

It became apparent quite early in Fairfield's life, before he went to college, that he was destined for a career in the arts, either as a writer or as a painter; he had considerable talent in both of these pursuits. In spite of his own artistic inclinations, father never completely understood Fairfield's aspirations or his first immature attempts to express them. Mother, however, was more sympathetic, albeit not informed about the prevailing vogue in painting. After graduating from Harvard, Fairfield attended The Arts Student's League in New York, where he studied under Bordman Robinson. Mother paid for his first trip abroad during which he toured Italy for several months, visiting all the museums and palaces in order to gain first hand knowledge of the famous works of the Italian renaissance painters.

After marriage he first settled in New York City, where he was living when he introduced me to Alfred Stieglitz, but after several years he moved permanently to South Hampton on Long Island, and it was there and in Maine that he developed his inimitable style of representational painting. His circle of friends included writers and poets of distinction and many abstract expressionist painters, among whom was De Kooning, an immigrant from Holland who was greatly admired by Fairfield even before he became famous. The French painters that Fairfield especially admired and whom, more than any others, he sought to emulate, were Bonnard and Vuillard. Fairfield's

dedication to realist painting was criticized by Clement Greenberg, who said of his work, "You can't paint like that and be successful"--to which Fairfield replied that that was precisely the way he would continue to paint. Fairfield was also a critic of recognized perspicacity and wrote reviews for Art News. He once said that he considered himself a better critic than painter. In 1960 he wrote an article for The Nation in which he discussed the relationship of painting to photography as an art medium and included a critical review of my color photographs, which were then being exhibited at the George Eastman House in Rochester. In the article he called my photographs an expression of the immediacy of experience, saying: "They are not like other color photographs. There are no eccentric angles familiar to the movies, snapshots or advertising, and the color is like a revelation. The color of photographs usually looks added: it floats in a film above the surface; it is a dressing-up...But Porter's colors, with all the clear transparency of dyes, have substance as well. They are not on top...His range of colors contributes to their namelessness...These photographs make wonder the natural condition of the human mind. Have you ever seen before the redness of grass, the blueness of leaves, the orange cliffs of autumn, the two circles of sunflower blossoms, or a kerosene lamp against the sun in a window? Or that where a tree has fallen, it seems to have fallen with intention? There is no subject and background, every corner is equally alive."

Fairfield started painting on Great Spruce Head Island, where his subjects were the landscapes of the Maine coast. My

interests at that time were wholly in the realm of science; as a consequence we had little in common besides the usual family intercourse. This was the situation for many years, even when we were together summers on the island. Not until I gave up science for photography did our interests begin to converge and finally become intimately interwoven. I was very affected by his paintings of the sea and sky and the spruce trees growing right down to the water's edge, which captured the very essence of relationships in the natural world. When I sent Fairfield a copy of Summer Island he wrote me: "Thank you for the Island book, which I love: it is your best collection of photographs, I think even better than In Wildness. In this book each photograph is better than the previous one, and there is never a let down. In the Adirondack book some that I very much like are the first wide landscapes with slopes of millions of leaves in the foreground and a mountain in the distance, and the ones of deserted orchards in which sight is carried beyond itself to a kind of total knowledge of the world as a whole."

During the last summers of his life, I often visited him in his studio on the back porch of the Big House, which had become his by right of occupancy. On these occasions he would show me what he was working on and the paintings he had completed; he would then ask for my opinions and listen reflectively to my comments, that as an inexperienced critic, I expressed with hesitation. During one of these conversations he told me that he had been influenced by my photography, words of praise that



Porter - 4 - (Fairfield)

I cherished. Fairfield was the brother to whom I grew closest in my later years. Shortly before his death he wrote: "I have just read Antarctic Experience which I couldn't interrupt. It is beautiful; accurate, transparent, and without rhetoric; I think it will become a classic. I could almost illustrate it in color from your descriptions." After his death his wife, Ann, wrote me: "He really loved talking with you; so often he said at the Island, 'I think I'll go and see if Eliot is home.' The text of the book on Antarctica was such a joy to him I'm sure he told you. He kept saying, 'It's beautiful, beautifully written. It's a classic.' "