



# *TEXTure*

**The Landscape Paintings of David Coughtry and Duncan Martin**

**September 13 - October 22, 2022**

Opening reception: Tuesday, September 13, 5:00 - 6:30 p.m.

and

Special Homecoming reception: Friday, October 14, 5:00 - 6:30 p.m.

James K. Schmidt Gallery  
Voney Art Center, Principia College  
Elsah, Illinois 62028



*Great Basin, (Great Basin National Park),*  
2013, oil on canvas, 60" x 48", Private  
Collection, artist: Duncan Martin

*Hurricane, 1986-2022, oil on canvas,*  
54" x 60", artist: David Coughtry



(front left) *Blue Drone, 2022, (detail), oil on canvas, 72" x 48"* artist: David Coughtry

(front right) *Abraham and Isaac, Court of the Patriarchs, 2022 (detail), oil on panel, 16" x 20"*, artist: Duncan Martin



# ***Couplings: The Work of David Coughtry and Duncan Martin***

By Paul Ryan

*Ah, not to be cut off,  
not through the slightest partition  
shut out from the law of the stars.  
The inner—what is it?  
if not intensified sky,  
hurled through with birds and deep  
with the winds of homecoming.*

– Rainer Maria Rilke, *Ah, not to be cut off*

*By asserting that perception, phenomenologically considered, is inherently participatory, we mean that perception always involves, at its most intimate level, the experience of an active interplay, or coupling, between the perceiving body and that which it perceives. Prior to all our verbal reflections, at the level of our spontaneous, sensorial engagement with the world around us, we are all animists.*

– David Abram, from *The Spell of the Sensuous*

*What is important now is to recover our senses. We must learn to see more, to hear more, to feel more.*

– Susan Sontag, from *Against Interpretation*

## ***Introduction: The Exhibition's Title and Intent***

Through an atypical use of upper-case letters, the word that is the title of this exhibition, *TEXTure*, becomes a hybrid concept that suggests two important aspects in the landscape paintings of David Coughtry and Duncan Martin, especially when considered together: text and texture. The exhibition title suggests how even a single painting, much less a curated collection of them, is both form and forum. *TEXT* signifies ways that visual art generates ideas and the role of language in communicating content, the verbal discourses and narratives—some personal, some art historical or based in aesthetics, and others conceptual or theory-based—that encircle and run through the artists' respective work and studio practices, both intentionally and unwittingly. *TEXT* also refers to the layered dialogues between Coughtry's and Martin's paintings, to the ways they "talk" with one another, emphasizing similarities and dissimilarities in form and content. And, *TEXT* (as well as the double meaning of the full title, *TEXTure*) refers to how a painting's literal surface is a type of nonverbal text to be "read" by the viewer. Finally, there is the textuality of nature itself (nature as *TEXT*)—the cultural and political representations of nature that affect our engagement with objective, actual nature.

The second aspect of the title, texture, represents the sensuousness of the form of painting—the "body" of a painting—and for this exhibition, the tactility and liveliness of both artists' preferred medium, oil paint, as it is employed across canvas, wood panels, or paper. Far from inanimate, under a sensitive eye and hand, oil paint's elastic physical properties transform neutral flat surfaces into fetishized objects, creating a unique objectness that, throughout the history of oil painting from Rembrandt to Cecily Brown, resounds with feeling, sensitivity, and searching. As the modernist painter Kazimir Malevich said: "[a]



*Portage, Dawn, 2022, oil on panel, 13.25" x 48", artist: David Coughtry*

painted surface is a real, living thing.”<sup>1</sup> Coughtry’s surfaces contain deep romanticist traces, inherent emotional qualities that stream like electricity from the artist’s direct experiences with the natural world to the studio and the activity of painting. And, in touch with the painterly actions that defined Abstract Expressionism, Martin’s gestural surfaces and use of thick paint imply a lyrical collaboration with the physicality and rhythms of seas, rivers, mountains, flora.

Conceptually the exhibition taps into a recent movement in curatorial practices, one that features combinations or juxtapositions of artists’ works that are in conversation aesthetically and conceptually. Examples include: “Jane Freilicher and Thomas Nozkowski: True Fictions” (The Milton Resnick and Pat Passlof Foundation, NYC, 11/5/21 – 2/26/22); “Living Histories: Queer Views and Old Masters” (The Frick Collection, Frick Madison, NYC, 9/21 – 9/11/22); and, Principia College’s own “Air-to-Air: Jane Barrow in Conversation with Cheryl Wassenaar” (The James K. Schmidt Gallery, Voney Art Center, Principia College, 9/7/21 – 10/9/21). In the case of *TEXTure*, the central intent is twofold: to generate new, meaningful dialogue about and between the art of Coughtry and Martin, considering each artist’s work through the lens of the other, and, of course, in the context of the work of other artists; and, to celebrate the friendship and professional relationship shared by these two artists for nearly 70 years.

