

# JAY STERN



:: GRANT WAHLQUIST GALLERY



# JAY STERN AWNING



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# AWNING

Since his arrival in Maine in 2021 Jay Stern has rapidly become known for jewel-toned paintings of interior scenes and still lifes. Stern begins his paintings with a thin, loose ground over which increasingly active, quick brushstrokes proliferate, alternately calling attention to the underlying ground or tucking it away such that each work manifests its own construction in an almost archeological fashion. Stern's obsession with the mechanics of appearances, the imbrication of abstraction and representation, and painterly surfaces places his practice squarely within a Modernist project that has obvious forbears in the region, especially John Marin and Milton Avery. Yet as "Awning" makes clear, perhaps no artist has had as seismic an effect on Stern's work as Paul Cézanne, whose own investigation of the landscape was greatly influenced by his friendship with geologist Antoine-Fortuné Marion. As Cézanne wrote to painter Joachim Gasquet, "In order to paint a landscape well, I first need to discover its geological foundations."

Though "Awning" does contain interior scenes, here Stern presents, for the first time, predominantly images of the Maine landscape—his own acts of geological excavation. While perhaps no subject has been explored so exhaustively in Maine art, Stern's combination of a newcomer's eyes and an explicitly queer perspective enables a fresh contribution to this storied tradition. The exhibition's title clearly nodding to structures that cover liminal or exposed spaces such as windows and doorframes, these paintings evince psychic states that are themselves liminal and exist on the cusp of a wide variety of transitions. By tracking the landscape through New England's seasons and careful composition and framing, Stern summons our attention to complicated feelings about coverage and exposure,

constraint and freedom, shelter and wilderness, chaos and control.

Taken as a whole, "Awning" reveals the analogical nature of Stern's artistic project. For example, the structures depicted in *Exposed Fall House* and *House on Mechanic St.* sit behind trees denuded of foliage and function as metaphors for (bodily) exposure, of intruding and perhaps also being observed. Taking this implicit sense of voyeurism further, *Hope Park* and *Birch Point Signs* both call attention to the often arbitrary ways in which land is broken into discrete or manageable units; through subtle invocation of the practice of cruising, they also seem to suggest the ways in which queer and other marginalized people have found ways to put the landscape to alternative use. Even in the interior scenes that remain—including the largest single painting in "Awning," *Forever Suspended in a Doorway (Self Portrait)*—the outdoors seems to emotionally predominate, to seep, intrude, or erupt into domestic space via moments of pictorial distortion.

Each of the paintings in "Awning" depicts a moment of fracture, cleavage, or becoming. Sometimes this depiction is literal, as in *Early Summer*, with its evocation of a table where a loved one has perhaps just departed; sometimes it is formal, as in the bifurcated scheme of *Drift Inn Beach*; sometimes it is perceptual, in which the near abstraction of *White Pine Walk* nonetheless becomes legible as a landscape. Yet in all cases these paintings are quietly powerful expressions of the potency of nature and everyday experience, of how—seemingly out of nowhere—a walk through the woods can lead to a revelation. In short, each painting is a manifestation of surprise.







