



APRIL GORNIK

*Embodied Landscapes*

ROSENWALD-WOLF GALLERY, THE UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS  
MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART OF THE PENNSYLVANIA ACADEMY OF THE FINE ARTS



APRIL GORNIK  
*Embodied Landscapes*

*Selected Paintings*

ROSENWALD-WOLF GALLERY,  
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9 JANUARY-6 MARCH, 1998

*Selected Works on Paper*

MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART OF THE  
PENNSYLVANIA ACADEMY OF THE FINE ARTS

9 JANUARY-19 APRIL, 1998

ORGANIZED BY LEAH DOUGLAS, GALLERY DIRECTOR  
THE UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS

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320 SOUTH BROAD STREET  
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MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART OF THE  
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118 NORTH BROAD STREET  
PHILADELPHIA, PA 19102

I value above all the ability of art to move me emotionally and psychically, without answers. I make art that makes me question, that derives its power from being vulnerable to interpretation, that is intuitive, that is beautiful.

— April Gornik

## EMBODIED LANDSCAPES: Paintings and Drawings of April Gornik

THIS EXHIBITION OF LANDSCAPE WORKS by April Gornik marks a number of firsts. Not only is it Gornik's first solo showing in Philadelphia, a city known for its indigenous practice of contemporary landscape painting,<sup>1</sup> but it represents a first-time curatorial collaboration between two local visual-arts institutions: the Rosenwald-Wolf Gallery of The University of the Arts, whose director, Leah Douglas, conceived of and organized the exhibition, and the Museum of American Art of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. The exhibition has been divided between the two venues, with Gornik's paintings featured at the former and her drawings and prints on display at the latter.

Born in Cleveland, Ohio, Gornik studied at the Cleveland Institute of Art before transferring to the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, in Canada; she currently lives in New York. At first glance, the artist and her art present a number of paradoxes: she is an urbanite who constructs evocative, sharply realized views of nature in her lower-Manhattan studio; she is also a thoroughly contemporary artist trained in the theories of conceptualism who acknowledges a debt to the history of art, rendering works that self-consciously recall America's late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century landscape tradition. Yet, these apparent tensions resolve themselves in the hybrid nature of Gornik's art and its sources. Neither realist nor abstract, the work falls somewhere in between; one critic has described her stylized approach as "cultivated primitivism," referring to her "faux-naïf obsession with rendering the particularities of a scene."<sup>2</sup>

Dubbed a neoromantic in the eighties, Gornik has long been measured against the reach of history. Apparently because of the artist's own stated predilection for certain nineteenth-century American painters – Martin Johnson Heade is most frequently cited – critics have viewed Gornik as a latter-day

(or postmodern) luminist. This view is legitimate on many levels. As a category of landscape painting virtually invented by post-war art historians sympathetic to modernist aesthetics, luminism – and, thus, Gornik's shared affinity with its practitioners – is inherently at a historical remove.<sup>3</sup> Although not employed in the nineteenth century, the term "luminism" is generally applied to the culminating phase of the Hudson River School, the popular midcentury landscape tradition that has been interpreted, both then and now, in terms of national identity. Less a coherent movement than a collection of stylistic attributes, luminism is identified primarily by horizontal, open compositions and an emphasis on light and atmosphere over other natural effects.

More intimate in scale and mood than the bombastic spectacles of Frederic Edwin Church and Albert Bierstadt, the quiet, contemplative waterside views by luminist painters like Heade and Fitz Hugh Lane suggest the same lack of narrative detail and detached artistic presence apparent in Gornik's work. The smooth, glassy surface of a painting such as *Moon Bay* (1996) conveys a silent, static quality (punctuated by the massive islanded rocks) that in nineteenth-century imagery may have evoked Ralph Waldo Emerson's theory of transcendentalism – the notion that the divine spirit is present in all physical matter – the major intellectual tenet of luminism.

Although the sheer size of Gornik's work, both paintings and drawings, seems to share more with the sublime productions of Church and Bierstadt, its internal spatial immensity and concern with minimalist structure recalls luminism's essentially conceptual nature.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the intrinsic theatricality of Gornik's landscapes, with their mysterious threat of impending disaster – for example, *Smoke* (1985), and *Wind Behind Rain* (1993) – underscored by the transitional suggestion of many of her tides – echo such works as Heade's stormy views of

Narragansett Bay.