## ***An Uncommon Friendship***

*David is one of a very few people I move through a landscape with and have the kind of immediate nonverbal response –felt, known, visceral,[a common] seeing and reading of the landscape. An untiring curiosity, delight...insatiable, painterly; individual but shared.*

- Duncan Martin, from an informal narrative co-authored by David Coughtry and Duncan Martin about their life-long friendship (summer 2022)

*It was...in the presence of [Martin’s] drawings I...felt that I must focus on such a heightened development when pursuing my art practice. I have since said many times that Duncan is one of the best painters I know.*

- David Coughtry, from an informal narrative co-authored by David Coughtry and Duncan Martin about their life-long friendship (summer 2022)

It’s rare to organize and/or experience a serious art exhibition that has at its heart a feature that might be described as charming. *TEXTure* is such an exhibition, and, in this case, that component is the life-long

friendship of the two featured artists. Coughtry and Martin are not just acquaintances but close personal friends whose individual lives have run parallel, diverged, and converged in rhythmic cycles from their births in the 1950s through the present. Martin was born in Chandler, Arizona, and Coughtry in Albany, New York. Both families relocated to Delmar, New York, a suburb of Albany, where, for most of their childhoods, David and Duncan lived within a few blocks of one another. They attended the same Christian Science Sunday School for years; both came from homes where there was a relatively sophisticated sense of visual culture; and, both were influenced by the encouraging instruction of their art teacher in grade school, sculptor Stan Reich. Growing up, Coughtry and Martin were active in Scouting and wilderness camping. Coughtry mostly explored the trails and rivers of the Adirondacks and Catskills while Martin camped throughout Maine and the White Mountains of New Hampshire—experiences that, according to Martin, were “formative for both [artists]...as landscape painters.” And, in their teens along with other friends, they attempted to start a rock band (!)—something Coughtry eventually did with some degree of success with the band “Fourth Street Generation.”

Both artists earned the B.A. in studio art from Principia College, Martin in 1976 and Coughtry in 1977, where they studied with nationally-recognized watercolorist James Green, painter and modernist James Schmidt, metalsmith and draftsman Judith McCreary Felch, and surrealist painter Glenn Felch. Principia’s studio program at that time, while extremely popular and adept at cultivating a strong work ethic and the “art spirit” among its students, was aesthetically and conceptually extremely traditional, particularly in the context of the cultural advancements of postmodernism and the larger art world’s aesthetic innovations, explorations of new media, and deepening links to cultural theory and deconstruction. While gaining a strong studio foundation within the Green-Schmidt-Felch ethos, a more sophisticated and updated artistic awareness/development occurred for both artists during graduate school. Coughtry received his MFA in painting from The State University of New York at Albany in 1984, studying with renowned painter Mark Greenwold and art historian and noted Jasper Johns scholar Roberta Bernstein, who, through the school’s proximity to New York City, shared first-hand with students the deep relevance and vitality of contemporary art. Martin received his MFA in painting in 1986 from The University of Pennsylvania, where he studied with important contemporary landscape painter Neil Welliver, who in addition to his persuasive teaching directed a fine visiting artist/critic program that introduced his students to the ideas of visual arts professionals such as Vija Celmins, Alex Katz, Janet Fish, Jane Freilicher,



*Sunset, Beaver Pond (Cuyahoga Valley National Park), 2019, oil on yupo paper, 11" x 14",  
artist: Duncan Martin*



John Yau, and Donald Kuspit.

Both artists returned to Principia College to teach—Coughtry for a total of 22 years and Martin for a total of 20—and are now emeritus professors in studio art. Sometimes team-teaching courses and collaborating on various pedagogical projects within the studio program, especially in their early years of teaching, they helped to maintain its strength and began to move it in a more progressive direction; and, both played important roles in developing a practical and dynamic vision for the new Voney Art Center which opened in 2017. During their tenure Martin directed two study abroad programs in studio art in Scotland; and Coughtry, along with studio colleague Dan Kistler, co-directed two programs in Turkey and Greece. Martin has said the following about their experiences of teaching together, a professional association that was, if not symbiotic, then certainly complementary:

*We were a good teaching combination. [As within our] painting, we found a common bond in the synergy of ideas and approaches to teaching. I deeply respect David's attention to every detail of his courses... (from an informal narrative co-authored by Coughtry and Martin about their life-long friendship, summer 2022)<sup>2</sup>*

Coughtry and Martin collaborated on a three-month painting sabbatical to Scotland in the fall of 1989—an experience that Martin has described as “truly significant...for both...strengthening our friendship and clarifying the intersections of our painting practice as well as distinguishing our differences...”<sup>3</sup> The project included a fully-funded residency at Shennanton House, a 1,000-acres estate in Dumfries and Galloway, Scotland, and a commission to create paintings that would be permanently installed in the renovated estate. By the project’s end, each painter left 12 paintings for the estate, images that to this day remain in the house, reflecting the “...rivers, lochs, and distant heather-covered mountains in the company of ever-present sheep...in all shades of weather...” as Martin has described the texture of their days working in Scotland.<sup>4</sup>



