficiently create different forms. I now focus on the shapes of colors from the highlights and the shadows to create my own landscapes.

All three of these artists have been an influence for my series of landscapes. I have learned to simplify elements of my landscapes, work more quickly in longer sessions, and use my underpainting as a tool for my whole painting. I have also learned how to paint for a larger scale landscape and these skills and techniques have helped me tremendously.

My series of four seasonal landscapes were done in many different sessions of painting. These four paintings are large scale and were done over the course of a couple months within 2023. The overall challenge of creating my series of work was to determine when a painting was completely finished. It is difficult to choose when one of my paintings should be left alone or continued to be worked on. My experience of painting from observation had a huge impact on my work and style as a painter. Multiple critiques and amazing feedback from my advisor and peers have allowed me to strengthen these works to where they are now. These critiques were done each week through my advisor and other thesis painters. Critiques gave me new perspectives and ideas on my series of work through ways of painting, techniques, imagery, color palette etc. This series of landscapes has been a challenge to paint, but also has pushed me into the artist I am today.

Citations

Figure 1) Coker, Talia. *Study of Lock 8*, 2022, Oil on canvas, owned by Talia Coker.

Figure 2) Coker, Talia. *Rainy Day*, 2022, Oil on paper, owned by Talia Coker.

Figure 3) Coker, Talia. *Kaaterskill Falls*, 2022, Oil on canvas panel, owned by Talia Coker.

Figure 4) Coker, Talia. *Nature's Mirror*, 2023, Oil on primed canvas, owned by Talia Coker.

Figure 5) Coker, Talia. *Fenced in Fall*, 2023, Oil on primed canvas, owned by Talia Coker.

Figure 6) Coker, Talia. *Winter Glare*, 2023, Oil on primed canvas, owned by Talia Coker.

Figure 7) Coker, Talia. *Magenta Sunset*, 2023, Oil on primed canvas, owned by Talia Coker.

Figure 8) Sherman, Claire. *Trees and Vines*, 2022, Oil on canvas. Accessed on 17 May 2023 from

<https://www.clairesherman.com/new-page-1>

Figure 9) Hinton, Keiran. *Sun Shower*, 2020, Oil on canvas. Accessed on 17 May 2023 from

<https://www.keiranbrennanhinton.com/2020>

Figure 10) Porter, Fairfield. *Sunrise on South Main Street*, 1973, Oil on canvas, Owned by The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Accessed on 17 May 2023 from

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/481499>