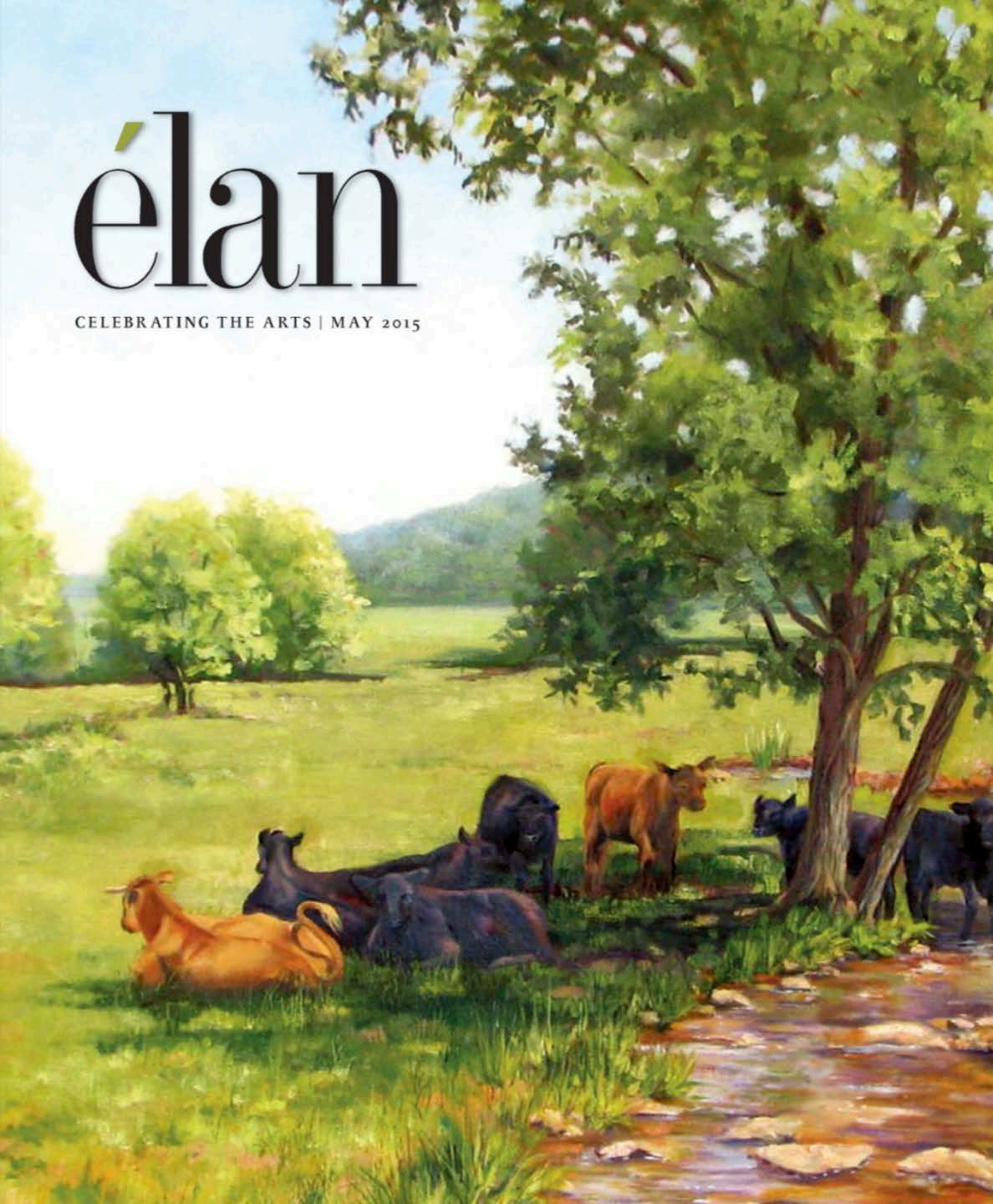


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CELEBRATING THE ARTS | MAY 2015



ARTIST MARY CHAMPION

# Curiosity

CONTINUING A VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY  
BY JOE MOTHERAL



*"I'm pulled toward rocks, trees, weeds, water and sky, with sky and land being the major players...I like fields of weeds with their under-appreciated flowers and seed heads forming a carpet of color and texture."*

—Mary Champion

I sat with Mary Champion at the Rust Library in Leesburg as she sifted through images of her paintings on a laptop. Her portfolio is a collage of Virginia landscapes—images of rolling terrain, trees, open fields, trails and waterways, along with the occasional abandoned building. For Mary, each painting conjures the questions, "What did the people do and where did they go?"

