



# Moments of Rare Beauty

**Kathleen B. Hudson** finds joy and refuge in sublime landscapes

BY BONNIE GANGELHOFF

**WATERFALLS CASCADING OVER ROCKS**, sun breaking through clouds, light lacing through redwood trees—these are a few of Kathleen B. Hudson's favorite things to paint. Her locations of choice are remote, isolated, and quiet. It's

the quiet places that allow the Colorado-based artist to become the most reflective and experience the subtle shifts in light and atmosphere that are key elements in her work. "There are some moments when the land around us can feel surreal

or otherworldly, and I like to find that moment of rare beauty for each painting and communicate it in paint in a way that feels true, not sentimental," she says.

Because Hudson seeks out such moments of rare beauty, she thinks her style of work often treads a fine line between the real and the otherworldly. In fact, some observers have called her evocative style "atmospheric realism." Hudson eschews the highly detailed, preferring instead to employ looser brushwork to capture the natural chaos and movement in the wild. Interestingly, while her paintings depict Mother Nature's natural chaos, they simultaneously convey a peaceful, calming sensibility. It's no surprise that her landscape pieces are in demand these days.

Perhaps the first thing to know about Hudson's current body of work is that water often plays a starring role. "I love that water is an element in constant vis-



▲ **Spring Runoff, Running Eagle Falls**, oil, 36 x 24.  
◀ **Wetlands Near Savannah**, oil, 36 x 36.



## representation

**FoR Fine Art**, Whitefish, MT, Big Fork, MT, and Tucson, AZ; **Edward Montgomery Fine Art**, Carmel, CA; **Charles Fine Arts**, Gloucester, MA; **McLary Fine Art**, Santa Fe, NM; **Cole Gallery**, Edmonds, WA; **Huse Skelly Gallery**, Newport Beach, CA; [www.kathleenbhudson.com](http://www.kathleenbhudson.com).

## upcoming shows

235—The Smaller Works Show, **FoR Fine Art**, Whitefish, MT. December-January 2023.

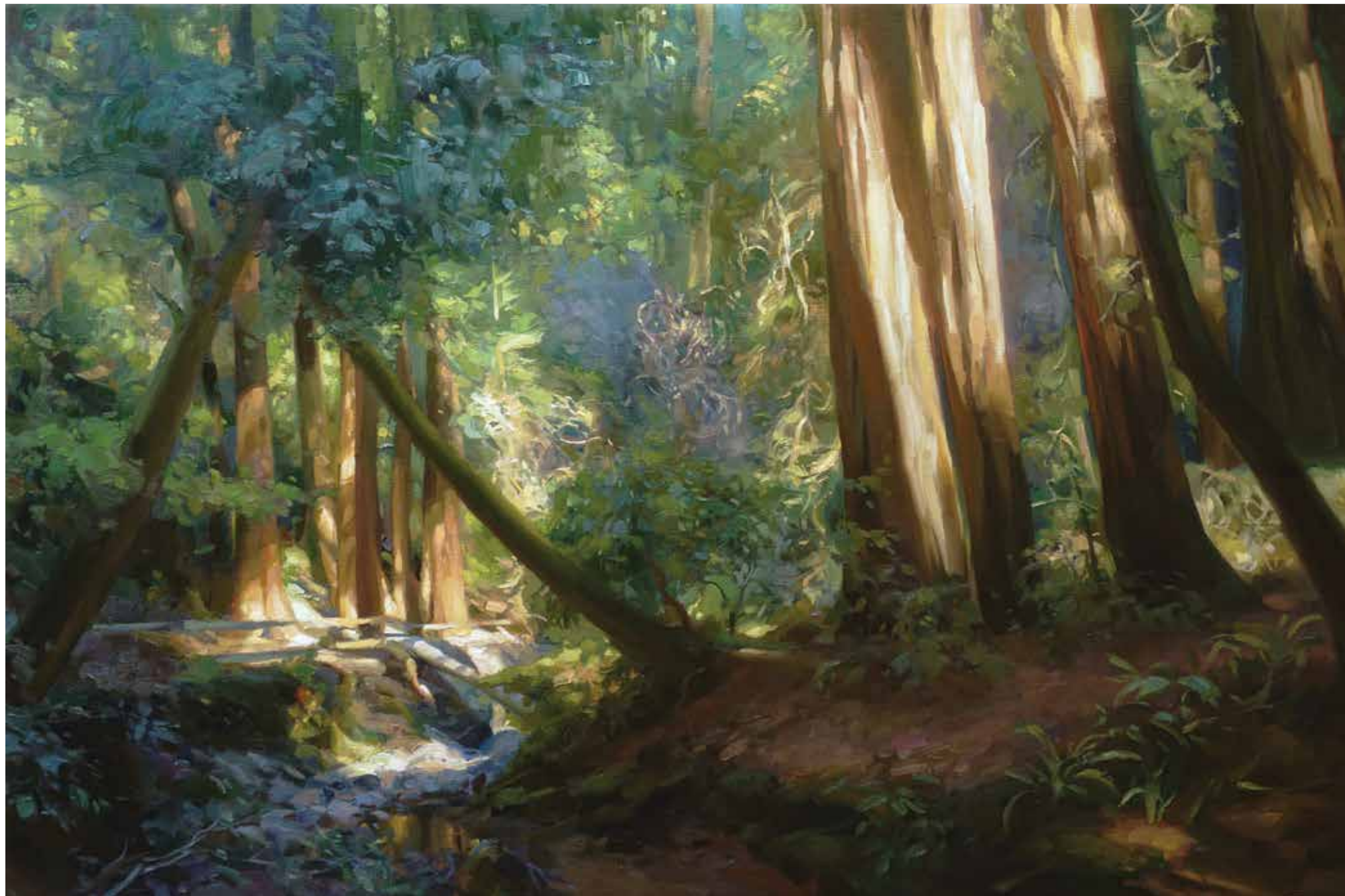
Plein Air Painters of America: 35 Years Outdoors, **The Booth Museum**, Cartersville, GA. Through February 26, 2023.