Like the so-called luminists, Gornik approaches landscape as an exploration of light and form; she is less interested in rendering the details of any specific locale than in describing imagined views in spatial terms.<sup>5</sup> She uses atmospheric space to beckon the viewer into her unsettling, depopulated landscapes, in an effort to show "space looking back at you."<sup>6</sup> This inventive approach to her subject matter has given Gornik's imagery a highly distinctive quality. Despite the apparent disappearance of the artist's hand in the scene, these works of bewitching, almost surreal beauty reveal a signature style and sensibility unmistakably her own.

What does it mean to be a landscape painter – stereotypically one of the most tradition-bound practices – in the postmodern age? In Gornik's case, it signifies a serious exploration of the meditative qualities of the genre through highly sophisticated formal means. Never simply an unmediated recording of reality, landscapes have always been loaded with cultural meanings. Gornik's contrived settings – drawn from memories, dreams, imaginings, as well as photographs – are no exception. An artist who finds the answers in her head rather than outdoors, Gornik eschews the plein-air approach of her historical predecessors both in her drawings and paintings. Although she uses the former as preliminary guides for the latter, her drawings (and prints) are fully realized tonal productions, full of luminous, painterly effects.

Gornik describes her art in terms of her own emotional landscape, a concept most apparent in the recent waterfall paintings and waterway drawings. Examining the implications of landscape as a metaphor for human sexuality – that is, the body – these images also beg comparison with the sensual, organic landscape imagery of such American modernists as Georgia O'Keeffe, Arthur Dove, and Charles Burchfield.

Gornik's critical and popular success, which has positioned her as one of the most prominent landscape painters

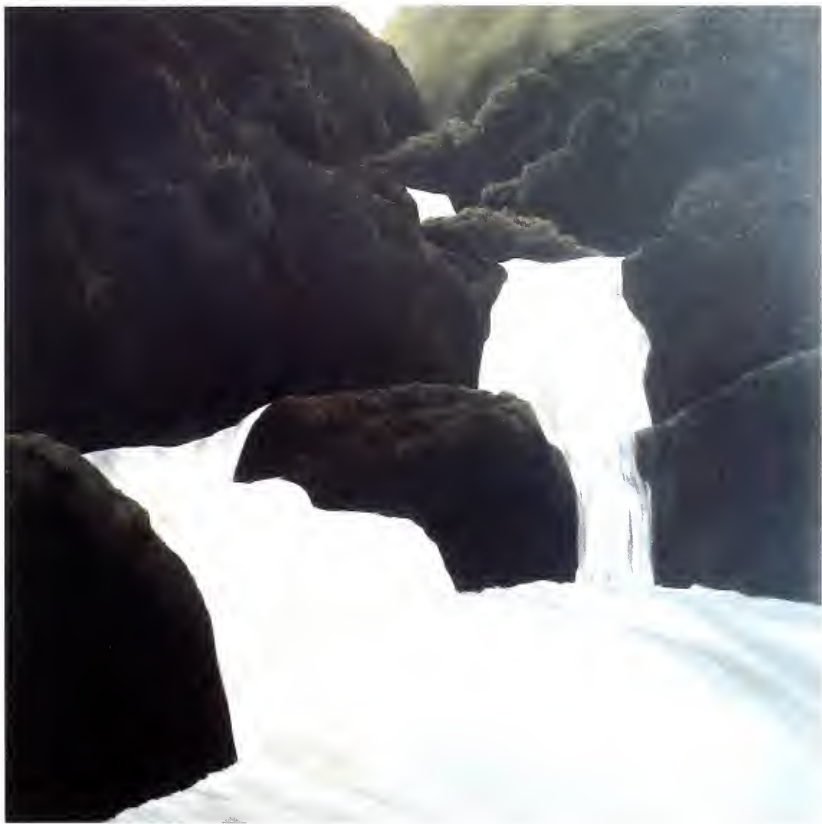
in the contemporary art world, reveals much about the enduring taste for the genre and its transformation in America. As Carter Ratcliff has observed, Gornik "persuades us to reimagine the familiar elements of landscape" through a language of personal expression.<sup>7</sup> Whether understood in the aesthetic context of romanticism, luminism, surrealism, or even postmodernism, her work conveys an emotional and psychological resonance that speaks to many.

