

COVER  
FEATURE



# EVENT HORIZON

## THE ART OF ANNE PACKARD

By André van der Wende



**I** S IT SAFE or even right to call Anne Packard an icon? I think so. As one of the finest painters of the Cape Cod Bay, the dramatic sweep of turbulent sky and sand flats that seemingly run on forever as they race to meet a sliver of water, it's easy to forget, amongst the homogenous reams of Cape Cod landscape painters, just how good she is. The irony being that Packard has had her fair share of imitators, a point of contention that raises her ire. They procure the "look"—a lone dory isolated in a seamless void, flat tracts of sand, sea, and sky—but very few are able to match imagery with soul the way she does. She's one of the great painters whose principal subject is the horizon, demarcated in contrasting clarity by a tight dark line of water, or ambiguously shrouded in fog with all points in between. Where does it begin? Where does it end? What's beyond? The unknown, the abyss, the cosmos, hope?

A painting such as *Ghost Boat* (1999) looks as if it just landed, arriving a moment ago from the ether, and is an incredible abstract painting in its own right. Plenty of other artists have exploited the expansive arch of Provincetown's bay, with the town on one side and the sand flats on the other, but no one catches it the quite way Packard does: a bell-jar moment with elegant mystery and serious splendor, ascribing psyche to the landscape while searching for truth. Packard, literally, lives that



(ABOVE) *GHOST BOAT*, 2002, OIL ON CANVAS, 48 BY 48 INCHES COURTESY FIELDS PUBLISHING  
 (TOP) *PROVINCETOWN HARBOR*, 1999, OIL ON CANVAS, 48 BY 72 INCHES COURTESY FIELDS PUBLISHING  
 (FACING PAGE) ANNE PACKARD ALL CURRENT PHOTOS OF THE ARTIST AND HER HOME BY PHIL SMITH



ANNE PACKARD IN HER HOME, SURROUNDED BY PAINTINGS BY HER GRANDFATHER, MOTHER, AND DAUGHTERS

iconic Provincetown view of the wharfs, buildings, and steeples lined up beneath the lightning rod of the Provincetown Monument as they all curve around the harbor. On the top floor of her waterfront home, her bedroom is sandwiched between the bay on one side, and her studio on the other, facing views of Provincetown harbor bisected by Provincetown proper from deep in the East End. "She rolls out of bed into the canvas!" says daughter Cynthia Packard. It's cliché to call it breathtaking, but that's what it is.

The name "Packard" carries a legacy of art in this town; daughters Cynthia and Leslie are both artists in their own right, with Cynthia in particular achieving comparable success. Anne's maternal grandmother,

Zella Bohm, was an accomplished artist with the brush, but it's really her grandfather Max Bohm, a distinguished romantic-visionary painter, who has left the most indelible impression upon the granddaughter he never met. Packard was born ten years after Bohm died in Provincetown in 1923 at



MAX BOHM, *BLUE EVENING*, YEAR UNKNOWN, OIL ON CANVAS, 28 BY 22 INCHES  
PACKARD HAS LIVED WITH THIS PAINTING THROUGHOUT HER LIFE AND HAS BEEN DEEPLY INFLUENCED BY IT.



*EVENING*, 2004, OIL ON CANVAS, 36 BY 36 INCHES COURTESY FIELDS PUBLISHING



(RIGHT) *NOR'EASTER*, 2000,  
OIL ON CANVAS, 36 BY 60 INCHES  
COURTESY FIELDS PUBLISHING

(BELOW) *SEASCAPE*, 2011,  
OIL ON CANVAS, 60 BY 36 INCHES

the age of fifty-five. In many ways, Packard's role has been to extend that legacy, so that the void his passing created will be fulfilled and burnished by future generations. "It all starts with my grandfather, Max Bohm. And if he hadn't come here to Provincetown, if he hadn't been an artist, none of this would've happened," Packard says. "I never knew him but I grew up with all his paintings around me and his *blue*—I just always wanted his blue. I went to Brittany, where he lived years ago, because I wanted to breathe what he breathed, I wanted to get that inside of me. I was sketching on this hillside and I felt him there—so in a way I'm always trying to paint up against him, not to honor him, but to push myself to where he pushed himself."

