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## THINGS SEEN

Norman A. Geske

*Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery*

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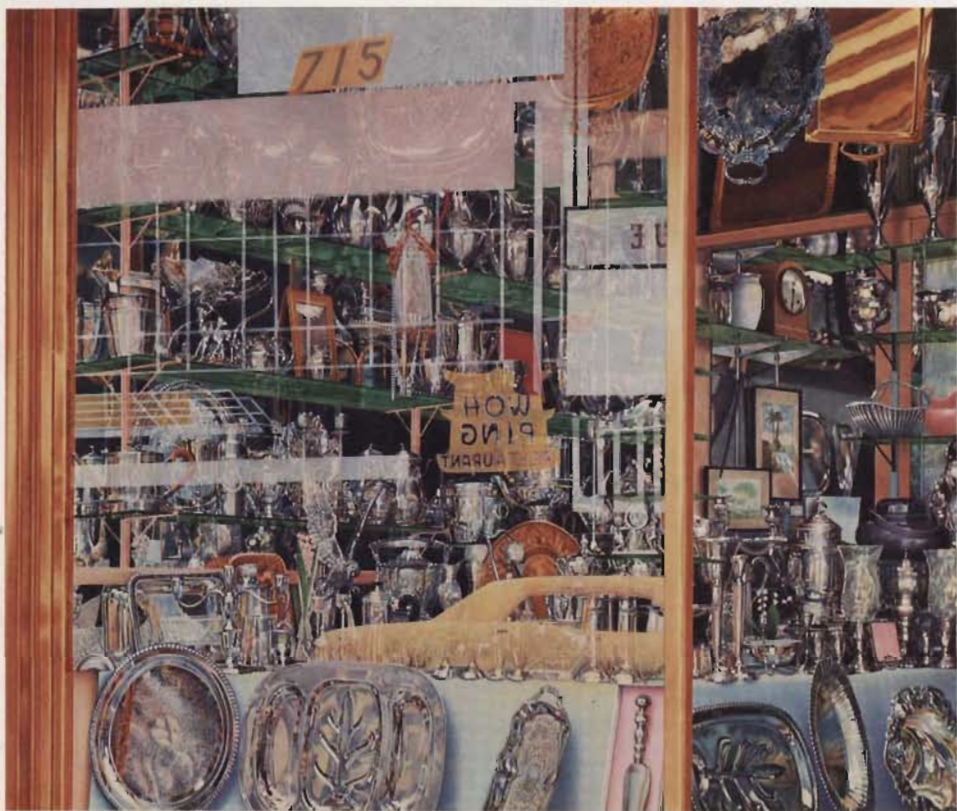


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# *THINGS SEEN*

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# ***THINGS SEEN***

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Cover: Don Eddy, *715 Lexington*, 1974

Designed by Bailey Lewis & Associates, Inc.

This project is supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts in Washington, DC, a federal agency.

## ***THINGS SEEN***

An exhibition organized by the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, Lincoln, Nebraska in collaboration with the Nebraska Art Association, Lincoln, the Staff, Board of Trustees and the Womens Board of the Mulvane Art Center, Topeka, and the Mid-America Arts Alliance.

The exhibition will be shown in the following institutions:

Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln  
September 5-October 1, 1978

Mulvane Art Center  
Washburn University, Topeka, Kansas  
October 8-November 5, 1978

Arkansas Art Center  
Little Rock, Arkansas  
November 15-December 16, 1978

Springfield Art Museum  
Springfield, Missouri  
January 2-January 28, 1979

Wichita Art Museum  
Wichita, Kansas  
February 4-March 11, 1979

Union National Bank  
Manhattan, Kansas  
Sponsors: Manhattan Arts Council  
Union National Bank  
Flint Hills Toyota  
Steel and Pipe Supply Company  
Pizza Hut, Inc.  
The Manhattan Mercury  
March 18-April 22, 1979

Mclloy Bank and Trust  
Fayetteville, Arkansas  
Sponsor: Northwest Arkansas Cultural Center  
April 29-June 3, 1979

Oklahoma Art Center  
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma  
June 10-July 15, 1979

Hutchinson Public Library  
Hutchinson, Kansas  
July 22-August 26, 1979

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## ***ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:***

First of all it is a pleasure to acknowledge the support of the respective boards of trustees of the Nebraska Art Association, of the Mulvane Art Center and the Mid-America Arts Alliance whose approval has made the present exhibition possible. Second, we wish to thank the National Endowment for the Arts for its grants to the Mid-America Arts Alliance and for the support and cooperation of the five partner State Agencies that make up the Alliance: the Arkansas Arts Council, the Kansas Arts Commission, the Missouri Arts Council, the Nebraska Arts Council and the Oklahoma Arts and Humanities Council. It is necessary, also, to express special appreciation to two individuals whose initiative and enthusiasm made the project "go". They are R. J. Hunt, Director of the Mulvane Art Center, who had the idea in the first place and asked us to undertake its organization, and David Smith, Coordinator of Visual Arts for the Mid-America Arts Alliance, who seized the opportunity to make it available to a much larger public than would have seen it in Lincoln and Topeka alone. As the exhibition began to take shape we were able to secure immediate and generous loans from public collections in a significant demonstration of the growth of Mid-America's concept of utilizing more fully the

artistic resources of our region. Of the total number of paintings in the exhibition twenty-four are lent by seven museums in the mid-America states. Three more come from neighbors in Illinois and New Mexico. To these loans we have added works from private and corporate collections where a loan for the year necessary to the exhibition's tour represents a significant generosity on the part of the owners. The dealers who have lent works from their stock have been generous as well in the interest of making their artists better known to a larger public and in several instances we called upon artists themselves for works directly from their studios.

The list of individuals who have been generous and helpful in a variety of ways includes the following: Lowell Adams, Warren Adelson, Lester Arwin, Martin Bush, Muriel Christison, Charles Eldredge, Sol & Bella Fishko, Philip Heckman, Nancy Hoffman, Kemper Kirkpatrick, Jill Kornblee, William Landwehr, Mrs. John C. LeClair, Chauncie McKeever, Larry Meeker, Wendell Ott, Jim Ray, A. M. Sachs, David Swanson, Tibor de Nagy, Tom Toperzer and Howard Wooden.

## ***INTRODUCTION:***

The present exhibition has been organized to focus attention on one of the most flourishing aspects of contemporary American painting, the revival of representational art in the traditional formats of the landscape, the figure and the still life. For the past ten years it has become evident that more and more artists are having second thoughts about the abstract style which had come to dominate the artistic scene within the several previous decades. There are instances of renunciation, a sudden yet deliberate turning away from abstraction toward some form of traditional representation. There are also numerous instances of artists beginning their professional efforts with a very conscious demonstration of allegiance to the figurative tradition against which their predecessors rebelled. Today, one of the principal problems in the organization of this exhibition is to accommodate the breadth and variety of this new involvement with realism.

Several considerations were operative in the final selection. First of all, it is of considerable interest to note that, far from being a mere "revival" of past concerns, the contemporary realist has a very different eye, an eye that has been profoundly affected by the abstract experience of half a century; but an eye that views today's experience with

insights that are peculiarly representative of today. To underline this difference and, at the same time, to demonstrate the fact that today's realism is indeed no revival but part of a continuity, we have attempted to suggest something of the history of the realist point of view since the turn of the century. There is ample evidence in the work of some of the younger painters that they are seeing for the first time the work of such American realists as Thomas Eakins and Edward Hopper, to say nothing of such European realists as Ingres and Courbet.

Other considerations, each of them affecting the final selection, have to do with the varying definition of realism, reality and the real. This is a semantic jungle, the density of which scarcely permits an exhaustive demonstration in an exhibition of fifty paintings, but one qualification is necessary to answer those who will look at the exhibition with artists in mind who are not included, all of whom are intrinsically realists: Ivan Albright, Paul Cadmus, Alice Neel, Fairfield Porter, and, among the younger generation, Jack Beal, Alfred Leslie, Neil Welliver, to name only a few.



Theirs is a realistic point of view but their method as painters is dominated by an attitudinal bias in some and, in others, by a painterly emphasis on light, color or texture which precludes dispassionate observation. For this occasion we have limited the operative definition of realism to an objective and precise observation of experience.

The title of the exhibition has been chosen to contain as succinctly as possible the essence of the idea represented in the paintings. It suggests that one of the simplest and most direct approaches to reality is through a fundamental acceptance of the evidence provided in the act of seeing. To see simply and fully, without undue emotion or reflection requires an exercise of intelligence that puts a considerable demand on the artist who chooses to record this experience as well as on the viewer who looks at the finished work. Such an experience of seeing is more ideal than commonplace, and in the exhibition it is demonstrated in fifty varying forms.

At the beginning of this exhibition, Thomas Eakins demonstrates the high level of realist accomplishment at the end of the nineteenth century. Eakins is followed by Henri, Sloan, Hopper, Marsh and others who demonstrate the survival of realist art during the first half of the present century. The third and largest part of the exhibition is devoted to the work of younger contemporaries, some of them well known on the national scene, some of them exhibiting in the context of such a show for the first time.

In the work of Thomas Eakins we find American realism at its finest, the demonstration of the act and the art of seeing at its highest level. In Eakins the intellectual aspects of seeing are fully expressed in the sciences of anatomy and perspective, and the study of light and movement, which is subsumed in the passionate honesty of his concern with his subject. The *Portrait of Mrs. Murray* is splendid evidence of this concern.

If Eakins can be said to represent the best achievement of realism in American art, we have a bench mark against which subsequent effort can be measured and it can be noted that, in the work of this artist, we find the basic impulse — to record with complete accuracy the facts of visual experience, which lie at the heart of realism.

Throughout the exhibition there is the evidence that a primary stimulus to the development of a contemporary realism

has been the burgeoning art of photography. We have witnessed recently, in this connection, a significant reversal of the once commonly held attitude that argued photography's primacy as a recorder of facts, making it unnecessary and undesirable that painting undertake such recording. Indeed, "photographic" was for some time a term of opprobrium as applied to painting. Now photo-realism has become a perfectly respectable descriptive term, and the legitimate relationship of painting to photography has been generally accepted. The photograph has become an all pervasive element in the visual arts, affecting the practice of painting and printmaking in a fundamental way.

The painter may start with a photograph or a color slide as a kind of sketch. All of the possibilities of the dark room can be utilized in the identification of the image, and the execution of the painting is frequently based on the most minute dissection and transfer of the image from the film to the canvas. What is remarkable is that the end result is something else than purely photographic, and while it may be argued that, in the majority of instances in this exhibition, the images presented could not have come into being without the camera, the observer is urged to look more closely.

There is a difference between the fact of the image and the experience of environment,

personality and imagination which is contained in William Allen's fish, James Bama's cowboy, Janet Fish's bottles, Harold Gregor's corncrib, Malcolm Morley's ship and Ed Ruscha's bowling ball. It is the shaping touch of the painter that makes the difference.

Norman A. Geske, Director  
Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery

## *The 19th Century*

## **THOMAS EAKINS** (1844-1916)

***Portrait of Mrs. Samuel Murray***, c. 1897

oil, h. 40" x w. 30" (101.6cm. x 76.2cm.)

Lent by the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, Lincoln, Nebraska

F. M. Hall Collection

This is one of two versions of a portrait of Mrs. Murray, the second version being smaller and completely finished.\* The relationship of the two pictures is uncertain, but of the two, the Nebraska version indicates more fully the intensity of Eakins' perception of his subject who was the wife of a close friend and pupil.