— Sylvia Yount, Curator of Collections  
Museum of American Art of the  
Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts


- 1 See catalog for Lisa Panzera's recent curatorial exploration, *An Extended View: Landscapes by Philadelphia Artists*, May 28-August 1, 1997 (Philadelphia: Levy Gallery for the Arts in Philadelphia, Moore College of Art and Design).
- 2 Stephen Westfall, "April Gornik at Edward Thorp", *Art In America*, (October 1986), 168.
- 3 John Wilmerding, Introduction, *American Light: The Luminist Movement, 1850-1875* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1980), 11-20.
- 4 Barbara Novak, "On Defining Luminism," *American Light, The Luminist Movement, 1850-1875*, (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1980), 28.
- 5 In an interview with the author, Gornik cited Henri Matisse as her all-time favorite artist, admiring his use of color and light as structural elements.
- 6 Carter Ratcliff, *April Gornik: Recent Paintings*, April 21-May 26, 1990 (New York: Edward Thorp Gallery), 13.
- 7 Ibid., 8.

*selected paintings*





TURNING WATERFALL, OIL ON LINEN, 76" x 76", 1997



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MOON BAY, OIL ON LINEN, 72" X 96", 1996





WATERFALL, OIL ON LINEN, 70" X 62", 1995





STEPPED WATERFALL, OIL ON LINEN, 69" x 65", 1995







WIND BEHIND RAIN, OIL ON LINEN, 79" x 90", 1993





SMOKE, OIL ON CANVAS, 76" X 100", 1985

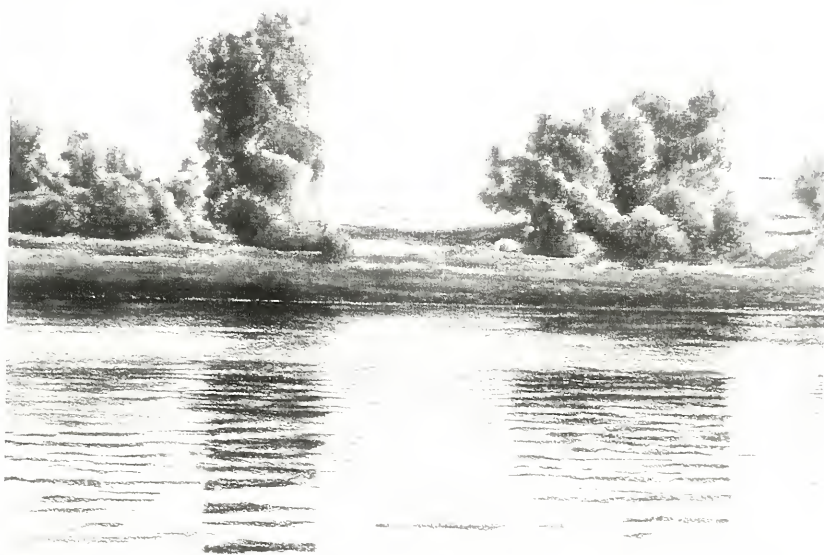
*selected works on paper*



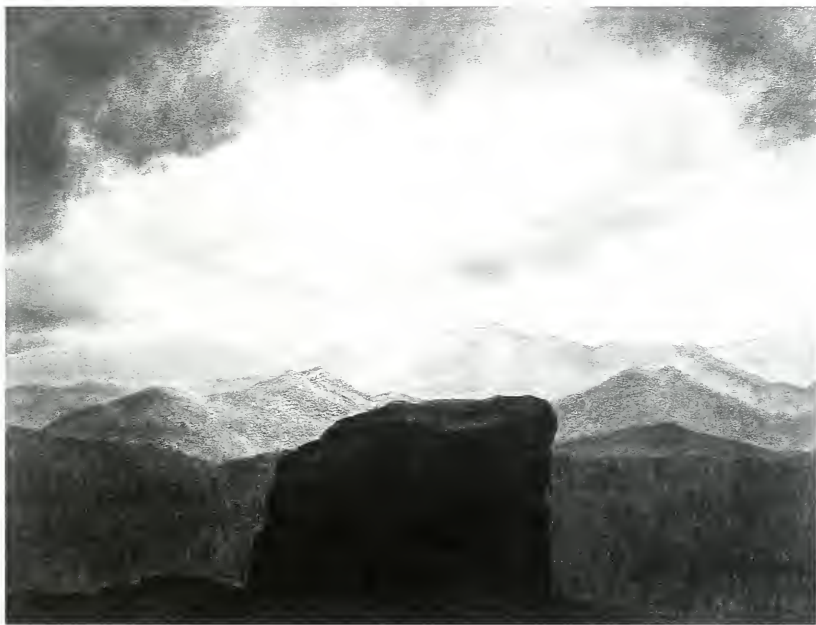
FOLLOWING THE WATERWAY, CHARCOAL ON PAPER, 29" X 40", 1995



WATERWAY CLEARING, CHARCOAL ON PAPER, 38" X 50", 1995



TWO CLOUDS, CHARCOAL ON PAPER, 38" X 50", 1994



ATLAS, CHARCOAL ON PAPER, 38" X 50", 1993





INSIDE OUT, CHARCOAL ON PAPER, 38" X 43", 1991



CLOUD PLUME, CHARCOAL ON PAPER, 53.5" X 41.25", 1991



IMPENDING RAIN, CHARCOAL ON PAPER, 38" X 50", 1990



DIVIDE, INTAGLIO, 31" X 39", 1994



LIGHT AFTER THE FLOOD, INTAGLIO, 24" X 41", 1987



## EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

1. TURNING WATERFALL · OIL ON LINEN · 76" X 76" · 1997