Part of Packard's remarkable story is that she's largely self-taught. There's no BFA, no MFA, no Hans Hofmann school here. Barring an extended series of classes with Charles Hawthorne and Edwin Dickinson disciple Philip Malicoat in the late '70s, Packard has done it, for the most part, on her own. A remarkably original raw talent, what Packard has is something you can't get at art school anyway: a particularly refined sensibility for capturing moods with unique sensitivity to a timeless moment. They're piercingly true without sentiment, so that when you look at an Anne Packard, there's no grandstanding, no ego. They get right to the point.

She doesn't hold your hand in a painting by taking the viewer through friendly tiers of blazing color and light the way so many painters of the Cape light do. "I'm not interested," she says. "I like nothing better than a good storm." Her palette is reflective, earthy, stormy, and cool, calibrated to a certain naturalism and Packard's own deeply private sensibility. Her paintings can be moody, briny, and achingly still, paired down to minimal abstraction, a vertical stack of sea and sky, and where they meet, the horizon, an indeterminate measure of the two. But the reason so many people *get* her paintings is not because of their adherence to an expressive realism, it's because they *feel* them. A good Anne Packard you feel before you even really see it. The realism is emotional, existential, and mysteriously direct. Her work has been called melancholy, but I find it not so much plaintive as truthful. As she likes to remind us, her paintings reside in solitude, but they're never lonely or despairing. They are about one's intimate relationship to nature, a conduit to a life force that stands outside of us.







If Packard's persona has a reputation for being antisocial, feisty, tenacious, tough, and singular, then circumstances decreed it. She carries herself in the posture of a survivor—and she is one—but she is equally generous, warm, funny, compassionate, and humble. She's *true*; there's no facade to Packard, and her utter lack of pretension—what you see is what you get—is refreshing and makes for easy conversation. Over the course of several long visits throughout the fall, winter, and spring at her waterfront home and studio, Packard talks openly about her hard-knock life; raising five children alone and losing one; Provincetown, and her outsider status here; determination and recovery from loss; success and integrity. But mostly we talk about what is at the heart of everything—her painting.

It's easy to talk to Packard about her work because she feels it intuitively and realizes it emotionally. Nothing is over-intellectualized, although she's one of the smartest landscape painters around. "I don't plan anything out," she says, adding that her paintings come "from the gut." Free of rhetorical cant and full of heart, they derive from her core: "I can paint dories out of my head." Even when she is at her most "scratchy" (wintertime), the conversation is alive and warm, her presence vivid, full of mutual exchange, passionate exclamations, colorful language, and pounding of the table to make a point. Not unlike the sense one has when viewing her paintings, time evaporates with Packard so what was to be an hour-long meeting would quickly become three. She will be eighty this summer, and is still vibrant and strong, still stretching her own canvases and tossing the large ones around with the ease of a pioneer gal.

Touring her home is a family affair; paintings by her grandparents, Zella and Max, and her daughters, Cynthia and Leslie, line the walls as reminders of past, present, and future. On the ground floor in a back room, a number of canvases, too large for her to carry up the stairs, sit in various states of confusion and correction. She really works the paintings, turning them upside down, confronting them in reverse through a mirror, and painting right over what to an outsider might appear to be a perfectly affable ground. "She'll move the composition around, and then she'll throw paint on it, then she'll stomp on it, and then she'll find something," observes Cynthia.

