2-18-1989

American Art Today: Contemporary Landscape

The Art Museum at Florida International University Frost Art Museum

The Patricia and Phillip Frost Art Museum

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American Art Today:
Contemporary Landscape

The Art Museum
at
Florida International University
COVER:
Louisa Matthiassdottir
*Sheep with Landscape, 1986*
Oil on canvas 47 x 60”
Courtesy of Robert Schoelkopf Gallery, NY

RIGHT:
Howard Kanovitz
*Full Moon Doors, 1984*
Acrylic on canvas/wood construction 108 x 54 x 15”
Courtesy of Marlborough Gallery, NY
American Art Today:
Contemporary Landscape
January 13 – February 18, 1989
Essay by Jed Perl

Organized by
Dahlia Morgan for
The Art Museum
at
Florida International University
University Park, Miami, Florida 33199 (305) 554-2890
### Exhibiting Artists

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### Lenders to the Exhibition

- Blum Helman Gallery, New York
- Grace Borgenicht Gallery, New York
- Maxwell Davidson Gallery, New York
- Sherry French Gallery, New York
- Fischbach Gallery, New York
- Frumkin/Adams Gallery, New York
- Graham Modern Gallery, New York
- Hirschl and Adler, Modern, New York
- Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York
- Ingber Gallery, New York
- Phyllis Kind Gallery, New York
- Marlborough Gallery, New York
- Mogol-Tysseling Collection, St. Paul, Minn.
- Prudential Life Insurance, Co. Newark, NJ
- Schmidt Bingham Gallery, New York
- Robert Schoelkopf Gallery, New York
- Ruth Siegel Gallery, New York
- Holly Solomon Gallery, New York
- Tatistcheff Gallery, New York
- Edward Thorp Gallery, New York
Acknowledgements

The Art Museum at Florida International University is proud to have organized American Art Today: Contemporary Landscape. This comprehensive exhibition follows last year’s American Art Today: Narrative Painting, and the 1987, American Art Today: The Portrait, the 1986 American Art Today: Figure in the Landscape, and American Art Today: Still Life of 1985. These exhibitions were conceived as parts of an ongoing series that annually examines the contemporary response to traditional themes.

Our small staff has been forthcoming with a tremendous amount of effort. Particularly I would like to thank Mr. William Humphreys, Museum Coordinator, who participated in every aspect of the organization, planning, and publication of the catalogue and notices for this exhibition; as well as Ms. Karen Goodson, who so efficiently handled the myriad details involved with correspondence, shipping and publications surrounding the show; and Ms. Linda Cole, who dealt with the financial aspects and records of this exhibition.

I would like to acknowledge the contribution of our Student Government Association, and the Office of Academic Affairs, who offered enlightened general support of The Museum. In addition, Citicorp, Eastern Airlines, The Friends of The Art Museum, and the FIU Arts Council have all recognized the significance of this exhibition. Their support has been essential to organizing the exhibition, and to publishing this extensive catalogue. Especially, we would also like to thank the Florida Arts Council, Division of Cultural Affairs for their generous grant in support of this exhibition.

This project, however, would not have happened without the generosity of so many museums, galleries, and private individuals who are listed as Lenders to the Exhibition.

Dahlia Morgan, Director
Looking Out

Jed Perl

As I write this in a twelfth floor apartment in Manhattan, my eyes keep going to the window and the view: a fringe of buildings at the bottom and, rising up and away, the cerulean sky full of pinkish and grayish clouds. Here in the city of mansonry and steel the window that frames a vista of sky—or, better yet, park or river—is at quite a premium, offering as it does a possibility of at least mental escape. And, sometimes, when I’m working through the day, the only thing that tells me that time is actually passing is the shifting of the light out of the window, from blue to grey and gold. Just now, in the middle of an autumn afternoon, the light begins to catch on the angles of buildings in the far distance, glazing them in lurid orange, scumbling them in dusky mauve... 

Landscape painting is about the changeableness of nature: even when what the artist gives us is something sharply focussed, as if seen through a telescope or a microscope, the effect is of a moment among other moments, a point in the progress from morning to noon to night. And even if there’s no human presence in the painting—no person with whom we can sympathize—really all landscape painting is about how nature affects human consciousness, the consciousness of the artist who is looking out at the world. Indeed, one of the paintings in this show, Gretna Campbell’s, makes this focus on the consciousness of the artist clear through its title—“Looking Up,” the looking being the important thing.