2. MOON BAY · OIL ON LINEN · 72" X 96" · 1996
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## APRIL GORNIK: BIBLIOGRAPHY

Born: April 20, 1953, Cleveland, Ohio  
Lives: New York, NY

## EDUCATION

Cleveland Institute of Art, Cleveland, Ohio, 1971-75  
Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Nova Scotia, Canada, B.F.A., 1976

## ONE PERSON EXHIBITIONS

- 1998 University of the Arts, Philadelphia, PA and the Museum of American Art of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, PA
- 1997 Turner-Runyon Gallery, Dallas, TX
- 1996 Edward Thorp Gallery, New York, NY
- 1995 Kohn Turner Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
- 1994 Edward Thorp Gallery, New York, NY  
Guild Hall Museum, East Hampton, NY  
Offshore Gallery, East Hampton, NY
- 1993 Frederick R. Weisman Museum of Art, Pepperdine University, Malibu, CA  
Mary Ryan Gallery, New York, NY, 1993, "April Gornik, Prints"
- 1992 Edward Thorp Gallery, New York, NY
- 1990 Edward Thorp Gallery, New York, NY
- 1988 University Art Museum, California State University, Long Beach, CA  
The Sable-Castelli Gallery, Toronto, Canada
- 1987 Edward Thorp Gallery, New York, NY
- 1986 Edward Thorp Gallery, New York, NY
- 1985 The Sable-Castelli Gallery, Toronto, Canada  
Galerie Springer, Berlin
- 1984 Edward Thorp Gallery, New York, NY  
Texas Gallery, Houston, TX
- 1983 The New Gallery of Contemporary Art, Cleveland, OH  
Edward Thorp Gallery, New York, NY
- 1982 Edward Thorp Gallery, New York, NY  
University of Colorado Art Galleries, Boulder, CO
- 1981 Edward Thorp Gallery, New York, NY

## GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1997 Center for Curatorial Studies Museum, Bard College,  
Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, "In Plain Sight"  
Edward Thorp Gallery, New York, NY, "Gallery Group Exhibition"  
Hammond Gallery, Lancaster OH, "Eight From Ohio: In  
and Out of Bounds"
- 1996 Turner & Runyon Gallery, Dallas, TX, "Inaugural Exhibition"  
Samuel P. Harn Museum of Art, Gainesville, FL, "Destiny Manifest:  
American Landscape Paintings in the Nineties"

