



Michaela Harlow *Still Waters*

# Spring Inspiration

How the Rejuvenation of Spring  
Can Affect the Creative Mind

by Clara Rose Thornton

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**T**oo often spring is looked upon as a relief from winter drudgery, or merely a road sign alerting life's travelers that summer is just a few miles away. In other instances, its characteristics are turned to myth, with people evoking notions of the Earth's soul awakening, shaking off the snow, and injecting the air with spice.

But what is the essential nature of the season? How does it extend beyond being a waiting room in summer's office or a tax refund after winter's liability? Spring is historically a time of inspiration to naturalist painters, individuals who pay attention to the subtleties of their surroundings on a height-ened scale. Three of Southern Vermont's finest landscape artists, each with a divergent style—Michaela Harlow, Judy Hawkins and Ann Coleman—share their

philosophies on the air, the hues, and the essence of a season that is a singular force all its own, and not just a categorical state of mind.

"Vermont is an endless source of inspiration for a painter," said Michaela Harlow, who resides outside of Brattleboro along the picturesque Green River.

"The natural world here is constantly changing, and never is that more apparent than in spring. Fall is a rapidly changing season as well, but where autumn seems to linger melancholy, spring rushes forward breathless. The sense of trying to keep up with spring is very different from the desire to hold on to fall. The changes

in April are all about beginnings, unlike the changes of October and November. Spring is like a song that begins subtly, almost imperceptibly at the start."

Harlow's abstract oil and pastel renderings encapsulate a certain viscera; the observer feels the scratch of texture as if brushed by a wayward twig, and deciphers layers of hue presented in a blurred vision of heaven. Her abstract method belies an acute recognition of nature's nuance, and points to a thematic strain: "In spring the layers of snow and ice slowly peel away with last year's bleached remnants, revealing the fresh and the new. The peeling away of layers seems to be an ongoing process from season to season in Vermont, and it works as a metaphor for the human experience in my work as well."

The fact of "layers" emerging in spring was continually mentioned. Judy Hawkins, of Putney, remarked that, "As the structure of the landscape becomes more complex and luxurious, with seemingly infinite layers of stems, leaves, flowers and grasses, change happens in terms of the quality of light, color and texture." And Ann Coleman, calling Whitingham home, said, "What I like about the Vermont landscape is the layers and textures: the farmlands, to the trees to the mountains, with ponds, lakes and streams.... What stands out about spring is the explosion of color amongst this; the layers and hues of color are unbelievably profound."

The spring season can have a seductive quality, wherein people are moved to explore the outside world and languish in temperate climes. Hawkins' works in oil, particularly *Spring Meadow* and *Blue Orchard*, communicate this subtle seduction by inciting a desire to enter their hazy world where the particles of new life waft through the air. "The transformation of the Vermont landscape from winter to spring seduces and inspires me," Hawkins mused.



Judy Hawkins *Spring Meadow*



Ann Coleman *Champlain Valley*





Ann Coleman's work is on continuous display at Ann Coleman Gallery in Wilmington, and she recently created two seasonal paintings bought by Honora Winery & Vineyard, located in West Halifax, for use on their wine labels. Her next exhibition is July 3-5 at the Wardsboro Library.

Judy Hawkins' current solo show, *Transformation: Sky and Water*, runs through May 9 at Furchgott Sourdiffe Gallery in Shelburne.

Michaela Harlow is represented by Emily Amy Gallery in Atlanta.

Echoing this sentiment, Harlow stated that "it seems a particularly sensual season to me, with the return of life's sound, fragrance and color; the smell of earth and bird song.

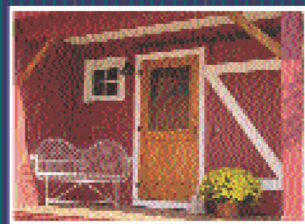
"(Spring's) rush of new life awakening has a huge emotional impact," Harlow continued. "I feel a surge of energy and a desire to create, inspired by the active process of rebirth that is spring itself. Spring is hope. Spring is life."

Coleman, whose realist, classically inspired

landscapes prize detail over whimsy, communicated a similar sense of renewed energy when surveying a spring vista. "So often I can be driving through Vermont or riding my bicycle and get the feeling that this is truly heaven on Earth, with the sun backlighting the breathtaking landscapes. I'll stop and shoot some photos with the possibilities for a next painting. I thank God for diversity."



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