**Forgotten Coast en Plein Air**, Port St. Joe, FL. March 17-26, 2023.

Solo show, **Cole Gallery**. April 2023.

Solo show, **McLary Fine Art**. May 2023.





Muir Woods, oil, 24 x 36.

ible motion,” she says. “It really lends itself to painting. And I can use my brush to amplify the direction of the waves’ movements.”

While this story was going to press, a solo show focused almost entirely on Hudson’s waterfall scenes was on view at FoR Fine Art in Whitefish, MT. EARLY SUNLIGHT ON THE FALLS from the show showcases Hudson’s understanding of how sunlight passes through water and how the mist refracts the colors of light.

The piece has an overall dark cast that draws the eye to the light hitting the water and pouring forward toward the viewer. Like many of her paintings, the work beckons the viewer to step inside the scene and feel the light.

Derek Vandeberg, owner of FoR Fine Art, says that while many artists attempt to paint water, Hudson gets it right. “Kathleen really excels at depicting the motion and energy in falling water, so that her paintings are very dynamic and

engaging,” he says. “There are no tricks or gimmicks—just a solid understanding of the physics of moving water and the interplay of light.”

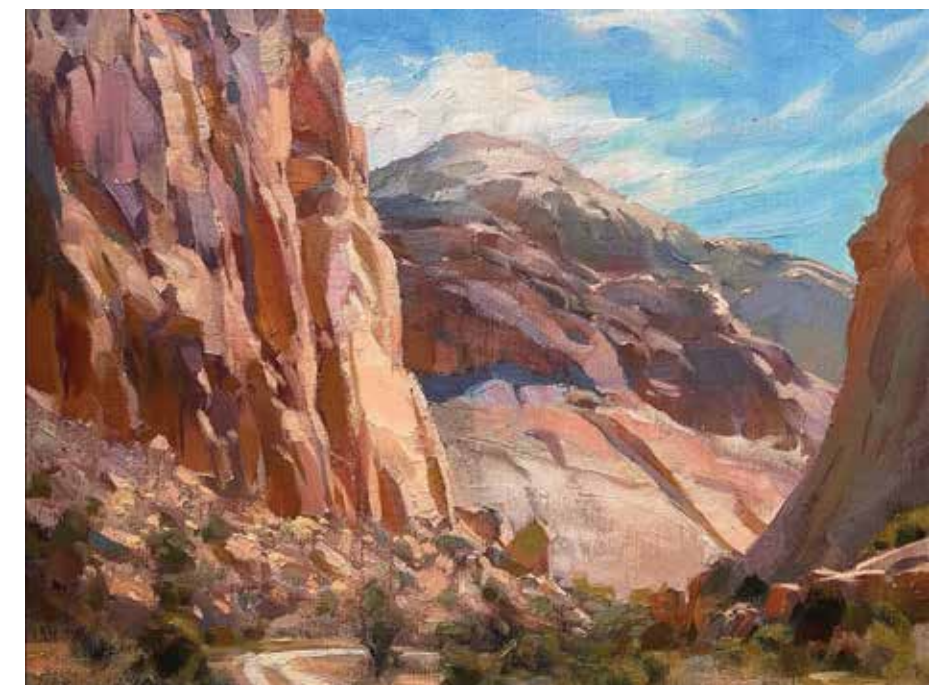
**THE LANDSCAPE** as subject matter has intrigued Hudson since she was a young girl growing up in Lexington, KY. Her mother, a history teacher, homeschooled her three daughters and often shared stories about near and far-off

lands. “My mother’s stories back then brought landscapes to life in my imagination,” Hudson says.