In 1949, the art historian Kenneth Clark, who had the English gift for expressing large ideas lucidly, presented a series of lectures about the painting of nature, Landscape into Art, and traced a progress from the medieval manuscript painters to the watercolors of Cezanne. “We are surrounded,” he said, “with things which we have not made and which have a life and structure different from our own: trees, flowers, grasses, rivers, hills, clouds. For centuries they have inspired us with curiosity and awe. They have been objects of delight. We have recreated them in our imaginations to reflect our moods.” Again, it isn’t so much the nature that is important, but the way we look at it—the “recreation,” the “imagination,” “our moods.” “Facts,” Lord Clark wrote, “become art through love, which unifies them and lifts them to a higher plane of reality; and, in landscape, this all embracing love is expressed by light.” The unifying force of light is what I see out of my window as I’m writing. And light is also, of course, what
Roger Brown Michigan City Sand Dunes, Mt. Baldi, 1983 Oil on canvas 48 x 96" Courtesy of Phyllis Kind Gallery, NY

James Coupé Pine Forest, 1988 Oil on canvas 24 x 60" Courtesy of Barbara Gillman Gallery, Miami
the landscape painters see when they look out from the canvas to the world beyond.

In the nineteenth century artists by the hundreds had set up their easels and camp stools and umbrellas out-of-doors. And this epidemic, caricatured in drawings by Daumier and many others, brought forth the greatest period of landscape painting in history. There was a cavalcade of individual styles: the chamber-scale classicism of Corot; the ordinary-as Picturesque of Constable; the sublime of Turner; the all-in-one surface of Monet; the atomic haze of Seurat; the candy color of Gauguin; the swirling impasto of Van Gogh; the shimmering translucency of Cezanne. But something strange happened in the course of the nineteenth-century's adventure with landscape painting. A discipline that began with an absolute faith in the objective truth of nature—in "the facts"—led, by the end of the century, to the triumph of subjectivity. Artists began to believe that there was no single truth to nature, that nature was simply what a particular artist grasped with his two eyes. Thus in Monet, the scientific methods of the 1870s were ultimately to be dissolved in the symbolism of the late Waterlilies. Meanwhile, Van Gogh and Gauguin looked for a spiritual realm within and beyond the temporal. And, in a decade of decision, 1905-1915, Matisse, Braque, Picasso, Kandinsky, and Mondrian leapt from the forest, the mountain, the ocean, to—something else: an order, abstract or nearly abstract, which they didn't quite comprehend even as they were inventing it.

That was then; this is now. A hundred years ago, landscape painting offered artists the promise of the most radical response imaginable both to nature and to the art of the museums. Today, the mission is more or less reversed. The landscape painter now asks us to believe in the objectivity of the world, and the ability of the looker—the artist—to embrace that objectivity. The landscape painter now demands the revival of historic techniques—one-point, two point, and aerial perspective; an orderly progress from foreground through middle ground to background.

Since the time of World War I, when Matisse, Derain, and others began to reaffirm a form of landscape painting that moved away from abstraction, landscape painting has had an element of "starting over." But the starting over is only convincing when it builds on a firm foundation of historical knowledge, a sense of what we've been through, of where we came from. The significance of landscape now rests in its ability to recover, rediscover, renew a world that eighty year ago evaporated in the "alternate realities," "pure relations," and "idealized figuration" that abstraction so triumphantly brought forth.
Wolf Kahn *Barn Above a Ridge*, 1986-87 Oil on canvas 72 x 84" Courtesy of Grace Borgenicht Gallery, NY

John Bowman *Lake Empire*, 1988 Oil on canvas 68 x 92" Courtesy of Holly Solomon Gallery, NY
Still, there can be little doubt that landscape painting is most convincing today when the slow dissolve of nature into abstraction is something that the artist holds in the imagination—as a fact of history that’s also an aspect of contemporary experience. Abstraction can mean the barrage of brushwork that Gretna Campbell, among others, has reclaimed for representation: or abstraction can be the construction of a picture out of blocks of strong color, that Louisa Matthiasdottir, among others, has reclaimed for representation. From what I know of the histories of these two artists, neither Campbell nor Matthiasdottir ever really painted abstractly. And yet a part of what convinces us in their interaction with nature is the extent to which the eye they turn to the landscape is a modern–an abstracting–eye. To a degree Campbell and Matthiasdottir experience nature through the syntax of abstraction, a syntax that was originally found within nature. But of course there can be no easy superimposition of abstraction onto or into nature. The particular interest of Campbell or Matthiasdottir rests in how the language of abstraction is reshaped in response to nature, how if nature can lead us to a new view of culture, culture can in turn lead us back to a new view of nature.