"I'm just waiting for something," Packard concurs. It's as though the means to success is out of her hands, the painting declaring itself if Packard is only attuned enough to see it, hear it. One day, when Cynthia and Leslie were children playing on their mother's large deck, a painting was suddenly hoisted out of an upper window and into the bay, followed by a series of loud expletives. Looking at one of her large canvases, which in many ways appears perfectly settled, Packard is not so sure: "It's too thin, you can see the canvas right through, but I just feel it needs some heaviness to it. . . . I want it richer!" She sighs heavily. "It needs some life. It's a classic Anne Packard, but it seems very flat to me. It just doesn't live yet. I've got to build up with some real," she draws the air in sharply, "juicy light there!" She refers to the open expanse of nothingness. "I painted this first, and then I put the boat in a month later."

It all suggests that Packard takes her time with her work. She may have several things going on at once, but a large part of her process is observing, sitting with the painting, seeing and feeling what fits and what does not. Time is an inordinately large component of her work, in terms of both process and its reading. She is able to arrest it somehow. "You know, I don't think an awful lot. . . . It just happens. I depend on that a lot, just some kind of instinct," she tells me, referring to how she thinks long, then acts quickly, stepping outside of the painting in a sense.



(ABOVE) *RED DORY*, 2003, OIL ON CANVAS, 25 BY 32 INCHES COURTESY FIELDS PUBLISHING

(FACING PAGE) ABOVE: VIEW INTO ANNE PACKARD'S BEDROOM, SANDWICHED BETWEEN HER STUDIO AND THE BAY; BELOW: PACKARD IN HER STUDIO

Cynthia helps with this process. The artistic crucible Packard shares with her daughter is a crucial, dynamic, often volatile relationship. “She comes over almost daily to give me a crit,” Packard explains. “I’m very dependent on her still. We push each other. I have to trust her—trust her maybe more than myself on something like that. Isn’t that interesting?” There’s no holding back. And, as is often the case, when one is hearing what one doesn’t want to hear but already knows, it can spark fireworks. The same dynamic holds true when Packard critiques Cynthia’s work. “She wants me to give her a crit, but she can’t stand it! . . . She gets such an attitude. But she needs it, so she puts up with it, and then I just get out of there as fast as I can. I don’t take it personally because it’s her personality. She says, ‘I don’t know, Ma. It’s maybe because you’re my mother, but I want to strangle you. I can’t stand it, and you were right—but I need you, and I want you to do it!’ It just curdles her blood!”

“Now she will come upstairs,” Packard continues, “and I say ‘I need you, Cynthia, take a look!’ Sometimes she’ll say ‘Yes,’ other times she won’t even finish walking up the stairs and she’ll pretend to put a finger down her throat, ‘Ugh!’ Now that stimulates the hell out of me,” she says rapping the table, “because I think she’s got such good taste and I know if I do something good and she says it’s good I can trust that.” There is much love, much humor between the two. “She has been my mentor at times, too,” Cynthia sheepishly admits.

Sitting at a table next to the expanse of bay windows that overlook the harbor on an overcast, gray day with an “Anne Packard” sky, we sit down to a breakfast of linguica, sliced red onion, white bread, and coffee that

Packard has prepared. When we first meet, she’s wearing a chartreuse scarf around her head that brings out the intensity of her hazel-colored eyes, a gray knit waistcoat, an orange sweatshirt, and faded blue jeans pocked with paint. It’s typical Anne Packard: pragmatic and user-friendly. By her own admission, she errs on the side of the masculine, part of her character and bearing that she says is integral to her work: “It’s all my masculine qualities coming out because I am kind of masculine in a lot of ways.” She may be referring in part to her sharp, broad features, high cheekbones and lantern jaw. She’s done her time as a “’50s housewife,” so that now there’s nothing demure about Packard or her work: they are both strong, resilient, and to the point. She prefers the company of men, and most of her collectors are men.

