

# ALEXANDRE

## **Welliver's Woods**

By Mark Strand

What sets Welliver's woods apart from the woods of others is that they are, of course, his. We see them and know instantly who painted them. That stream plunging and swirling around those gray rocks is familiar, so are those clouds parading in ragged order across that sky spreading a midday blue over those hills. They are all part of Welliver's woods. The unaffectedness, the ease with which they are simply there, without a hint of what went into their making, without an indication anywhere of the turmoil that prompted them, is what sets them apart. Of course, we can see the many brush strokes in a large Welliver and believe that they—in their tireless application—tell us what goes into a Welliver, but we would be wrong, for there is much in a Welliver that we cannot see. In the past of each one are the long hikes into the woods, which Welliver takes, loaded down with easel, canvas, brushes, oil, thinner, and tubes of color, to the spot where he will paint; then there are the hours he stands, in all kinds of weather, and paints what will be the small preparatory paintings on which he bases the large drawings that lead finally to the large paintings. So the number of strokes doesn't describe anything but the last phase of a Welliver's coming into being. Each painting is the culmination of a heroic series of actions, and yet each seems indifferent to the difficulties endured in its making. For all their vitality, their surface play of light woven with color, Welliver's paintings seem remarkably controlled—calm without being languorous, reticent without being retiring. The appetite that initiated them, the will that saw them to completion, though no longer visible, are nevertheless there, and are felt. His landscapes compel our attention as no one else's do. Their inclusiveness, their singularity are overwhelming. What we

see—and what moves us—are the force and depth of his connection to his chosen terrain. There is nothing ambivalent about his passion. He will paint nothing else. The woods are not only his, they are him. That wildness, those turbulent waters, those trees and rock-strewn hilltops—they are the images by which Welliver chooses to be seen and through which he sees himself. They occur again and again because they are the means by which his existence is affirmed. Under the virtuosic manipulation of paint, behind the illusion-making, the suave conceptual grandeur that makes of his Maine woods a virtual sufficiency of self, are an urgency and an energy that are stunning. This is why Welliver's paintings seem so emotionally dense, so assertive in their naturalness. They embody a vision so uncompromised and of such compact immensity that the viewer is powerless before them. Welliver's marks—those sweeps and touches of paint that describe trunks, branches, clouds, water, foam, everything, with disarming rightness, are his signature, one that bears the burden of dual representation, revealing a self in nature, and the nature of a self.

It embodies as it describes, generates as it concludes.

It is Welliver; it is also Welliver's woods.

— Mark Strand, 1997