

# A painter finds Boston Public Garden bursting with birdsong

By Cate McQuaid Globe Correspondent, Updated April 8, 2021, 10:00 a.m.



Mike Glier's "The Sound of a Woodpecker in the Boston Public Garden." MIKE GLIER/COURTESY OF KRAKOW WITKIN GALLERY, BOSTON

In May 2019, Mike Glier spent a week in the Public Garden, preparing to paint. Before sketching, he closed his eyes to drink in the world through his other senses. Then, on his



drawing sheet, he rendered the patterns of birdsongs. The rising, fluty whistle of a mourning dove. The dry screech of a grackle.

Glier has been bringing a conceptual twist to the pleasures of landscape for years. In “Bird Songs of the Boston Public Garden” at Krakow Witkin Gallery, vivid abstract patterns waft through the air and trees of a beloved park. Coppery loop-de-loops billow behind the George Washington statue in “Song of the Mourning Dove in the Boston Public Garden.” A fluttering burst of yellow petals hovers like a dragonfly near the lagoon in “Song Sparrow Singing in the Boston Public Garden.”



Mike Glier's "Song Sparrow Singing in the Boston Public Garden." MIKE GLIER/COURTESY OF KRAKOW WITKIN GALLERY, BOSTON

“The bird is an image of freedom ... an effortless movement through space unencumbered. It’s a hopeful wish,” Glier once said in an interview.

His painted birdsongs confound and delight. The thinking brain struggles to parse forms we don’t recognize in a space we hold dear, flexing to match trill and whistle to color and form.

Glier, who teaches at Williams College, is a nimble painter, sensitive to color, stroke, and form. Over George Washington’s head, the mourning dove’s glossy swirls ping against a matte sky. Behind the sparrow’s precise yellow song, pale green foliage is nearly vapor. There’s a sense, in each work, of a moment just coming to be and about to vanish.



Mike Glier's "Song of the Mourning Dove in the Boston Public Garden." MIKE GLIER/COURTESY OF KRAKOW WITKIN GALLERY, BOSTON

“The Sound of a Woodpecker in the Boston Public Garden” captures that rat-a-tat-tat in an unexpectedly undulant reddish haze dropping over half the scene. The pecking echoes in the red rhyming with tones in distant trees. Leaves tremble in percussive dashes.

The blunt distinction between representation and abstraction doesn’t fly in landscape painting. Shaping and composing forms, a skilled painter does both at once. Glier’s paintings argue against another binary notion: that nature and culture are opposites. His Public Garden is a park where nature is tamed, the birds are wild, and the delicate structures of their songs make it clear they have their own culture. And we are immersed in it all.