There is nothing in this portrait of the ideal or the sentimental. It is the kind of portrait painting which is the product of the artist's most concentrated scrutiny of his subject. It is the antithesis of the commissioned portrait and could only have been possible in the intimacy of a close friendship. The directness of the artist's observation is such that the painting defies any easy or traditional classification and becomes instead, in the most profound sense, a portrait of a human being.

Eakins was a photographer and used his prints as another means of arriving at the truth to be painted. We should not forget his association with Muybridge in the photographic study of human and animal locomotion. And as a final note it is of some interest to note that today his photographs are commanding a price commensurate, if not equal, to the prices received for his painting.

\*In the collection of the Baltimore Museum of Art



## *The 20th Century, Older Generation*

## **ROBERT HENRI** (1865-1929)

***Figure in Motion***, 1913

oil, h. 77" w. 37" (195.5cm. x 94cm.)

Lent by the artist's estate

It is of special interest that Robert Henri's ***Figure in Motion*** was exhibited in the Armory Show in 1913—together with another painting of a figure in motion Marcel Duchamp's ***Nude Descending a Staircase***. We must assume that he could not have seen Duchamp's picture before the opening of the show, but he may have had an advance description from Arthur B. Davies or Walt Kuhn, the exhibition's organizers. William Homer, Henri's biographer, speculates that it would not have been beyond him to offer a challenge. Taken quite apart from such a context, the ***Figure in Motion*** was a daring picture to offer the American art public at that time and an unusual work in the totality of Henri's production. Significantly, it does not rely on the traditional conventions for such a subject, such as a "bather," a reclining Venus or an odalisque. Unlike his other paintings of the nude it does not blunt the issue with costume or drapery. It is fully realized, explicit and personal.

It is probably as close to a genuine realism as can be found in his work, yet it should be remembered that Henri refused to be called a realist. "My work is not realistic. My work is pure abstraction. I abstract from what I see — men, rivers, lights, women — the ideas of those things, and that's what I paint. I refuse to be grouped with people who paint men and things."\*

\*William Innes Homer, ***Robert Henri and His Circle***, Cornell University Press, 1969, p. 262





## **EDWARD HOPPER** (1882-1967)

### ***Room in New York*, 1932**

oil, h. 20" x w. 36" (50.8cm. x 91.4cm.)

Lent by the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, Lincoln, Nebraska

F. M. Hall Collection

To call Edward Hopper a realist is to demonstrate how inclusive a definition of realism must be. If realism is concerned with the inclusion of all the details, the specifics of a subject then Hopper is no realist. Yet the specifics of any subject painted by Hopper are all there. They are the intangible, unseen specifics of mood and emotion, of weather and atmosphere and the *feel* of the hour of the day or night. He abstracts by simplification of form and distillation of color to achieve so full an expression of the experience of a random moment that the mind of the viewer is flooded with instant recognition.

***Room in New York*** is filled with this suggestive power. Note that the proportion of the window is very large considering the size of the room. (There is no suggestion of frame or sash, incidentally). The room itself is unusually small and high ceiled, its furnishings confined, as far as we can see, to an armchair, a table, a lamp and a piano. The man and woman are lost in the distractions of a newspaper and a one finger tune on the piano. The reality of the situation is inescapable.

NAG



***PETER HURD***, b. 1904

***The Bonfire***, 1950

egg tempera, h. 32" x w. 46" (81.3cm. x 116.8cm.)

Lent by Roswell Museum and Art Center, Roswell, New Mexico

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Donald Winston & Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Winston

Note: The artist did not wish to make a statement regarding his painting.



## ***JOHN KOCH*** (1909-1978)

***The Window Washers***, 1975

oil, h. 60" x w. 40" (152.3cm. x 101.6cm.)

Lent by the Wichita Art Museum, Wichita, Kansas

Gift of the Paul Ross Foundation

“The powers and uses of photography are self-evident and ubiquitous. However adroit and provocative, photography can never seriously contend with painting as an expression of the inspired and thinking soul of man.

I find preposterous the widely accepted notion that photography has somehow outlawed figurative painting in any form whatever, even portraiture. A great deal of photographic portraiture is admirable, a vast amount of photographic portraiture lamentable, of course. But Holbein or Ingres, you know — the camera can never give you this.”\*

\*John Koch ***John Koch in New York 1950-1963*** Museum of the City of New York, n.d.



## **REGINALD MARSH** (1899-1954)

### ***The Park Bench*, 1933**

tempera, h. 24" x w. 36" (61cm. x 91.4cm.)

Lent by the Nebraska Art Association, Lincoln, Nebraska

Reginald Marsh, as one of the most important of the pupils of Robert Henri, was deeply interested in the life of the city, in particular the life of the streets, and his work of the thirties is possibly the most deeply felt of his career. This is the realism of the social commentator which reports the facts with candor and compassion.

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## **WALTER MURCH** (1907-1967)

### ***The Motor*, 1951**

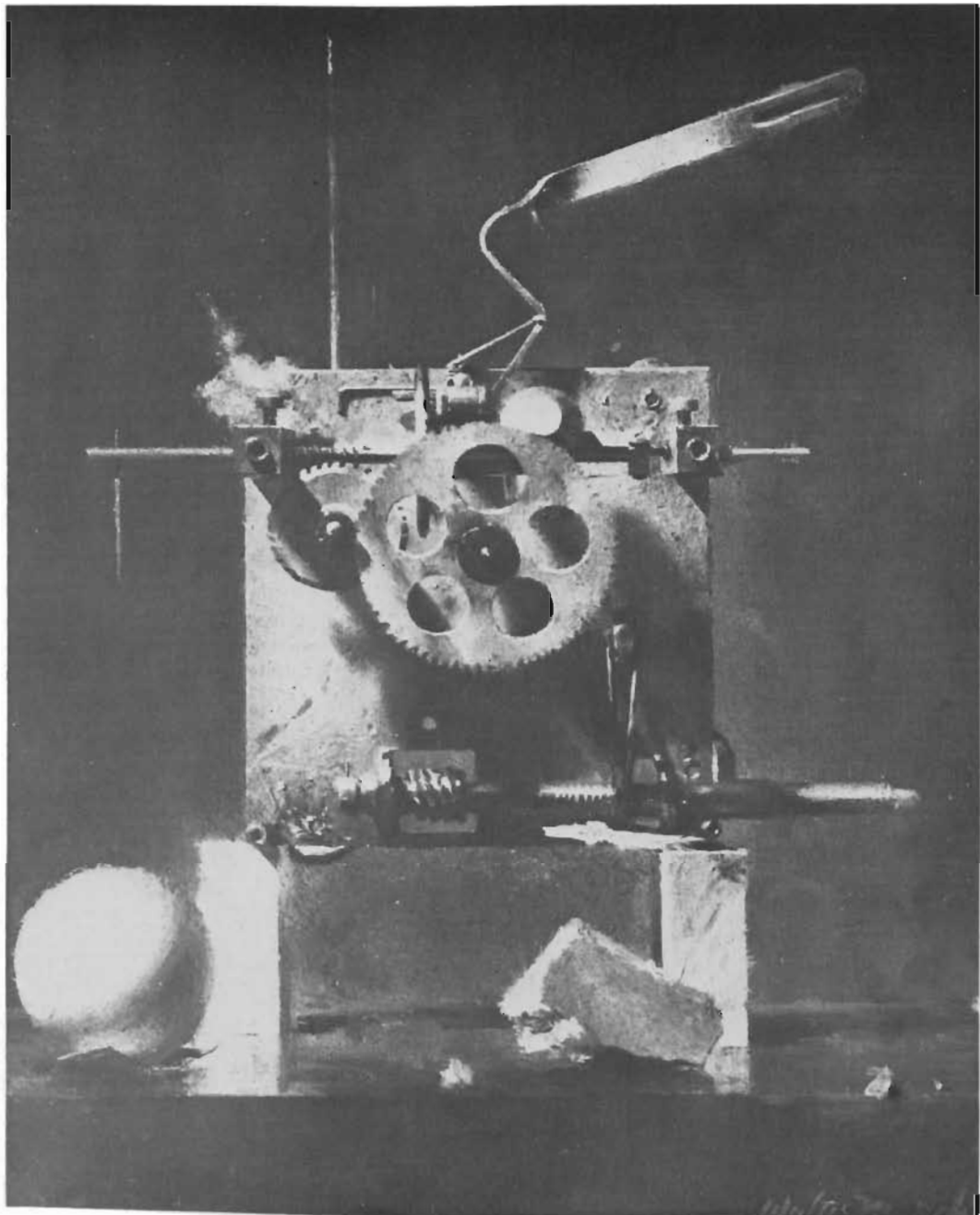
oil, h. 25" x w. 19" (63.5cm. x 48.2cm.)

Lent by the Krannert Art Museum

University of Illinois, Champaign, Illinois

In the work of Walter Murch we have the continuation of the tradition of *trompe l'oeil*, with several significant differences which make his paintings distinctively of the twentieth century. First of all, the objects in them are widely various in character and are usually not objects selected as expressive of a conventional beauty—a light bulb, a loaf of bread, a smoked fish, a dilapidated mannekin, an old phonograph, and, in this instance, an abandoned motor. They are the “found objects” of modern art, unimportant in terms of their origin or use, but of interest to the artist for their qualities of form, texture and color. Secondly, they are “seen” not only as objects of a certain kind, but as part of an ambience of light filled space. They partake of it and seem at moments to merge with it in an almost palpable fluctuation of the artist’s observation and, through him, ours. Rarely has the transitory quality of optical experience been so completely expressed.

NAG



## ***CHARLES SHEELER*** (1883-1965)

### ***Barn Reds***, 1938

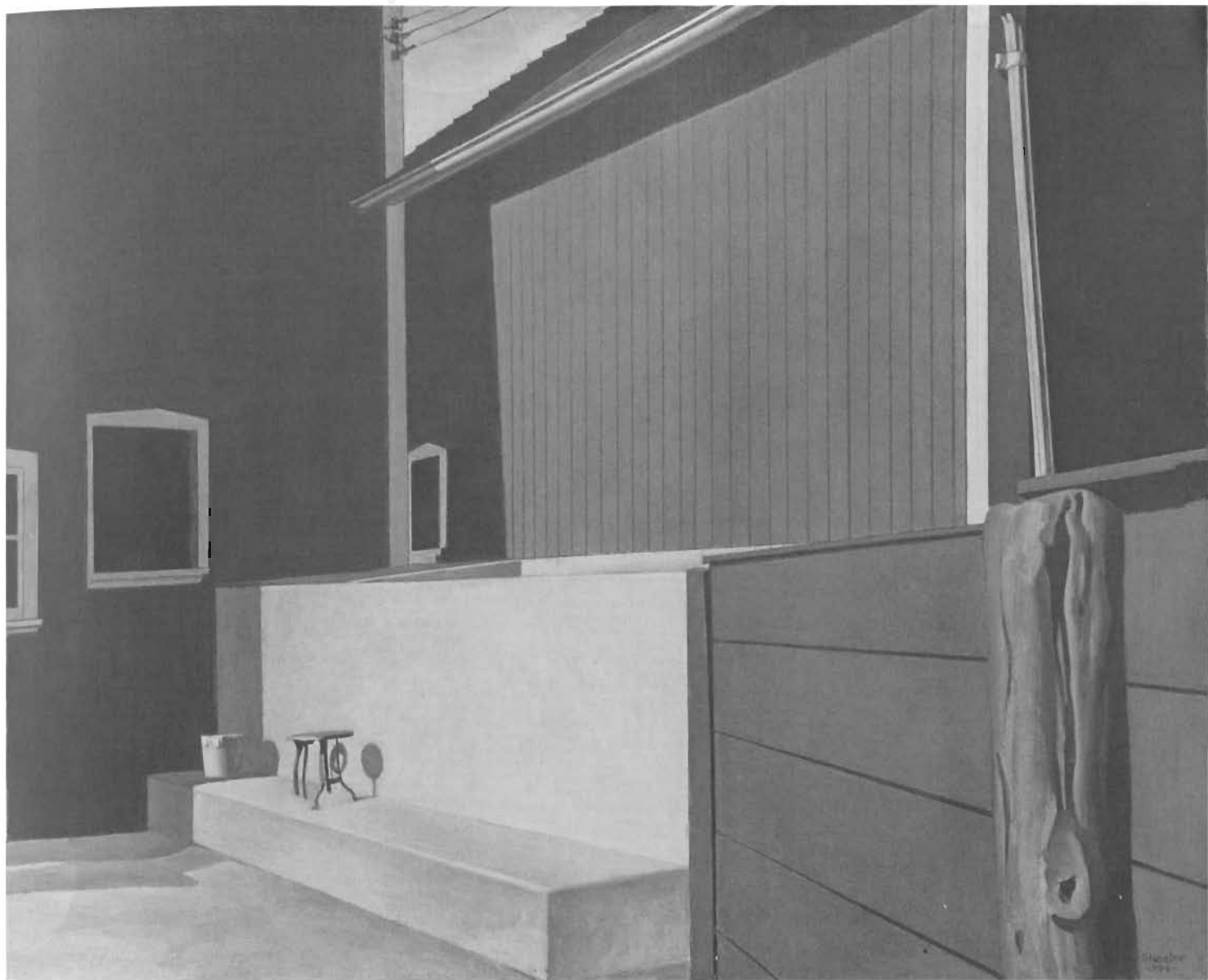
tempera and pencil, h. 10<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub>" x w. 12<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub>" (26.5cm. x 32.7cm.)

