

Hypoluxo Scrub gets spotlight in new exhibition at Norton House

Kristina Webb

Special to the Palm Beach Post
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Paul Gervais was on a Brightline train north from Art Basel in Miami when he spotted it: An unspoiled patch of paradise north of Boynton Beach.

The beautiful spot Gervais saw on the west side of the train tracks that day in December 2021 is the Hypoluxo Scrub, a pristine, 98-acre natural area owned by Palm Beach County and stretching south from Hypoluxo Road along Federal Highway.

“It just looked like no one had ever been there before, you know?” he said, smiling. “I went there the very next day and I just thought it was amazing.”

So amazing, in fact, that inspiration struck — in the form of a series of paintings that are on display through Jan. 7 in the Norton House at the Ann Norton Sculpture Gardens in West Palm Beach.

“An Endangered Landscape: Recent Paintings of the Hypoluxo Scrub” is Gervais’ first exhibition of landscape paintings, his first collection of landscape paintings — and some of his first landscape paintings, period.

The artist and author — his novel “Extraordinary People” was nominated for the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction — has spent most of his career in the abstract.

Discovering Hypoluxo Scrub and its near-pristine appearance was “totally by accident,” Gervais said. It sits on the west side of the Atlantic Coastal Ridge, and the natural area has two walking trails, a 2-acre restored wetland and an observation tower.

But landscape painting called to him first in England, the part-time home he shares with his husband, Gil Cohen. They also have a home in Palm Beach after spending 35 years in Italy’s Tuscany region.

“I’m a non-representational artist,” he said. “My art has always been abstraction, minimalist. I’d never painted a landscape prior to two years ago.”

He made several visits to the natural area, shooting hundreds of photos with his iPhone. He took those images back to his home studio, where he began to transfer them to canvas and wood with his brushes.

“With all that sand and the reflection



Paul Gervais stands in front of "A Fallen Pine in the Scrub," 2023 oil on linen, which is part of "An Endangered Landscape: Recent Paintings of the Hypoluxo Scrub" exhibition at the Ann Norton Sculpture Gardens. MEGHAN MCCARTHY PHOTOS

If you go

What: Paul Gervais, “An Endangered Landscape: Recent Paintings of the Hypoluxo Scrub”

