



The Beginning (Again): New Paintings by Chris Willcox

Chris Willcox paints places. Her work is rooted in the past, both in the tradition of representing landscapes in paint and in the histories that haunt the places she paints, where ghostlike horses and humans navigate terrains suspended between then and now, here and there. Layers of acrylic shimmer like semi-transparent strata of sediments. They, too, keep time but blur any semblance of certainty. The past bleeds into the present, as if to embody Derrida's "logic of the ghost." What emerges from Willcox's paintings is a queer temporality, disorienting and out of step with the linear progression of straight time.

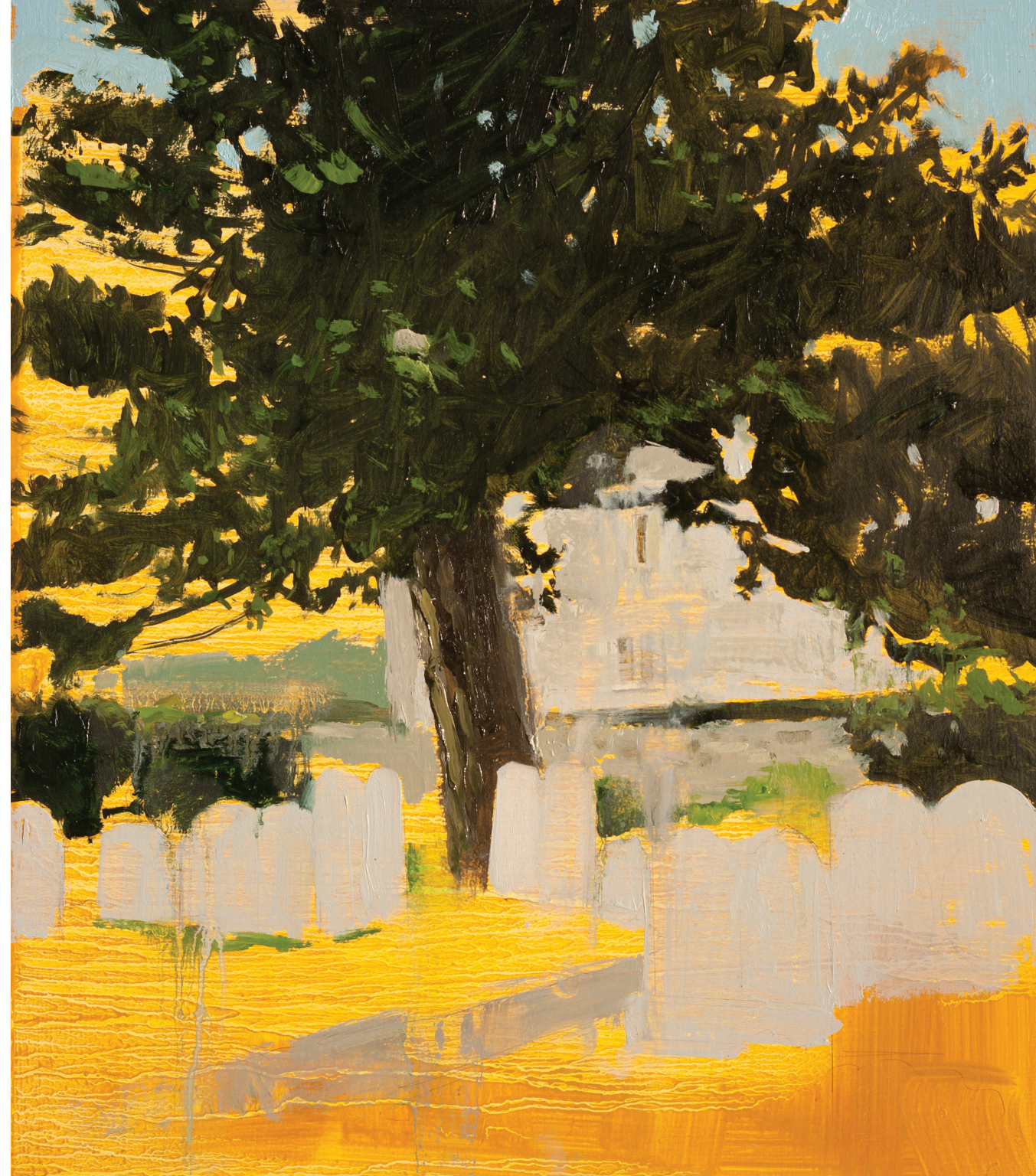
As if a case in point, "The Beginning (Again)" signals a return to a starting point, another round in an ongoing engagement. The exhibition brings together a series of large-scale acrylic paintings on paper with smaller, more recent oil paintings on wood panels. The scenes that unfold in the larger work, primarily picture the land around Minnesota's Fort Snelling as a landscape of aftermath. They bear witness to what no longer can be undone. Willcox's fascination with places steeped in tragic history continues: how might places hold such memories? In previous bodies of