The character of the response to nature, the back and forth with nature—this is different for each artist and in each circumstance. Still we yearn for the generalization that builds on the specific. If any generalization holds for a good many of the artists gathered here, it may be that the desire to paint the landscape, as well as the phenomenon of exhibitions of landscape painting such as this one, are aspects of a back-to-nature movement that has been simmering in the United States for a quarter of a century. For art world insiders an interest in landscape painting was often first piqued by the environmental concerns of the 1960s. In the 1970s, many artists and art historians began to take a closer look at nineteenth-century American landscape painting. The 1980s have witnessed an upsurge in nostalgic accounts of small-town and rural life, in the visual arts, as well as in movies and books. And then there is the fascination with the nature philosophy of Ralph Waldo Emerson, currently at high tide among the intellectuals.

But of course, even if these larger movements have some bearing on landscape painters, they will only have relevance to the extent that they are broken up into smaller movements, into the actions and inclinations of individuals. Some of the painters included here started out in the fifties, not the sixties, and were going to Cape Cod or Maine long before the age of communes and Geodesic Domes. And as much as the mood of the nation, or the mood of the intelligentsia, may affect artists, artists will first and foremost be bohemians, living out a traditional bohemian
Rackstraw Downes *Portland from Back Cove, 1983-84* Oil on canvas 20 3/4 x 52 1/4" Courtesy of Hirschl and Adler, Modern, NY

James Cook *Meanders on Wolf Creek, 1987* Oil on canvas 43 x 93" Courtesy of Tatistcheff Gallery, NY
conflict between the life of the city and the life of the country. What brings an artist now to the landscape isn’t, after all, all that different from what once attracted Georgia O’Keeffe, Marsden Hartley, John Marin, or, in Europe, Giorgio Morandi, John Piper, Albert Marquet. What we can say for sure is that landscape is an urban inclination, a yearning of the city slicker for the country life, or of the transplanted country bumpkin to return to roots. This has been the case all through history, from Imperial Rome, to Sung China, to the Netherlands of the burghers, to Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century.

In addition to work by Gretna Campbell and Louisa Mattiasdottir; already mentioned, this show includes a range of artists overwhelming in their variety. The works are as different, one from the other, as can possibly be imagined—as painterly as Wolf Kahn’s and Paul Resika’s, as un- or even anti-painterly as Rackstraw Downes’s and James Valerio’s. What is sure is that these paintings are as various as the country that produced them. They form a whole rather like one of those maps of the United States of America on which little vignettes illustrates the landscape of this or that place. New England, with its rivers and forests, is well represented; but we also encounter the flatlands of Florida, the heartland of the Middle West, and the many roads that lead out to the Pacific coast. All of this adds up to a cacophony of various colorations, shadings, vegetations, vistas, perspectives—the work of many artists who live in one time and one nation, but also, simultaneously, in different places, and in different states of consciousness. But then, this is how we all are, in our own place and time, looking at the facts of nature that become our feelings, our impressions....

As I finish this, my window—embroidered with spots of rain, each with its little highlight—has turned into a sort of lace curtain, obscuring everything it promises to reveal. But wait another minute. The rain has stopped. The uniform gray of the sky breaks up into a dull chiaroscuro—clouds on the move. And the buildings begin to reveal their individuality—tan, rose, charcoal, mauve. Quick. Catch it before it disappears.

Jed Perl, art critic for The New Criterion, also contributes regularly to Art in America, Vogue, and The New Republic. He has taught at The Parsons School of Design (C.U.N.Y.) and his new book “Paris Without End” has recently been published by North Point Press.
Gretna Campbell *Looking Up, 1986* Oil on canvas 48 x 50” Courtesy of the estate of the artist, Campbell-Finkelstein Paintings, NY

Neil Welliver *Drowned Cedars, Mooseborn, 1980* Oil on canvas 96 x 120” Courtesy of Marlborough Gallery, NY
Artist's Biographies

Carol Anthony

Selected Recent Solo Exhibitions

Selected Group Exhibitions

John Bowman

Born 1953, Sayre, Pennsylvania

Education BFA, Rutgers College

Selected Recent Solo Exhibitions

Selected Group Exhibitions

Robert Berlind

Born New York City, NY 1938

Education Columbia College; BA Yale School of Art and Architecture; BFA

Selected Recent Solo Exhibitions

Selected Recent Group Exhibitions

Roger Brown

Born 1941 Hamilton, Alabama

Education BFA, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago; MFA, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago

Recent Selected Solo Exhibitions

Recent Selected Group Exhibitions

David Deutsch Curved Landscape, 1985 Acrylic, gouache and ink on paper mounted on canvas 7 5/8 x 77 1/2 x 3 3/8”

Courtesy Blum Helman Gallery (Private Collection), NY
Robert Berlind *Winter Vineyard*, 1987 Oil on linen 40 x 96” Courtesy of Ruth Siegel Gallery, NY

Susan Shatter *Tropical Pyramid*, 1988 Oil on canvas 39 x 98 1/2” Courtesy of Fischbach Gallery, NY
**James Cook**

**Born** Topeka, Kansas 1947  
**Education** Emporia State University, Emporia, KS BA Wichita State University, Wichita, KS MA

**Selected Recent Solo Exhibitions**

**Selected Recent Group Exhibitions**

**James M. Couper**

**Born** Atlanta, Georgia 1937  
**Education** Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL MA Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia BA

**Selected Recent Solo Exhibitions**

**Selected Recent Group Exhibitions**

**Richard Crozier**

**Born** Honolulu, Hawaii 1944  
**Education** University of Washington, Seattle BBA University of California, Davis MFA

**Selected Recent Solo Exhibitions**

**Selected Recent Group Exhibitions**

**Brad Davis**

**Born** 1942 Duluth, Minnesota  
**Education** University of Minnesota at Minneapolis BA

**Selected Recent Solo Exhibitions**

**Selected Group Exhibitions**
Charles Moser  *Cornfields*, 1987  Oil on canvas  Courtesy of Schmidt Bingham Gallery, NY
Archie Rand *River*, 1985 Acrylic on canvas 46 x 58" Courtesy of Phyllis Kind Gallery, NY
James Valerio *Nature Study, 1988* Oil on canvas 96 x 120" Courtesy of Frumkin/Adams Gallery, NY
David Deutsch

Born 1943 Los Angeles, California
Education University of California, BA
Selected Recent Solo Exhibitions

Selected Group Exhibition

Rackstraw Downes

Born 1939 Kent, England
Education Cambridge University, England, BA; Yale University, MFA; University of Pennsylvania, post-graduate fellowship.

Selected Recent Solo Exhibitions

Selected Recent Group Exhibitions

Jane Freilicher

Born Brooklyn, New York 1924
Education Brooklyn College, BA; Columbia University, MA

Selected Recent Solo Exhibitions
1988 Fischbach Gallery, NY; 1986 The Currier Gallery of Art, Manchester, NH; 1983 Kansas City Art Institute, Kansas City, MO; 1982 College of the Mainland Art Gallery, Texas City, TX; 1979 Utah Museum of Fine Arts, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah

Selected Recent Group Exhibitions

April Gornik

Born 1953 Cleveland, Ohio
Education Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Nova Scotia, Canada BFA

Selected Recent Solo Exhibitions

Selected Recent Group Exhibitions

Michael Gregory

Born Los Angeles, CA 1955
Education San Francisco Art Institute BFA

Recent Selected Solo Exhibitions

Recent Selected Group Exhibitions
Brad Davis *Above Hanging Lake*, 1986 Acrylic on canvas 103 x 72" Courtesy of Holly Solomon Gallery, NY
Wolf Kahn

Born 1927 Stuttgart, Germany

Education University of Chicago, BA


Howard Kanowitz

Education Providence College, B.S. New York University, Institute of Fine Arts


Leonard Koscianski

Born 1952 Cleveland, Ohio

Education Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture; Cleveland Institute of Art, Cleveland BFA; University of California at Davis MFA


Louisa Matthiasdottir

Born 1917 Reykjavik, Iceland

Education Hans Hofmann, New York


Charles Moser

Education Connecticut College, New London BA Queens College, New York, NY MFA


Grover Mouton

Born 1946 Lafayette, Louisiana


April Gornik *Shearing Light*, 1982 Oil on canvas 54 x 108” Courtesy of Edward Thorp Gallery, NY

Paul Resika *Provincetown Pier: Yellow Light* 1988 Oil on canvas 50 x 76” Courtesy of Graham Modern Gallery, NY

