

JANET MONAFO

Past & Present



VOSE GALLERIES

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Front Cover: *White Eggs, White Eggplants*, p. 13

Back Cover: *Self-Portrait with Rose*, 1987

Pastel on paper, 46 1/8 x 46 1/8 inches, signed lower center: *MONAFO 87*

Janet Monafo: Past & Present

————— Essay by Henry Adams, Ph.D. —————

September 29th - November 3rd, 2018

————— V O S E G A L L E R I E S —————

Janet Monafo: Master of Pastel

HENRY ADAMS, PH.D.

Janet Monafo is a curious combination of an artist with a contemporary vision, and one who has direct links with the Boston School of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as represented by figures like Frank Benson, Edmund Tarbell and William Paxton, who saw themselves as heirs to the work of old masters such as Johannes Vermeer. A few decades ago, this Boston tradition was viewed as outmoded, and lacking in the conceptual, philosophical qualities that were associated with avant-garde modern art. Yet in its own way, realistic painting inherently grapples with conceptual and metaphysical issues. Don't we sense that in some way there's something metaphysical about the work of painters such as Vermeer and Diego Velázquez, intent as they were on accurately representing what they saw?

What is it that we see when we see the world around us? How do we know that it's real? How can we create an artistic illusion that seems "real," that provides as rich and convincing an experience as the real world itself? Oddly, the most convincing effect of realism is often created not through direct imitation, but by creating a sort of harmonic organization of color and form that's not the same as reality, but in dialogue with it. Continuing on this line of thought, to me it seems that Janet's work is not just beautiful but metaphysically fascinating. And even if you're not a metaphysicist, there's something arresting about her work in purely visual terms that will hold your attention for hour after hour.

Janet's father died when she was quite young, and pursuing an artistic career was

clearly a challenge. She never attended a formal art school, but nonetheless got very solid training from one of the last practitioners of the Boston School, an elderly chain-smoking portraitist named Margaret Fitzhugh Browne.

A formidable early foreshadowing of the modern woman, Miss Browne had pursued a professional career at a time when it was not standard practice to do so, had once painted a portrait of the King of Spain that got her a good deal of attention, and had gone on to paint a good many members of the staff and faculty at MIT. Miss Browne had a figure and portrait rendering class in the Fenway Studios building, where many of the notables of the Boston School had their studios. There was not much formal instruction, but the opportunity to work away diligently from the model for many hours at a time. In spirit it was very much a 19th century atelier. Unlike art teaching today, which tends to stress ideas, and is not much concerned with the challenges of actually making things, the emphasis was on mastering the technical skills that go into making a representational painting. Though her studio was down on the ground level, there was good north light, and though she probably would not have expressed it in this way, close attention to light stood at the heart of Miss Browne's artistic approach.

Janet cheerfully admits that her attachment to pastels came about through practical necessity. After she got married (to a fellow artist), she woke up one day and discovered that she had two children to raise and that this was quite demanding.

When working on her art she never knew when she might be interrupted nor when she would be able to return to work. Since oil paint dries, it generally needs to be laid out and mixed up fresh every time you start work, and it's obviously frustrating to spend an hour or so mixing up colors only to be interrupted and to never actually get started doing anything to the work itself. With pastel, on the other hand, once you've lined up your sticks of color in the right sequence, you can go to work instantly whenever there's a moment free. Pastel is the ideal medium for an artist who is constantly interrupted.

That said, I think there's something about the velvety quality of pastel that Janet connected with at some deep level, and as a consequence, she stuck with it even after her children had grown and it would have been perfectly feasible to take up oil paint instead. Pastel allows you to draw crisp lines, but also allows you to achieve effects of blending that are somewhat different from what you can do with paint—effects which resemble the *sfumato*, the mysterious 'smoky' quality, which we find in the paintings of Leonardo da Vinci. The colors have a richness and intensity beside which oil paint seems dull, and yet, as indicated, also has a sort of mysterious, dusky quality, which is rather different from watercolor.

We tend to think of pastels as fragile. In fact, pastel is one of the most durable of mediums. To be sure, if you rub the surface it will come off, but most people (hopefully!) don't rub the surface of their drawings and paintings, and a sheet of glass or Plexiglas will provide good protection. The colors of pastels don't easily fade: they're just as durable as oil paint. If spared violent handling, a pastel made today will still look fresh hundreds of years from now.