*Martin and Coughtry near Glencoe Scotland, 1989*

## Perception as Coupling

...the early French anthropologist Lucien Levy-Bruhl...used the word "participation" to characterize the animistic logic of indigenous, oral peoples—for whom ostensibly "inanimate" objects like stones or mountains are often thought to be alive, for whom certain names, spoken aloud, may be felt to influence at a distance the things or beings that they name, for whom particular plants, particular animals, particular places and persons and powers may all be felt to participate in one another's existence, influencing each other and being influenced in turn.

– David Abram, from *The Spell of the Sensuous*

*Perception, in Merleau-Ponty's work, is precisely this reciprocity, the ongoing interchange between my body and the entities that surround it. It is a sort of silent conversation that I carry on with things, a continuous dialogue that unfolds far below my verbal awareness—and often, even, independent of my verbal awareness... Whenever I quiet the persistent chatter of words within my head, I find this silent or wordless dance always already going on—this improvised duet between my animal body and the fluid, breathing landscape that it inhabits.*

– David Abram, from *The Spell of the Sensuous*

Although the personal and professional bonds between Coughtry and Martin are an important frame providing windows of human interest and biographical contexts for viewing the work, the heart of the exhibition is the seriousness and aesthetic quality of the paintings, individually and in dialogue with a variety of ideas in the visual arts and other disciplines. Paintings by both artists typically reflect a felt connection to their subject matter, achieved through an intuitive working of surface and composition and sensitivity to the expressiveness of color. The means or process for attaining this result—a distinguishing and necessary feature of both their practices—is a pattern of immersion in nature and the artist's expression of a deep humility in its presence before the act of painting begins, whether working *en plein air* or returning to the studio to paint the landscape. An excerpt from Coughtry's current artist's statement describes this intention and practice:

*I am reminded of a particular sublime fortnight of painting in a forest, working solo late fall on Shelving Rock in the Adirondack mountains. The Eden-like terrain was a lone comfort, aside from the desired objective of studying and painting there earnestly, if not lovingly. In the face of isolation, devoid of domestic comforts, I began to discern among these wilds a timeless, incontrovertible sense of a presence, that was invariably over me, walking with me---a stable, guiding and directing presence. The forest became a homeland. Paintings from the experience were transformative, beyond previous artistic competency, with little sense of sovereign authorship. Liking to Henry David Thoreau—"I took a walk in the woods and came out taller than the trees."<sup>5</sup>*

And a quote by the modernist American landscape painter, John Marin, cited often in the past few years by Martin during artist's talks and on his website echoes this process and reflects Martin's sentiments:

*How to paint the landscape: First you make your bow to the landscape. Then you wait, and if the landscape bows to you, then, and only then, can you paint the landscape.<sup>6</sup>*

Both of these statements, hints of the depth of their experiences in nature, suggest an alignment by Coughtry and Martin with animism—a concept and sensibility often associated with indigenous populations

who acknowledge the aliveness of inanimate objects and natural phenomena, a way of interacting with the world that does not involve translation of matter into spirit or a “transcendent” erasure of the sensing body, but rather recognizes the soul in all things and beings in the present physical world. This concept/sensibility is at the heart of German philosopher Edmund Husserl’s (1859-1938) pioneering ideas regarding the philosophical discipline of phenomenology, especially his idea of *Lebenswelt*, or the “life-world.” Contemporary philosopher-ecologist David Abram describes the “life-world” in this way in his seminal 1996 book, *The Spell of the Sensuous*:



*El Capitan*, (Yosemite National Park), 2019-22, oil on canvas, 72" x 70", artist: Duncan Martin

*The life-world is the world of our immediately lived experience, as we live it, prior to all our thoughts about it...[it] is the world as we organically experience it in its enigmatic multiplicity and open-endedness, prior to conceptually freezing it into a static space of “facts”...*<sup>7</sup>

Abram goes on to discuss links between Husserl’s ideas and French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s (1908-1961) radical revision of phenomenology with an emphasis on Merleau-Ponty’s idea of the participatory nature of perception. Addressing Merleau-Ponty’s embrace of the sensing body and his critiques of human exceptionalism and the objectifying stance of the subject-object dichotomy, Abram describes the philosopher’s sense of perception as participation with what is seen, as “...reciprocity, the ongoing interchange between [one’s] body and the entities that surround it.”<sup>8</sup> He adds, “...[neither] the perceiver nor the perceived...is wholly passive in the event of perception.”<sup>9</sup>

Such perception/participation seems to be at the heart of the ways that Coughtry and Martin experience nature, which then moves them to paint within the spirit of communal interactions of the sensing body and nature. If this is so, they are inadvertent or accidental phenomenologists, and their art signifies a