Lent by the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, Lincoln, Nebraska

F. M. Hall Collection

The art of Charles Sheeler contains, within the eighty-two years of his life, the classic example of the adaptation of a basically realistic point of view to the concept of abstraction, as established by the Cubists in the years before the first World War. It is interesting to note, however, that even at the early stages his point of view was one which sought to discover and emphasize the qualities of abstract form in realistic subjects. Allowing for the fact that his meticulous approach to image-making usually resulted in the subject having a "cleaned up" look, his subjects, as for example the barns of his native Bucks County, Pennsylvania, are usually seen straight on, but with his position carefully chosen to compose the picture naturally within the chosen format, very much as a photographer would do — and Sheeler was a photographer of very considerable skill. It is also of interest to note that the photograph rarely differed in any important way from the drawing or painting which might derive from it. In other words, the "seeing" of the subject was the important part. The renderings in various media were, in a sense, variations on the things seen.

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## **JOHN SLOAN** (1871-1951)

### ***Rio Grande Country*, 1925**

oil, h. 30" x w. 36" (76.2cm. x 91.4cm.)

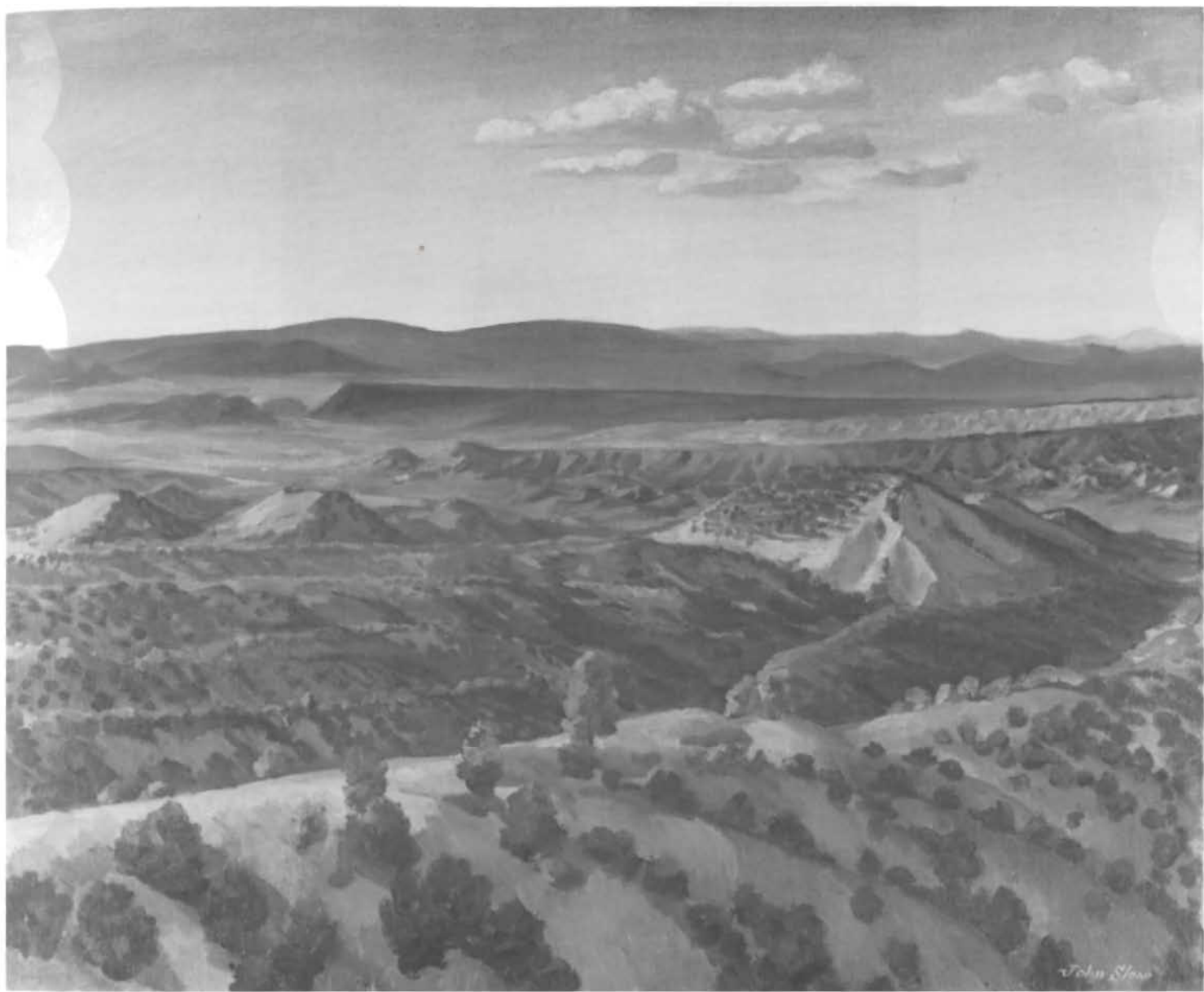
Lent by the Nebraska Art Association, Lincoln, Nebraska

Nelle Cochrane Woods Collection

John Sloan is more of a realist in terms of his subject matter than in the manner of his treatment of the subject. Like Henri he was an enthusiast whose feelings and convictions found their natural outlet in a painterly style compounded of a richly loaded handwriting of the brush and a vigorous and uninhibited response to color.

There are occasions, however, when Sloan's response to a subject, as in the case of ***Rio Grande Country***, which is that rare thing for him — a landscape devoid of human activity, — when the intrinsic simplicity of the theme seems to have engendered the self-discipline necessary to the solution of that most profound of artistic problems, the rendering of landscape space.

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***RAPHAEL SOYER***, b. 1899

***Standing Nude Female***, 1960

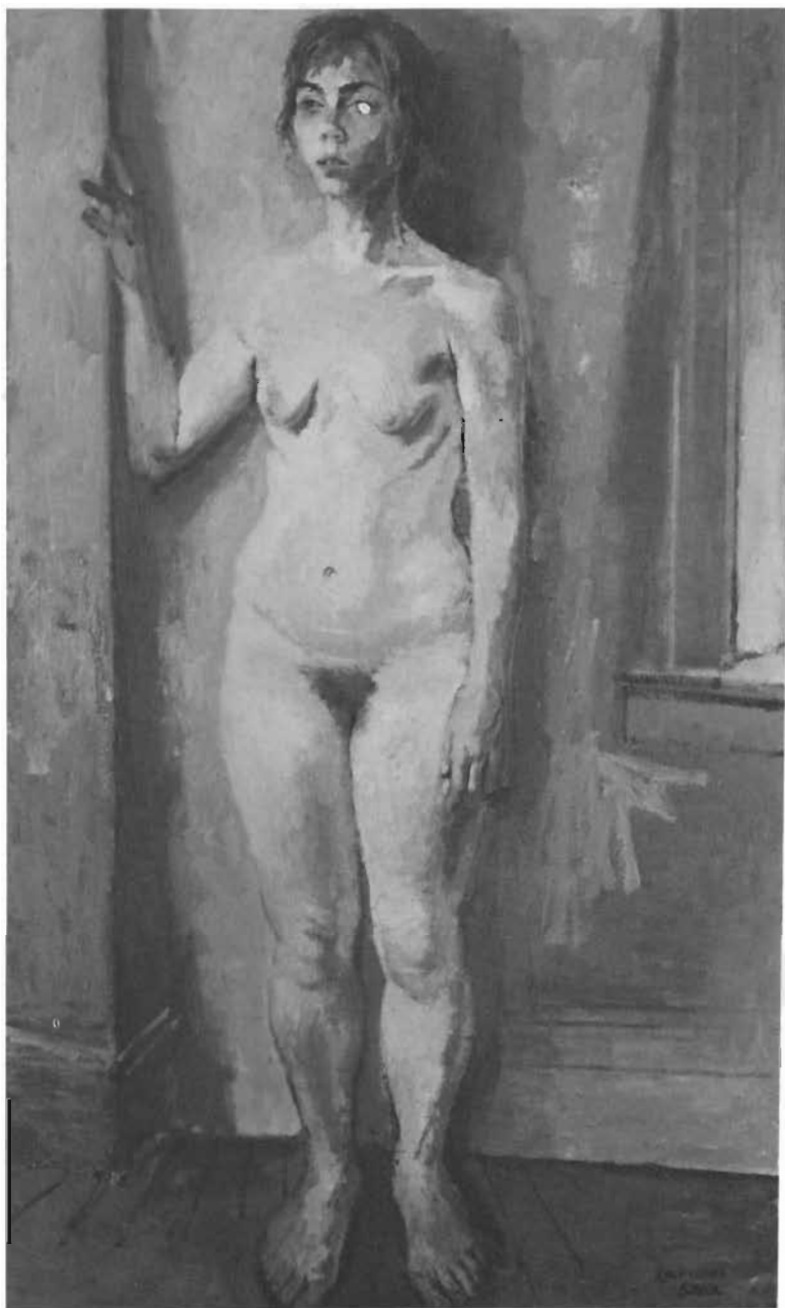
oil h. 54½" x w. 32¼" (138.4cm. x 81.9cm.)

Lent by the Krannert Art Museum

University of Illinois, Champaign, Illinois

“My art is representational by choice. In my opinion, if the art of painting is to survive, it must describe and express people, their lives and times. It must communicate. I consider myself a modern artist, or rather an artist of today. I dislike the word “modern” in relation to art — it implies temporariness. I am an artist of today, because I am influenced by the thoughts, the life and the esthetics of our time. I am also an inheritor of many great painters who preceded me and made tradition living, on-going and ever renewable like nature itself, by finding dynamic, contemporary and personal ways to depict and interpret their life and their times.”

Raphael Soyer, 1978





## **ANDREW WYETH,** b. 1917

### ***Spring Beauty*, 1943**

watercolor, h. 20" x w. 30" (50.8cm. x 76.2cm.)