Freedman Gallery, Albright College Center for the Arts, Reading, PA,  
"20/20: The Visionary Legacy of Doris Chanin Freedman"  
Fotouhi-Cramer Gallery, NY, NY, "By the Sea"  
James Graham & Sons, NY, NY, "Water"  
Fine Arts Gallery at Southampton College, Southampton, NY,  
"Master Workshop Exhibition"

1995

Viridian Artists Inc, NY, NY, "The Paris Review Print and Poster Series"  
Anor Art Museum, Elmira, New York, "Re-Presenting Representation II"  
Edward Thorp Gallery, New York, NY "Summer Gallery Group"  
The Work Space at Dolgenos Newman & Cronin, New York, NY,  
"Down The Garden Path"  
Mary Ryan Gallery, NY, "Elementum"  
Art Museum at Florida International University, Miami, FL, "American Art  
Today: Night Paintings"  
California Center for the Arts Museum, Escondido, CA,  
"Revisiting Landscape"  
Lizan-Tops Gallery, East Hampton "Light and Shadow: The  
Changing Season"  
Galerie de la Tour, Amsterdam, 1995, "100 Personal Heroes Part 2"

1994

Edward Thorp Gallery, New York, NY, "Winter Gallery Group"  
Gallery Camino Real, Boca Raton, FL, "Landscape Not Landscape"  
Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase, NY, "Inspired by Nature"  
Aldrich Museum, Ridgefield, CT, "Timely and Timeless"  
Edward Thorp Gallery, New York, NY, "Summer Gallery Group"  
Jan Weiner Gallery, Kansas City, MO, "Still Light"  
Aspen Art Museum, Aspen, CO, "Mountains of the Mind: American  
Mountain Landscape Painting from 1850 to the Present"  
Feigen Inc., Chicago, IL, "Changing Views"  
Jan Abrams Gallery, L.A., CA, "A Woman's Nature"

1993

The Morristown Museum, "Living With Art: The Collection of  
Ellyn and Saul Dennison"  
Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art, Cleveland, OH, "25 Years"  
Edward Thorp Gallery, New York, NY, "Gallery Group"  
Whitney Museum, Fitchburg, CT, "Landscape as Metaphor"

1992

The Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, CT, "Four Friends"  
*travelled to:* Rayburn Foundation, New York, NY, *and*  
Ringling Museum, Sarasota, FL, *and*  
Oklahoma Museum of Art, Oklahoma City, OK  
Edward Thorp Gallery, New York, NY "Gallery Group"  
Transamerica Pyramid Lobby, San Francisco, "Selective Vision"

1991

The Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, NY, "Romance and Irony in  
Recent American Art"  
The National Museum of Women, Washington, DC, "Presswork: Art of  
Women Printmakers"  
Weatherspoon Art Gallery, Univ. of N. Carolina, Greensboro, NC  
"Art on Paper"  
Parrish Museum Design Biennial, Parrish Art Museum, Southampton,  
NY, "Weathervanes"