**Archie Rand**

*Born* 1949 Brooklyn, NY  
*Education* BFA, Pratt Institute NY  
*Recent Selected Solo Exhibitions*  
1987 Phyllis Kind Gallery, Chicago, IL;  
*Recent Selected Group Exhibitions*  

**Paul Resika**

*Born* 1928 New York City  
*Selected Recent Solo Exhibitions*  

**Susan Shatter**

*Born* 1943, New York  
*Education* Boston University, MA, MFA; Pratt Institute, NY, BFA; Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, ME  
*Selected Recent Solo Exhibitions*  
*Selected Group Exhibitions*  

**Tom Uttech**

*Born* Merrill, Wisconsin 1942  
*Education* Layton School of Art, Milwaukee, WI BA University of Cincinnati, OH MFA  
*Selected Recent Solo Exhibitions*  
*Selected Recent Group Exhibitions*  

**James Valerio**

*Born* Chicago, Illinois 1938  
*Education* School of Art, Institute of Chicago, BA, MFA  
*Selected Recent Solo Exhibitions*  
*Selected Recent Group Exhibitions*  

**James Weeks**

*Born* 1922 Oakland, CA.  
*Education* California School of Fine Arts, San Francisco, CA; Hartwell School of Design, San Francisco, CA.  
*Selected Recent Solo Exhibitions*  
Jane Freilicher *Wide Landscape*, 1983 Oil on canvas 40 x 68" Courtesy of Schmidt Bingham Gallery, NY

James Weeks *Landscape with Trees, Concord River* 1973-87 Acrylic on canvas 50 x 67" Courtesy of Hirschl and Adler, Modern, NY
Selected Recent Group Exhibitions

William Wegman
Born 1943, Holyhoke, Massachusetts
Education Massachusetts College of Art, Boston BFA in painting University of Illinois, Urbana MFA in painting
Selected Recent Solo Exhibitions
Selected Group Exhibitions

Neil Welliver
Born Millville, PA 1929
Education Philadelphia Museum, College of Art, Philadelphia, PA, BFA; Yale School of Art, Yale University, New Haven, CT, MFA
Selected Recent Solo Exhibitions

Selected Recent Group Exhibitions

Jane Wilson
Born Seymour, Iowa
Education University of Iowa MFA
Selected Recent Solo Exhibitions
Selected Recent Group Exhibitions

James Winn
Born 1949 Hannibal, Missouri
Education Illinois State University, Normal, IL. BS, MFA
Selected Recent Solo Exhibitions
Selected Recent Group Exhibition
William Wegman *Red Farm Estates*, 1988 Oil and acrylic on canvas 48 x 68" Courtesy of Holly Solomon Gallery, NY

Michael Gregory *Apogee*, 1988 Oil and tar on wood 15 x 23 1/2" Courtesy of Nancy Hoffman Gallery
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<td>Richard Crozier</td>
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<td>Courtesy of Holly Solomon Gallery, NY</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neil Welliver</td>
<td>Drowned Cedars, Mooseborn, 1980</td>
<td>Oil on canvas 96 x 120&quot;</td>
<td>Courtesy of Marlborough Gallery, NY</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jane Wilson</td>
<td>Three O'Clock Sun: Watermill, 1988</td>
<td>Oil on linen 60 x 76&quot;</td>
<td>Courtesy of Fischbach Gallery, NY</td>
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<tr>
<td>James Winn</td>
<td>Standing Water, 1987</td>
<td>Acrylic on paper 30 x 72&quot;</td>
<td>Courtesy of Sherry French Gallery, NY</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Richard Crozier *St. George’s River, 1987* Oil on canvas 40 x 120” (diptych) Courtesy of Tatistcheff Gallery, NY

James Winn *Standing Water, 1987* Acrylic on paper 30 x 72” Courtesy of Sherry French Gallery, NY
Grover Mouton  
*Water Tower II, 1987*  
Derwent color block on photo reproduction and rag paper 30 x 40”  
Courtesy of Marlborough Gallery, NY
Jane Wilson *Three O'Clock Sun: Watermill, 1988* Oil on linen 60 x 76" Courtesy of Fischbach Gallery, NY
Leonard Koscianski *American Idyll*, 1987 Oil on canvas 72 x 96" Courtesy of Mogol-Tysseling Collection, MN
Tom Uttech *Black Wolf, Kiskadinna Lake*, 1987 Oil on canvas 66 x 72" Courtesy of The Prudential Collection, Newark, NJ and Maxwell Davidson Gallery, NY
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