Lent by the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, Lincoln, Nebraska

F. M. Hall Collection

If one accepts one of the meanings of realism as it pertains to artistic representation given in a current dictionary\* as visual accuracy then it becomes clear that Andrew Wyeth's ***Spring Beauty*** is something more. It is undeniable that few of us would see Wyeth's subject, a flowering plant, in just the way he does. The flower, yes, but not, at the same time and with an equal attentiveness, the thousands of minutiae that make up the rest of the picture. Naturalism is however conformity to nature, and the flower is, after all, only one of the natural facts present in the scene and intrinsically no more important than any other. Wyeth's capacity to see is exhaustive. He provides us with the facsimile of his experience and against the breadth and intensity of his perception we react just as he did and see only the miraculous thrust of movement against inertia which is the subject of the picture.

NAG

*\*American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 1969*



## *The 20th Century, Younger Generation*

**MICHAEL AHERN,** b. 1946

*Filicales*, 1977

oil, h. 84" x w. 58" (213.3cm. x 147.3cm.)

Lent by the 3M Company, St. Paul, Minnesota



***WILLIAM ALLAN,*** b. 1935

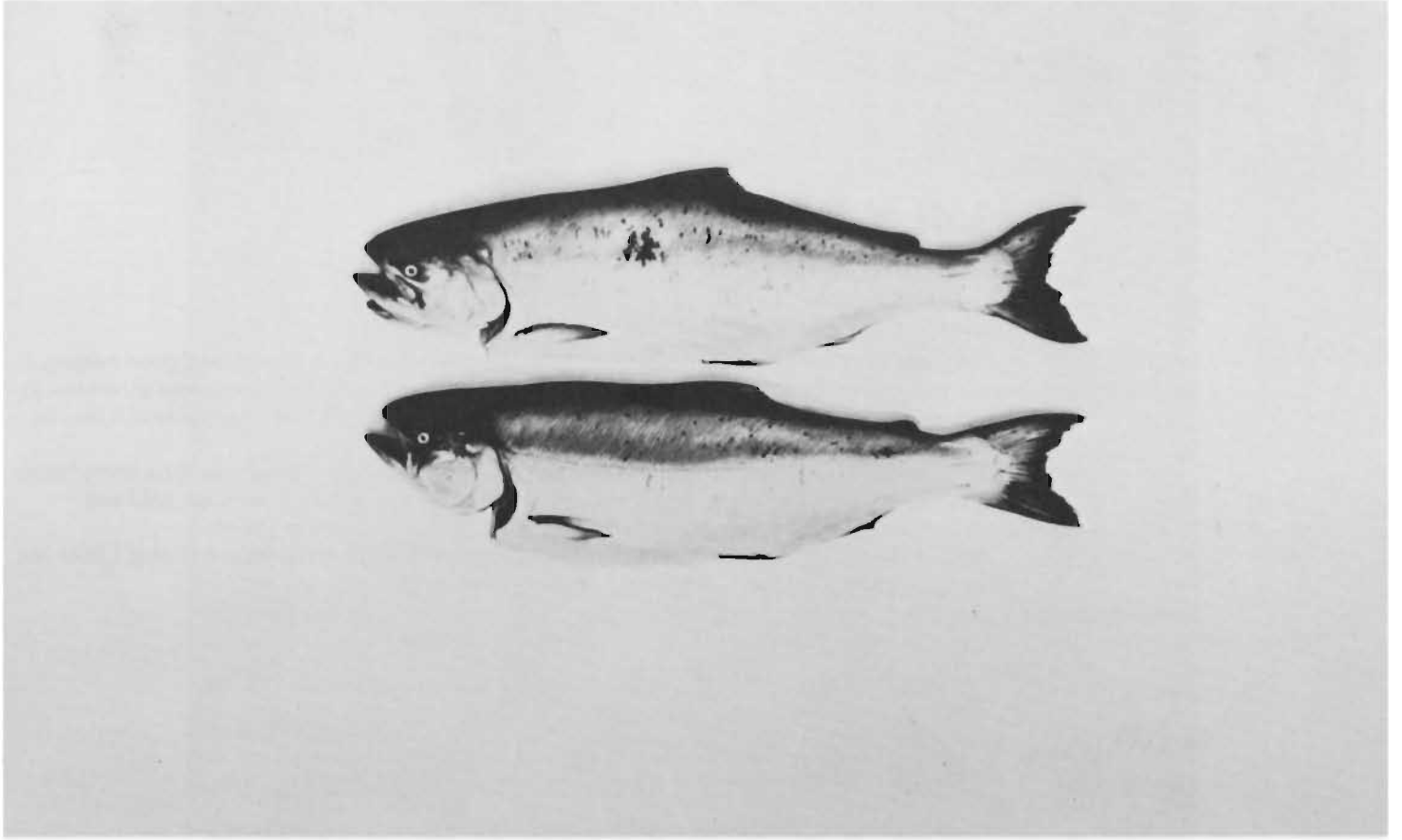
***Salmon Double,*** 1977

watercolor, h. 24" x w. 38" (61 cm. x 96.5 cm.)

Private Collection, New York

"I would hope that the 'concept of realism' is asking for more than the identification of objects, or the passivity of the familiar, from the artist and especially the viewer."

William Allan, 1978



## ***ROBERT BECHTLE***, b. 1922

**'67 Cadillac**, 1968

oil, h. 20" x w. 22" (50.3cm. x 55.9cm.)

Lent by Doane College, Crete, Nebraska

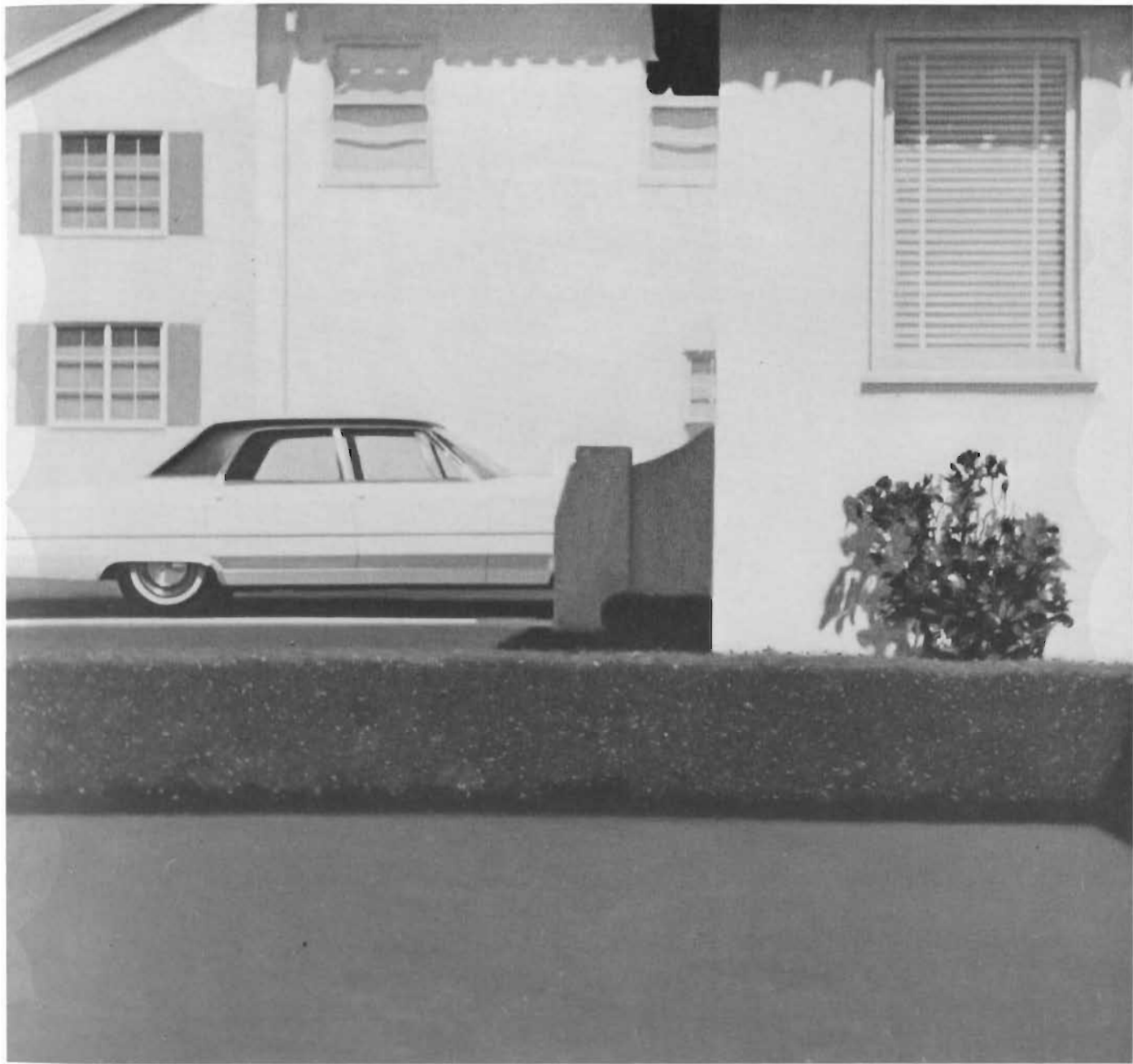
"I first started to work in a realistic manner as a way of avoiding many of the problems of style that were troubling me in the early sixties. I was interested in the use of subject matter; realism, paradoxically, seemed the only direction that was relatively open and free of recent precedent. It offered the prospect of solving painting problems without being overly aware of how others had solved them or of even knowing just what the problems or possibilities might be.

My inclination toward the use of subject matter goes back to the Bay Area Figurative tradition of the late fifties. My drift to realism came partly as a reaction against the more obvious expressionist attitudes of the tradition and partly as an acceptance of the implications of using subject matter for its own sake.

It became important for me to try for a kind of neutrality or transparency that hides the more artful evidence of the painter's craft and that causes the subject to be the first thing encountered in the picture. Of course, my painting is no more neutral than any other. It involves choice, decision, emotion, etc. but I hope in a way that is not overly apparent. I choose to paint the things I do — cars, suburban streets, etc. — because they seem to offer the greatest opportunity of looking without reminding me of other art."

Robert Bechtle, 1978





**CAROYLN BRADY**, b. 1937

*Split Leaves and Fishbowl*, 1976

watercolor, h. 22 $\frac{3}{8}$ " x w. 30" (56.8cm. x 76.2cm.)

Lent by the Springfield Art Museum, Springfield, Missouri



***HAROLD BRUDER,*** b. 1930

*The Discovery of Glenwood*, 1968

oil, h. 64" x w. 84" (162.5cm. x 213.3cm.)

Lent by the Forum Gallery, New York

"I lived and taught in Aspen, Colorado during the summer of 1967. My studio was on the side of a mountain. Glenwood Canyon was only an hour away. *The Discovery of Glenwood* grew from the experiences of that summer. I saw in the vastness of the canyon landscape parallels to a Poussinesque Drama: The grand manner of the seventeenth century imposed on the American West. It was a sense of personal discovery raised to a monumental level that I wished to communicate."

Harold Bruder, 1978



***DAVID COOLEY***, b. 1948

***Icarus Wore Black***, 1977

oil, h. 56" x w. 65" (142cm. x 165.1 cm.)

Lent by the artist

Realism as a classifying term continues to trouble me as I am sure it has countless others. Realism connotes objective academic rendering of observed events or stimulus. However, my perception of events and objects are highly subjective in nature. Certainly I do not profess to copy nature detail for detail. I attempt to render visualizations of form, space and light that are subjective symbols altered to achieve a working harmony on the canvas. Through the language of form and color I hope to merge the long tradition of still-life painting with the developments of contemporary non-representational painting into a viable search for new allegorical themes. To transcend the real and visualize the magical essence of the observed is my aim. If a suggested suspense should arise out of the real it is, again, because of the subjective nature of reality, a psychic reality, through things perceived.