Being an artist, Packard says, “is a blessing, and a torment.” I ask how it is a torment. “I never ever finally get there,” she explains, “and I guess there never is a getting there. You just try to take it to the next level, but then you get to that level and you want to reach again, right?” She raps the table affirmatively in front of her with her palm. “And God knows I don’t know what I’m reaching for half the time. I’m a very visceral person. I’m not an intellectual painter. That’s why I started—because it was a very important way to express something in me.”

Her outsider status remains fascinating, a position Packard openly covets and long reveres. “I may hold myself apart from people, but it’s not because I think I’m special in any way. If you can believe it, it’s almost a kind of shyness. . . . I am not social at all. Everything is family.” I ask her where she thinks she would be if she had not found painting. She considers



FOG, 2002, OIL ON CANVAS, 20 BY 24 INCHES COURTESY FIELDS PUBLISHING



SEVERAL OF THE "MINIS" IN A CORNER OF PACKARD'S STUDIO

this for a long time before responding. "I'd still be outside of the regular people," she says, laughing.

Packard has always felt like an outsider, perhaps from the time she was born in White Plains, New York, in 1933. Raised in Hyde Park, Packard

found that her destiny was spelled out for her by her physician father, who steered a compliant Anne toward secretarial school and early marriage. She married George Packard, an English teacher, when she was twenty-one years old, then lived in Princeton, New Jersey, happily raising a family that would eventually include five children. "I was brought up to be a mother and a wife," she tells me, "and my parents didn't let me go to art school, even though I wanted to go. I had to either be a nurse or go to secretarial school. I was brought up thinking, 'You're just a girl, and you are stupid anyway,' because I was always sort of dyslexic. I just didn't think I was much of anything, so I got married and I had all those kids! Five kids in seven years—that I could do successfully, and I enjoyed it."

As for her art education, Packard had taken a couple of courses as a freshman at Bard College. "It was terrible!" she says. "I didn't have anything to say. I think I had to live a little bit." She didn't return to painting again until she was thirty and visiting Barnstable. "I lived on the tip end of Sandy Neck every summer with all the kids. And there was no electricity, no running water, and so on . . . it was very free living. And someone brought me over a set of acrylics, and said, 'Why don't you play around with these?' I just picked up a little piece of driftwood and painted a boat, and then I did another, and everybody loved them! This is how I started. Painting on pieces of driftwood." She no longer paints on driftwood, but she has maintained the format in her postcard-size paintings that she calls her "minis," delicate, outrageously alive pieces full of internal details and reflecting her inquisitive mind. They offer her a freedom that she tries to carry over into her large paintings. "I love them! The whole world is in there," she says.





BULKHEADS, 1985, OIL ON CANVAS, 20 BY 24 INCHES COURTESY FIELDS PUBLISHING

While Packard’s introduction to painting reflected a time of inspiration and discovery, it was also a world that was soon to change dramatically. Her husband, after seventeen years of marriage, left for Paris with one of his nineteen-year-old students—an act of self-involvement and irresponsibility that left no support for Packard or the children. Still in New Jersey, she went into full-swing survival mode: “That’s when I really started to scratch; I sold Amway door-to-door; I ran a catering service, all for Princeton, with cocktail parties out of my kitchen, and we survived!” When she reached toward her father for help, she was rebuffed with, “Sorry, Anne. You made your bed, you lie in it.”

“I was devastated,” she recalls, “and now I know it was the best gift he ever gave me. Everything I had done, I had done it on my own, so it gave me an extra sense of self.”

Adversity imparted valuable lessons, but tragedy also intruded on her life in the loss of her eighteen-year-old son, Stephen, in 1974, missing, presumed murdered in the Californian mountains. “It wasn’t easy. I was like a pariah, you know: ‘Her husband left her, her son, this and that, they don’t have any money, and they’re different anyway.’ You don’t want to be different out in New Jersey, let me tell you!” Don’t call it melancholy, but there is a solemnness, a benediction, to some of her paintings—the lone dory, or boats in pairs, adrift in shrouds of blue and endless registers of gray and tan.