Where: Ann Norton Sculpture Gardens, 253 Barcelona Road, West Palm Beach

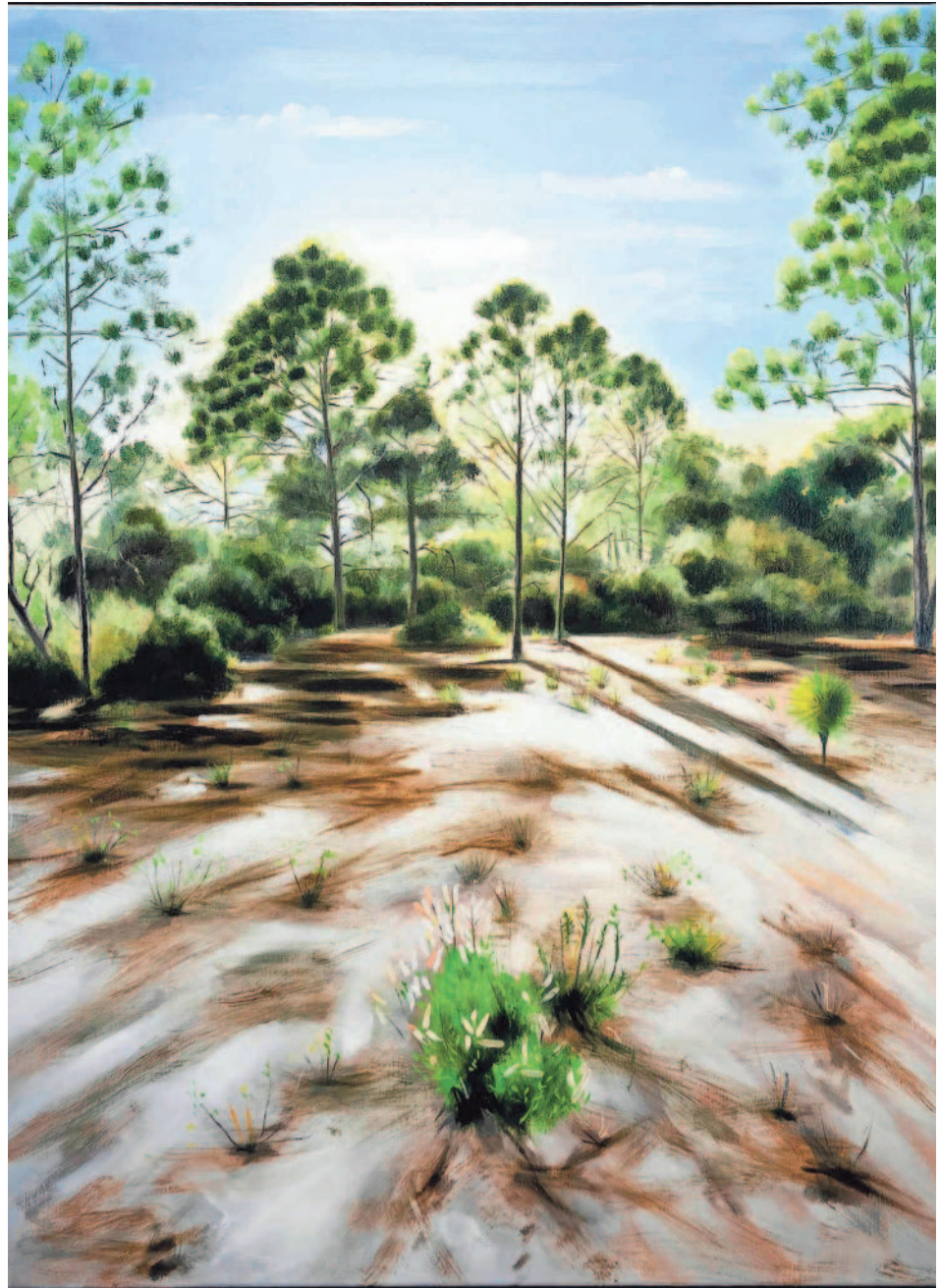
When: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesday-Sunday through Jan. 7

Cost: Free for members, \$15 for non-member adults, \$10 for seniors age 65 and older, \$7 for students and free for ages 5 and younger

Information: Call 561-832-5328 or go to www.ansg.org

that you get, and the shadows that are often blue on the sand, you kind of can’t go wrong,” Gervais said. “And I didn’t want them to be postcard images ...

“I like a bit of some vaguely disturbing images that are a little bit brutal. Because it is a little bit brutal,” he said. “Finding the beauty in the brutality, I think that’s probably what I was looking



This untitled painting of the Hypoluxo Scrub by Paul Gervais highlights the sandy ground and shadows in the natural area.

to do.”

Gervais focused each painting on the natural world, being careful to remove any suggestion of human presence. There were some tracks from a vehicle used by preserve staff, which he did not include, he said. Where there might have been footprints from other visitors, Gervais also did not include them. He did, however, include animal tracks.

“These are landscapes that are original and natural and more or less untouched,” he said. “It’s impossible that they could survive intact from centuries ago. I really like them without people, without human activity, just focusing on the natural fuel of it. That’s something that’s so rare to find in Florida

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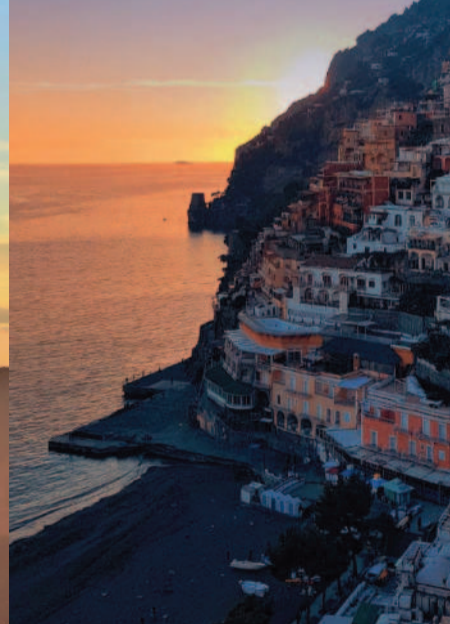
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