David Cooley, 1978



## **KENNETH DAVIES,** b. 1925

***The Blackboard***, 1950

oil, h. 20" x w. 26" (50.3cm. x 66cm.)

Lent by the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, Lincoln, Nebraska

***"The Blackboard*** was painted in 1950 immediately after my graduation from the Yale School of Fine Art. At that time, I was involved exclusively with *trompe loeil*. My concern was painting an interesting composition of provocative objects so realistically that the viewer would be momentarily fooled into believing they were real.

Twenty eight years later, I still paint *trompe loeil*, but in addition, I have become increasingly interested in subject matter other than strictly still-life. I am now intrigued with simpler arrangements, stronger value patterns and combining abstract shapes and designs with very realistic renderings. I feel that this gives me the best of two worlds. I hope that my work now has a sound abstract composition and at the same time entertains the eye, upon closer examination, with its realistic details."

Kenneth Davies, 1978





**JILLIAN DENBY**, b. 1944

***Portrait of S. L.***, 1977

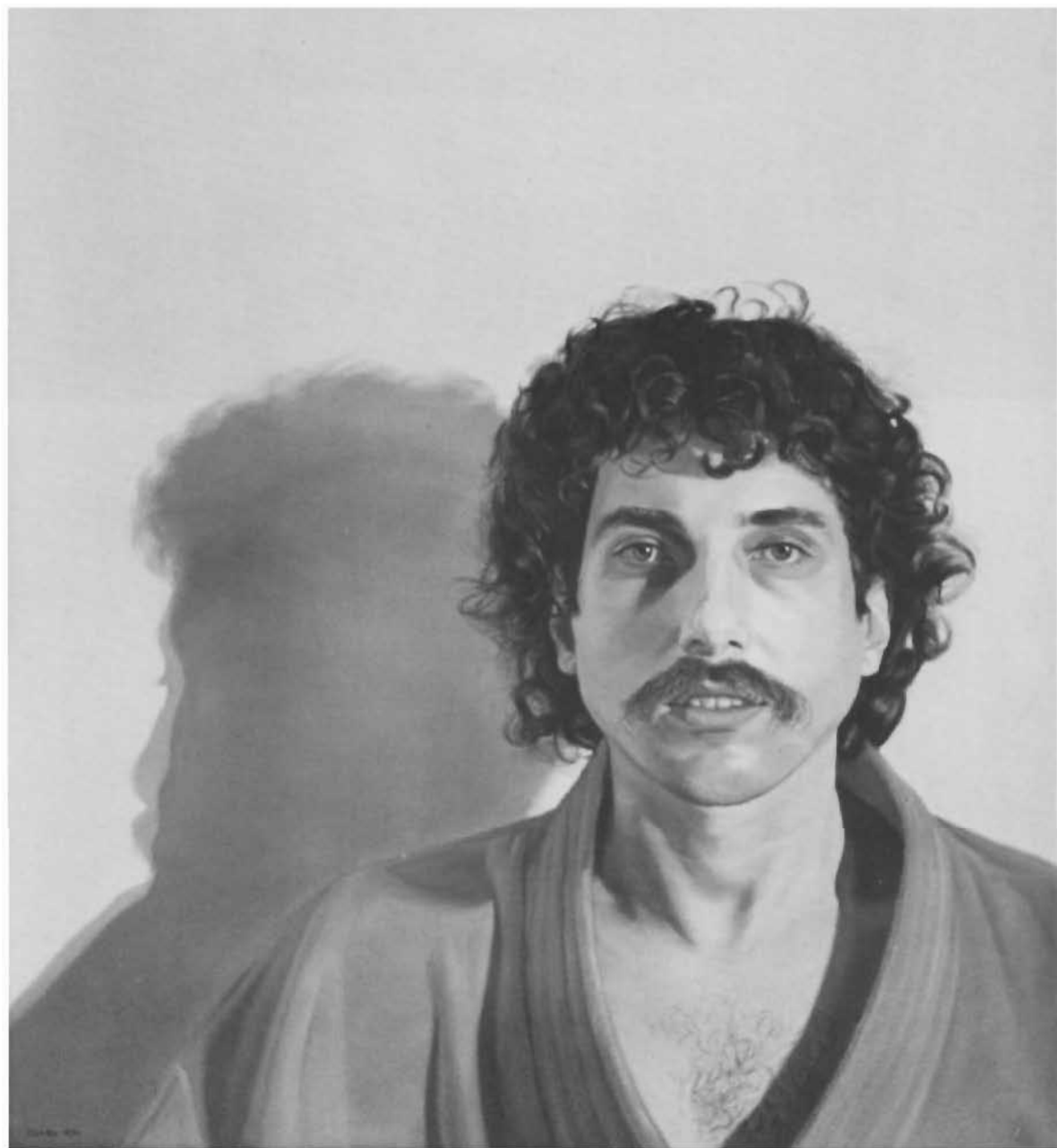
oil, h. 30" x w. 28" (76.2cm. x 71.1cm.)

Lent by A. M. Sachs Gallery, New York

"I feel like one of those writers who never reads. I just don't see enough to come to any conclusion about realism. As a steady compelling interest, I just experience art from the inside out. I don't feel that my work is particularly realistic, it is just that I am drawn to expressing certain attitudes of form in as clear a manner as my mind's eye sees it. The way I paint is the manner most suited to the atmosphere I wish to suggest.

In antiquity, art was judged by its ability to move you and invoke some internal harmony that left you less deadened to the world than you were before. This expression may last only a few moments, however, it may also be the only reason art really survives at all. It is after all not a finite experience. This may ultimately be why representational art has drawn the kind of attention it has in these days. It seems to have the bravura and courage to simply jump in and celebrate all the mysteries that have always been around us, and still try to continue the innovative in pictorial tradition. It seems a herculean task, but with all the boring and pedantic impostures of art, no less a rewriting of this scenario could be indicated at this time in contemporary art."

Jillian Denby, 1978



***RACKSTRAW DOWNES***, b. 1939

*The Plantation*, 1977

oil, h. 13½" x w. 41½" (34.3cm. x 105.4cm.)

Lent by Kornblee Gallery, New York

Note: The artist did not wish to make a statement regarding his painting.



## ***DON EDDY***, b. 1944

### ***715 Lexington***, 1974

acrylic, h. 40" x w. 48" (101.6cm. x 121.9cm.)

Lent by the Nebraska Art Association, Lincoln, Nebraska

Thomas C. Woods Collection

"The exploration of realism or of the nature of reality is not so fundamental to my work as the exploration of the nature of visual perception. In the space between the work of art that uses images, and whatever is really out there (objective reality) stands the nature of visual perception. Any defensible concept of realism must fundamentally deal with the nature of visual perception. And, paradoxically, when the nature of visual perception is explored any concept of realism becomes irrelevant. A case can be made for the idea that we do not 'sense' reality so much as we use various organizational systems to transform massive amounts of raw visual data into a coherent visual world view.

Modern physics teaches us two important things about the relationship between perception and reality. First, it teaches that there is no objective way of knowing what is out there because the insertion of any receptor device fundamentally alters what is there. Second, modern physics points out that there is vastly more data out there than the limited mechanism of the eye has the ability to receive.

The eye is a limited receiver of raw visual data. It is passive in the sense that it receives everything it has the ability to receive without distinction. It is active in the sense that it filters the data according to its mechanical limitations. Beyond the point of entry of raw data it is no longer a question of 'seeing,' but of further filtering, organization and transformation. The data is first transformed into an electrochemical impulse and transported along the optic nerve to the cerebral cortex. The recorded impulses are then acted upon by various organizational systems. There is interaction with impulses from other senses, organization through cognitive systems, organization by possible innate system (i.e. parallel to Chomsky's model for language acquisition), transformation through interaction with emotive capacity, organization through universal organizational system (i.e. survival of species), and organization through culturally bound organizational systems. The net result, in a given culture at a given time and place, is that which we commonly assume we see.

If this is an even vaguely accurate analysis of the nature of perception, then (faced with the dynamic fluidity of the system) it is absurd to talk about realism. One cannot comment on the closeness of the images in the work of art; one must focus on just what matrix of organizational systems are at work transforming raw visual data into a 'set' that approximates a given culture's understanding of reality."

Don Eddy, 1978



***JANET FISH,*** b. 1938

***Campari Bottles,*** 1973

oil, h. 48" x w. 42" (121.9cm. x 106.7cm.)

Lent by Kornblee Gallery, New York

"I am fascinated by the fluctuations of appearance. As the eyes grow familiar a process of vision begins in which the complex configurations of form can emerge. These are seen by the light of experience, they become the web of the sixties."

Janet Fish, 1978





## ***CHUCK FORSMAN,*** b. 1944

***Denver Nights #2,*** 1975

oil, h. 25" x w. 35" (63.5cm. x 88.9cm.)

Lent by Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York

"I'm interested in the world as it exists. I love to wander in it and look hard at it. There's much to love and hate about the world and what's happening to it, and there's little about it that I'm indifferent to., Things hated and loved and most things in between can interest me equally. I've developed a healthy regard for things that aren't necessarily good for me. Now, I often paint what I loved and hated side by side because I enjoy contradiction and difficulty and I learn most quickly in this way.

I paint realistically out of some desperate need to convey my feelings about things as they are rather than how I think they should be."

Chuck Forsman, 1978



***SONDRA FRECKELTON***, b. 1936

*Onions and Basket Quilt*, 1977

watercolor, h. 47-3/16" x w. 43-3/4" (119.8cm. x 111.1cm.)

Lent by Springfield Art Museum, Springfield, Missouri, purchased with  
the aid of funds from the National Endowment for the Arts