It’s Provincetown’s incorrigible trait to be different, and here, beside the healing ocean she had known since she was a small girl, Packard could just *be*. When she finally left Princeton and spent her first summer in 1975 at the house on Commercial Street where she still resides today, Packard was broken: “All I wanted to do was return to Provincetown. I just developed this

heartache for this place, as a child even, and all I wanted to do was come back here.” Come back, and get to work. Two years later she was living in Provincetown full-time and painting—not to pass the time, but to survive.

Packard seems to thrive in hard times. It’s a great motivator. “That’s how I got where I am now. You know, I did every sidewalk show I could find and that’s the only way I could get anywhere; no galleries would ever look at me. I’m out here,” she says, pointing out toward Commercial Street, “hanging my paintings on the fence because everyone just sort of laughed at me. For a long time all I did was paint to survive and I didn’t dare to think of any ambitions—it just didn’t enter my mind. I was lucky because right from the get-go I always



A CORNER OF PACKARD'S LIVING ROOM, OVERLOOKING PROVINCETOWN HARBOR





ROCKPORT BOATS, 2003, OIL ON CANVAS, 30 BY 25 INCHES COURTESY FIELDS PUBLISHING

“In town here, back then, in the middle ‘70s? I was just that woman with all those kids down the street that hung her paintings on the fence.”

sold. Even if they were ten or fifteen dollars, it was okay.”

Philip Malicoat helped her to refine her skills. “Phil’s classes were wonderful,” she says. “There were only about five or six of us at most, and they were three times a week in his studio. It was an ongoing class. Phil was color-blind and that’s one of the reasons why, I think, I don’t have a lot of color in my paintings. But he taught me value, and he taught me to paint the negative space. He gave me hope, and he had hope in me.” However, she says, she ultimately disappointed him, and he would chastise her and question her integrity amid accusations of abusing her muse by selling her paintings from the fence outside her home.

I ask if she ever approached any galleries to show her work, and she’s taken aback at such a suggestion. “In town here, back then, in the middle ‘70s?” she asks, exasperated. “I was just that woman with all those kids down the street that hung her paintings on the fence. . . . I like business, I’m good at it. But I never went to any of the openings, and I didn’t even try to get with the in-crowd or anything like that. It was easier to stay aloof and,” she pauses, “I was terrified of that scene. . . . There were a lot of big names, and I didn’t know anything. I was just doing what I was doing. I have to say it was Motherwell who gave me some credibility. He saw something in me that I didn’t. I was just trying to survive.”

The story of Packard selling her paintings from the fence outside her house is by now a part of her lore, along with the story of how neighbor Robert Motherwell started buying them so that her work started to gain momentum and cachet. The real story, however, is about raw talent and an inordinate amount of hard work and determination: “It’s all about commitment and work and discipline.” Packard painted, and painted, sold, kept her head down, and painted some more. She painted through grief, she painted to live, and she did it on her own.

“I know how lucky I’ve been, too,” she tells me, “but I’ve worked for it. . . . This is what Phil used to say: ‘It’s 5 percent talent and the rest is work’ and I never stopped and it worked! And then, somewhere along the line, I dared to think privately that maybe I had something special—but still I could only look at it sideways.”



AGAINST THE SEA, 1993, OIL ON CANVAS, 36 BY 36 INCHES COURTESY FIELDS PUBLISHING



*WINTER STORM*, 2013, OIL ON CANVAS, 36 BY 48 INCHES



*BACK BEACH*, 2013, OIL ON CANVAS, 30 BY 40 INCHES



It's early spring when I last visit Packard, the day sunny and bright, the water still and glassy. "I'm going to retire!" she announces enthusiastically. This is a different Packard than the one I last saw in January. "Everything was gloom," she admits. "I didn't have anything in me. Nothing! I felt I'd said everything I could say, and I was tired of producing. It made me crazier and crazier."

