

ADAM WOLPERT



THE GREAT OAKS

Front Cover:

Laguna Oak, 2022, oil on linen, 60 x 84"

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The Great Oaks Series

The Great Oaks paintings by Adam Wolpert are immediately captivating in their strength and sheer beauty. They are part of the continuum of landscape painting throughout the history of art. By their nature, they can be compelling, telling us stories that words cannot describe.

We were introduced to the enormity and magnificence of Yosemite by Albert Bierstadt, and of Yellowstone by Thomas Moran. Edgar Payne and Maynard Dixon taught us about the great Southwest landscape with its red cliffs and plateaus. These visuals remain in our consciousness and have inspired migrations of people, national parks, and land conservation. Wolpert's Great Oaks paintings are not large vistas but intimate close-ups, and they have much to teach us about our time and place in the Northern California landscape.

The artist has chosen his subjects carefully, spending many hours looking, seeing, and selecting what to include, what to exclude. Fundamentally this work is rooted in deep, prolonged observation in the presence of the trees. This leads Wolpert into an authentically caring relationship with them. This relationship that arises between tree and painter is as much the painting's subject as the tree itself. It emerges from the practice of slowing down and connecting with the tree as a living being.

He has approached his paintings with various brush styles to achieve a complex patchwork of techniques in the foreground, background, and subject itself. This wide breadth of stylistic variation is inspired by the great diversity of nature herself. The paintings represent different seasons and times of day, exhibiting a range of foliage, bark characteristics, and patterns of light and shade. They are contemporary paintings, close-up, raw, and confrontational. Large in scale, their open branches frequently reach off the canvas, enveloping the viewer into the landscape itself.

To have the opportunity to see this series together in one venue is an extraordinary experience. Despite their similar compositional structure, with the singular central focus of the tree, they are distinctly very different paintings. One can imagine a dialogue between them. Are they landscapes, are they portraits, or are they documentary images, paying homage to something that existed in our time?

Regardless of your interpretation, the paintings themselves are extraordinary works of art, honoring the Great Oaks' presence, which is simultaneously awesome, exquisitely beautiful, and tenuous.

Thank you, Adam, for the opportunity to present this brilliant body of work.

Sandy Erickson

Halfway between Light and Wood

by Renny Pritikin

It has long been a truism that nature is what we find in the world: rivers, animals, mountains, trees. Culture is what we make: cars, clothing, art. However, that neat dichotomy has begun to break down in the twenty-first century. We know that what people make has an outsized effect on the world we inhabit, for one thing. Even more to the point is that we now understand that we are in no way separate from nature, that both nature and culture are part of an interrelated whole. We exist on a spectrum with pure nature at one end and pure human doings at the other. In the middle are cities, with falcons nesting on skyscrapers. Artists like Adam Wolpert also occupy a kind of middle ground, where actual trees and the mental constructs we bring to our perception of nature are made manifest in paintings equally full of foreboding and exaltation.

Light infiltrates the surfaces of Adam Wolpert's Great Oaks oil paintings and forms their subject matter. It's as though the exteriors of his trees, suffused with light, form an amalgam, a third material, halfway between light and wood. That mixture, mysterious and emotive, drives the power of his landscapes. Wolpert plants his trees at the dead center of his canvases, and they dominate not only the physical and visual space but the psychic space as well. The light, the sky, and the surrounding flora—even the hills—pay homage, kowtow even, to his oaks' gravitas. Trees backlit or glowing in slanting sunlight, especially in evening twilight, reflect a heartbreaking melancholy that Wolpert delivers in painting after painting, a tacit suggestion of unhealth lurking amid the glory. Ironically, these trees can simultaneously be perceived as flourishing entities fully embodying life and as environmental symbols under dire threat.

