



Something Deep and True

Contemporary landscapes of Koch stir the imagination a PFAC

By Fran Ward

It's a moment of perfection! Standing in a gallery among watercolor landscapes by Philip Koch, we can slow our pace, come to a complete halt and breathe a sigh of relief. We're here now! That's all that matters. The art of Philip Koch has provided us a beautiful respite.

There's more to Koch's landscapes than meets the eye in "Unbroken Thread," an exhibition of Philip Koch's contemporary landscapes at the Peninsula Fine Arts Center through October 2.

Timelessness is central to Koch's works. Each picture is a frozen vignette of Nature at its grandest simplicity. While this artist captured his vision, his artist models (sky, water, trees and hills) posed without moving. His paintings depict places where the earth is untouched and there is no trace of a specific time. There is no year. There is only forever.

The large works present an immediate awakening of all the senses. Vivid blocks of color first attract us. Upon closer glance, we see scenery, as expected. There are foregrounds and backgrounds, broad swipes of nature, color and silhouettes.

As we stand in either of the two galleries devoted solely to work from his collection, we feel a distinct impact. Singling out an individual picture, we experience its sensuous nature. For observing is an experience of the senses, not the intellect, as we witness the moment Koch recorded that particular vision of beauty.

We share his view on cold mountaintops on a clear day as we overlook land and water below. On a buggy, muggy day, we stand at still water and hear big-winged insects buzz by our ears. As day ends, we observe bands of sky hold tightly to their vivid hues until last light as the temperature drops.

They are his expressions of New England—whether on the rugged coast of Maine or in a valley in the White Mountains. He does not recreate from photographs. He creates from the imagination. Before he paints, he draws using vine charcoal—a

natural substance for storing his particular memory of nature.

He attributes his art to the location, his experiences and a continuation of work that preceded his. "Koch feels that artists of the past were crucial to his maturing into a professional artist and their creativity is an 'unbroken thread' of which he has become an extension."

Formerly an abstract painter, Koch discovered the work of Edward Hopper, a 20th century American artist. "The sunlight and long shadows in his work absolutely enchanted me." Koch fell under Hopper's spell, decided to become a realist painter, and has painted at Hopper's studio using Hopper's easel.

I believe another common thread is that we, the viewers, are an element of each tableau. By looking at the scenery, we become part of the art. We breathe in nature and become part of its depiction. We share an air of contentment with the art, artist and natural setting.

There comes a realization, though, that the room is not about the art, and not about the artist. It is about the majesty of Nature, its peace and tranquility.

Koch has a gift for presenting what he experienced so we can experience it, too.

He says, "When you do it right, art is clearer than reality. Every now and then you see something deep and true."

A professor at the Maryland Institute College of Art, Koch hopes to be doing what he's doing for the next 30 years. Here's to now and 30 more years "of something deep and true!" **V**

Unbroken Thread: Nature Painting and the American Imagination—The Art of Philip Koch and The Virginia Landscape: Works on Paper
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