And as far back as she can remember, art was a major part of her life, too. When textbook lessons were done for the day, Hudson often picked up a pencil and drew. She recalls lining up her model horses from dozens of different angles. When she was 6 years old, her parents, recognizing her artistic bent, engaged



Early Sunlight on the Falls, oil, 40 x 60.



Entrance to Capitol Gorge, oil, 11 x 14.

a local artist to give her lessons. When he moved away, Hudson joined a weekly adult oil painting workshop, setting up her easel alongside her grandmother, Mary. To learn how oils worked, the budding artist remembers obsessively copying Sargent’s CARNATION, LILY, LILY, ROSE until the teacher suggested she try something new.

By all accounts Hudson had an unconventional childhood. Some would call it bohemian. Her mother grew up as an Air

Force brat, moving frequently to cities across the U.S. and Germany. “My mom came by some wanderlust as a result,” Hudson notes. “Homeschooling for her meant that she could pack up and take us on long road trips and backpacking adventures in Europe for a month to see museums and historic sites.”

When Hudson’s grandfather retired from the Air Force, he got into the “homeschooling act,” too. He declared that his new mission was to show his





Storm Over the Front Range, Boulder, CO, oil, 16 x 20.

grandchildren his favorite places in America. He purchased a conversion van and took Hudson and her sisters on monthlong journeys across the country, with many forays focused on the West and the grand national parks, such as Yosemite, Zion, and Glacier. Hudson recalls that on one trip they followed the entire Oregon Trail. "I owe my love of the western landscape to my grandfather," she says.

By the time Hudson was 15, she had visited all 50 states and walked through the grand galleries of art museums in Paris, London, and Vienna.

ONE MIGHT THINK that Hudson's unconventional education would hurt her chances when it came time for college,

and several colleges did reject her applications, but Harvard University gave her the thumbs up. While at Harvard Hudson studied medieval history and literature. In her spare time, she continued to draw, paint, and find time for hikes into New Hampshire's White Mountains.

When Hudson graduated in 2009, she wasn't sure what direction to pursue with her newly minted degree. She briefly contemplated law school, but there was a recession on, and she didn't want to accumulate thousands of dollars in debt.

With a giant leap of faith, she moved back to Kentucky and decided to pursue a full-time career in fine art. Through her new art magazine subscriptions, she learned about shows, galleries, and the various plein-air events unfolding across

the country. During this time of transition into the art world, she signed up for workshops with Susan Lyon, Scott Burdick, and Roger Dale Smith. Over the next decade Hudson began participating in plein-air events, where she discovered a like-minded cadre of people passionate about art. Invitations to shows and gallery representation came her way.

Today she's a member of several prestigious plein-air art organizations, including the Plein Air Painters of America and Laguna Plein Air Painters Association. For Hudson, the plein-air events offer the chance to gather reference material for larger studio paintings during the cold Colorado winters. For example, she's currently using reference material from one such trip to scale up a smaller version of a scene from California's Muir

Woods National Monument. At 4 by 6 feet, the work will be the artist's largest painting to date, she says.

Hudson has viewed many sublime scenes in her lifetime, but for her the old growth of coastal redwood forests in Muir Woods is one of the most sublime. "Standing there it can feel like you're in a Gothic cathedral, with the dense tree canopy overhead and the sunlight filtering in gently as if through stained glass," she says. "The tall tree trunks draw your eyes ever upward. When I've walked through there, I've noticed that a hush descends on the others walking the paths. It's almost like people instinctively feel they have entered a form of sanctuary."

When Hudson isn't traveling to plein-air events around the country, she's content to stay close to home in Colorado Springs where subject matter abounds nearby. From her house she can see Pikes Peak and has painted sunsets in her front yard. In 20 minutes, she can arrive at the front entrance to Garden of the Gods, the national monument known for its massive red rocks. Rocky Mountain National Park is also within easy reach.

Whether she sets up an easel in the Rocky Mountains or Muir Woods, Hudson feels a deep kinship with people who have walked the same ground in the past and marveled at the magnificent views. For her, there's a universality in humans' need to find joy and refuge in the beauty of the landscape. "The country or century we live in doesn't change that," she says. "Our visual appreciation of the landscape transcends the usual boundaries of language, space, and time. It's inherently humbling to stand in a landscape carved by millennia of glaciers, ocean waves, shifting sediment, or ancient rivers and remember that your lifespan will be a mere blip in that time frame." ❖

Bonnie Gangelhoff is a contributing editor at *Southwest Art*.

See more of Hudson's work at [www.southwestart.com/featured/hudson-k-dec2022](http://www.southwestart.com/featured/hudson-k-dec2022).



Road to the Foothills, oil, 24 x 24.



Timberline Falls, oil, 36 x 36.