***White Pine Walk***

2024

48 x 60 inches

Oil on canvas











**Laundry Day #14**

2024  
24 x 20 inches  
Oil on panel





***Forever Suspended in a Doorway (Self Portrait)***

2024

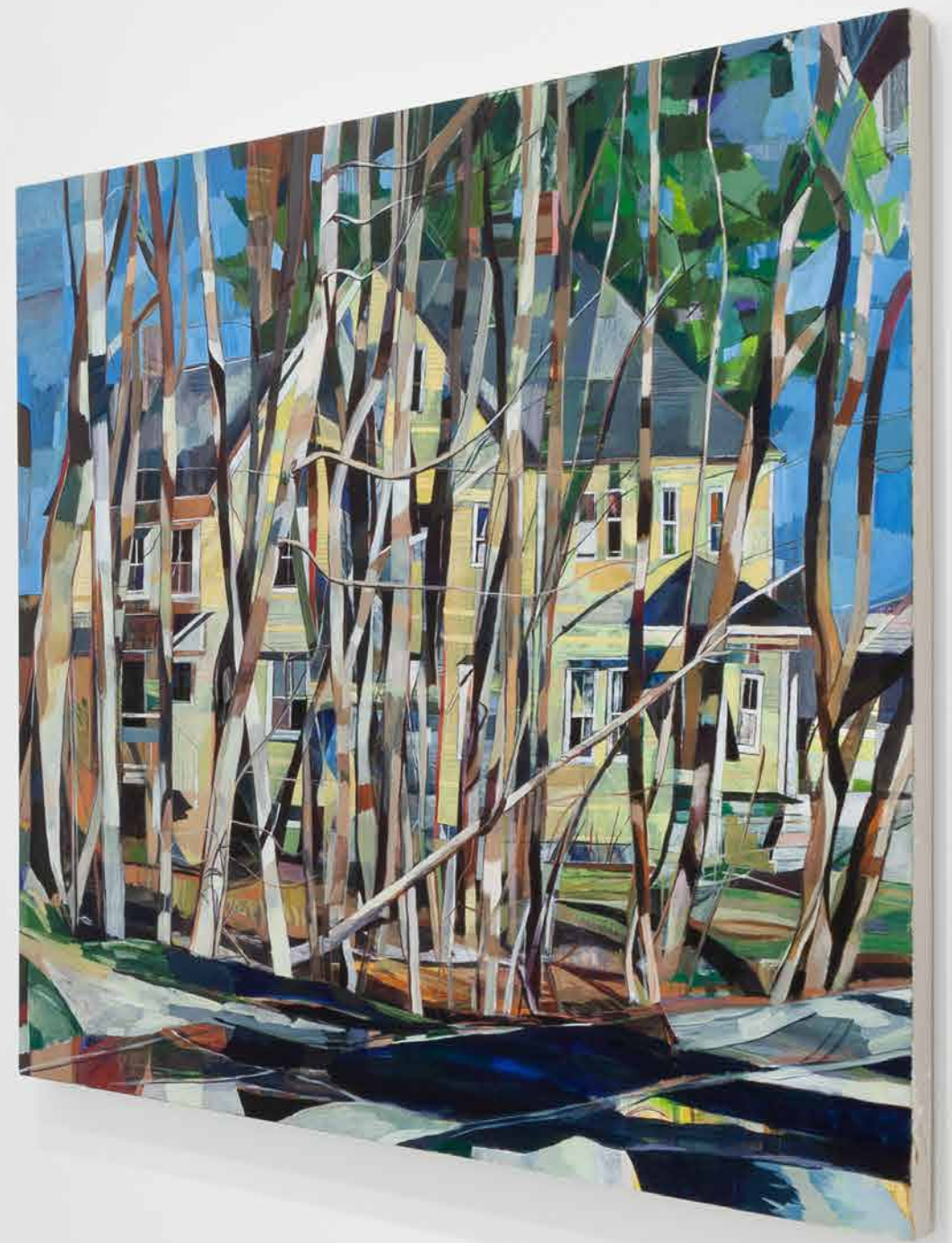
65 x 80 inches

Oil on canvas













***House on Mechanic St.***

2024

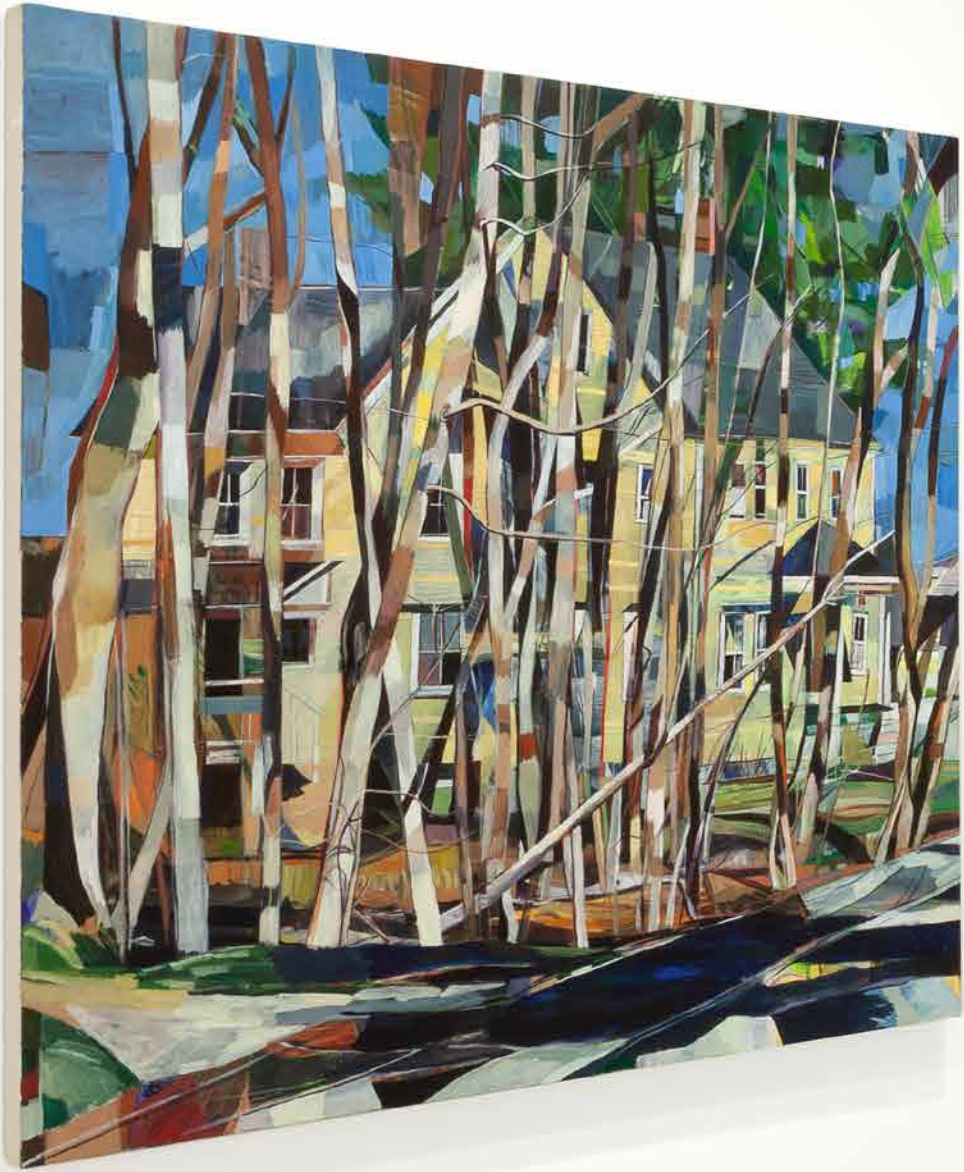
48 x 48 inches

Oil on canvas













***Birch Point Signs***

2024

24 x 30 inches

Oil on canvas













***Exposed Fall House***

2024

29 x 28 inches

Oil on panel