work, Willcox traced the fates of early Antarctic explorers and researched the almost century-old battlefields of the First World War in France and Belgium. Having walked across that scarred land, Willcox seeks to make visible an elusive residue, the spectral traces of histories that still, mysteriously, affect us in the present.

On the wooden panels, the palette and paint change. Luminous pink glows underneath dramatic drips of oil. Scenes seem wrested from the sheer materiality of paint. Here, Willcox moves away from specific locations and toward structures of broader symbolic significance: a cabin, a bridge, a bunker, a church. They speak to basic human needs for shelter, safe haven, and reliable passage. At times, they are unfinished or on the verge of dissolution, as if their presence was precarious. (It is.)

The movement evident in "The Beginning (Again)" coincides with a profound turning point in how the humanities have been making sense of our place in the world. *Landscape* traditionally has implied distance: "land has to be far off so that it can be seen all at once, as a panorama.

(right) *Church*, oil on panel, 13" x 16", 2015.





Cabin, oil and spray paint on panel, 14" x 13", 2015 (detail).



The Messenger, oil on canvas, 48" x 36", 2015 (detail).



Green Door, oil and spray paint on panel, 9" x 10", 2015.

Land recedes and becomes *landscape*. *Landscape* equals *land*; the land escapes, out of your reach: the word landscape pulls the land away, or pushes you back away from the land." From afar, land turns into territory to be conquered, fought over, and usurped; or, instead, into romantic visions of 'nature,' another increasingly fraught term that parses the human-made and the 'naturally' occurring. But no silent observers are we, always at a distance: we are part of the mesh, entangled, implicated, and called upon to see ourselves anew in the exigencies of our time. In Willcox's latest paintings, animals gaze back at us: a white wolf, a pale mare. Derrida, seeing himself in his cat's implacable gaze, muses, "thinking perhaps begins there." Again.

The paintings embrace such uncertainty. After the erosion of certainty, what remains? What longing lingers? And what do we encounter when we immerse ourselves in a place rather than look at it as if from afar? Though steeped in the past, the paintings harbor an anticipatory quality, a potentiality not quite on the horizon. This sense of a not-yet becomes most tangible in a series of almost encounters: *The Deserter*, a figure astride on a caribou, pauses in a wintry wasteland, head slightly turned. A meeting seems imminent but not unavoidable. In *The Messenger* a rider approaches on a bridle-less horse, arms folded impassively. A low sun backlights their approach, the glare suggesting a squint, a mirage, a maybe.



The Deserter, oil on canvas, 19" x 23", 2015 (detail).



Wolf 2, oil on panel, 18" x 16", 2015.

The visual language in Willcox's paintings is rich in archetypal imagery. The messengers, deserters, and witnesses step out of linear history and into an epic time of myth and stories. Far from ancient, this landscape offers a place and time to turn and return to when faced with the incomprehensible. The work not only gestures to the past but opens toward the world's futures, in all their messy and unfinished potentiality. The paintings in "The Beginning (Again)" embody a longing for "another way of being in the world and time, a desire that resists mandates to accept that which is not enough." A half-built house, a white wolf's gaze. They dare us to desire impossible doorways where there were none.

Christina Schmid serves as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Art at the University of Minnesota. She is a writer, teacher, critic and occasional curator. Her essays and reviews have appeared in Artforum, ArtPulse, Flashart, afterimage, and a number of online publications, such as mnartists.org.



Above *The Beginning (Again)*, acrylic and ink on paper, 40" x 60", 2015 (detail).

Cover *Bridge*, oil on panel, 13" x 14", 2015.

The Beginning (Again): New Paintings by Chris Willcox

November 6–December 11, 2015

Opening Reception:

Friday, November 6 from 7–9 pm

**Chris Willcox in conversation with
Christina Schmid:**

Thursday, November 19 at 7 pm

Law Warschaw Gallery

Janet Wallace Fine Arts Center, Macalester College

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(651) 696-6416

Gallery hours:

M/T/W/F	10 am–4 pm
TH	10 am–8 pm
SAT/SUN	noon–4 pm

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