In *Coral Oak #2*, a half dozen neighboring trees form a ring several yards wide around the subject tree. Their trunks subtly genuflect, like courtiers in a regal reception. The tops of these adjoining trees—full of greenery in opposition to the stark white branches of the tree in the middle—fit just under the outspread arms of the large oak, forming a wide, flattened vee. These secondary trees are depicted in a much brushier way, eschewing the near photorealistic rendering of the main oak. Strips of bark hang in space from some dead branches, adding a mild undercurrent of trauma. A perfectly selected and rendered pale blue serves as the sky, above a background of sunlit dried grass and distant hills. The whiteness of the light matches the whiteness of the tree's gleaming bark, a ghost of its living self.

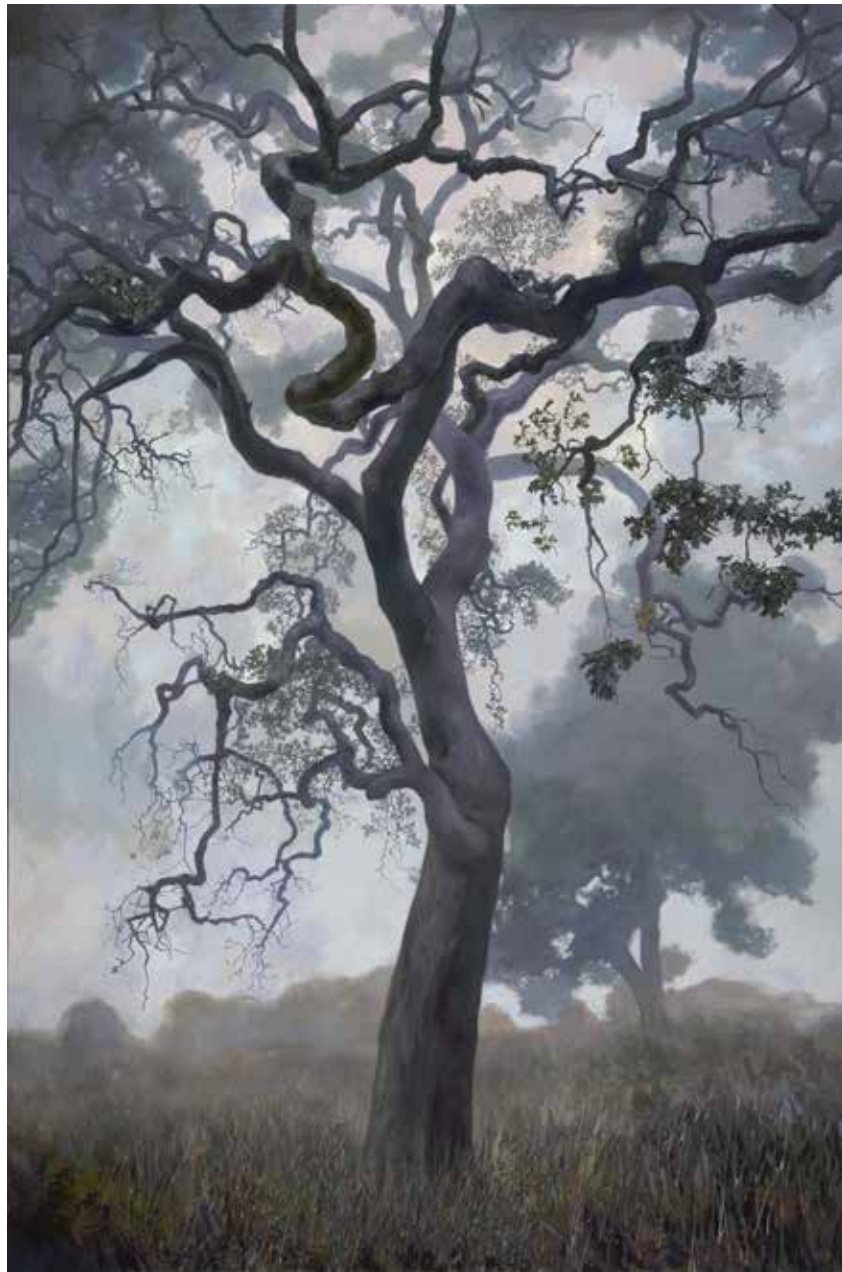
If *Coral Oak #2* is a story that takes place at high noon, the narrative in *February Afternoon* takes place a few hours later, in the late afternoon. This oak, despite being covered with moss and growing without neighbors, doesn't appear to be experiencing the frailty and isolation of old age. Its limbs exude strength and power, thick in the way a weightlifter's arms are meant to be muscular and imposing. Light illuminates the tree's leaves on the right side, while those on the left are darker—implying that the sun has begun to set on the right-hand horizon, and providing the only asymmetry in this highly symmetrical portrait.