At this point in her career, untethered by various galleries' demands and client requests, Packard has severed all ties to concentrate on her own gallery, which she opened on Commercial Street in 1986 in the old Christian Science Church. Now she's free to paint at will: "I'm delighted! I figure I have done my duty and what I want to do now is paint and not produce. I felt all this great relief; I did a lot of reading; I've walked three to four miles a day now; I stopped smoking. . . . I feel marvelous!"

After a winter sojourn to Puerto Rico, she came home resolved not to paint, to just do what she wanted—but that changed after a major snowstorm battered the Cape, which she witnessed firsthand at a beach in Truro: "That storm came and I went out to Ballston Beach and spent two to three hours there. I was so turned on by that storm and the water coming through—just the breath of it! And I came home and I started to

"Everybody wants a boat? I'm not painting that boat. I'm not doing boats! I feel very free. . . . God, I feel good!"

paint. I haven't stopped." At this point, we make our way upstairs to the studio to see the fruits of her labor.

"This is all new work up here and it's kind of different!" Packard says, waving at canvases on the walls, an easel, and more paintings stacked on the floor, all in various states of resolve. She's clearly animated, and excited, flitting from one canvas to the next: "All of this was done in the last three weeks. . . . I just started fussing. It's all in the mind's eye." While Packard does her share of plein-air work, in the studio she works from memory and imagination: "I just make it up. I start out with one little image and then change it." A large painting of a lone figure standing on a grassy beach knoll overlooking a stark white sea and closed gray sky is still contentious. "This one is still looking a little corny, but I don't know. . . ." I ask her about the figure. "I had to have the figure there," she says, discussing this as a way to anchor the picture. "But I can't quite put it on the canvas. . . . I hate figures, that it needs a figure. . . . doesn't it?" she asks, still unsure, questioning. The figure has moved several times, from left to right, Packard says, explaining the painting's cycle of possibilities.

There's another small painting of a simple building nestled amongst verdant green fields and woods. It's peaceful, strong, direct. She made it



THE VIEW OF THE TOWN AND BAY FROM PACKARD'S STUDIO



into a larger version that, as it stands, is more finished and romantic, but Packard still prefers the original. "I like that painting and it's very different for me. It's more of my grandfather." Bohm constantly finds his way into Packard's work, through his palette, his use of silhouetted forms, or in more direct references, such as the majestic poetry of Packard's schooners and rigged vessels, which we can see in *Solitude 11* (2005), a clear nod to Bohm's own ties to sea and sails. For right now, however, her subject matter has shifted focus. "So I've been painting no boats!" she announces emphatically, a conscious decision to defy expectations. There's a tall, minimal painting of a thin horizon line, the top right flank bruised with a subtle spread of indelible gray that she achieved by accidentally pouring turpentine and manipulating it across the surface. For all of Packard's horizon paintings that allude to Mark Rothko's late work and color-field painting, she still manages to create a dimensionality that feels specific to time and place. "I feel alive again!" she says, as though surprised by her own comment. "I really thought, 'That's it, Anne, that is it. You've said everything and you're just repeating yourself.' It's crazy, isn't it? The business of being an artist."



THE CAPE, 2013, OIL ON CANVAS, 18 BY 24 INCHES



BEACHED, 2013, OIL ON CANVAS, 24 BY 30 INCHES



TWO BOATS, 2003, OIL ON CANVAS, 44 BY 72 INCHES COURTESY FIELDS PUBLISHING

We talk about her playfulness as an artist and actually having fun in the studio, not tightening up and not letting it become all work. She explains how this quality has changed her approach to painting, and life, especially over the last few months. “When I was going through this thing of saying, ‘I’m going to semiretire, I’m not going to produce,’ I realized that all these years I would get up and feel like I was going to work. Work! Every day! And, yes, with work you can have discoveries, so good things would

happen, but, while it was fun, it was also work, and I am not going to work anymore. I’m just going to do it, and these things that are coming, I’ll put ‘em out there and that will be that. Everybody wants a boat? I’m not painting that boat. I’m not doing boats! I feel very free, I feel,” she pauses, “God, I feel good! I’m even running to be a library trustee and I never run out and do those kinds of public things or get involved. But I decided I was going to give back a little bit, and see what happens. Raise a little help down there.”