Like the choice of pastel as a medium, the decision of focusing on still life was also a practical one for a mother. Live models need to be scheduled. It's hard to get them to pose for weeks at a time. A still life will sit on a table happily as long as you want it to. "I was never interested in still life at all," Janet comments. "But when I started to do some still life I found out that there were a lot of problems in the picture, and I like solving problems and reaching some sort of solution."

Oddly, while it seems perfectly suited to such subject matter, for most of its history, artists in pastel have focused on portraits rather than still life. Even the famous still life painter Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin, who took it up late in life, used it for portraits. And when pastel artists have focused on still life, they concentrated principally on flowers. It's often the case that when you take up a new medium, you can approach even rather traditional subjects in a fresh and original way. When she took on the challenge of recording still life in pastel, Janet ventured into territory that was surprisingly unexplored.

Janet Monafo's paintings have such a profusion of objects that it becomes hard to grasp the series of steps that go into putting them together. To do so, it's helpful to look at small examples of her work, or at just a few objects within a larger piece. The basic trick of "realistic" painting is that you don't represent the object as you know it exists, but rather the ever-changing ways in which it's hit by light. You try to represent the light, not the object itself. Most of us are familiar with the idea that objects are defined by light and shadow—that the light hits an object on one side and the other side is in shadow. A basic principle of realistic painting is that you try to render

the direction of the light with reasonable accuracy, so that the objects all seem to exist in the same space, to harmonize with each other. This seemingly simple principle, however, is more complicated than it seems, for light bounces off the different objects in a room in complicated ways.

Interestingly, the object that's used in art classes to demonstrate as clearly as possible how light falls is an egg. But look closely at the eggs in Janet's painting *Summer Squash and Flowers* of 1997 (p. 28) and you'll quickly realize that painting a simple egg is pretty complicated. In very simplified terms, most of the lighted side of the object is the color of the object, but there's generally a little dash of white—the highlight—where the object is hit by light most sharply. The shadows start very soft but then progressively darken as we move around the object and away from the light. On the very far side of the egg, however, where we would expect to find deepest shadow, there's generally a "reflected highlight," a slightly lighter place where a bit of light is illuminating the shaded area, because it's bouncing off other objects. Finally, there's the cast shadow, which usually is a little darker than the shaded side of the object, and which also is modulated by reflected highlights.

One of the many things that's wonderful about *Summer Squash and Flowers* (p. 28) is that Janet is not just rendering according to a mechanical formula, but is very intently studying every egg, and as a result, the way each egg is modeled by light, highlight, shade, reflected highlight, and shadow is very different. Each egg is the same geometric shape; but becomes something entirely different each time because of the way it's hit by light. Janet's pastels make us realize that the world is more complex

and mysterious than we knew. Every substance responds to light in a slightly different way, and as a consequence if you accurately record the fall of light you'll be able to capture the distinctive quality of each individual thing. Paintings like *Tapestry* (p. 5), *Paradise Found* (p. 21), and *Fruit and Flowers* (p. 15), provide an amazing variety of substances: a piece of paper, a piece of cloth, porcelain, brass, a knife-blade, the skin or the cut-open flesh of a piece of fruit.

Essentially you need to record whether a surface is matte, like cloth, and absorbs a good deal of light, or shiny, and reflects it back to us. In extremely shiny surfaces like silver or brass, the surface acts like a mirror, and creates shimmering highlights which flicker across the object and change their configurations every time you move your viewpoint even slightly. This effect is extremely difficult to capture. Some of Janet's clusterings of shiny objects, such as her rendering of copper pans and silver vessels, *Copper Cluster* (p. 10) and *Silver Cluster (East)* (p. 26) are a tour de force of technical ability in mastering this challenge. So is the seemingly modest little still life of *Grapes on Gold* of 2009 (p. 14), with its masterful rendering of the gold foil on which the bowl is set.

