WELCOME

Heather Sincavage
Director Sordoni Art Gallery

As Wilkes University is situated on the banks of the Susquehanna River, the Sordoni Art Gallery is proud to present Upstream & Down: The Susquehanna. The exhibition features paintings by local and regional artists and examines the beauty of our river while taking on unique perspectives and the ever changing palette of the seasons.

I would like to thank the contributing artists for sharing their work with the Wilkes campus and local community. There is also much gratitude for the lending organizations that shared their artwork. Thanks also to Stanley I Grand who served as curator of this exhibition and for his long standing service to the Sordoni Art Gallery.

Finally, as the gallery moves forward, I am eager to look further at the region’s identity in exhibitions, happenings and art events. We have a rich history and a dedicated community of artists. For me personally, as new to the region, I cannot think of a better exhibit to commence my time at Wilkes. It is a valuable map to my new home.
THE SUSQUEHANNA
Stanley I Grand
Curator

The North or main branch of the Susquehanna River begins as the outflow of Otsego Lake, in Cooperstown, New York. Flowing through northeastern Pennsylvania, the Susquehanna receives the waters of the Lackawanna River south of Scranton. The confluence with the West Branch near Sunbury adds additional volume, as does Penns Creek, the Juniata River, and Octoraro Creek among other tributaries. The Susquehanna ends its course at Havre de Grace, Maryland, where it empties into the Chesapeake Bay. The Susquehanna provides half the Bay's freshwater and in pre-Columbian times nurtured a healthy ecosystem. Indeed the river's name is derived from the Len'api Sisa’we'hak’hanna, which translates as "Oyster River."

In 2005 the Susquehanna earned the dubious honor of “Most Endangered” American River and it is also a major source of Chesapeake Bay pollution. Inadequate and antiquated sewer systems dump untreated waste into the river after every heavy rainfall. This combined with agricultural runoff, mining and industrial pollutants, nitrates, and pharmaceutical contaminants has contributed to the demise of the Bay and the decline of the river’s once famous smallmouth bass population. Yet despite efforts to clean up the Bay and river, all the stakeholders have been unable to reach a comprehensive agreement. In 2016, after a decade’s worth of scientific investigation and despite the strong advocacy of the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission, Pennsylvania’s Department of Environmental Protection refused to classify the Susquehanna as “impaired,” which would have required that a plan be developed to combat pollution.

Those of us who live, work, and study along the Susquehanna’s banks know both its beauty and its rage. Cities such as Wilkes-Barre have expended great resources to confine the river and prevent disastrous floods such as that caused by Hurricane Agnes in 1972. Despite all the many challenges associated with the river, it is nonetheless a regional treasure that has defined the area’s history, culture, and people. It is worth saving. I hope that the inspiration it has provided these artists will inspire in turn.

FEATURED ARTISTS
Michael Allen
Ruth Bernard
Tom Dougherty
Rob Evans
Brian Keeler
William Kocher
Earl Lehman
Raoul Middleman
Peter Paone
Thomas Paquette
E. M. Saniga
Robert Stark
Joseph Sweeney
John David Wissler
Mark Workman
Scott Wright
MICHAEL ALLEN

*Thaw*, 2016
oil on canvas, 72 × 60
Courtesy of Lancaster Galleries, Lancaster, PA

My work cites the overlooked, focusing on relationships when the ordinary is suddenly beautiful, when the simple is suddenly complex. I make paintings on-site to get to know a place so it can be easily conjured in the mind’s eye in the studio. *Thaw* came about over a span of several years and is a collective of many observations co-existing as one. I have painted from this location in varying seasons and weather since 2002.
— Michael Allen

RUTH BERNARD

*Long Level*, 2016
oil on canvas, 30 × 36
Courtesy of the Artist

I am a plein-air painter who enjoys being outside experiencing the venue and its essences. But after being invited to participate in this exhibition, I realized that because of my schedule and the weather, I was not going to be able to work on a painting the way I usually do.

I went down to Long Level, about 20 minutes from my home, and took some shots with my handy iPhone. I thought this would make things easy. When I finally started to paint, it felt different and I did not like it.