Is this Packard coming out and shedding her scaly skin? The prickly visage masks feelings of vulnerable self-doubt. “I would just like to know if I’m a good painter or not. And I really don’t know,” she explains. “I was told I was no good for anything most of my life except to be a female. Isn’t that awful?” Reacting against expectations and the status quo is what has defined her; she refuses to be tamped down by other people’s expectations of what a woman should do. “All my life I’ve always fought against everything,” she tells me. “I always felt I was different, not better. I wasn’t going to be part of the herd, so I always picked something that was going to be outrageous to do. Even as a little girl, I’d climb the highest, I’d be tougher than any boy. And then as a young woman, I could be wilder than anybody. . . . I was going to dress differently, I wasn’t going to be a part of the establishment. But everything was focused on a way not to be better, but to be different, to be outrageous. After five kids, I could compete in any swimming contest. I remember going into a physical contest with my husband’s friends and beating all of them at sit-ups—and they were all athletes. It’s directed my whole life.”

She refers to her work as a kind of nostalgia rooted not in sentiment but in truth, a patina of a perfect moment or a past age: “I keep going back to the solitary,

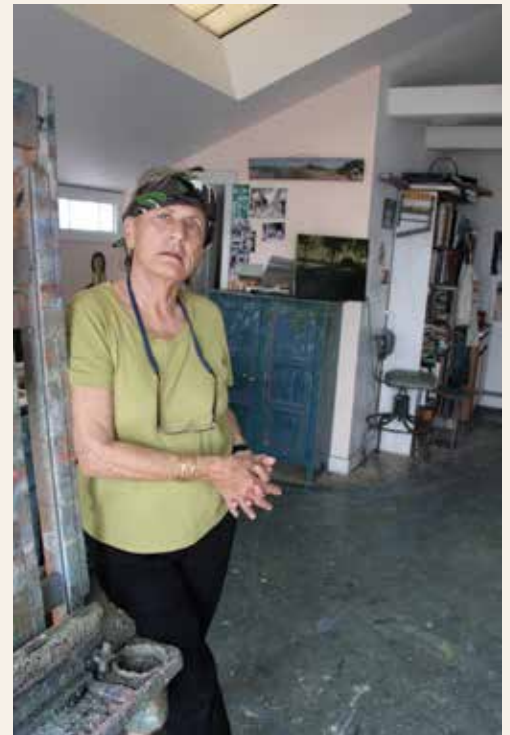


nostalgia. It's that sense of long ago from the flats here in Provincetown." Her son Michael is a commercial fisherman in town, and she likes to feed off that energy of the water and the bustle of the piers. "It's all about the drama of the sea, and the fisherman," she explains. "He's a dying breed now and he knows it, but I love that connection. It makes me feel part of what Provincetown used to be." An artist recently visited the studio and summed up Packard's nostalgia as "quietly leading us into a world where time and space seem to float effortlessly . . . silencing the chaos around us."

She does all this with no flashiness, no pomposity, trickery, overembellishment, or fuss. Confronting a painting such as *Fog* (2002), or *Ghost Boat* from the same year, Packard talks about them as apparitions, as though she's unable to direct the experience, and the experience directs her. "I don't know what I'm doing," she says, and coming from Packard, that's no false modesty. In *Two Boats* (2003), a large six-foot-long canvas, there are two dories anchored on the flats, suspended in a vaporous field of tan and warm gray. There's lots of open space, vast tracts that would send other artists scurrying, but Packard is a master of corralling such boundlessness into a compelling unified whole. There's nothing extraneous in these empty spaces, which you feel you could step and wander freely into. It's a land with no borders. It's a brave painting.