## **GREGORY GILLESPIE**, b. 1936

### ***Self Portrait (Bald)***, 1971-72

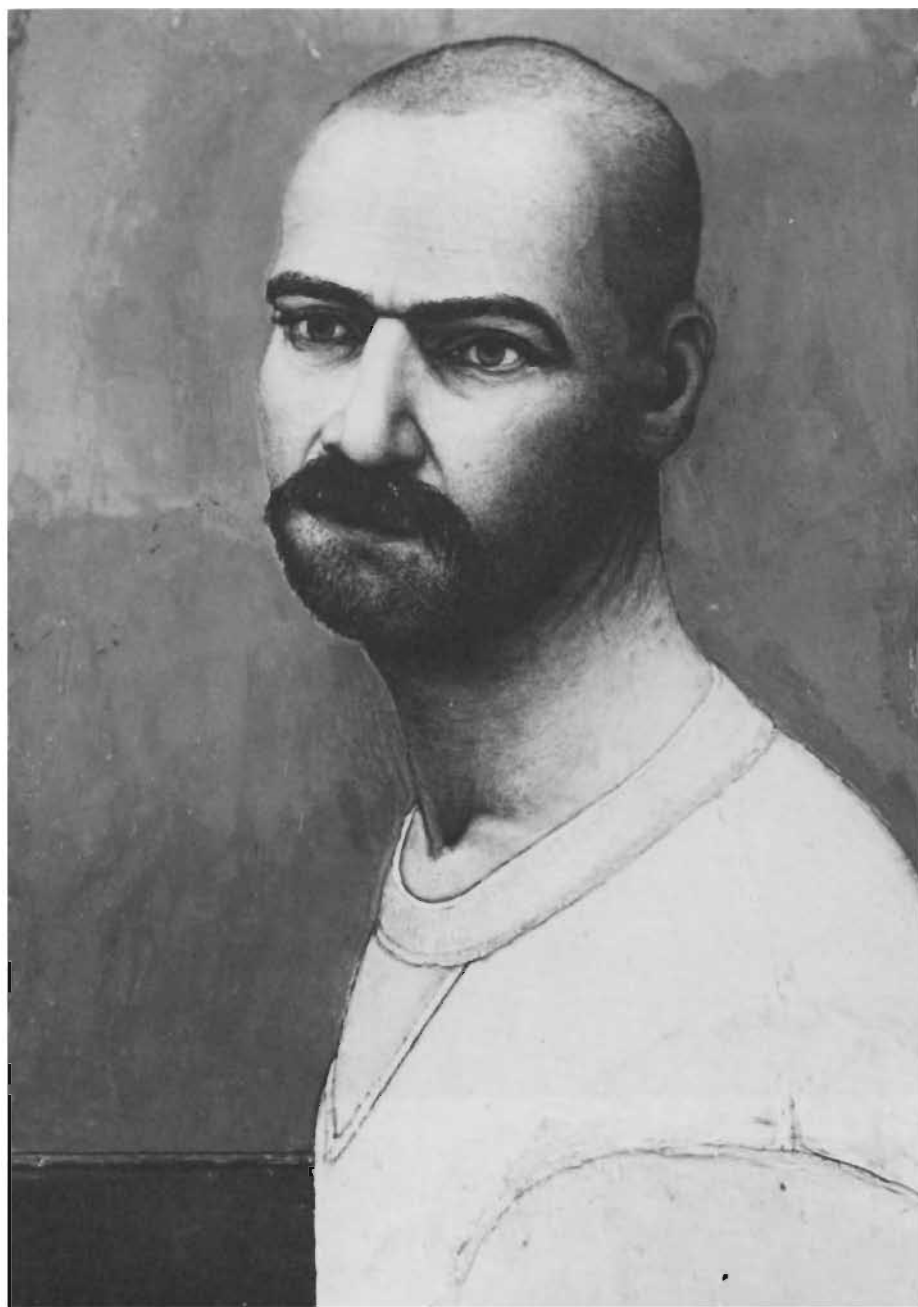
mixed media, h. 15" x. w. 10" (38.1cm. x 25.4cm.)

Lent by Bella & Sol Fishko

A retrospective exhibition of the work of Gregory Gillespie was held at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC in 1977. An extensive interview with Gillespie, conducted by Abram Lerner and Howard Fox, was included in the exhibition catalog. Two questions and the artist's answers are extracted below:

- Q. It is difficult to ask this of the artist — but how do you account for the fact that you set out to paint what you have in front of you and produce something which is certainly not photographic, and has an intensity which is unique? Do you have any control over that? I don't imagine that you set out by saying to yourself, "I'm going to make this object very intense. Or very strange." You have said that you only want to paint what you see.
- A. Well, that's true. That's what I try to do. But I know that you can't really paint pores. It is too complex. Even with a magnifying mirror there's a point where you can't see any more. And the brushes are clumsy. I work with a triple zero brush which is the smallest brush I've been able to find. But if you paint with that brush under a magnifying glass, you see it's really clumsy. Sometimes I wish I could have a brush that is better than that, smaller than that. But maybe it is really my mind which resists going further right now. Anyway — in the early paintings when I would begin to lose the accuracy and the painting would develop a strangeness, I'd say, "That interesting — I think I'll follow that, I'll pursue that. I think I'll let that happen." It wouldn't be calculated beforehand, but as it would happen I would approve of it. And then say, "Well, the hell with reality."
- Q. Why then is accuracy so important to you? Do you feel that in painting things very accurately that you're arriving at a very special truth?
- A. Yes, I do. I really do. And I think it's often been true in art. It's the naturalistic impulse, going back to observing carefully. It always revitalizes art. Much of the weak art in the past resulted from the loss of reality, when the artist stopped observing nature — how things were actually happening. You can always tell when a figurative artist is working from his observations. Life always has these amazing surprises. The imagination tends to feed on itself and its store of memories. Of course, the great thing is to have both sources working together — complementing each other.

**Gregory Gillespie**, by Abram Lerner, Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, 1977, p. 27



## ***RALPH GOINGS***, b. 1928

***Pie Case***, 1975

oil, h. 24" x w. 34½" (60.9cm. x 86.6cm.)

Lent by the Nebraska Art Association, Lincoln, Nebraska

Nelle Cochrane Woods Collection

"I use the impersonal, mechanical image of the photograph to paint a facsimile of reality. The camera generalizes detail information, diagrams perspective and objectively records the random arrangement of objects. However, the photograph is not the subject of my work but rather a source of information, information that must be translated into paint information. The painted image is more important than the reality or the photo image.

Specific subjects are selected because of the visual qualities of the objects and their random informal arrangement. I take my own photographs with an eye toward gathering visual information. Composing is done intuitively with the camera."

Ralph Goings, 1978





***SIDNEY GOODMAN***, b. 1936

***Landscape***, 1966

oil, h. 67" x w. 77" (170.1cm. x 195.5cm.)

Lent by the Nebraska Art Association, Lincoln, Nebraska

Thomas C. Woods Collection

“The great past tradition of figurative art is a constant and powerful reminder. It speaks of other human beings, of other times and places. As a painter, I feel the weight and force of earlier works and as a result I am nourished by their presence. To deny or dismiss this tradition would diminish us in terms of our human understanding and awareness. The painter today knows he cannot compete on equal terms with past masters, but he can try to control his experience for his own time and place, just as they did.

‘Realism’ is a broad and relative term...In my own approach, it is natural for me to rely on my imagination, memory and direct observation.

I use whatever means, direct or indirect, that gets me close to the kind of visual experience that is most expressive and real to me.”

Sidney Goodman, 1978



***HAROLD GREGOR***, b. 1929

***Illinois Corn Crib #31***, 1975

oil, h. 60" x w. 66" (152.3cm. x 167.6cm.)

Lent by Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York

“After several years in southern California where the weather is constant, the continual cycle changes in the central Illinois agricultural scene impressed me as did the flatland farm imagery. It was nature subordinated by human beings for human beings, not to human beings as in a French Pastoral. I realized that the farm as a subject was not new but even this aspect was challenging — to visit a stock, time-worn theme and attempt to extract a personal statement from it. My paintings are photo derived but I feel they transcend their photo reference to offer a sense of the emanating light and energy that suggests to me an equivalent of our most positive aspirations.”

Harold Gregor, 1978



## **LAURENCE HOFMANN,** b. 1943

***Florence Pass Trail, Big Horn Mountains,* 1978**  
acrylic on gesso, h. 64" x w. 80" (162.5cm. x 203.1cm.)  
Lent by the Friends Gallery, Minneapolis Institute of Arts

"Since I can remember, I have had a love for landscape. My earlier work (1963-1972) was nearly all non-objective, yet landscape forms permeated the work, and in retrospect it seems as if I have always been a landscape painter. The idea to make large 'photo-real' landscape paintings, first occurred to me circa 1973, at approximately the same time I became interested in the airbrush as a painting tool. That interest led to experimentation, and the almost immediate realization that I had found a method of painting that was not only exciting for me, but was also fully compatible with an already developing use of photography in my work.

The unusually smooth surface of the canvas, is the result of twenty-two coats of gesso, wet-sanded at four different times during the gesso application. The gesso, as well as large areas of a color, is applied with an automotive type spray gun; all other color is applied with an airbrush. The original images come from 35mm slides of my own taking, from which 8" x 10" color prints are then made, to service as work prints. Ninety-five percent of the painting is then done from these work prints, though the emphasis is not on copying the photograph with its minute detail, but in reproducing the essence of the photographic image.

Places of the sort I have chosen to paint, always affect me with a sense of peace, and a freedom of spirit that I seem to find nowhere else. It is my intent that these paintings affect the space of which they are a part, with a certain amount of that peace; that they affect the viewer with a sense of space and quietude that is special to those places. They exist for no other reason."

Laurence Hofmann, 1978



***MARTIN HOFFMAN***, b. 1935

*Dad*, 1974

acrylic, h. 60" x w. 80" (152.3cm. x 203.1cm.)

Lent by the Nebraska Art Association, Lincoln, Nebraska

Nelle Cochrane Woods Collection

Note: The artist did not wish to make a statement regarding his painting.





***KEN HOLDER***, b. 1936

***Otoño's Ponies***, 1976

acrylic, h. 46" x w. 58" (116.8cm. x 147.3cm.)

Lent by the artist

“Realism is for me like the basic stock for a stew. It is the broth which in its purity is satisfying enough for some, but becomes more exciting and nourishing with the addition of the special ingredients which I choose to feed my own particular hungers and tastes. Considering it in this way, I do not think of myself as a ‘realist’ per se, but as a painter who uses realism as a flexible context within which I can pursue multiple interests of form and content.”

Ken Holder, 1978



## ***BILLY MORROW JACKSON***, b. 1926

***Moments***, 1977

oil, h. 48" x w. 72" (121.9cm. x 182.8cm.)

Lent by Wichita Art Museum, Wichita, Kansas

"I do not like to think of myself as a realist painter. Laymen and painters as well attach dubious criteria to the term Realism, the more obvious one being that the artist emulates or imitates that which is there before him, the way it is and purports to transfer that, in a two-dimensional facsimile sense, to the surface of his canvas or panel: a concept that sublimates or diminishes the creator while ironically enhancing the process.

However, until a new cover is moulded by more innovative minds I will politely refuse the chapeau of Realism but confidently wear the heat of Representationalism, another old but less battered concept. In contrast to the imitative process of Realism as I have come to understand it, Representationalism's flexibility allows for the painter's interpretation of reality where the content and composition of balance, rhythm, dark and light pattern, warm and cool interplay complement the countenance and expression of the painting. I am then an unabashed Representationalist wing for a kind of reality that is buoyed upon the distillation of aesthetic decisions and indecisions, hard work and sudden insight, creativity and dull routine, self-indulgence and self-denial, thwarted talent and fitful inspiration, strengths and weaknesses, intuitions and procrastination, fleeting confidence and mounting frustrations, alone with whatever love and magic goes into a work of art. Hopefully this admixture will result in an unforgettable visual experience for the someones who see what they are looking at."