"recuperation of the living landscape," to appropriate Abram, who goes on to state:

*As we return to our senses, we gradually discover our sensory perceptions to be simply our part of a vast, interpenetrating webwork of perceptions and sensations borne by countless other bodies—supported, that is, not just by ourselves, but by icy streams tumbling down granite slopes, by owl wings and lichens, and by the unseen, imperturbable wind.<sup>10</sup>*

## Painting as Coupling



*Into the Saguaro*, (Saguaro National Park), 2009, oil on canvas, 36" x 48", Private Collection, artist: Duncan Martin

*As a painter, cursed or blessed with a terrible and vital sensuousness, I must look for wisdom with my eyes.*  
– Max Beckmann, from "On My Painting" (1938)

*The mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible.*  
– Oscar Wilde, from a letter

The epigraph by David Abram at the beginning of this essay in part states:

"perception always involves, at its most intimate level, the experience of an active interplay, or coupling, between the perceiving body and that which it perceives."

This "active interplay, or coupling, between the perceiving body and that which it perceives" not only describes the act of seeing in the creative processes of Coughtry and Martin, but it also extends to their processes of painting—processes that involve the physical senses and an open awareness, a "vital sensuousness," as German Expressionist painter Max Beckmann described—that are nonverbal

linguistic responses to particular experiences. The approaches to landscape painting that Coughtry and Martin embrace involve “speaking” through paint—marking, layering, composing, creating within the sensuous language of painting in a sensuous world. This process does not enact a subject/object, or artist/landscape, dichotomy. Ideally there is not a separation between the artist and the field of sensory experience but, rather, immersion/participation and a coupling with nature. Because of the perceived aliveness/soul of perceived things, it is a fluid back-and-forth, a conjoining occurrence. Abram writes about the idea of the “flesh of language” as a way of signifying language’s embodied, pre-verbal origins where there is already an exchange between the perceiver and the living world. Not only does the act of painting, through the lush tactility and flexibility of the medium of paint and its physical connections to the human body, singularly signify the “flesh of language,” in some very real ways for painters like Coughtry and Martin it is the “flesh of language.” And so, their paintings are actually events within or inspired by this sensory communication, and then as objects, signify what could be described as spiritual (though anchored in the physical, organic world)—a term that Coughtry sometimes uses in describing his creative practice—but what could also be called, echoing the title of Abram’s book, expressive representations of “the spell of the sensuous.”



*Twilight, River Road, 2010, oil on canvas, 36" x 36", artist: David Coughtry*





*Over the Chain*, 1990, oil on canvas, 30" x 45", artist: David Coughtry

### ***Coupling with Context: The Centuries-long Project of Landscape Painting***

*I think having land and not ruining it is the most beautiful art that anybody could ever want.*

– Andy Warhol

The genre of landscape painting has its origins in Chinese painting of the 4th century. During the 10th through 12th centuries it culminated in a period known as the "Great Age of Chinese landscape" where the defining element of a painting was its expression of a quality referred to as "Spirit Resonance," content gleaned from a symbiotic flow of energy between a painting's theme, process, and the artist.<sup>11</sup> In the West, because of hierarchical practices and rigorous instruction established by the European academies which assigned priority to the dramatic narratives of history painting—a broad genre that suited the ideological imperatives of power, namely the Church and governing class—landscapes were not acceptable as subjects until the 17th century when the French painters Claude Lorrain and Nicolas Poussin mastered what is known as the classical landscape. What may be called the modern landscape evolved and gained significant attention in the 19th century as various aesthetically and conceptually-linked movements—Romanticism, the Barbizon School and Realism, the practice of *plein air* painting and Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, and then Expressionism in the 20th century—effectively explored the many expressive and conceptual possibilities of painting the landscape. Today, even in the context of



the development and popularity of new technologies and artistic media and the attention given to other pressing social-environmental-political issues, landscape painting remains an important cultural practice, in large part because of its distinctive history and extensive exploration/accounting of humans' relations to nature and the land.

In the context of art history, Coughtry's and Martin's work is part of a lineage that began with 19th century Romanticist painting, a movement in which landscape painting in some ways shared a similar deep reverence for nature with Chinese painting, though the two are extremely different stylistically. Romanticism was initiated with European painters like John Constable and J.M.W. Turner and it extended to American artists, particularly those associated with the Hudson River School (Thomas Cole, Edwin Church, Albert Bierstadt, George Inness and others). The legacy of American Romanticist landscape painting flowed into the 20th century, though it was challenged to a certain degree by artists who, beginning in the 1920s and 1930s, turned to imagery of industrialization, urbanization, and consumerism.