- Edward Thorp Gallery, New York, NY, "Summer"
- Mary Ryan Gallery, New York, NY, "Landscapes"
- Annina Nosei Gallery, New York, NY, "Landscape Painting"
- 1990 Edward Thorp Gallery, New York, NY, "Gallery Group Exhibition"
- Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, RI, "Terra Incognita"
- Residence of the Ambassador, Mexico City, Mexico, Mexico City, Mexico, "Contemporary American Artists"
- Graham Modern, New York, NY, "Landscape on Paper"
- Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, VA, "Harmony & Discord: American Landscape Today"
- Whitney Downtown at Federal Reserve Plaza, NY, and Fairfield County, CT, "The (Un)Making of Nature"
- The Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth, "Romance & Irony in Recent American Art"
- Chicago Public Library Cultural Center, "Didier Nolet: Dreams of a Man Awake"
- Indiana University Art Museum, IN, "Echo Press: A Decade of Printmaking"
- 1989 The Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, NY, "Painting Horizons: Jane Freilicher, Albert York, April Gornik"
- Daniel Weinberg Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, "A Decade of Drawings: 1980-1989"
- Greensboro, NC, Weatherspoon Art Gallery, University of North Carolina, "Art on Paper 1989"
- Edward Thorp Gallery, New York, NY, "Summer"
- Three Rivers Arts Festival, Pittsburgh, PA, "The Transformative Vision: Contemporary American Landscape Painting"
- The Dayton Art Institute, Dayton, OH, "A Certain Slant of Light: The Contemporary American Landscape"
- National Gallery of Art, Wash, DC, "The 1980s: Prints from the Collection of Joshua P. Smith"
- Ruggiero Henis Gallery, NY, "Imminent Space"
- Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, TX, "10 + 10: Contemporary Soviet & American Painters," *travelled to:* San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA, Albright Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY, *and* Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee, WI, *and* The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington DC, *and* Artist's Union Hall of the Tretyakov Embankment, Moscow, *and* Central Artists' Hall, Tbilisi, Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic, *and* Central Exhibition Hall, Leningrad, The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY, "1989 Biennial Exhibition"
- The Whitney Museum of American Art at the Equitable Center, New York, NY, "Nocturnal Visions in Contemporary Painting"
- The Montclair Art Museum, Montclair, NJ, "Art of the '80s from the Chemical Bank Collection"
- The Art Museum at Florida International University, Miami, FL, "American Art Today: Contemporary Landscape"
- 1988 Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, RI, "Art for Your Collection"
- The Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, NY, "Drawing on the East End, 1940-1988"
- Fay Gold Gallery, Atlanta, GA, "New American Landscape"
- Edward Thorp Gallery, New York, NY, "Group Show"
- Marlborough Gallery, New York, NY, "Changing Perspectives in Contemporary Representations"
- Greenville County Museum of Art, Greenville, SC, "Just Like a Woman"
- National Academy of Design, New York, NY, "Realism Today: American Drawings from the Rita Rich Collection," *travelled to:* Smith College, Northampton, MA, *and* The Arkansas Arts Center, Little Rock, AK, *and* The Butler Institute of American Art, Youngstown, OH
- 1987 Edward Thorp Gallery, New York, NY, "Gallery Group"
- Wellesley College Museum, MA, "1976-1986: Ten Years of Collecting Contemporary American Art, Selections from the Edward R. Downe, Jr. Collection"
- Art Gallery, Long Island University, Southampton, NY, "The Masters II"
- Chemical Bank Gallery, New York, NY, "The Great Outdoors"
- The Rockwell Museum, Corning, NY, "Boundless Realism: Contemporary Landscape Painting in the West"
- Barbara Mathes Gallery, New York, NY, "Disquiet in the Landscape"
- The Whitney Museum of American Art, Fairfield County, Stamford, CT, "The New Romantic Landscape"
- Sherry French Gallery, New York, NY, "Night Light/Night Life"
- Squibb Gallery, Princeton, NJ, "Landscapes: Real & Imagined"
- 1986 Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, CT, "A Contemporary View of Nature"
- Lorence Monk Gallery, New York, NY, "Manor in the Landscape"
- Weatherspoon Art Gallery, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, NC, "Art on Paper"
- Freedman Gallery, Albright College, Reading, PA, "The Freedman Gallery: The First Decade"
- Lehman College Art Gallery, Bronx, NY, "Landscape in the Age of Anxiety"
- Edward Thorp Gallery, New York, NY, "Group Show"
- Michael Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, "Still Life/Life Still"
- Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, AZ, "New Narrative Painting: Selections from The Metropolitan Museum of Art"
- Elliot Smith Gallery, Saint Louis, MO, "The American Landscape"
- Edward Thorp Gallery, New York, NY, "Group Show"
- Luhring, Augustine & Hodes, New York, NY, "Watercolors"
- Contemporary Arts Center, New Orleans, LA, "Landscape, Seascape, Cityscape 1960-1985,"
- The New York Academy of Art, "Landscape, Seascape, Cityscape 1960-1985,"
- Jus de Pomme Gallery, New York, NY, "Artists Pick Artists"