Billy Morrow Jackson, 1978



***W. LOUIS JONES***, b. 1943

***Bloodroot***, 1976

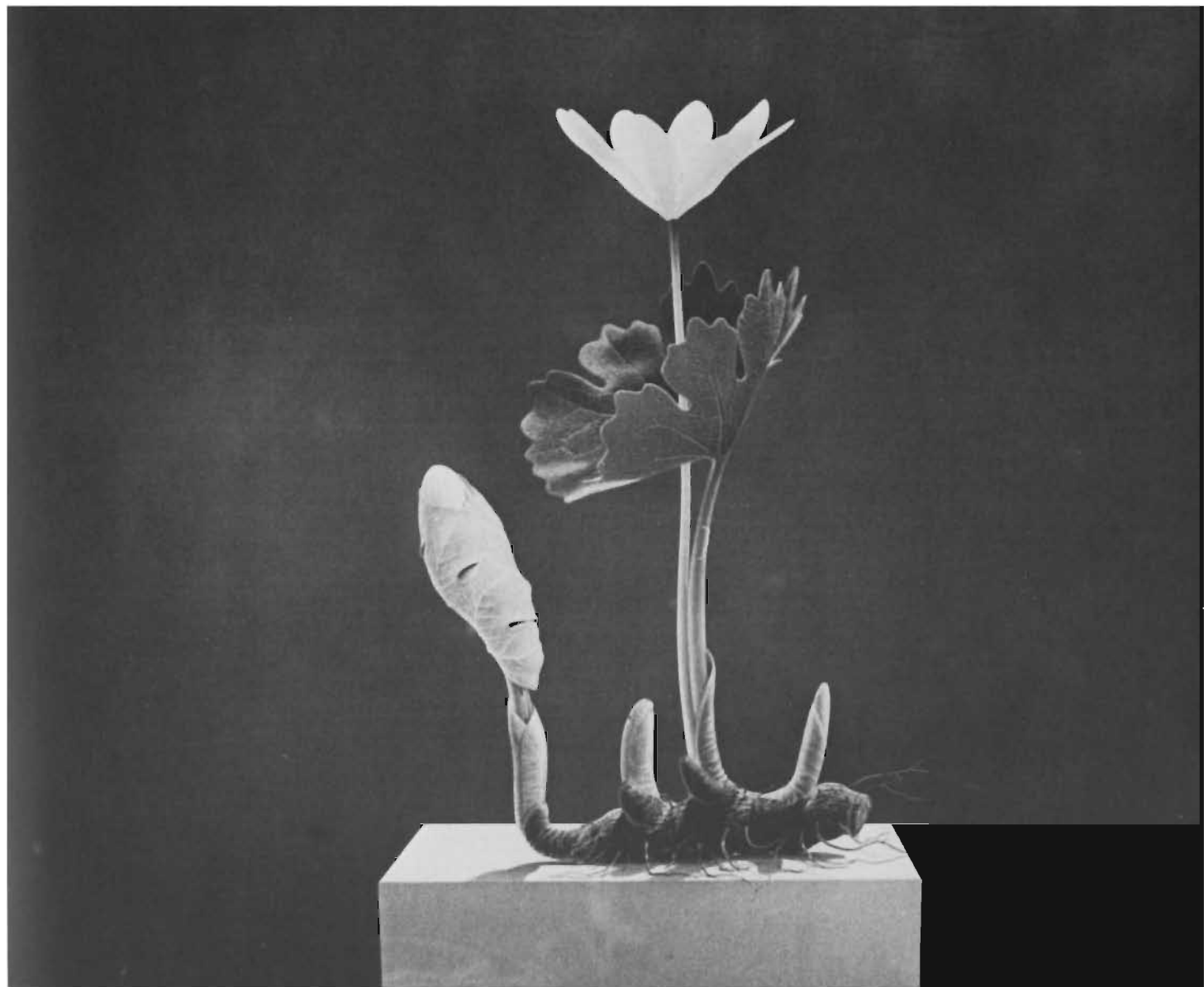
acrylic, h. 66" x w. 78" (167.6cm. x 198.1cm.)

Lent by the Kornblee Gallery, New York and the Arwin Galleries, Detroit

"I very much care about the way things look, seeing appearance as a sensitive total of experience, a record giving evidence of the past, present and future potential of a being for dealing with the complex interrelationship of forces generated by the ancient web of life on this planet.

I make images which I hope may be seen and understood as Icons of contemplation; statements on the richness and prime value of the individual, standing apart for a moment—an eddy of private consciousness and form within the tides of a four billion year old sea of life."

W. Louis Jones, 1978



***BRUCE KURLAND,*** b. 1938

***Trillium and Adder's Tongue,*** 1974  
oil, h. 10" x w. 8" (25.4cm. x 20.3cm.)  
Lent by Edwin A. Ulrich Museum of Art  
Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas

“Many beautiful pictures have been painted without the use of realism and up to rather recently, it has played a minor role in modern art. My involvement with it is based on two convictions. One, I have a talent for it, and two, it's a ‘wonderful trick.’ The area I most enjoy in its use is the area of the painter as a conjurer; using images we all agree upon in subordination to the formal elements of picture making.”

Bruce Kurland, 1978





***STEPHEN LORBER,*** b. 1943

***Haitian Snake Basket,*** 1977

oil, h. 62" x w. 62" (157.4cm. x 157.4cm.)

Lent by Oklahoma Art Center, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Note: The artist did not wish to make a statement regarding his painting.



***MALCOLM MORLEY,*** b. 1931

***Empire Monarch,*** 1965

liquitex, h. 18" x w. 36" (45.7cm. x 91.4cm.)

Lent by Larry Meeker, Kansas City, Kansas

Malcolm Morley's steamship paintings have, by now, assumed an "historic" character, being among the first demonstrations that, aside from duplicability, the painter could indeed do anything the photographer can do, a fact that, once established, has added all the possibilities of photographic seeing to the options of the painter.

NAG



## ***DON NICE***, b. 1932

### ***Maine Totem***, 1977

water color, h. 90" x w. 26¼" (228.5cm. x 66.7cm.)

Lent by the Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York

There is much about Don Nice's multi-image paintings which suggests the votive panel paintings of the early Renaissance, containing a central image of the Madonna and Child surrounded by the images of saints or scenes from sacred history. A central image, a landscape of the Hudson River valley is surrounded by a series of framing images; a wild bird, an ice skate, a bag of popcorn, a partially used match book, a coach's whistle. The impartial care with which these disparate images are rendered would suggest an inter relationship and their equal value in the eyes of the artist. In the ***Maine Totem*** the objects assembled seem to take precedence over the relatively modest landscape element. Are we being asked to consider a meaning which is the sum of two parts?

NAG



***GEORGE BENTLEY NICK***, b. 1927

***35 Oliver St., Watertown, Mass.***, 1970

oil, 28" x 30 1/8" (71.1cm. x 76.5cm.)

Lent by the Nebraska Art Association, Lincoln, Nebraska

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Carl Rohman

"Responding to our beautiful world and using this source is the foundation of my painting. The limitations of the tools of art making and the conflicts of dealing with the observable world are a great intrigue to me.

All painting is done on location, before the subject and much of it in a specially constructed studio-truck."

George Bentley Nick, 1978





## ***DAVID PARRISH***

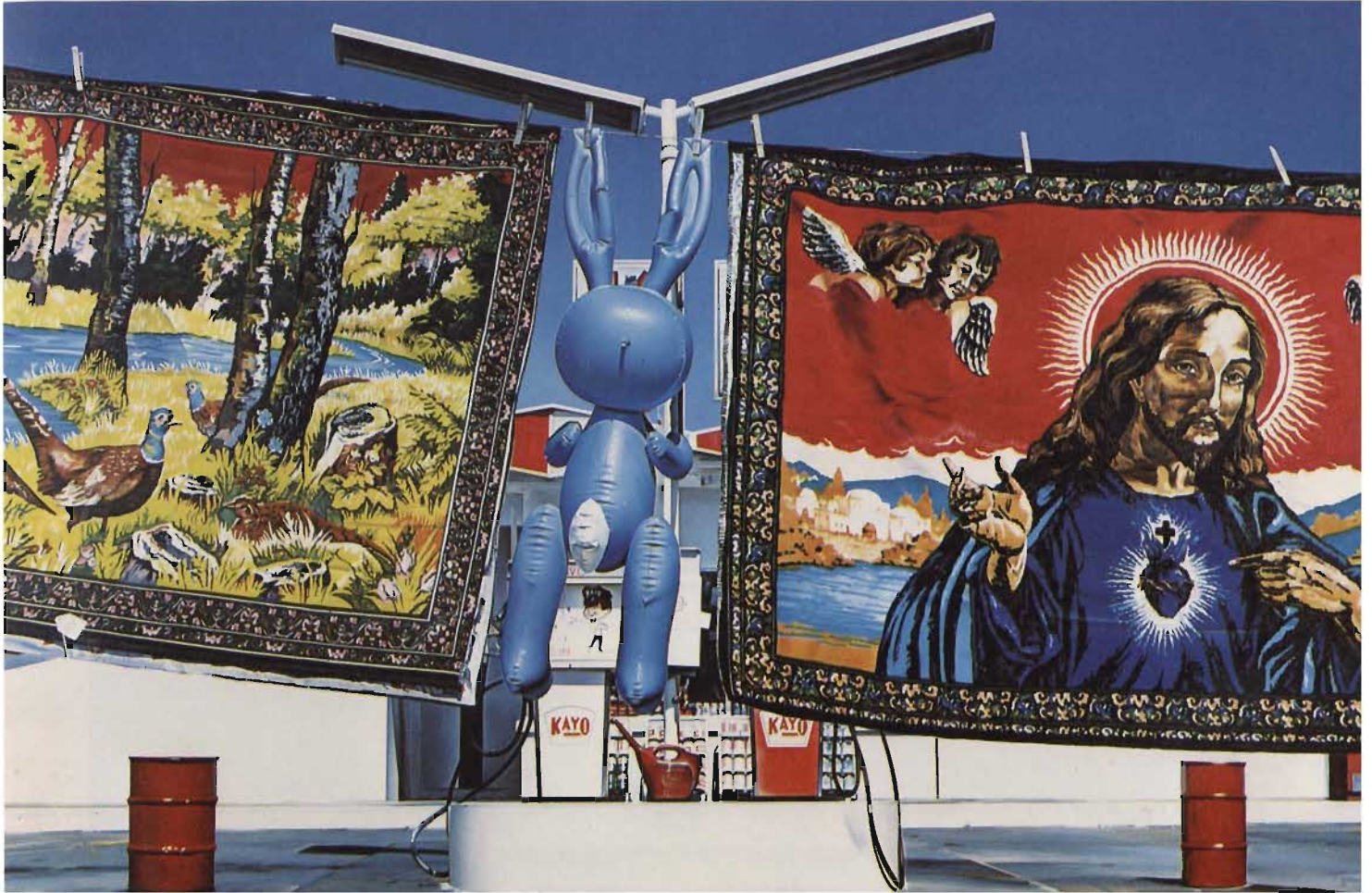
***Kayo II***, 1977

oil, h. 50" x w. 70" (127cm. x 177.7cm.)

Lent by the Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York

“Sinclair Oil a few years ago displayed for sale “Dino,” a plastic inflatable dinosaur. Some oil companies sold models of their stations, toy gasoline trucks, or other “appropriate” all American advertising gew-gaws. In the South KAYO stations display tapestries of Christ, pheasants in woodland scenes, frolicking tiger cubs, mustangs in meadows, harem girls, Last Suppers along with pneumatic rabbits, elephants, 747’s etc. This southern anomaly I wanted to portray in a suitable realist style. To reduce mannerism and artifice as much as possible and to minimize my own bias and pedantry, I present the scene as presented to me by the attendant. The composition is his. The observation mine.”

David Parrish, 1978



***PHILIP PEARLSTEIN***, b. 1924

***Resting Female Model***, 1975

oil, h. 60" x w. 60" (152.3cm. x 152.3cm.)

Lent by the Nebraska Art Association, Lincoln, Nebraska

Nelle Cochrane Woods Collection

"I am primarily interested in the technical problems concerning realist painting from the living model (never from a photograph), and I regard the nude human figure as a traditional studio appurtenance, and its movements as closer to dance, gestures of abstract formalized meaning, devoid of symbolic readings."

Philip Pearlstein, 1978





**GARY PRUNER,** b. 1940

*Foam-Chrome #2*, 1973

oil, h. 56" x w. 42" (142.2cm. x 106.7cm.)

Lent by Helen Foresman Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas.

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Darwin Daicoff

“The chrome series was painted with a concern for the modern still life. With that in mind I investigated the known aspects of objects in a contiguous condition to those qualities that seem to be just beyond our vision. As the clear object lies in our vision, true to all its particulars, we tend to search for something that it's not about. But the unknown curiosities, yet to be formalized, become a clearer vision than the real.”

Gary Pruner, 1978



***JOSEPH RAFFAEL***, b. 1933

***Crown***, 1969

oil, h. 77½" x w. 60" (196.8cm. x 152.3cm.)