Moss Oak, by contrast, conveys, if not a death scene, an old age in which long-term survival is not assured. Its trunk has holes in which critters could conceivably take up residence, and its days as an old stump come readily to the imagination. A chilly fog is beginning to envelop the tableau.

Memorial Oak approaches the subject matter of light on bark from the opposite direction, through exploring shade. The branches of the tree facing the viewer are dark, while their far side appears to be receiving sun. Bifurcation becomes the motif of the painting—branches half in light and half in shadow. Even the central trunk of the tree (and thus the entire painting) is split vertically, offering a more material, less evanescent duality beyond light. Doubleness, two-sidedness, implies being duplicitous, invoked by Wolpert to remind us that the beauty he depicts is life-affirming yet at the same time masks the reality of global climate crisis.

Solitary Oak could be the last tree on earth, seen as it is, alone in a vast grassy plain. Wolpert's oaks are delivered with the utmost rigor and discipline, upright signposts of what we treasure and what we have put in jeopardy.

Renny Pritikin is an Oakland-based curator, art writer, and poet.



Spirit Oak, 2021, oil on linen, 72 x 48"



Blooming Apples, 2021, oil on linen, 48 x 72"



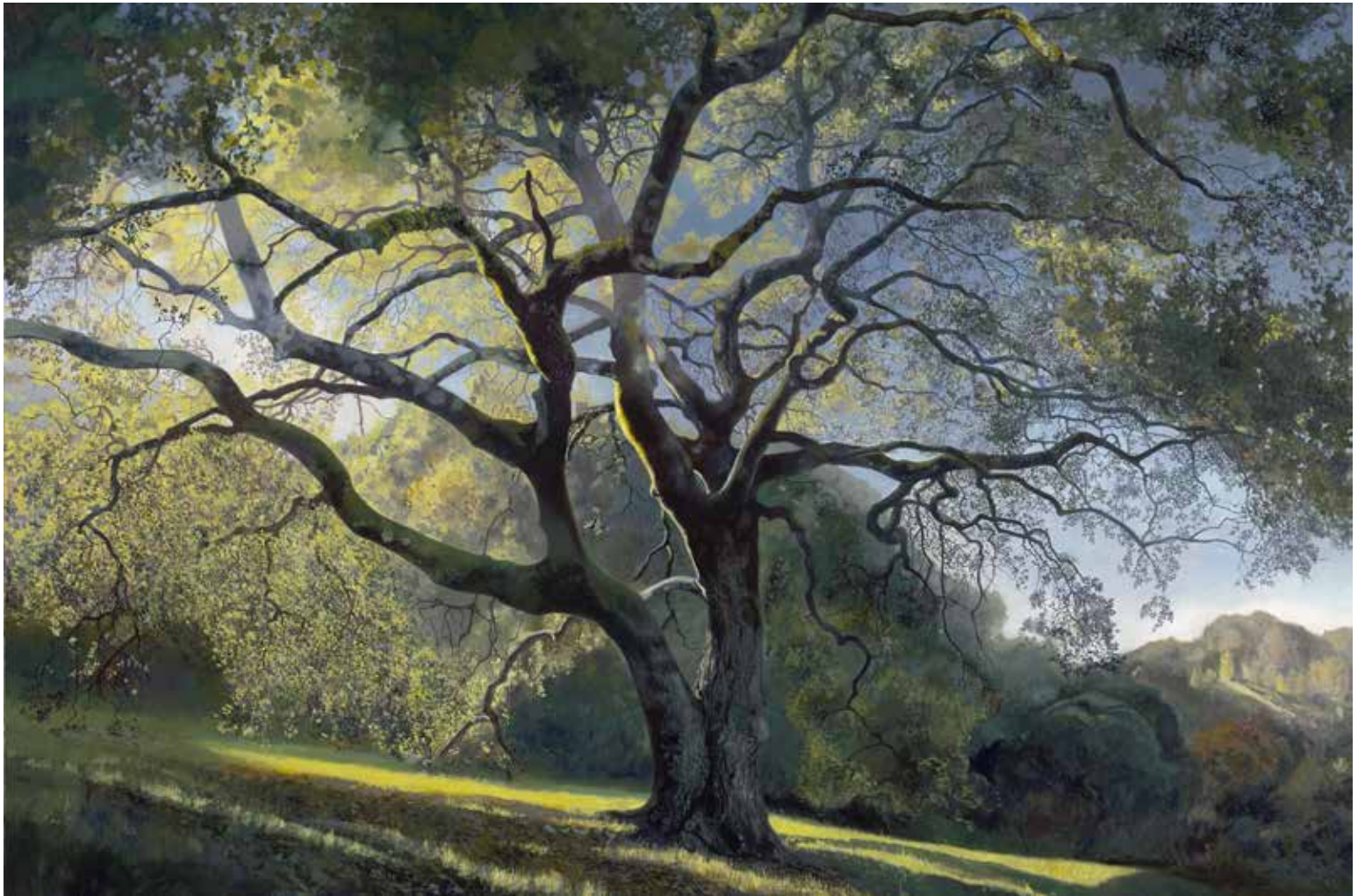
Boundary Oak, 2021, oil on linen, 48 x 72"



Moss Oak 1, 2021, oil on linen, 48 x 72"



Moss Oak 2, 2022, oil on linen, 48 x 72"



Kitchen Oak 2, 2022, oil on linen, 48 x 72"



Memorial Oak, 2019, oil on linen, 48 x 72"



Laguna Oak, 2022, oil on linen, 60 x 84"