Influenced by transcendentalist philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson's ideas about the necessity of establishing a unique American artistic culture based upon the new nation's treasure of natural beauty, the aesthetics and content of the Hudson River School continue to affect American culture in a variety of ways—from the movement's idealized visual hymns that capture nature's beauty to politicized assertions/validations of American exceptionalism and empire. Its aesthetic influence, particularly as it echoes Emerson's spiritual sense of the natural world, can be seen in the work of three painters associated with Principia whose work honors the beauty and sublimity of nature: David Coughtry, whose work has been associated with a kind of neo-Hudson River aesthetic; Duncan Martin, whose "58 in 58 Project" has so far been a culminating activity for him—an initially five-year project (2011-2016) that involved painting in each



*Morning, St. Elena Canyon, (Big Bend National Park), 2013, oil on canvas, 72" x 84", artist: Duncan Martin*



*Tailings Study, Olana, 1995*  
oil on museum board,  
6" x 9",  
artist: David Coughtry

of the then 58 national parks in 58 months, but that has been evolving with the increase of national parks (now at 63 parks); and, Frederick Oakes Sylvester, a renowned regional landscape painter of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and Principia's first art director, who was deeply engaged with the zeitgeist of American Romanticism.

Although there are numerous parallels between Coughtry's and Martin's paintings and their studio practices, there are also differences. One is that Coughtry, in attitude and practice, imbibes the spirit of Romanticism, its deeply felt sense and poetic interpretation of everything. If he is not quite of the neo-Hudson River aesthetic, he is certainly a pure neo-Romanticist. While Martin's work and practice is tinted with Romanticist sensibilities, formally his paintings are more closely aligned with Expressionism, a radical modernist movement at the beginning of the 20th century that has streamed through culture for over a hundred years. Martin's gestural surfaces are in conversation with a range of expressionist painters, from works by the high modernist Oskar Kokoschka through the Abstract Expressionist Joan Mitchell, to the expressionist landscapes of John Marin, Marsden Hartley, Richard Diebenkorn, and Martin's mentor in graduate school, Neil Welliver, to the passionate gestures of contemporary expressionist Cecily Brown. In Martin's paintings there are almost always two subjects: the particular landscape he is painting and each painting's tactile objectness, a characteristic born of modernist painting's momentum toward nonobjectivity in art. Another distinction between Coughtry's and Martin's work is that Coughtry is devoted to seeking the essence of what he sees, experiences, and paints. Martin's focus is more on the animated, vibrant qualities in nature; hence, his emphasis on gesture, action, and reaction in his painting process. This is true even when the subject has an overall calm or pastoral presence.

Silently but vigorously adjacent to the art historical and cultural texts woven through Coughtry's and Martin's paintings and just beneath the aesthetic allure of their surfaces is the living subtext of the climate crisis, the ecological catastrophe generated by unwise human activity that we are all witnessing, directly or indirectly, this moment. That we are approaching a dangerous precipice is no longer in doubt: scientists, foremost thinkers in every discipline, and daily headlines about extreme temperatures, drought,





*Barfad Fell, evening*, 1989, oil on panel, 8" x 12", Collection Shennanton House, Scotland, artist: Duncan Martin

wildfires, rising ocean levels, intense flooding, deforestation, and plastic pollution bear this out. All of us are complicit and all of us are in peril. And so, the lively and attuned discourse within *TEXTure* must necessarily include this subtext, this issue.

Many difficult questions arise from its haunting presence, one of which is: how does one paint the landscape with a consciousness that nature as we know it is being dramatically and negatively altered by longstanding self-centered actions and greed? Within the contemporary artworld today, some landscape painters are specifically addressing this—American painter Alexis Rockman, one of the most notable, has for years depicted future landscapes affected by climate change. But, the most striking art addressing the climate crisis is being generated by artists working in other media. Four of many examples include Icelandic-Danish artist Olafur Eliasson's installation "Ice Watch," which brought the grief of melting arctic ice directly to Europe; Chinese artist Ai Weiwei whose 2019 exhibition "Roots" addressed the destruction of the Amazon rainforest; Canadian photographer Edward Burtynsky's work that depicts ways industrialization, manufacturing, and consumerism is altering landscapes across the planet; and, American artist Aurora Robson, who exhibited at Principia's Schmidt Gallery in 2019, and whose sculptures address the hazards of plastic pollution.

In his essay, *Painting with the Flow of the World*, for the 2019 book, *Landscape Painting Now: From Pop Abstraction to New Romanticism*, art writer Barry Schwabsky says the following about landscape painting's capacity for dealing with the climate crisis:

*In the twenty-first century, the idea of landscape painting has become more fraught. We know that*





*Breakish, Skye, 2016, oil on panel, 7.75" x 16", artist: David Coughtry*

*we can no longer ignore the reality of climate change. The earth, and our relation to it, seems to be inexorably changing before our eyes.*

*Is painting up to the challenge those changes are imposing on us? Maybe that's the wrong question. It's hard to hope that society as a whole can adequately respond to the "inconvenient truth" (in Al Gore's famous phrase) of our situation. But as we watch anxiously to see what will happen, art remains a means for paying attention—to ourselves, to the world around us, and to the relation between the two. Or are they two?<sup>12</sup>*

