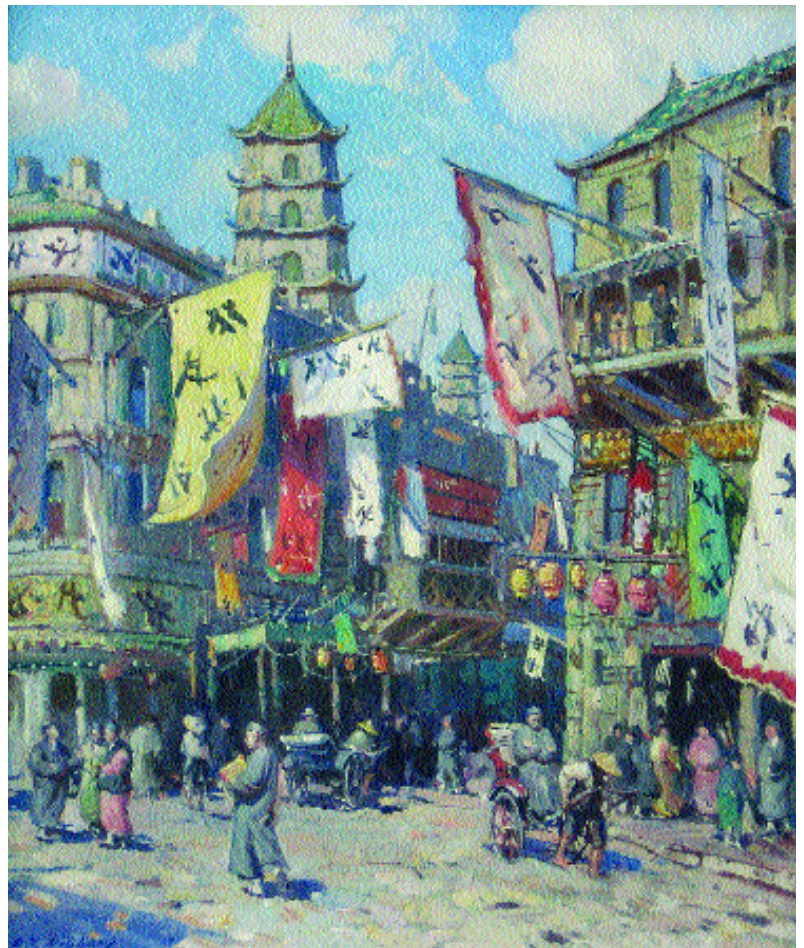


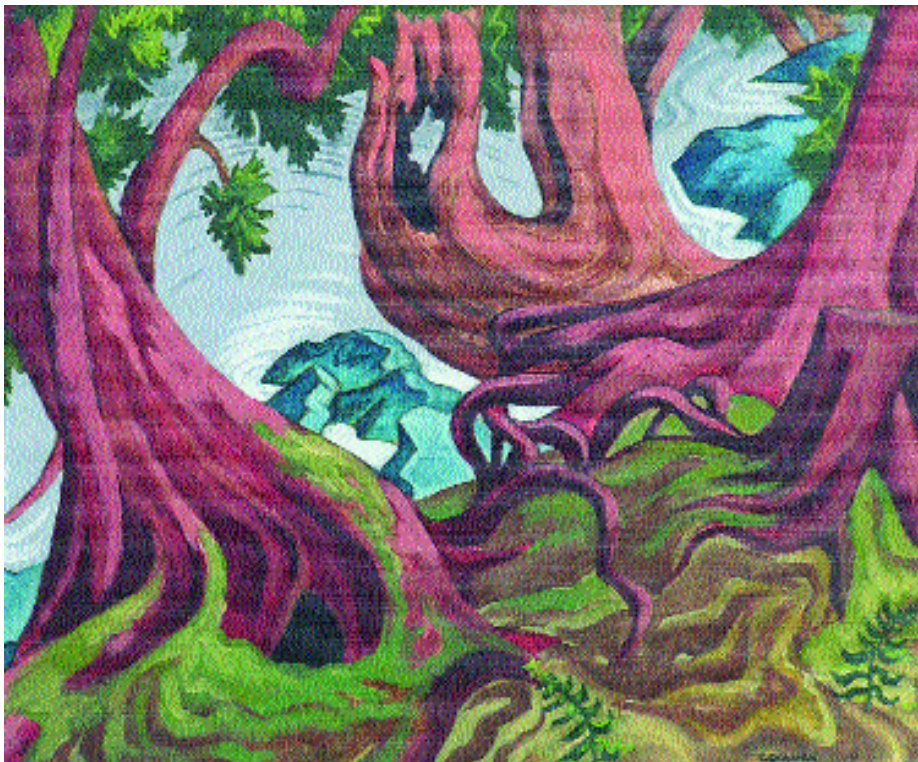


work. Though this painting is often referred to as a “wedding piece,” because of the predominant presence of a bride, its figures appear isolated from one another. This theme of isolation is carried to an ultimate commentary in his still lifes, such as *Geranium*, where the objects of the study appear to exist on isolated planes, alienated from each other, while still related for the sake of the painting’s composition.

A Works Progress Administration Easel Painter in the 1930s, Ronald Slayton (1910-1992) was an art professor in high schools, college classrooms and at a school he founded himself, The Dog River Art School, at his farm. He served as curator of the T.W. Wood Art Gallery in Montpelier for almost twenty years, and helped organize the Vermont Art Teachers Association, serving as its president.

Slayton considered himself a “social realist,” with his work ranging from sarcasm to humor, as evidenced by his *Burlington Gothic*, a witty play on Grant Wood’s *American Gothic*, with decidedly Vermont references (cornucopia of fruits and flowers, the family, and the dog, the farm house, the lunch pail, and a dissonant configuration of construction beams.) In the last twenty-five years of his life, Slayton’s medium of choice was watercolor. While his son remarks that Slayton did not believe in “beauty for its own sake,” his watercolors when not narrative, do not stand in the way of beauty, pure and skilled.