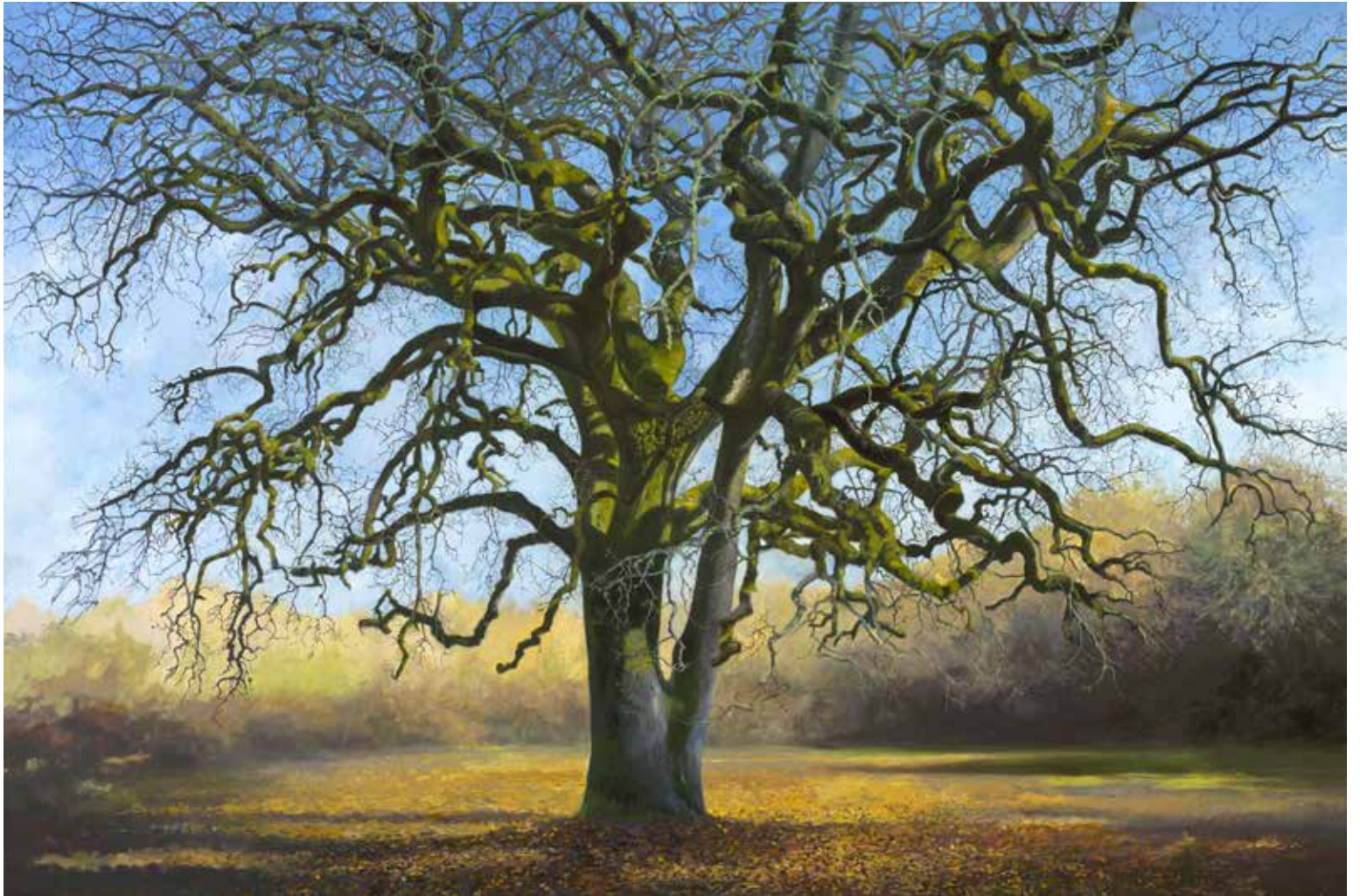
First Light, 2020, oil on linen, 48 x 72"



