



Above: Lynn Boggess, 4 April 2023, oil on canvas, 62" x 54". Opposite: Lynn Boggess painting on location.

Nature's Go-Between: Lynn Boggess

Evoke Contemporary sat down with West Virginia artist Lynn Boggess to chat about nature, his art, and using all that paint.

Evoke Contemporary: How did painting become a significant part of your life?

Lynn Boggess: I grew up in a rural farming community in the Ohio Valley, exploring the streams and woodlands for hours on end. At the same time, I drew constantly—not from nature, at first, but from stories of adventurers and explorers.

I was introduced to Andrew Wyeth's paintings in early adolescence; at the same time I began working with acrylic paints—both of which I connected with immediately. Summer art camps on college campuses with college instructors helped tremendously throughout my high school years.

Wyeth's realism followed me to college, but was soon replaced by extensive exposure to the modernist traditions—especially abstract expressionism and color-field painting. In graduate school, I further explored the current theories of conceptual and installation art. At the same time, through all this, I continued to paint small studies from nature.



EC: *You taught for years—what was your approach as a teacher?*

LB: When I was invited to teach at my former undergraduate college, I thought it was crucial that students balance their explorations with disciplined skills in rendering from life—still lifes, the posed human figure, and, on location, from nature. I wasn't an instructor who would lecture and hover over students. I worked alongside them on assignments, doing endless demonstrations. I was my own best student, and my skills developed rapidly. After my promotion to Professor an opportunity came for a sabbatical, and that allowed me to sort out what direction I needed to go in painting.

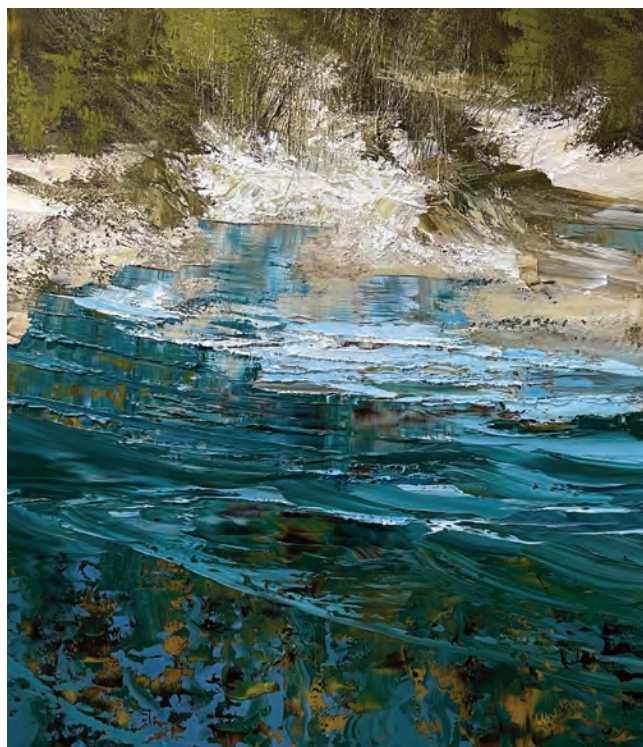
EC: *Was the sabbatical productive?*

LB: Yes and no. I set up a studio and worked tirelessly on large, complicated, postmodern forms of layered imagery, with numerous processes of applying paint. And yes, the paintings won awards and acceptance in a museum, but it purged from me the idea of making art solely in a studio. The work was introspective and dark in content—something I couldn't imagine devoting my life to doing.

In the months that followed, I painted exclusively out of doors, and that has continued to be an obsession for decades now. Walls contain things—the vastness of outdoor space brings a timelessness and grandeur that make you feel insignificant. I find significant form outside. I look for contrasts—water near rock, a tree against the wind. It's very consoling and addictive.

EC: *Where do you paint?*

LB: We built a remote studio in the woods and a house in town, so we can Ping-Pong between the extremes of solitude and community. We pack up and drive into the mountains (a blessing during the recent hot summer!) until we miss people again—at which time we head home to Shepherdstown, a picturesque small town with a tree-lined main street and plenty of friends. I think mankind is a nomadic creature, and it's natural for us to live between nature and urban environments.



EC: *Do you paint in the same area all the time?*

LB: I have favorite spots, and where I paint is often about access. A place I love to look at looks different at different times, different light, different seasons. It doesn't take a lot to find a difference in the same scene. Sometimes I build a platform to give me that different vantage point on a familiar scene.

EC: *Talk a little about your process.*

LB: Plein air pushes you—three to four hours to complete a painting instead of three or four days in the studio. I don't use brushes, I use trowels—they really lay paint on the canvas! Paint is thick, it absorbs movement. Oil paint is meant to be thick and layered, and thinning it down makes it something it's not.

EC: *Your paintings are full of movement and emotion. Talk a little about that.*



Opposite: Lynn Boggess, *12 July 2023*, oil on canvas, 62" x 54". Above: Lynn Boggess, *23 November 2022*, oil on canvas, 70" x 60".

LB: For me, painting is more about a negotiation with my feelings, thoughts, ideas, and emotions. I like to balance the emotions I'm feeling with the realism I'm seeing. I'm keenly aware of styles of art—there is a difference between naturalism and realism. Within realism, there's a spectrum—high realism is not just what things look like. Realism to me is injecting not just the external but also the internal dialog.

It's like a melodrama for me—taking the clutter and confusion of a scene and making sense of it all. To me, it creates clarity. It's comforting, and makes me make sense of the world around me.

—Mara Christian Harris