This was not a good sign: no wind, no sun, no changes, no people interrupting me. What was I going to do? Luckily the painting experience took over and I knew everything was going to be fine. I ended up making 4 or 5 paintings from those photos and am pleased with the results.
— Ruth Bernard
This painting is a view of the Susquehanna River in Wilkes-Barre just south of the Market St. Bridge. I've painted from the same location a number of years ago, and there is a noticeable change in the city skyline. In 2007, the Hotel Sterling’s 14 story Plaza Tower was demolished; followed in 2013, by the demolition of the original main structure built in 1897.

In this particular painting, I started by doing a small oil sketch along the river. I then used this sketch as an aid in painting the larger work back in the studio. If I weren’t able to paint directly “on location”, I would record the subject with the aid of a camera. I often return to the location to “look again”.

Intimate views of a subject can be any location. The more panoramic the scene, the less general it is. Unlike some artists who paint the intimate landscape, I gravitate toward longer views.

— Tom Dougherty

Living on a ridge overlooking the river, I have long been fascinated by the sublime beauty and mystique of the Susquehanna. The river’s power is especially evident in the winter, when the currents push large sheets of ice up along the shore. This painting depicts the view at Long Level looking south toward the windmills on the ridge at Turkey Point.

— Rob Evans
The Susquehanna River has been a source of inspiration for me over many years. As I grew up in Wyalusing, in Bradford County, PA, many Tom Sawyer-like summers were spent on the river and the Wyalusing Creek. Over the years I have made plein air studies and large studio works of the river in oil and pastel one of my primary motifs. Currently I have a solo show at the Roberson Museum in Binghamton, NY, where several of these Susquehanna paintings are included.

— Brian Keeler

Shikellamy was an Oneida chief and leader of the Iroquois peoples. A state park was named after him, and part of that park consists of a bluff that overlooks the Susquehanna River at the point where the West Branch joins the Susquehanna in Northumberland County, Pennsylvania. Shikellamy’s village once stood near the overlook of the river.

This painting speaks from my fond childhood memories of days spent along the Susquehanna River banks, beneath the bluffs of Shikellamy in Northumberland, where our long relationship began.

— William Kocher
Landscape has always been the bedrock of my work. Even in the non-objective pieces. Picasso said you have to start with something, and from boyhood in the marshes around Essington, PA, my curiosity was cultivated into passion by observing things closely.

Ever changing sky, weather, distant train whistles and constant airplanes merged with turtles and fish, insects, toads, birds, et cetera and filled my imagination.

I am drawn to water. The great Susquehanna surges through these mountains and pulls me like the divining rod of its great Y.

— Earl Lehman

This railroad bridge just north of Havre de Grace reconciles, by joining the two main but divergent banks of Susquehanna River: one, the careening sway of hawks that hover above and the shy flocks of blue heron that adorn the rocks before the upper Chesapeake; and, secondly, the impingement of man and industry on its historic flow.

— Raoul Middleman
PETER PAONE

*Agnes Susquehanna - Born 1972, 2000*

Acrylic on MDF board, 40 × 40

Visions of the Susquehanna River Art Collection, Susquehanna Heritage, Wrightsville, PA

Like human blood vessels, when [rivers] erupt, they also cause damage to the body areas that surround them; and in this case, the land displacement causes confusion, turmoil, destruction, and allover mud and gray and brown muck.

— Peter Paone


THOMAS PAQUETTE

*Maria Antoinette Overlook, 2006*

Oil on canvas, 30 × 46

Visions of the Susquehanna River Art Collection, Susquehanna Heritage, Wrightsville, PA

The Susquehanna carries not just water but more than its share of history, some of it surprising. I have long been intrigued by the so-called Marie Antoinette Lookout, on the river near Wyalusing. A settlement in the winding valley below was established by aristocrats who fled the French Revolution in 1793. They came in advance of Queen Marie Antoinette, and built an enclave suitable for the queen's safety. But rather than heed their call to flee to safety with them, she remained in France and the rest is well-known history.

I wanted to portray this beautiful valley despite its story, but perhaps reflecting some of the melancholy apropos of its peculiar history. The promise of a distant summer seems held in the buds of the twisted foreground trees; the turbulent atmosphere threatens. This melancholy doesn't need a tragic page in history to be manifested; it is a basic expression of life. The French asylum-seekers' compound is now mostly buried beneath the riverine soil of the Susquehanna, a potential chapter in history erased by time.