Mary readily admits that nearly all of her paintings grow out of a sense of curiosity. She especially enjoys painting water because it seems to suggest a "voyage of discovery." Indeed, the shimmering water in "Goose Creek at Banshee Reeks" may inspire the viewer to wonder about its source and its eventual destination. What discovery would there be if one could see beyond the parameters of the painting?

Using roads, paths, fence lines and rivers, Mary hints at a deeper narrative and a mysterious destination. "Sky Meadows Vista" features the semblance of a trail winding through a field. "Spout Run" depicts a stream flanked by trees and foliage. And "Unison Farm III" emphasizes the arc of a rutted dirt road. Each painting suggests a story, says Mary. "And the viewer is free to fill in the details," she adds.

Mary especially enjoys creating landscape scenes in early spring and late fall, seasons that offer a variety of color. "I'm pulled toward rocks, trees, weeds, water and sky, with sky and land being the major players," she says. "I like fields of weeds with their under-appreciated flowers and seed heads forming a carpet of color and texture. I prefer that to manicured lawns."

After painting still lifes and experimenting with abstract expressionism, Mary transitioned into landscapes about seven years ago. She begins each painting by laying down a background of peach on the canvas. "The peach tone imparts a warm counterpoint to the blues of the sky and the greens of trees and grasses," she says. Sometimes Mary uses a violet wash to underscore the



"Goose Creek at Banshee Reeks," oil on canvas, 20" x 30"

dark hues. "A good pattern of light and dark will do a lot to hold a painting together," she says.

She prefers to work in a studio with photographs instead of painting onsite, noting that she tends to get distracted out in the open. She tries to paint five or six days a week, with each session lasting from four to six hours. "You have to give up a few things and focus on painting to succeed as an artist," she says.

A survey of Mary's paintings yields a natural flavor that accurately depicts Virginia's rural environs and invites the viewer to investigate and construct the backstory of the scene. A signature element in all of her paintings is light, a natural aspect that she perceives as "dew on the lawn like a field of jewels—early morning sun creating tiny prisms."

Mary's journey as an artist began where she was

born in Dallas. Mary never wavered from her passion as she took art classes, beginning in preschool and continuing through college. She notes that most of her art teachers in high school and college had been heavily influenced by abstract expressionism. And while she says she "got it," she was not engaged by the style.

After marrying and moving to Alabama, Mary joined the Huntsville Art League and studied art under retired



Above: "Spout Run," oil on canvas,  
24" x 36"

Photograph courtesy Bath County Community Hospital

At right: "Shenandoah Sunset," (detail), oil  
on canvas, 20" x 24"; collection of the artist

Opposite: "Path Through the Woods," oil  
on panel, 14" x 11"; collection of the artist



university professor Jack Dempsey who taught "classic drawing and oil painting along with a dose of philosophy and poetry." During her five years studying with Dempsey, Mary learned how to handle oil paint and "how to keep learning and avoid falling into the trap of thinking you know it all."

After relocating to Virginia—living first in Alexandria and later in Leesburg, Mary strengthened her artistic foundation. She became active in several local galleries and joined the Loudoun Sketch Club. Since then, she has exhibited her paintings in numerous local venues, including the Cooley Gallery in Leesburg, as well as Berkeley Gallery in Warrenton and Gallery 117 in Galax, Virginia. She has also mounted shows in other regions of Virginia, Maryland and Delaware, as well as in Alabama and Tennessee. Her paintings are part of collections in the U.S., Europe and Australia.

Mary will participate in the 10th Annual Western Loudoun Artists Studio Tour, scheduled for June 20 and 21. She also will be part of group exhibit in June and July at Gallery 117.

Mary Champion | [www.marychampionart.com](http://www.marychampionart.com)