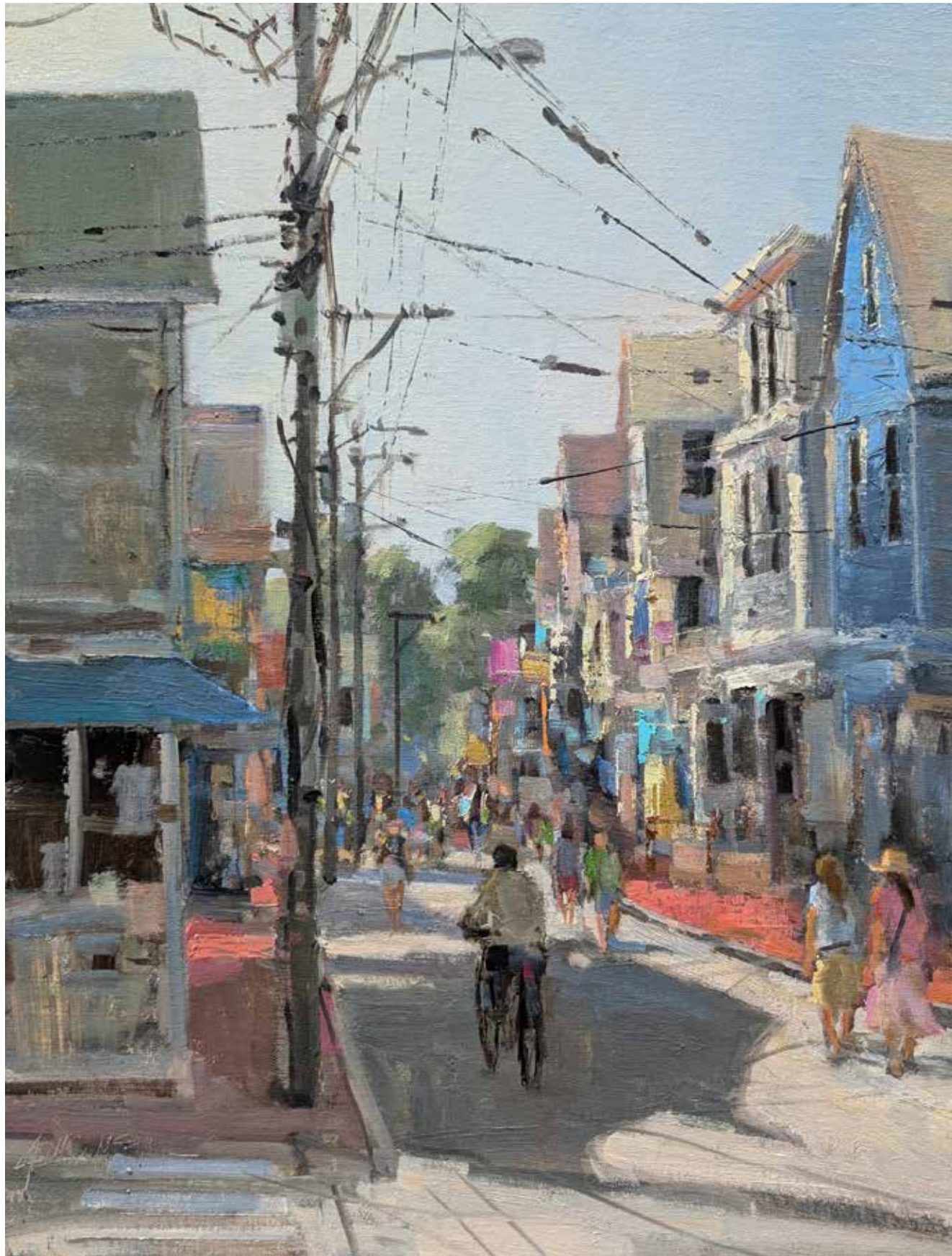




Timeless Tempo • oil • 20" x 16"

LOOKING TO THE LIGHT WITH PAINTER JONATHAN MCPHILLIPS

by Chris White

In Jonathan McPhillips' painting *Overlook*, three sailboats drift over the flat water of an anchorage. They might be Cotuit Skiffs or Beetle Cats, their topsides sky blue, white, and varnished wood. They could be racing, perhaps sometime in late morning, or making their way home from picnics on a island

or sandspit. In the mooring field, about seven small motorboats loll tethered to buoys. It feels like any Saturday in July, but this scene takes place in the background of the painting. The foreground depicts the path to reach it, what you would see if you followed the ribbon of powdery white sand that

weaves between scrub saplings and bayberry bushes. The pathway inserts the observer directly into the point of view, a narrow opening into the sights of summer beyond. The path is almost overgrown, to the point where you'd walk single file and carefully place one foot in front of the other to avoid catching



The New Lineup • oil • 8" x 10" • Rock Harbor, Orleans

briars or brushing stray triadic leaves of poison ivy. You'd want to be barefoot. And if you stay with *Overlook* long enough, you can practically feel that sand between your toes, taste the salt air, and inhale the scents of the shoreline, even as high tide seems to erase it.