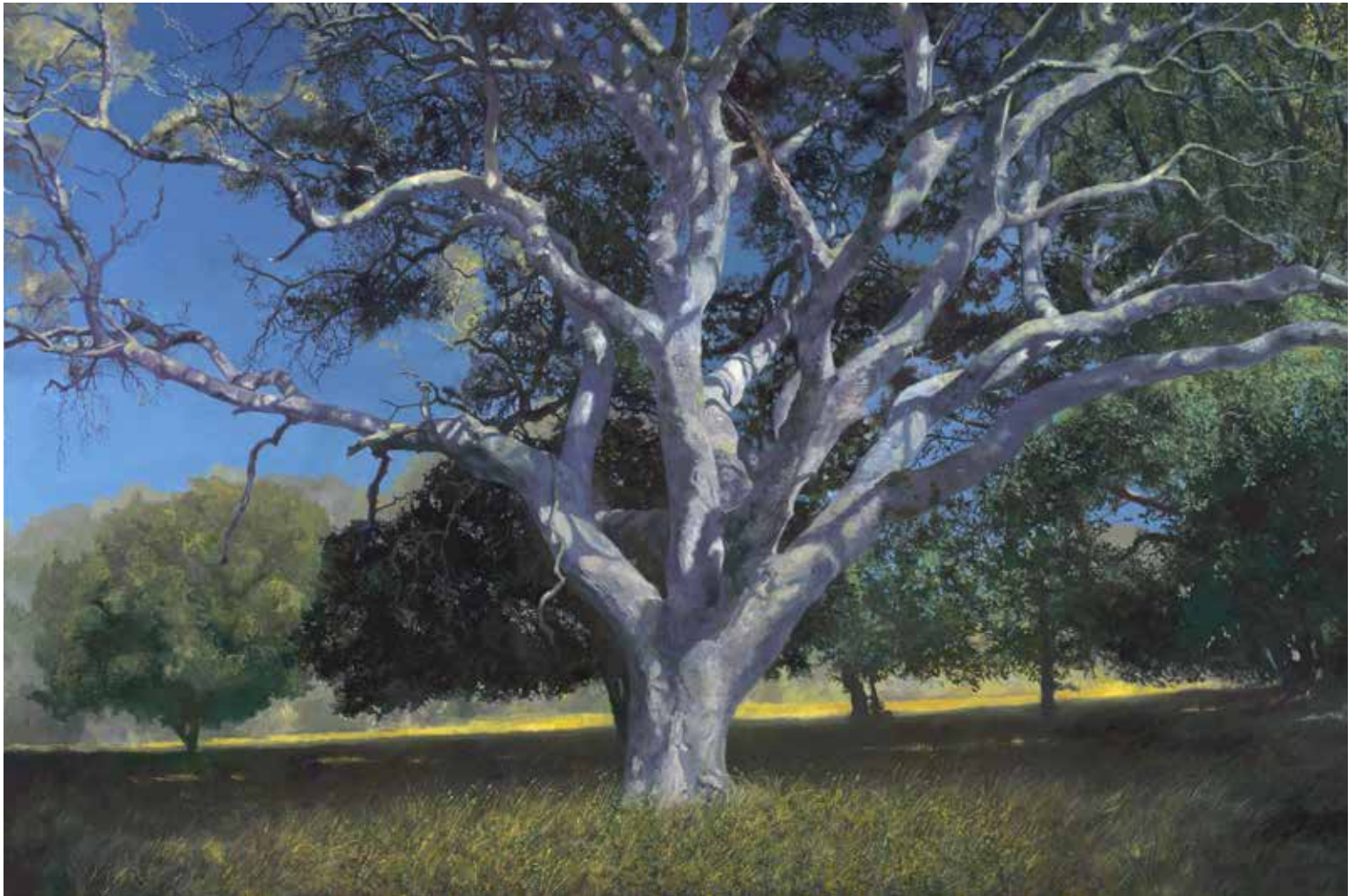
February Afternoon, 2021, oil on linen, 48 x 72"



Winter Oak, 2018, oil on linen, 48 x 60"



Landwell Oak, 2019, oil on linen, 48 x 72"



Coral Oak 2, 2021, oil on linen, 48 x 72"



Solitary Oak, 2022, oil on linen, 48 x 72"

Artist Biography

A passionate artist from an early age, Adam Wolpert explored the media of performance, ceramics, sculpture, and collage before turning seriously to painting while earning his BFA from the University of California, Santa Barbara. After a rigorous two-year training in classical realism at Studio Cecil-Graves in Florence, Italy, where he immersed himself in the work of the great European masters, Wolpert completed an MFA at the University of California, San Diego. In 1994 Wolpert moved to Sonoma County and co-founded the Occidental Arts and Ecology Center (OAEC) where he still lives and paints. He has had major gallery representation since 1988, and is now represented by Erickson Fine Art Gallery in Healdsburg, California.

After completing multiple series - including a year spent painting seventy-two iterations of the same composition through four seasons (the Pond Series) - Wolpert's process led him to explore his relationship with the vanishing great oaks of Sonoma county, through large portraits of the magnificent trees. This series started in 2017 and continues to this day.