What's extraordinary in Janet's work is not only the rendering of each individual object, but the way in which the objects are all "in key" with each other. The challenge is not unlike that of getting sixty members of an orchestra to all play together in tune. When we start to look closely at objects we start to realize that they all have a story to tell, and Janet's work often explores this fact. For example, *Prime and Gone-By* (p. 32) of 2009 invite us to look closely at the way light falls and discern that the fresh mushrooms have moist smooth surfaces and



REPULSE THE MONKEY, 2008
Pastel on paper,
39 5/8 x 51 5/8 inches
Signed lower left:
MONAFO '08



TAPESTRY, 2016
Pastel on paper, 49 5/8 x 39 1/8 inches, signed lower left: *MONAFO 16*

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BUDS, 2010
Pastel on paper, 57 3/8 x 45 inches, signed upper left: *MONAFO '10*

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that the wilted mushrooms are drier, more wrinkled, more puckered.

What makes Janet's work "modern," and not just a rehash of the work of the traditional Boston School? Several things stand out, but one is her mastery of flat surfaces and geometric pattern. Again, *Summer Squash and Flowers* (p. 28) provides a striking example. As we look at the design, there's a feeling of push-pull between the three-dimensional objects—the eggs, egg cups, teapots, boxes, and summer squash—and the floral pattern on which they float. It's hard to read the design in two ways at once, that is as both three-dimensional and flat: we find ourselves asking which mode of interpretation is the right one, "Which one is real?" On occasion, Janet will even turn the paper on which she's working, so that it becomes a diamond rather than a square, as in her remarkable Vanitas piece *Self-Portrait with Rose* (back cover). A few of the designs, such as *Blue with Lilies*, 1999 (p. 8), have a boldness of design and unusual harmonies of color that remind me a bit of David Hockney. One of my favorites is *Paradise Found* of 1995 (p. 21), a truly masterful design, worth studying closely, which combines seemingly chaotic sections, such as the wonderful rendering of

crumpled paper, with subtle rhythms from the ornament on the tablecloth which subtly tie all the disparate parts of the design into a unity. "You need to organize things," Janet comments, "to help people see."

Another modern trait I sense in these works, though this is perhaps a bit more arguable, and certainly less easy to describe, is a feminist quality, though in a way that's intriguingly self-reflective rather than strident. Eggs, cooking, flowers, floral patterns, pots and pans. This is a world of feminine tasks to be dealt with. But the scale, the confidence, the boldness with which they're rendered also speaks of a woman's ability to accomplish something fully at the level of men but on her own terms. The woman in the brooding Vanitas *Self-Portrait with Rose* (back cover) is an impressively forceful figure, whose brooding may perhaps have something to do with gender issues, but more deeply seems to reflect a determination to take on the big issues of life and art—and to produce something in her art that will endure. To me it's an intriguing record of something peculiar about the cultural moment we live in today. As we look at the woman in this pastel, we feel that this is someone to be reckoned with.