Overlook is both representative of McPhillips' philosophy and an ironic title because one purpose of his work is to call attention to moments that people often overlook. People living on the Cape might take such scenes for granted, pay them little attention. As the artist states when describing another of his paintings, "It is easy to pass by the beauty that sits just yards from the roadway. The view of working boats in Orleans' Town Cove is often obscured along Route 6, yet catching glimpses of the colorful skiffs always intrigues me. A short turn down a side street, and the view can be taken in thoroughly. *Brightening Day* is an exploration of that lovely view." In this painting, a fishing skiff floats at its mooring, its orange ball dangling against the green

I FEEL I AM
INHERENTLY A 'DARK'
PAINTER. THAT HAS
CHANGED FOR THE
BETTER WITH THE
LIGHT AND LIFE ON
THE CAPE THAT I
HAVE EXPERIENCED
THROUGH PAINTING.

~Jonathan McPhillips



Overlook • oil • 24" x 30" • Ryder's Cove, North Chatham



Brightening Day • oil • 9" x 12" • Orleans

hull is almost a reflection of the sun burning a hole through the gauze of morning fog. Taken together, the two paintings send a clear message: to wake up and take notice of our surroundings, to capture time. McPhillips says, “As I grow older, it has become more important to me to document a snapshot of history in each painting, rather than just depicting an object or place without thought of its past, present, or future.”

McPhillips’ current collection at Addison Art Gallery in Orleans exudes warmth and a fondness for place. And while his experience as a landscape artist is wide, he’s pleased to see these feelings come through in his work. He says beaming, “I am so glad there is optimism

in there. And nostalgia. I am thinking about those things often in my paintings. Optimism and nostalgia reflect my experience with the Cape Cod community. The glow and sunshine help to reinforce the visual translation. I feel I am inherently a ‘dark’ painter. That has changed for the better with the light and life on the Cape that I have experienced through painting.” Other recent works include *Companions*, featuring a pair of boats on trailers at Arey’s Pond Boatyard; *A New Lineup*, which displays Rock Harbor’s fishing fleet at the pier; and *Illuminated Harbor*, where two white lobster boats bask in the sun off an empty shoreline. But his Cape scenes include more than boats. In addition to other subjects, he

also paints nightscapes such as *Harbor Celebration*, the streets of Provincetown bustling with tourists in *Timeless Tempo*, and the Cape Cod Canal’s train bridge in *Reliable Passage*.

Based in Rhode Island, and a cum laude graduate of Connecticut College with a BFA in Fine Art, McPhillips’ focus on coastal landscapes has taken him all over New England. He’s won numerous awards for both his studio art and *en plein air* works completed on location, and he maintains an active presence within the wider art scene as a prominent member of such organizations as the American Impressionists Society and The Salmagundi Club in New York. Still, the Cape remains special to him. He says, “The light on the Cape is always

a good answer to distinguish it from other areas in New England and beyond. That is undeniable. However, I have learned so much about the history of Cape Cod. Through the special exhibitions at Addison Art Gallery, I have gained so much more information that I hope to convey in my art.”

For over a decade, Addison has exclusively represented McPhillips on the Cape, and the gallery has become an integral facet of his life as an artist. “My experience and influence from the Cape scenery and community have evolved and grown over the past 15 years,” he says. “Addison Art Gallery has been the foundation of that growth, and I am so appreciative of the relationship. Although

it has changed as far as scope and reach, I think the gallery relationship has benefited me in the reliability of things that don’t change. The processes of working together and the cadence of a twelve-month period are very established and so helpful for me as an artist. The gallery has exposed me to locations, community, and opportunities that have been paramount for my artistic development.”

Along the way, McPhillips has explored, taught painting, and published instructional video courses. Many of his forays with technology arose during the pandemic, and he continues to maintain an active website that, among links to resources and his work, features a survey where

guests can offer suggestions for his subject matter. He says, “I included that in my website as an experiment, and I really have not promoted it too much, so I only have about a dozen responses, but ‘cityscapes’ is the leader! I love to paint and paint many things. I also enjoy and embrace the feedback from people who enjoy my work (and even those who do not!). I think it is a disservice to keep my inspiration and influences in a silo and I am happy to hear what others like to see.” Interest in his city paintings likely draws from his accomplished use of color and his ability to depict a nocturnal, buzzing culture.

Some of his paintings have even traveled internationally through an initiative of the US

Government. McPhillips says, “I became part of the State Department’s Art In Embassies program over 15 years ago when an Ambassador to Lithuania was looking for work of New England artists to display in the US office/residence during his tenure. I think I was found by the director of AIE through a Google search. They choose existing available work, and it is extended on loan for the period of the ambassadorship. I currently have one painting at The Hague. It is a Pleasant Bay marsh and catboat scene chosen by the ambassador and his spouse. I hope to be able to visit these paintings someday. They have much more exciting travel experiences than I do!”

As a painter, McPhillips continues growing and he reflects, “I think it would be hard to discern a specific evolution of my art although I know my work is always changing in subtle ways,” he says. “Most importantly, I try to get better. That is a stair step process, and I am always trying new techniques and tools to complement my foundational style.” He and his wife Janie have two daughters, and they’ve very much been part of his journey. He explains, “I once said my wife and two daughters are in every brushstroke. It is very rewarding to paint towards goals, as well as having goals that inspire the painting. My family is an incredible inspiration for me.” 🏰

On August 8, McPhillips opens a solo show at Addison Art Gallery, where he says, “I hope to show the best work I can that honors the history and beauty of Cape Cod.”

Chris White is a freelance writer for Cape Cod Life Publications.



Companions • oil • 12” x 16” • Orleans, MA (Arey’s Boat Pond)