**Hope Park**  
2024  
24 x 30 inches  
Oil on canvas





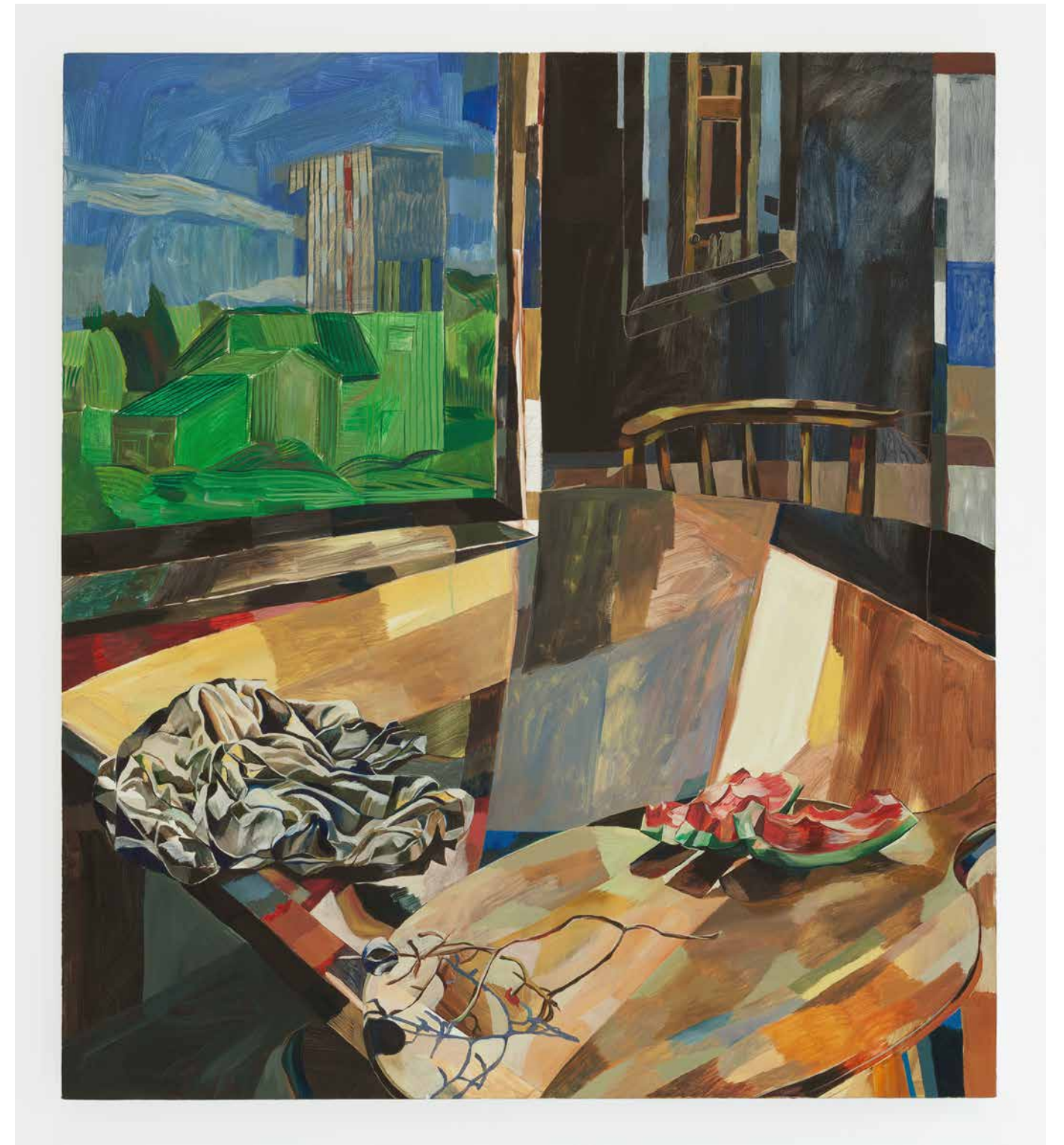




Jay Stern received a BFA in painting from the University of Cincinnati and an MFA in arts leadership from Seattle University. Stern's work has been presented in exhibitions at: NOON Projects, Los Angeles (solo); Turley Gallery, Hudson, New York (two-person exhibition with Jean Blackburn); UTA Artist Space, Atlanta (forthcoming); the Portland Museum of Art, Maine (forthcoming); the Center for Maine Contemporary Art, Rockland; the

Caldbeck Gallery, Rockland; studio e Gallery, Seattle; and Koplín Del Rio, Seattle, amongst others. His work has been written about in numerous publications including Art New England, Décor Maine, the Portland Press Herald, and The Stranger. In 2024, Stern received an Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation grant and was an artist in residence at the James Castle House in Boise, Idaho. He lives and works in mid-coast Maine.





**Early Summer**  
2024  
45 x 40 inches  
Oil on canvas









***Drift Inn Beach***  
29 x 28 inches  
Oil on panel







