



Rackstraw Downes, *The Plantation: Misty Morning*, 1979. Oil on canvas, 13 1/8 x 47 1/2 in.

DIRECT RESPONSE: CONTEMPORARY LANDSCAPE PAINTING

This exhibition has been named “Direct Response” because the painters represented in it paint the landscape at first hand, without artifice. We believe that the model of a landscape painter is an artist who picks out a special corner of the world, plunks an easel in front of it and, forgetting about the media, forgetting about art history, paints the landscape anew. There are those “landscape painters” who say “everything has already been done” but who still want their paintings to refer to nature and the open air. They have read the theories of Ernst Gombrich who claims that art is always more about other art than it is about nature. We have read him too but, loving art more than we love art history, we try to prove him wrong.

And why not? The best landscape painting of the past four or five centuries has been as much about places as about ideas. The best landscape painters have discovered new points of view not merely as effectively by reading the spoilsport critics as by stepping out of their studio door and then using their eyes.

Each generation sees things differently. This is called the generation gap, as we all know. But generations not only differ in their views on politics and pornography, they also see a difference in, say, clouds. We look at the masses of piled-up clouds in a Dutch 17th-century landscape with a touch of disbelief—surely their rhetoric is exaggerated! The clouds in a typical Impressionist landscape are too fluffy and cottony—we can’t quite believe them either. What are the permissible clouds of today? We won’t know until we paint them, or until we paint them out. It’s quite possible that clouds are not an issue. Just because they are there doesn’t mean we are obliged to paint them. In the past we painted ruined temples and gnarled oak trees, now we don’t. Each generation paints what it needs and understands and leaves the rest alone.

We have plenty of opportunities which previous painters lacked. We can use brighter colors and more of them. We can use huge canvases routinely because there are trucks to move them all over the country. We use bigger brushes and more

paint. Above all our visual opportunities are more varied. We look down on the landscape from airplanes or we take the elevator to the 50th floor and look down on the street from there. We drive at 65 mph (in a rural zone, that is) and look through the windshield at nature. Or, living in the suburbs, we regard the out-of-doors through Andersen windows which have no bars to obstruct the view. We can ape the camera lens anywhere. There is new subject matter begging to be painted: night-time traffic, giant tanks, Tokyo, Long Island, California! The bulldozer ripping open a potato field to build condominiums weighs upon us as much as the heavy haze coming up on the horizon.

So let us dispense with nostalgia and fatigue! In our healthy moments we are as open as ever to the novelty and freshness that are always available, inviting direct response.

Wolf Kahn

CHECKLIST

Lennart Anderson

Footbridge to Topsham (Maine), 1983
Oil on canvas, 10 5/8 x 15 in.

View of Brunswick, Maine, with Footbridge, 1985
Oil on canvas, 14 1/4 x 17 in.

Landscape with Road and Telephone Pole, 1968
Oil on canvas, 15 x 18 in.

Courtesy of Davis & Langdale Co.
New York, N.Y.

Robert Berlind

Vineyard in the Snow, 1987
Oil on linen, 28 3/4 x 96 in.

Winter Oaks, 1987
Oil on linen, 70 3/4 x 78 1/2 in.

Courtesy of Ruth Siegel Gallery
New York, N.Y.

Richard Crozier

Kindred Spirits, 1987
Oil on canvas, 48 1/4 x 140 in.
Courtesy of Tatistcheff Gallery
New York, N.Y.

Rackstraw Downes

The Plantation: Misty Morning, 1979
Oil on canvas, 13 1/8 x 47 1/2 in.

Portland from Back Cove, 1983–84
Oil on canvas, 20 3/4 x 52 1/4 in.

(over)

A Bend in the Hackensack at Jersey City, 1986
Oil on canvas mounted on board, 10 ¼ x 28 in.

Courtesy of Hirschl and Adler Modern
New York, N.Y.

Jane Freilicher

The Changing Scene, 1981
Oil on canvas, 52 x 64 in.

Union Square at 4:00 PM, 1987
Oil on canvas, 40 x 36 in.

Courtesy of Fischbach Gallery
New York, N.Y.

Yvonne Jacquette

Triboro Triptych at Night II, 1987-88
Oil on canvas, each panel 79 ¼ x 63 ½ in.
Courtesy of Brooke Alexander
New York, N.Y.

David Kapp

Canal Street West, 1987
Oil on linen, 84 x 60 in.

East-West, 1988
Oil on linen, 72 x 72 in.

Courtesy of David Beitzel Gallery
New York, N.Y.

Wolf Kahn

Evening Glow, 1982
Oil on canvas, 52 ¼ x 76 ¼ in.
Collection of the Memorial Art Gallery
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Julius G. Kayser, 85.59

Victorian Barns in New Jersey, 1986
Oil on canvas, 52 x 66 in.
Courtesy of Grace Borgenicht Gallery
New York, N.Y.

John Lees

Landscape, 1981-85
Oil on canvas, 16 ½ x 20 ½ in.

Study for Bog, 1984-85
Oil on masonite, 8 x 14 in.

Painting 5/84, 1984
Oil on canvas, 16 ¼ x 20 in.

Courtesy of Hirschl and Adler Modern
New York, N.Y.

Louisa Matthiasdottir

Two Sheep, 1986
Oil on canvas, 19 x 22 in.

Vatnsstigur, 1988
Oil on canvas, 28 ⅝ x 36 ½ in.

Greenhouse, Red Roof, 1982
Oil on canvas, 13 x 16 in.

Courtesy of Robert Schoelkopf Gallery, Ltd.
New York, N.Y.

Richard Raiselis

Cityscape with Crescent Cloud, 1988
Oil on canvas, 9 ¾ x 17 ½ in.

Landscape with Radio Antenna, 1985
Oil on canvas, 8 x 17 ½ in.

Marshall Field, 1986
Oil on canvas, 15 x 20 in.

Courtesy of Robert Schoelkopf Gallery, Ltd.
New York, N.Y.

Wayne Thiebaud

River Pond, 1967-75
Acrylic on canvas, 74 ⅝ x 76 ⅙ in.
Collection of the Memorial Art Gallery
Joseph C. Wilson Memorial Fund, 75.421

Halfdome and Cloud, 1975
Oil on canvas, 25 ¼ x 23 in.
Courtesy of Allan Stone Gallery
New York, N.Y.

DIRECT

RESPONSE



CONTEMPORARY

LANDSCAPE

PAINTING

APRIL 30-JULY 2

COVER:

Wolf Kahn

Evening Glow, 1982
Oil on canvas, 52 ¼ x 76 ¼ in.



Memorial Art Gallery
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER

500 University Avenue
Rochester, New York 14607