Or are they two? is an interesting question. It leads back to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and David Abram's extension of these ideas into the field of ecology. And with this it also raises perhaps an even more fundamental question: what are we really seeing when we look at nature? For the visual arts in the last three or four decades of the 20th century, postmodern theory—from linguistic theory to ecocriticism to post-colonial theory—made it clear that equally important to the question/issue of "what we see" is the question/issue of "how we see," and that the "what" is intertwined with the "how." Considering the issue of "how" asks us to recognize the various contexts that define our preferences, motives, desires, and actions. The issue of "how" actually affects—can even determine—"what" it is that we see. It signifies an acknowledgment of the ways in which seeing/experiencing the world are always mediated by these contexts, that is, by ideology—by the myriad "texts" of ideology, whether political, religious, educational, or cultural ideology, in one's personal and social experience. The abuse/destruction of nature by humans almost always occurs through a particular ideological reading of nature and specific humans' relationship with it. For example, in the United States during the 19th century the concept/ideology of Manifest Destiny regarded wilderness as both Eden and evil, but ultimately as foreboding darkness and something to be overcome, tamed, destroyed; and, this perception, initiated by ideology, necessitated strategies of vast environmental destruction in the name of "progress." Related to this, the genocide of indigenous peoples of the North American continent was justified through the ideology of White Christian nationalism as reflected in Manifest Destiny. Paying attention to the issue/question of "how" we see—to the ideological contexts that mediate and affect the ways we see the world and respond to it—aids us in removing these mediating "lenses" from our thought and perception, and to see the world more

impartially and with openness, that is, as it really is.

Navigating context and returning to the philosophy of phenomenology, one can perhaps begin to see and experience Husserl's "life-world" in its thriving pre-verbal state, and to cultivate Merleau-Ponty's sense of the participatory nature of perception that leads to experiential reciprocity, fluidity, and a lived ecology. Such reciprocity and coupling are active in the creative processes of Coughtry and Martin, and, to again quote Abram from *The Spell of the Sensuous*, such attitudes and practices can lead to "...the recuperation of the incarnate, sensorial dimension of experience [which] brings with it a recuperation of the living landscape in which we are corporally embedded."<sup>13</sup>

In conclusion, and for the fun of it, some final comments about context—one of the important texts of *TEXTure*. In the context of context it becomes possible to see nature itself as a kind of text to be read, interpreted through ideology, and then acted upon. The genius of Andy Warhol's remark about nature at the beginning of this section of the essay is that, first, it is an invitation to everyone; for, within Warhol's ethos, anyone can be an artist. Second, it describes a means of making art that wholly relies on the art of perception while leaving the object of perception (land/nature) alone, while not disturbing it, and by ignoring or rejecting any ideological context—a strategy beautifully linked to Warhol's art of eliminating the artist's hand. And, third, the art exists as the appropriation of something that already exists (another trademark strategy of Warhol's practice)—the given form/beauty of the natural environment.

Here is an excerpt from Martin's "58 in 58 Project" website:

*I have been amazed to see how much wild and open space has been preserved in our National Parks—51.9 million acres, to be exact. The land sits there, awaiting our arrival and exploration. It is in itself a kind of work of art, allowing each of us to relate to and respond to it in our own way.*<sup>14</sup>

Who would have guessed that such aesthetically-oriented painters as Martin and Coughtry would be in conversation with Andy Warhol? But their work is attached to both the long project of landscape painting and the diverse conceptual discourse of the contemporary, a rhizomatous flow of text(s) and coupling(s) not to be overlooked.

Paul Ryan is a painter and art writer, professor of art and chair of the Department of Art + Art History, and director of the James K. Schmidt Gallery, Principia College.

## Acknowledgements

As always, this exhibition would not be possible without the generosity of others. I want to thank artists David Coughtry and Duncan Martin for their generosity in sharing their ideas and work with The Schmidt Gallery and the Principia College community. And I also want to thank them for their many years of service as professors in the Department of Art + Art History. The exhibition catalog and invitation were designed by Bruce Rea, who, as always, brought his discerning eye to the work. And many thanks to Deb Wold, James K. Schmidt Gallery registrar, for her precision and support in every task; to Graham Littell, 2022-2023 post-graduate teaching intern in the Department of Art and Art History, for his assistance installing the exhibition; to the Gallery's student assistant, Olivia Skinner; and, to Jon Hosmer, the College's Web Director, for his advice and work on the Gallery website. Much appreciation goes to my colleagues in the Department of Art and Art History for their support of all of the Schmidt Gallery exhibitions as a key part of our educational programming. And finally, speaking of texts, the text of this essay would not have been possible without the rich array of ideas from other authors, particularly the insightful, caring thought of David Abram and his beautiful book, *The Spell of the Sensuous*. Quoting (and demonstrating) Roland Barthes' *The Death of the Author*: "...the text is a tissue of citations, resulting from the thousand sources of culture."

