

sarily available in non-motoring society,” Robert Sullivan writes in his book *Cross Country*.

Granted, Hulme wasn’t backcountry hiking like Cheryl Strayed, but one could argue that her auto-camping journey was a small step in the direction of a twenty-first-century woman’s solo hike. The author revels in the freedom of the outdoors. Like Thelma and Louise, Hulme and her girlfriend, Tuny, were bold, independent, on the lam from boredom, and fated to run into many of the same problems that bedeviled Susan Sarandon and Geena Davis: the endless come-ons of confidence men—most of them not so good-looking as Brad Pitt—hints of sexual menace, and constant unwanted offers of help. You can’t blame them for hiding firearms in their purses. She and her companion had access to places usually reserved for men—garages and stables, for instance—and they got to do things that women did not normally do. They camped out on an open prairie where two cowboys teased them for the tiny pistol they brought to protect themselves against varmints and assailants. In Choteau, Montana, a blacksmith invited them to watch him work in his forge. The moment is erotically charged; in a modest way, this is a sex scene without any actual sex. “He found a rod,” Hulme reported, “scanned it critically, seeming to see through its rusty stiffness, the curving bracket he could make of it. Then he thrust it in the live coals of his forge. He pumped the bellows and a spurt of red sparks shot up the chimney. And while the rod heated, he led us around his shop, exhibiting specimens of his wrought-iron workmanship.”

Hulme’s book is compromised every so often by the author’s social snobbery, but it contains moments of fear, sexual menace (and titillation), and camaraderie that reminded me time and again of *Wild*. What puzzles me is the fact that Hulme, who went on to become a bestselling fiction author in 1956 with her novel called *The Nun’s Story*, which was made into an award-winning movie with Audrey Hepburn, either could not succeed in having the camping memoir published or didn’t even try to get it out into the wider world. It was privately printed. Only a few copies exist today; to get my hands on it, I had to go through Interlibrary Loan and read it in the Special Collections room at UC Santa Cruz. It just makes me wonder why she chose to deprive American readers of her voice. Why did she feel the time was not right to tell her story

to a larger audience? Nevertheless, we can thank her for her candor now; the book has a cheeky revelatory quality that Hulme might have suppressed had she known the book was meant for mass consumption. If only Hulme had been born six or seven decades later, she might have had some chance at the big time. Maybe she’d be headlining AWP conferences now. Maybe Michelle Dockery and Laura Carmichael from *Downton Abbey* would line up to play Kathryn and Tuny.

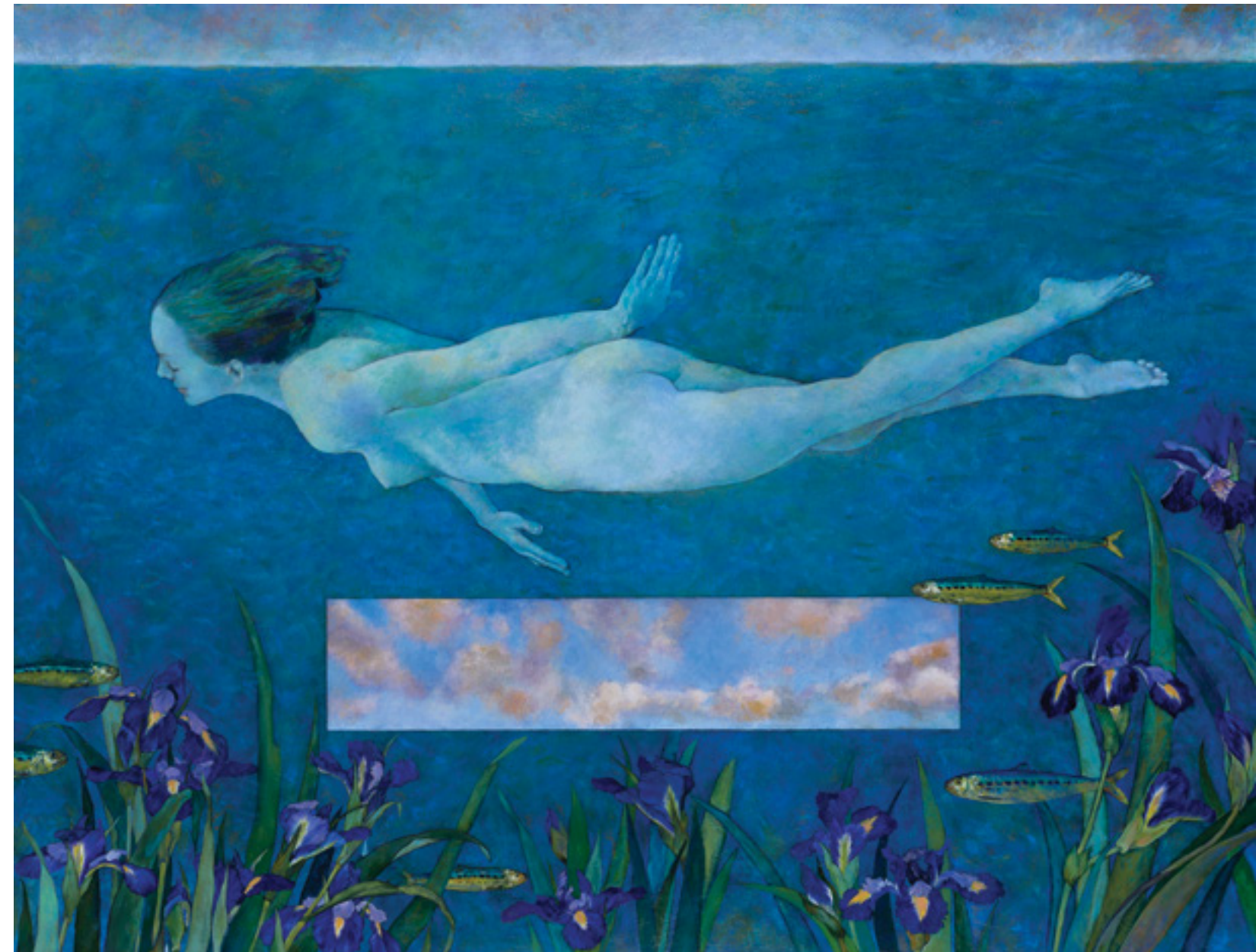
But perhaps the fame and notoriety of these books is not, ultimately, the point; the fact is these women -- in spite of all the discouragement and double-standards, and even without the promise of an audience, or the assurance that their words would make their way in the world at all, still took it upon themselves to climb mountains, hike on their own, and camp with other women.

In doing so, they claimed a piece of the wild for themselves.

Dan White’s second nonfiction book, *Soaked to the Bone*, which he describes as “an embodied history of American camping,” is set to be published in 2016 by Henry Holt & Co. His first book, *The Cactus Eaters*, (HarperCollins) was an indie bookstore bestseller and a *Los Angeles Times* “Discovery” selection. He was a Steinbeck Fellow at San Jose State University in 2007–8.

ALLISON ATWILL

Indigo, 2014
Acrylic on birch panel, 36 x 48 in



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