

MAKING WAVES WITH WATER

Artist Joseph Sampson is impassioned by the liquid element

BY ELIZABETH LEWIS
PHOTOS COURTESY OF JOSEPH SAMPSON

“WATER, WATER, EVERYWHERE . . .”

Such might be the chant that best describes artist Joseph Sampson's recent body of work. He is devoted to painting water in its infinite variety. Whether painted ebbing and flowing over slick, smooth pebbles or being pierced by granite outcroppings reaching toward a multi-hued sunset, Sampson's waters are so evocative one can almost hear the whoosh as they lap rock and shore.

Over the last seven years, Sampson's early passion for water has deepened. “I have always felt an attraction to water,” he says, loading his van before embarking on yet another weekend trip to Georgian Bay. “Perhaps because I spent my early childhood on the island of Malta. Now my work is all about water. I use oils to capture its texture and movement as it reflects light. I spend hours on or by water, experiencing its many moods.”

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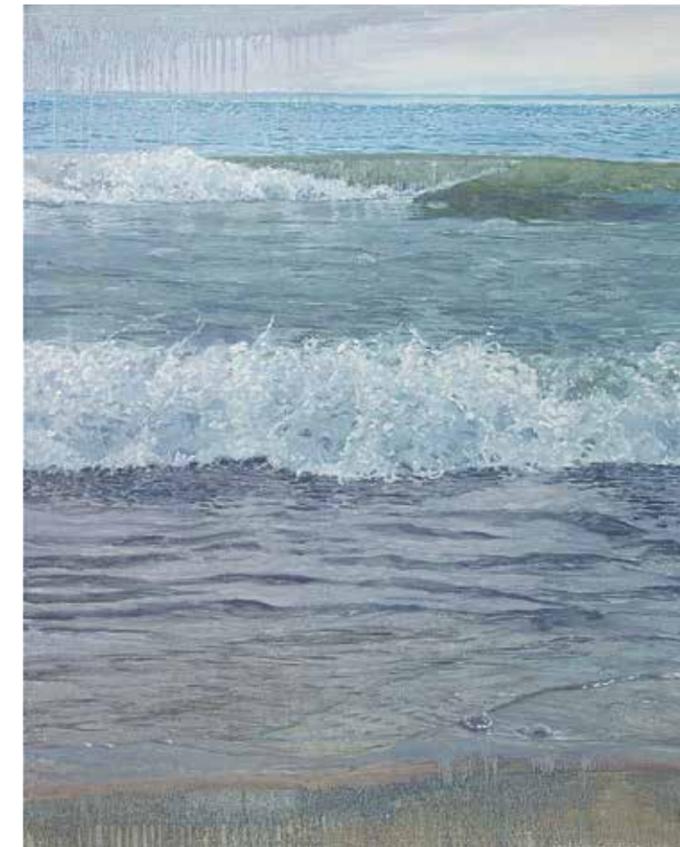
Harbour Gallery
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*“Now it’s always water,
water and its surroundings.”*

Whenever he can, the Ontario artist heads up to the province’s northern lakes to fish with his brother Ken. Fishing, needless to say, is a euphemism for being close to water. “We love to chase muskies,” Sampson says. “But we’re more catch-and-release fishers. Being on the water and taking photos is what it’s about for me.”

Raised in Windsor, Sampson moved to Toronto in the early ’90s to study at the Ontario College of Art. Later, during what he now laughingly refers to as his “Lord of the Rings” days, his work as likely as not featured dragons and dwarfs. Gradually, however, he began painting landscapes, reproducing trees, snow and water until finally, there was just water. He painted his first signature waterscape in 2005. “Now it’s always water, water and its surroundings,” he says.

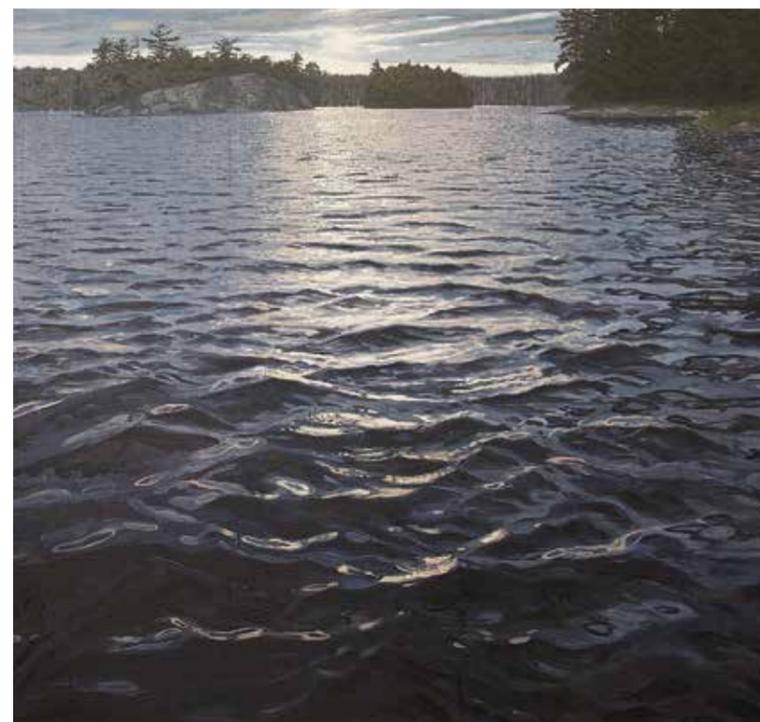
Even a cursory overview of Sampson’s oil paintings reveals an expert brush blending exacting detail with the play of reflected light. There remains, too, a touch of Tolkien. Being pinned to a particular style is a matter of indifference to him. Only when pressed, does Sampson admit: “I guess my work is somewhere in between realism and impressionism. I’m a realist but I also try to capture the magic of the moment and place in time.”



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Among the influences that can be gleaned from Sampson's work are those of celebrated Canadian landscape painter Ron Bolt and portrait artist Lucian Freud. With Bolt, Sampson shares a passion for Canada's coastal and river waterways. His thick layering of oils to create life and movement, however, are reminiscent of the sometimes choppy, impasto style used by the world-renowned British master.

Though they share a common theme, no Sampson waterscape is the same. Each one represents a unique experience of water viewed from either the water or the shore. "In my open-water paintings, I want viewers to feel inside the scene itself, like they are riding the waves," he says. "You could say these paintings are more alpha. Those that include the shoreline are usually more restful, as though the viewer were taking a gentle walk along the water's edge." 📖

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Joe Sampson generally bases a painting on hundreds of photos taken on a single day. Sometimes, however, that is not possible. “Then I might have to Frankenstein a painting from a whole bunch of different photos taken at different times,” says Sampson. “But really, I always say Mother Nature has the best brush, so why mess with it?”

Joe Sampson’s respect for Mother Nature has led him to support fund-raising efforts by Waterkeeper Alliance, a global charity founded by Robert F. Kennedy Jr. in 1999, devoted to creating “a swimmable, drinkable, fishable world.” When the Ontario branch, Lake Ontario Waterkeepers, held a gala earlier this year to raise funds and awareness, Sampson contributed for auction a 36 inch 48 inch painting, *A Few Pebbles Hang On*.

Prices for his works range from \$750 to \$14,000. They are available through his website as well as Harbour Gallery in Mississauga. ☛

• For more information about the Lake Ontario Waterkeepers and the work it does cleaning up Lake Ontario, visit the website www.waterkeeper.ca

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