– Paul Ryan

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<sup>1</sup> Kazimir Malevich, *The Non-Objective World: The Manifesto of Suprematism* (Chicago: Paul Theobald and Company, 1959).

<sup>2</sup> Duncan Martin, from an informal narrative co-authored by David Coughtry and Duncan Martin about their life-long friendship (July 2022)

<sup>3</sup> Duncan Martin, from an August 16, 2022, email to the author.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> David Coughtry, from artist's statement for the exhibition, *TEXTure: The Landscape Paintings of David Coughtry and Duncan Martin*, The James K. Schmidt Gallery, Voney Art Center, Principia College, Elsah, Illinois (September 13 – October 22, 2022).

<sup>6</sup> John Marin, *John Marin by John Marin* (Holt, Rinehart + Winston, 1970).

<sup>7</sup> David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, Vintage Books Editions, 1997, 2017), p.40.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>11</sup> Wikipedia, article: "Chinese Painting," [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese\\_Painting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_Painting) (sourced August 7, 2022).

<sup>12</sup> Barry Schwabsky, *Painting with the Flow of the World, in Landscape Painting Now: From Pop Abstraction to New Romanticism* (New York, D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers, 2019), p. 22.

<sup>13</sup> Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, p. 65.

<sup>14</sup> Duncan Martin, from "about," <https://www.58in58.com/about> (sourced August 7, 2022).



## Artist's Statement: Duncan Martin

*A [good] painting concentrates the experience of being*  
--Frank Auerbach

My work begins *in* the landscape, and continues in the studio, painting from the experience of being *in* the landscape.

While in the field, I paint small oils or watercolors, gathering more information from sketches and occasionally photos and videos. Back in the studio, I call upon the memory of that experience and the language of paint, while developing larger works.

While I am engrossed in the physical process of mixing color, pushing paint around, building up surfaces, seeing and building relationships, responding and adjusting, my awareness of my surroundings is heightened, and I become conscious of what I did not initially see or feel - the shifts and changes in weather, light, wind, temperature, the animation of all around me, flora, fauna, sounds, movements. And when I am most transparent and in tune...the painting reflects this. The painting is no longer a picture of a landscape but embodies the spirit of the landscape. Something of truth reveals itself, transcending landforms and paint. This becomes the substance of the work.

*How to paint the landscape: First you make your bow to the landscape.  
Then you wait, and if the landscape bows to you, then, and only then,  
can you paint the landscape.*  
--John Marin



*Blue Evening, Crater Lake, (Crater Lake National Park), 2022, oil on panel, 18" x 24", artist: Duncan Martin*

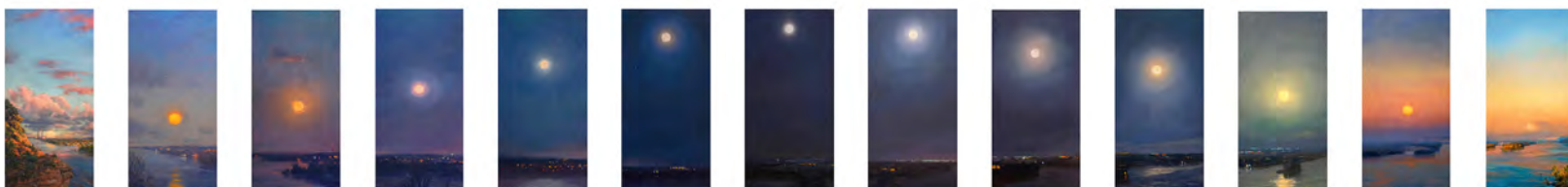
## Artist's Statement: David Coughtry

Keeping a weather eye on landscape, alluring or formidable, as a practicing artist deeply committed to a relationship with nature, the kindling of an instilled attentiveness alights the adventure of landscape painting. There are periods and places in which I have found earth's terrain, illumination, and elemental tensions so utterly spirited, surprising, and private. I love the advantage over time of observing nature's incessant metamorphosis, revealing rare and fleeting ambient phenomenon to be visualized and captured creatively. It's the soul-stirring spectacle of meteorological conditions coalescing with myriad topographic regions that wholly substantiate my propensity for responding artfully. Occasionally, it may be a more intellectual comprehension that reveals entrancing conditions in landscape. From artist Alan Gussow, author of *Sense of Place*: "Always it is the sudden revelation in a familiar place, the moment of memorable clarity when what has been seen often is seen as if for the first time." Likewise, encounters with somewhat mundane or accustomed landscapes I think of as potential excuses for ratcheting color's sway—modest, nondescript environments and places being transformed from the visually ordinary toward the inventive and extraordinary. Searching for place, I accept the challenge of understanding adopted environments with sensitivity, and intensity. Perception sparks engagement with new vantage points, and when arriving at a most relevant, singularly compelling place, interaction between nature and the act of painting can't begin too soon.

