

Call of the Wild

An exhibit about 'The Road Not Taken' makes all the difference at the D&R Greenway.

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By Ilene Dube

As our planet becomes increasingly paved over with shopping malls, tract housing and six-lane roadways, time spent alone in the natural world becomes more and more of a special treat. No one knows this better than Yardley, Pa., resident Silvere Boureau, who packs up his paints and his kayak and heads off to his favorite spots in the Adirondack Mountains, Maine and the Pine Barrens.

He skillfully captures not only the flora of the wilderness, but the light and the weather, so when viewing his murals in restaurants, on ceilings and living room walls, we can feel the cold and wet he endured for such revelry.

When those of us less gifted view the glory of nature, we may try to preserve it on film or a digital card. Lacking a camera, we may try to take a mental impression. Or we may be inspired to choreograph a dance, write a song or pen a poem.

Poet and songwriter Marcia Pelletiere wrote the following words when looking at Mr. Boureau's painting "Porter Run, Pa.":

"Moving into the scene, my knee grazes/ the sharp icy edge of a boulder."

Mr. Boureau has endured nature's sharp edges so that we may worship at its altar.

The Parisian native is one of 20 artists whose work is on view at the D&R Greenway Land Trust's Marie Matthews Gallery in the

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Johnson Education Center in Princeton. The exhibit is titled *The Road Not Taken: Journeys Into Nature*, referring to both the trails not yet explored and the land not yet developed, serving as a reminder of how precious this land is.

Curator Jack Koeppel says Mr. Boureau's experience in nature was exactly what he was looking for. "He marveled at the wilderness I took for granted, and through him I was able to look at it through fresh eyes."

Mr. Koeppel recalls seeing a winter's night scene in Mr. Boureau's studio, and hearing about Mr. Boureau's camping trips with his daughter.

"Underlying this exhibition is inspiration: What happens when an artist goes out in nature and does something we can't?" asks Mr. Koeppel. "We look at it through the eyes of an artist and go out, inspired. But the artists actually execute the work through inspiration."

The title of the exhibit is, of course, taken from the Robert Frost poem, and another component will be a reading by poets inspired by the artwork Dec. 13. For those who can't attend the reading, there are inspirational phrases on the walls: "Reading about nature is fine, but if a person walks in the woods and listens carefully, he can hear more than what is in books." (George Washington Carver)

The subject of the artwork — oils, pastels, watercolor, photographs Polaroid image transfer — is land preserved by the D&R Greenway. Many



have taken the theme literally, including a winding road or path or trail. "I wanted to talk about the healthy lifestyle walking on these lands encourages," continues Mr. Koepfel.

"A show like this helps people understand our mission better," says D&R Communications Director Jo-Ann Munoz. "These lands have been preserved with public dollars so it's important for the public to have access to them, to get out and enjoy the beauty of what they've preserved."

This is the first exhibit for artist Marisa Keris, who grew up on her family's farm and wrote about her personal connection to the land in her artist statement. Igor and Ola Svibilsky are husband-and-wife photographers — he works in sepia tones, she works in color — but both capture an old-world look in their images.

"I have a passion for trees," says Mr. Koepfel. "These (trees in Mr. Svibilsky's photographs) are so hauntingly beautiful, representing a distant landscape — and yet it was taken right outside the building." What looks like an ancient forest is the sycamore allee planted in the early 1900s as part of the Edgerstoune Estate.

When Mr. Koepfel first saw the JPEG Mr. Boureau submitted for the exhibit, he knew he had to pay a studio visit — Mr. Boureau's works are very large, and the size alone makes an impact.

"To stand on a mountain top and look as far as the eye can see without encountering any mark of human intervention remains an exhilarating experience," he writes on his Web site. "I take time to roam the Eastern state forests, scouting for that special place — an out of the way valley, a hidden waterfall in an untouched landscape, where you can feel the timelessness of ecosystems in perfect balance. I paint en plein air, sketch or take a photograph and then paint a larger picture in my studio. My intention is to capture and render the spirit of the place with minimal interpretation."

Like many creative people, Mr. Boureau worked at unusual jobs while finding himself. He did everything from stone masonry to making and manipulating puppets for an avant-garde puppet theater, and helped to set up exhibits for photographer Henri Cartier Bresson. Mr. Boureau describes leaving the "jungle of Paris for the wilderness of America." In 1982, he was "seduced" by America's promise of national parks and preserved land and moved to Taos, N.M. His father had been an abstract painter, and Mr. Boureau was painting in an expressionistic style at the time — he had yet to find his voice in realism.

Having left a career as an art teacher at the Academy of Versailles, and searching for his own path as an artist, he moved next to the Sea Gate community in Coney Island, Brooklyn, and met his wife, Anne Fulper, who was working at the Whitney Museum of American Art. When the couple's daughter, Ella, was born, the threesome moved into Ms. Fulper's family home in Yardley.

Since 1984, he has painted murals in restaurants, hotels, golf clubs, churches, hospitals and private residences. House Beautiful commissioned a screen for a show at Tiffany & Co. in New York. These have all been inspired by his Bucks County environs, or Deer Isle, Maine, where he rents a house with his wife and daughter. He will go off for four or five days to get lost in the wilderness, sometimes bringing his daughter.

"Purple Woods" was painted at dusk at Bowman Hill Wildflower Preserve, and although it is a 72-by-56 inch oil painting, it is soft as pastel to recreate the effect of the twilight. As Mr. Boureau is talking about this painting on the upper floor of the Johnson Education Center, Jennifer Shue, a floral designer with Spruce in Princeton, appears and puts her arms around the painter, declaring him her favorite artist. He has painted small florals for her shop, and has just completed a large painting of Ms. Shue plunging into a warm Caribbean sea with a smile on her face.

Talking about "Porter Run, Pa.," painted in Tyler State Park, Mr. Boureau says, "When we have a good snow fall, I try to go out early to see the results — the entrails of the earth, a beautiful spot not much traveled. The first light is pink, so beautiful on the snow. I take it in, like a blanket of warmth, a gesture of love, caressing the earth with the cover of snow."

He recalls camping in the snow with his daughter, observing the moon and the frozen lake. "You get to the core of things in nature," he says. "It's my church. Why build a building to isolate you from the beauty of creation."

The Road Not Taken: Journeys into Nature is on view at the Marie L. Matthews Gallery, Johnson Education Center, D&R Greenway Land Trust, 1 Preservation Place, Princeton, through Jan. 11. Gallery hours: Mon.-Fri. 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Poets and artists reception, Dec. 13, 5:30 p.m. (609) 924-4646; www.drgreenway.org. Silvere Boureau on the Web: www.silverboureau.com