— Thomas Paquette
E. M. SANIGA

The River at Port Deposit, 1998
oil on canvas, 12 × 16
Collection of Carolyn Monier, Santa Rosa, CA

My painting was done with me sitting on a small stool holding my travel box. I sat in the back of my truck (which had a cap on it). It was a cold, snowy day in Port Deposit, Maryland and I parked the truck facing away from the Susquehanna to get the view I wanted. I used four colors: ivory black, cremnitz white, cadmium red and Viridian.
— E. M. Saniga

ROBERT STARK

The New American Landscape, 2011
oil on canvas, 60 × 36
Courtesy of the Artist

Daily life relies on intuition, conflict, courage, mistakes, surprises, a letting go of beauty, a surrender to chaos, silence, solitude. Failures inform more than success. There needs an edge, energy, attitude, delinquency, doubt, passion, mystery, and grace. An old-school artist on all four sides, healthy, vulnerable, centered, I persist. Each day afresh.
New paintings keep me present, my voice, yes?
— Robert Stark
JOSEPH SWEENEY

Above the Susquehanna #4, 2011
oil on linen, 30 × 40
Courtesy of the Artist

This painting was made on the Susquehanna River overlooking the town of Halifax just north of Harrisburg. It was painted from the spot near the place where the Appalachian Trail crosses the Susquehanna River. To me it was reminiscent of Thomas Cole's Oxbow painting, The View from Mt. Holyoke, 1836. The clouds were coming up bringing some rain. I saw it as a complete cycle: clouds, rain, water, river, soil and back again.
— Joseph Sweeney

JOHN DAVID WISSLER

Time Remembered, 2011
oil on linen, 40 × 60
Collection of Dennis F. Clabaugh, Mt. Gretna, PA

I begin to paint...rectangle, life experience, idea, memories, paint...the struggle of painting itself...Corot, Turner, Bonnard...turning point, my idea has to change...the paint begins to take me there.

I am now surprised.

Where will it go?

Mixing colour, scraping with knife, drawing with end of brush, wiping with rag...sitting back to look, standing back to look...music, rhythm, paint.

Paint, music, paint, standing back...seeing as if for the first time...sitting, listening...wiping out, painting again...space, light, movement, atmosphere...there it is!

Remembered idea, remembered experience, remembered time...
— John David Wissler
MARK WORKMAN

Liberty Narrows, 2016
acrylic on paper, 23 × 50 ½
Courtesy of the Artist

I have chosen to paint the location on the Susquehanna River known as the Dauphin Narrows. I was drawn to the majesty of the scene made more dramatic by the voluminous clouds overhead on the day I gathered photographic reference material. The small scale Statue of Liberty is a well-known landmark on that stretch of the river. These qualities offered the iconography for the symbolism I strive to include in my paintings in order to better express myself and to give the painting depth beyond the pictorial plane.

— Mark Workman

SCOTT WRIGHT

Release, 2011
oil and pastel on linen, 54 × 44
Courtesy of the Artist

I am a painter primarily interested in exploring the ever-changing meaning of landscape in the contemporary world. For me, landscape is a religion—literally. I grew up in a small New England town where my house was surrounded by woods, deep forests, mountain trails, caves, ponds, waterfalls, and streams. I had daily outdoor adventures, some uplifting, some scary and confusing, but all formed a character-building ethos that I still live with today. I believe that having empathy, humility, and wonder for the natural world helps to fulfill our humanity and reminds us that living in balance with our surroundings perpetuates life while a lack of mindfulness limits it.

About twelve years ago I began painting landscapes based on my own aerial photographs. Until that point I had never conceived of making paintings without a horizon line. But by looking straight down at the world from above I discovered that rivers took on the appearance of veins and arteries; tidal marshes served as lungs. Roads, bridges, and power lines were synapses transmitting our impulses. Suddenly the earth was transformed into a living, breathing organism.

The patterns I see from the air are organized into three major categories; natural forces growing and replenishing themselves, human forces dominating and changing the land, and a blending of the two where neither is in clear control of the other. That we are now turning towards renewable energy sources such as wind and solar seems to me to be a holistic solution to sustaining life on all levels.

— Scott Wright