Lent by the Wichita Art Museum, Wichita, Kansas

Members Foundation Gift

“The images I paint are images from nature but my sense of reality in the art comes from the act of painting itself. I try to let the canvas and the paint be themselves; to let the colors drip, blend, run or stay still. I watch the paint make the contact with the canvas and do what it will. Through this experience I sense the act as a real and transcendent one. There is the feeling that something is actually happening on the canvas, that something has come alive. Like a bird being born.”

Joseph Raffael, 1978





***EDWARD RUSCHA,*** b. 1937

***Bowling Ball,*** 1970

gunpowder and pastel, h. 23" x w. 29" (58.4cm. x 73.7cm.)

Lent by the Oklahoma Art Center, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

"Realism is hopeless when only used for itself. If fool-the-eye could also fool-the-mind. Then we would all be further along in the big storybook of art."

Edward Ruscha, 1978



***PAUL SARKISIAN***, b. 1928

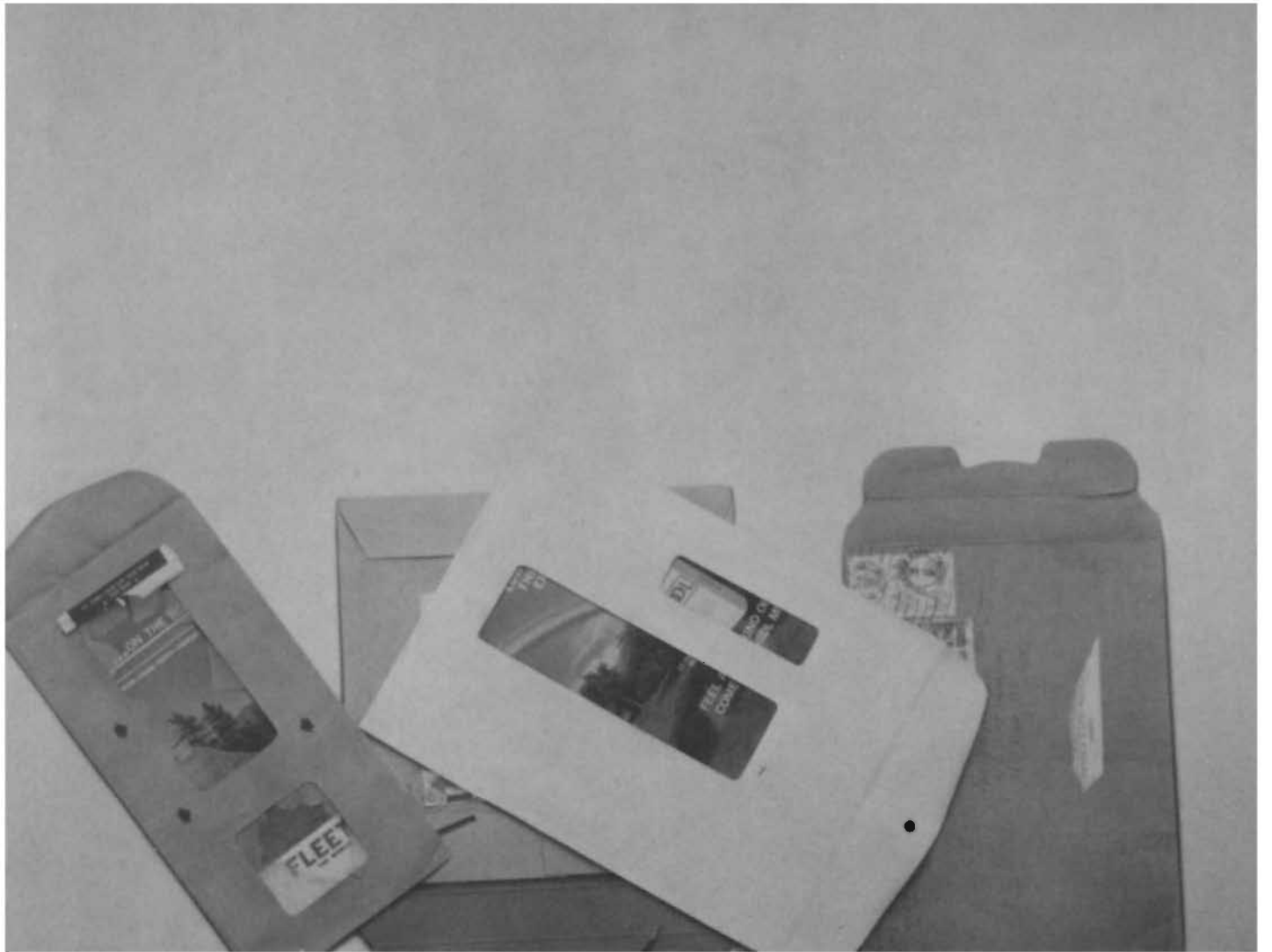
***Untitled***, 1976

acrylic, graphite on paper, h. 27 1/2" x w. 36" (69.8cm. x 91.4cm.)

Lent by the Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York

To fool the eye Paul Sarkisian creates an illusion of reality that rivals the casually arranged letter rack paintings of the nineteenth century masters, Harnett and Haberley. The illusion he creates is so complete that one all but refuses to accept what is seen, even as illusion.

NAG



## ***BEN SCHONZEIT***, b. 1942

### ***Keys (South)***, 1974

acrylic, h. 72" x w. 72" (182.9cm. x 182.9cm.)

Lent by the Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York

The device used in ***Keys (South)*** is a simple one. First of all a drastic reduction of the field of vision, then a dramatic enlargement of scale and a tiny fragment of visual experience becomes a revelation of a whole range of data hitherto unseen although visible.

Ben Schonzeit is very much involved with the variety of ways in which things can be seen. Two separate views of ***The Continental Divide***, each seven feet square, are juxtaposed to create a kind of double take. Again, in a series of pictures of the same room from the same position, he has used different media combinations and color schemes, climaxed by life size panels doubled and reversed by mirrors. These are the games that artists play, perhaps, but they make the point that what we see depends on how we see it, a game that everyone can play.

NAG



**AARON SHIKLER**, b. 1922

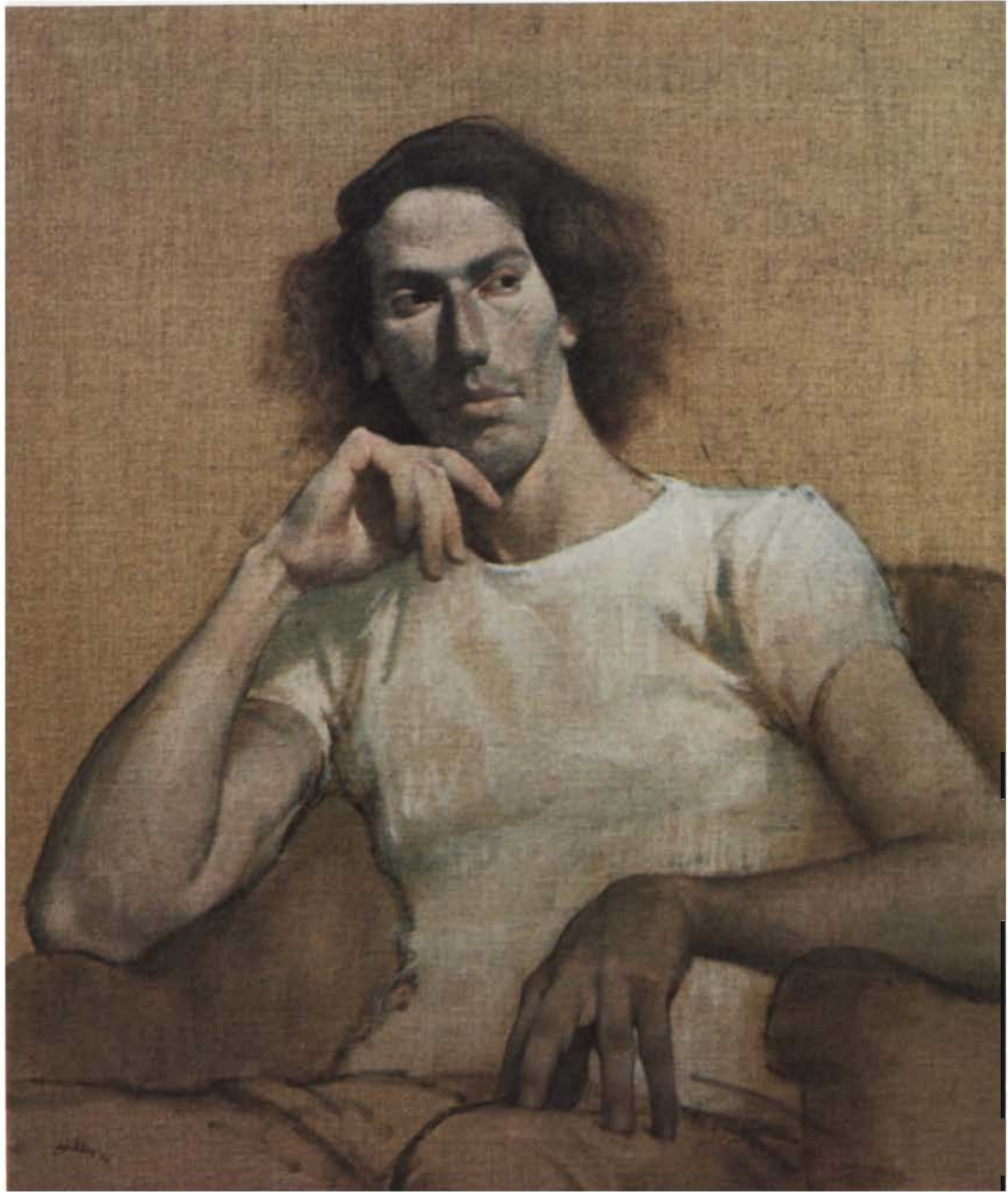
*Portrait of the Young Artist*, 1975

oil, h. 24 1/16" x w. 20 1/8" (61.3cm. x 51.1cm.)

Lent by Davis & Long Company, New York

Note: The artist did not wish to make a statement regarding his painting.





**WAYNE THIEBAUD, b. 1920**

***Man Sitting, Back View*, 1964**

oil, h. 36" x w. 29 1/2" (91.4cm. x 74.9cm.)

Lent by Albrecht Art Museum, St. Joseph, Missouri,  
The William Toben Collection

Note: The artist did not wish to make a statement regarding his painting.



***ROBERT VICKREY***, b. 1926

*Carri & Coco*, 1977

egg tempera, h. 23 1/2" x w. 35" (59.7cm. x 88.9cm.)

Lent by Oklahoma Art Center, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

"The realist today is looked upon as an odd creator, yet there are things to be said about this world which can be stated in no other way. Carri in the painting is my daughter, Coco, who is now dead, was our old dog. I was trying to create a sense of peace and a moment of happiness in spite of the loneliness of the surroundings."

Robert Vickrey, 1978



**JOHN WILDE**, b. 1919

***Nightshade***, 1956

oil, h. 16" x w. 20" (40.6cm. x 20.8cm.)

Lent by Nebraska Art Association, Lincoln, Nebraska

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. F. H. Woods, in memory of Mrs. Minnie Latta Ladd

“I feel...I must accept as fact...that painting needs subject matter and story based on illusionary... experience with the outside world (nature)...(Furthermore) this need has no scientific or rational limitations—only those limitations if any, which confine the realm of poetry. ...”

John Wilde, 1978

“All creatures by pairs and by tribes pour into his mind as into Noah’s ark, to come forth again to people a new world...and therefore the rich poets...have obviously no limits to their work except the limits of their lifetime, and resemble a mirror carried through the street, ready to render an image of every created thing.”

Emerson (***The Poet***, 1841)