Of the area around his family's farm in Fletcher, Vermont, Robert Blair (1912-2003) said, "There is nowhere else that I know where you can stand in one spot and turn slowly in a circle and be completely inspired at every degree of the turn." In truth, Blair considered himself an itinerant painter. He would set out on his motorcycle, and end up wherever it and his paints took him. Returning to the family farm in Vermont every summer, Blair found the rural life and mountain vistas iconically suited to the lush colorations of his work in watercolor, oil, acrylic, and sometimes, a combination of two or more media. If anything, Blair's identification with the place and his empathy for the common citizen made Vermont his aesthetic home.

Momentous events occurred early in Blair's career. After studying at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the Metropolitan Museum of Art acquired one of his paintings, and he received two Guggenheim Fellowships in a five year pe-



ABOVE: Alden Bryan, *Venice*, 1964, o/linen, 29 x 21, Phoebe and Alden Bryan.

RIGHT: Ron Slayton, *River, Rocks and Roots*, w/c, 14 x 18, Billi and Bobby Gosh.

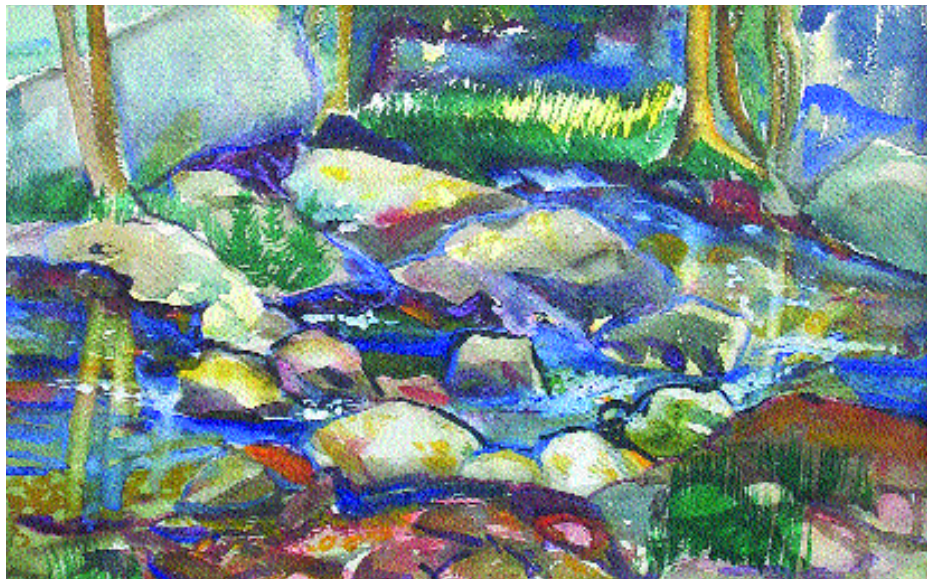
ABOVE LEFT: Ron Slayton, *Burlington Gothic*, 1937, o/c, 27 1/2 x 19 1/2, Billi and Bobby Gosh.