At the heart of this process is an independent perspective where form and depiction are incidental to place. Beyond facade or excessive homage to subject, worthwhile enticements for painting become evident when attuning thought more closely to conceptual connections with landscape, being open and receptive to transparent ideas—the embrace of feeling, unfeigned emotion, and memory. It is these kinds of attributes that primarily drive content in my painting. The great landscape painter George Inness states: "Every artist who, without reference to external circumstances, aims truly to represent the ideas and emotions which come to him when he is in the presence of nature, is in the process of his own spiritual development, and is a benefactor of his race." This suggests how an image might become more intelligibly or imaginatively conveyed and received. Inness also proposes: "The true artistic impulse is divine."

I am reminded of a particular sublime fortnight of painting in a forest, working solo late fall on Shelving Rock in the Adirondack mountains. The Eden-like terrain was a lone comfort, aside from the desired objective of studying and painting there earnestly, if not lovingly. In the face of isolation, devoid of domestic comforts, I began to discern among these wilds a timeless, incontrovertible sense of a presence, that was invariably over me, walking with me—a stable, guiding and directing presence. The forest became a homeland. Paintings from the experience were transformative, beyond previous artistic competency, with little sense of sovereign authorship. Likening to Henry David Thoreau: "I took a walk in the woods and came out taller than the trees."

Transcending physical elements or platitudes associated with landscape, it is essentially a spirituality that elucidates the artist's collaboration with nature---the soul of landscape, sustaining curiosity and creative effort.



River Arc-Moons, 2010, Oil on Panel 6"x102", David Coughtry

## Artist's Bios

**David Coughtry** is a 1979 graduate of Principia College. He earned his MFA (1983) from The State University of New York at Albany, working with renowned painter Mark Greenwold and art historian Roberta Bernstein. Coughtry has presented numerous solo exhibitions throughout the United States as well as participated in major traveling exhibitions such as *New Response: Contemporary Painters of the Hudson River* (1986), *The Artist as Native: Reinventing Regionalism* (1993), *Rediscovering the Landscape of the Americas* (1996), *The Great American Paint-In* (2020). He has completed many notable commissions and his art has been shown at various venues, including the Middlebury College Museum; The Ringling Museum of Art; The Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts; Albany Institute of Art; The Chicago Art Institute Museum; The Lowe Art Museum; among others.



As a professor emeritus of studio art at Principia College, in 2019 Coughtry concluded academic contributions after devoting 23 years to teaching. Resuming professional work as a full-time painter, he purchased and rehabilitated a Henry Street building in Alton, IL. He now maintains his artistic practice in the new studio, which includes an exhibition space to be opened and shared with the surrounding community. Coughtry's website address is: [www.davidcoughtry.com](http://www.davidcoughtry.com)

**Duncan Martin** is a painter living and working in Elsah, Illinois, and Saguache, Colorado. Martin received a BA in Studio Art from Principia College in 1976. After graduation, he spent several years painting in Calhoun County, Illinois, culminating in an exhibition in Inge Mack's Maybeck Gallery in Elsah, Illinois in 1981. He continued his study of painting, working with Neil Welliver at the University of Pennsylvania, and received the MFA in 1986. Martin joined the Principia College Studio Art faculty in 1987. In 1995, he left full-time teaching to focus on painting and lived in New Mexico, Arizona, and Colorado. In 2010, he returned to Principia College as a Professor of Art. Martin served as Chair of the Art and Art History Department for eight years and retired from teaching in June 2022.



Since 2011, Martin's work has focused on an ambitious painting project, 58 in 58, initially a five-year project that involved painting in all (then) 58 national parks in 58 months. He has also painted in the 59th park, Glacier National Park, which was added in 2013, and has plans to paint in the four other new national parks which have subsequently been established. A selection of work from this project was exhibited at the Schoodic Institute at Acadia National Park celebrating the 100th anniversary of Acadia National Park and the National Park Service in August 2016. The project continues as Martin develops a body of work from his experiences painting in the parks.

Martin's paintings have been exhibited at the SIUE Invitational Exhibition 2021, Edwardsville, Illinois; The Schoodic Institute at Acadia National Park; Hunt Gallery, Mary Baldwin College, Staunton, Virginia; Davis Dominguez Gallery, Tucson, Arizona; Nielsen Gallery, Boston, Massachusetts; Susan Street Fine Art, Solana Beach, California; Shaw Contemporary and gWatson Gallery, Maine; The Gallery at the Tucson International Airport, Tucson, Arizona; The Tucson Museum of Art, Tucson, Arizona; and the New Bedford Art Museum, New Bedford, Massachusetts. His website address is: [duncanmartinart.com](http://duncanmartinart.com)

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This exhibition was initiated and curated by the James K. Schmidt Gallery.

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