Solo Exhibitions

- 2022 *The Great Oaks*, Erickson Fine Art Gallery, Healdsburg, CA
2019 *Great Oaks*, San Luis Obispo Museum of Art, San Luis Obispo, CA
2018 *The Pond Series*, Jackson Hole Center for the Arts, Jackson Hole, WY
2017 *The Pond Series and Other Recent Works*, Ice House Gallery, Petaluma, CA
2014 *New Work*, The Wall Gallery, Oakland, CA
2011 *Premonitions*, Quicksilver Mine Company, Forestville, CA
2010 *Sonoma County Landscapes*, Museum of Sonoma County, Santa Rosa, CA
2009 *Painting Space*, Look Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
2007 *New Paintings*, Jan Baum Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
New Small Paintings, Quicksilver Mine Company, Forestville, CA
2005 *New Paintings*, Venue Gallery, St. Helena, CA
2004 *Relationships: New Paintings*, Jan Baum Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
2001 *Inner and Outer Contemplations*, The Presidio Alliance, San Francisco, CA
2000 *Silent Circles*, Jan Baum Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
1999 *California Landscapes and New Studio Paintings*, Mountain View Center for the Performing Arts, Mountain View, CA
1998 *Place/Spirit*, Jan Baum Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
1997 *The Garden on the Edge*, Bradford Gallery, San Anselmo, CA
1995 *Figures and Landscapes: New Paintings*, R. B. Stevenson Gallery, La Jolla, CA
1994 *Adam Wolpert: Paintings 1994*, Mesa College Art Gallery, San Diego, CA
Adam Wolpert: New Work, Jan Baum Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
1993 *Ambiguous Figures*, UC San Diego, Visual Arts Center Gallery, La Jolla, CA
Still Point, Jan Baum Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

Selected Invitational Exhibitions

- 2021 *Extraction*, Erickson Fine Art Gallery, Healdsburg, CA
Think About Water, online exhibition, thinkaboutwater.com
- 2020 *Ecoconsciousness*, online + billboard exhibition, ecoartspace.org
Salon Style, SFMOMA Artists Gallery, San Francisco, CA
Landscape: Awe to Activism, Museum of Sonoma County, Santa Rosa, CA
- 2012 *The Last Hurrah*, Quicksilver Mine Company, Forestville, CA
- 2006 *Of the Land*, Quicksilver Mine Company, Forestville, CA
- 2004 *Botany 12*, Museum of Sonoma County, Santa Rosa, CA
- 1997 *Remembrance of Exhibitions Past: 20th Anniversary Celebration*, Jan Baum Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
- 1996 *Open Air Paintings: 12 Weeks in Fairfield* (Tony King, William Wheeler, Adam Wolpert), Fairfield Center Gallery, Fairfield, CA
- 1995 *Winter Group: Gallery Artists*, R. B. Stevenson Gallery, La Jolla, CA
Gallery Artists, Jan Baum Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
Art Fair Seattle, Elizabeth Leach Gallery booth, Seattle, WA
- 1994 *The Sacred and the Profane*, Jan Baum Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
- 1993 *Captured Moments: The Narrative in American and European Paintings*, Adamson-Duvannes Galleries, Los Angeles, CA
- 1992 *Gallery Artists*, Jan Baum Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
- 1991 *Phantasy: The Image-Making Power*, Jan Baum Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
California Contemporary Realism, John Wayne Airport, Costa Mesa, CA
- 1990 *5th International Contemporary Art Fair*, Jan Baum Gallery booth 962, Los Angeles, CA

Adam Wolpert - The Great Oaks catalogue is printed in conjunction with the exhibition at Erickson Fine Art Gallery in Healdsburg, California in the Fall of 2022.

This group of images is selected from a series of 27 paintings in an on-going series.

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Essay by Renny Pritikin
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I offer sincere thanks to my wife Katy and daughter Sabine for their love and encouragement and to my wonderful parents Dorothy and Stanley Wolpert for their unfailing life-long faith and support of my work.

Adam Wolpert