ABOVE FAR LEFT: Francis Colburn, *Geranium*, 1955, o/c, 32 x 22, Billi and Bobby Gosh.

LEFT: Francis Colburn, *Cedar Roots*, 1948, o/board, 10 1/2 x 12, Billi and Bobby Gosh.

riod. He served as an infantryman in World War II, with permission from his general to carry his art supplies into battle as long as painting did not interfere with his duties, resulting in massive documentation of the war, including the Battle of the Bulge, firsthand.

Throughout his career, watercolor was Blair's primary medium, particularly suited to channeling his vitality, and his vigorous, almost calligraphic handling of his subjects.



The boundlessly energetic Blair would utilize unusual implements (spatulas, combs, twigs, hardware and particularly wide brushes) in applying and scratching into paint, "using paint by the pound as well as

by the tube." He became passionately engaged with ways of utilizing ink in his compositions, employing a strong, thick sense of outline, akin to Japanese woodblock prints, yet bold in its definition.



The fluidity of Blair's watercolor lines and his almost extravagant use of the range of color betray his kinship with nature. His love of horses, of crashing waves and vio-

lent skies, as well as his fascination with rural folks, and their farm machinery and their unpretentious social life—all found their way into a portfolio rich with motion

and emotion that chronicles a way of life as long as it lasted. Early in his adulthood, Blair made what was to be lifelong friends with renowned watercolorist Charles Burchfield who advised him, "The only way to develop your art is to go your own lone way." From one individualist to another, it was a point well taken.

Alden Bryan (1913-2001) was essentially an enigmatic character, hardly the kind of person one expects at the center of a fine arts movement in Vermont. Originally from Missouri, Harvard-educated in economics, and an avid sailor and tennis player, Bryan married, Mary Taylor, a sculpture student, and a year later the couple sailed into Gloucester Harbor, where they had their first glimpse of working landscape artists.

After studying with Gruppé in Gloucester, Bryan went to Vermont in 1939 to study painting with Charles Curtis Allen, N.A. Shortly thereafter, the Bryans settled on a dairy farm in Jeffersonville, where he introduced pasteurized milk to the area. Throughout a lifetime of varied achievements that included establishing a bakery, restaurant and inn, designing the base



ABOVE: Emile Gruppé, *Gloucester Fish Pier*, o/linen, 24 x 36, Phoebe and Alden Bryan.
 RIGHT: Robert N. Blair, *View from Pumpkin Harbor Road*, w/c, 26 x 40, estate of Robert N. Blair.

ABOVE LEFT: Alden Bryan, *France: Cote d'Azur*, 1972, o/linen, 24 x 36, Bryan Memorial Gallery.

LEFT: *Reginal Wilcox Raking Leaves*, o/c, 20 x 24, Jane and Terry Shaw.

lodge of Smugglers Notch Resort, building the first indoor tennis center in Vermont, Bryan painted. Every summer the Bryans returned to their studio and art gallery in Rocky Neck, Gloucester.

Bryan painted in more than twenty-five countries, ranging from Katmandu to Cape Horn, Africa, to the Antarctic, Hong Kong and Indonesia. But, it was in Vermont, and in the old city of Quebec, and on the Massachusetts seacoast where his command of painting produced the most compelling works. Over 1,000 paintings cover the changes in the local farmland of Vermont, and in the waterfront docks, recording the transformation from the age of sail to the age of steam.



When Mary died in 1978, Alden set out to build a gallery in her memory, giving mortar and design to a spirit the Bryans had nurtured for over thirty years. Inviting the best artists he knew to exhibit, the non-profit gallery on Main Street in Jeffersonville became a magnet for painters who lived the artistic legacy of Lamoille County,

Vermont. The area's unfettered vistas and local population welcomed the artists, and then left them alone. The camaraderie of artists in Vermont has produced accomplished painters in every generation for over one hundred years. *Masters of Vermont: The Men* provides an eye witness to their brotherhood.