You could say the same about *Evening*, from 2002, and *Red Dory*, painted a year later, paintings that Packard reveals were a breakthrough: "I just like solitary objects. I like all that space in there, that single object. Of course, everything's sort of singular out here anyway, or out in the dunes. . . it's just instinct. I can't take credit for it in a way!" She has an unsurpassed facility for knowing when to leave something alone.

Packard has also tried her hand at "straight" abstraction, but by her own admission the paintings come out resembling what she thinks abstraction should look like. She



HINT OF PURPLE, 2011, OIL ON CANVAS, 48 BY 48 INCHES

"It took me a lot of courage to finally not put something in it. They're so simplistic. That's where I really like to go, and it's hard to lead people there because they still want what they think is 'Anne Packard.'"





(TOP TO BOTTOM) ANNE PACKARD IN FRONT OF HER HOME IN PROVINCETOWN; PACKARD WITH HER DAUGHTER, CYNTHIA, IN 2008; PACKARD SURROUNDED BY HER CHILDREN (LEFT TO RIGHT: MICHAEL, SUSAN, CYNTHIA, AND LESLIE IN 2001)

needn't try so hard; she's already an abstract painter par excellence, with broad open sweeps of muted color that meet with generosity and the geometry of sails and boats nestled within. I like to get up close to these surfaces, which collate abstractions within abstractions and are immersed in possibilities, layering memory and motions of trust and distrust that coalesce into something honest. Look at *Bulkheads* (1985), an architectonic snapshot, all right angles and diagonals sculpted with the help of a palette knife, or *Rockport Boats* (2003), a modest painting of boats tied next to the waterfront, both paintings built up in an abstract manner of strong diagonals and contrasting values. They're both fine examples of how to build a painting, but next to *Sand, Sea and Sky II* (2002), they almost appear "cluttered." I ask Packard if she ever thought she would achieve an effect like this, in which the elements are reduced to a wavering white horizon line, and a blanket of gray sky meets the baseline of the flats.

"It took a lot of courage for me to not put something in it. They're so simplistic. That's where I really like to go, and it's hard to lead people there because they still want what they think is 'Anne Packard.'" They're still a quintessentially Cape Cod experience, specific to our locale, but also reflect a broad perspective beyond the regional that makes them universal and transcendent. Packard doesn't consider herself to be a regional painter and has carried her muse on her prodigious travels over the years to Mexico, Ireland, Italy, France, Montana, California, and Maine. Often painted "en plein air," or sometimes worked up into larger studio paintings, the travel paintings and sketches are lively, vibrantly fresh forays with an often brighter palette. They're an invigorating adjunct to her large Cape paintings, giving her a chance to refresh her eye and relax in a playful noncommittal way.

It used to be that Packard would paint all day; now, it's just mornings. It's not a sign of slowing down, it's a sign that she doesn't have to push herself anymore. "I get up at six thirty, read the paper, walk, come back, work. Nap, work for maybe another hour or two if I'm in the mood—but it's the morning when the inspiration comes. The other times, I'm sort of fussing around and wondering and looking. And you know, it's not just when you paint—I work when I go to bed at night. Painting, of course, is my best friend, my best companion. I can always go there, up to the studio, and do it, so I'm not just sort of flailing around in my old age saying, 'What am I going to do with the rest of my life?' Even if I repeat myself, I have something in me that somebody wants." Anne Packard, despite the challenges that have marked her journey, continues to thrive. "I am not a victim and I was determined not to be a victim. I still paint, I've still got the search in me. I get pretty sick of that horizon, but lately I've enjoyed it more than I've ever enjoyed it. I've enjoyed all the Cape. I really appreciate what I have. It's an appreciation." ❏

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*All images courtesy of Fields Publishing are from the award-winning book Anne Packard.*