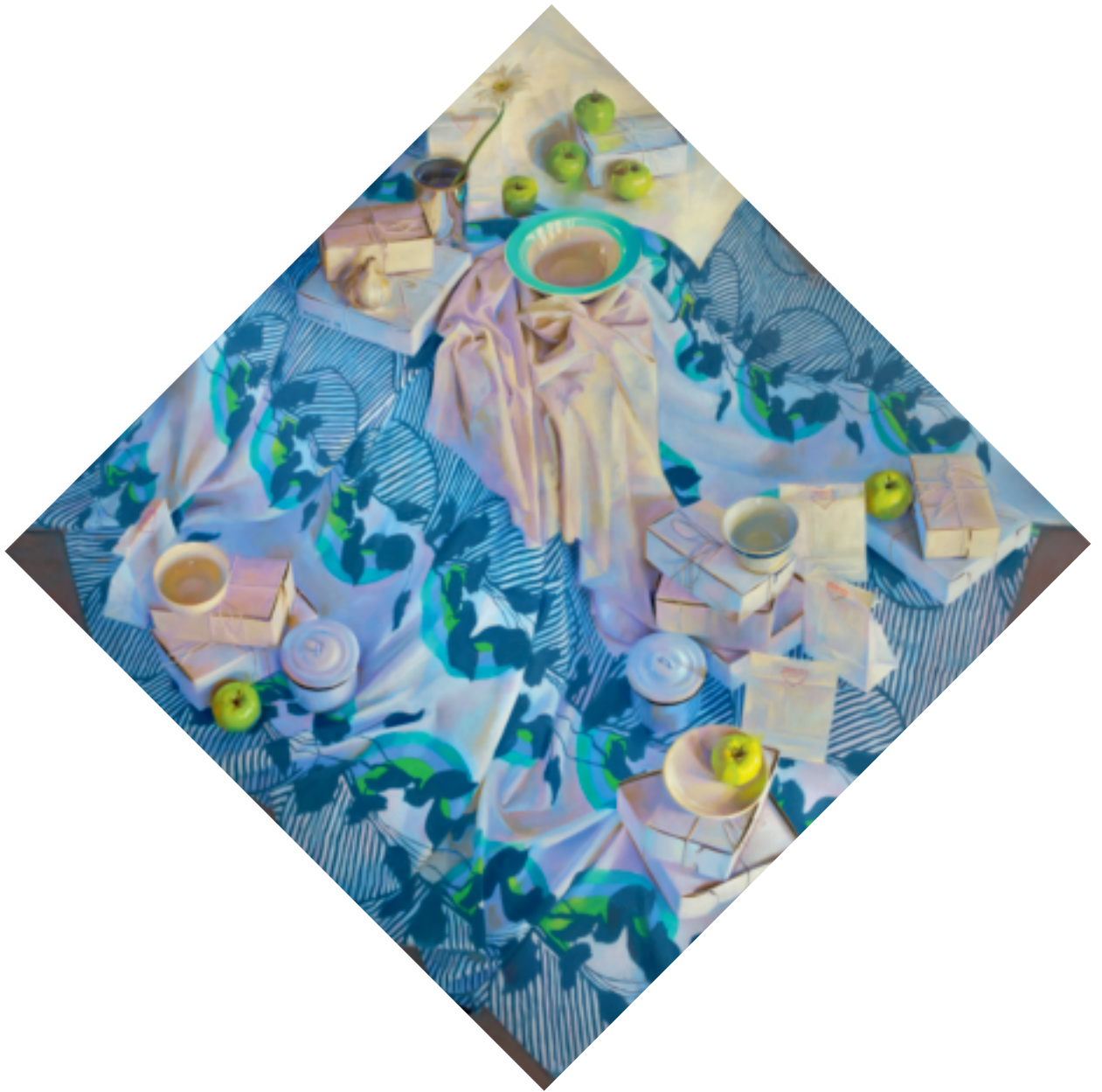


HENRY ADAMS IS THE RUTH COULTER HEEDE PROFESSOR OF ART HISTORY AT CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY, IN CLEVELAND, OHIO. Among his numerous published works are *Eakins Revealed* and *Tom and Jack: The Intertwined Lives of Thomas Hart Benton and Jackson Pollock*. His writing on American Art has also been published in *The Burlington Magazine*, *The Art Bulletin*, *Art in America*, *American Art Review*, *Smithsonian Magazine*, and *Art and Antiques*. We would like to extend our deep thanks to Dr. Adams for his contribution to this catalogue. In reading his essay, we've discovered new lenses through which Janet Monafó's works can be viewed, discussed and thoroughly enjoyed.



BLUE WITH LILIES, 1999

Pastel on paper, 58 x 39 inches, signed upper right: *MONAFO 99*



TRINITIES, 1988

Pastel on paper, 45 7/8 x 45 7/8 inches, signed upper left: *MONAFO 88*



COPPER CLUSTER, 2008
Pastel on paper, 37 x 49 inches, signed lower left: *MONAFO '08*



THE EGG, 2003

Pastel on paper, 50 3/4 x 48 3/8 inches, signed center right: *MONAFO 03*

WHITE EGGS, WHITE EGGPLANTS, 2007

Pastel on paper

51 5/8 x 39 5/8 inches

Signed upper right: *MONAFO '07*





GRAPES ON GOLD, 2009
Pastel on paper, 14 x 16 inches, signed lower right: *Monafo '09*



SWEETS, 2006
Pastel on paper, 13 x 16 1/2 inches, signed upper right: *MONAFO '06*



FRUIT AND FLOWERS, 2018
Pastel on paper, 35 1/4 x 35 3/4 inches, signed lower left: *MONAFO '18*

IRIS AND SUNLIGHT, 2000
Pastel on paper
49 x 39 1/8 inches
Signed upper left: *MONAFO 00*





DROPPED ON TOAST, 1995
Pastel on paper, 12 1/2 x 16 1/2 inches, signed lower right: *Janet Monafó '95*



PASSAGE, 1997
Pastel on paper, 21 7/8 x 29 3/4 inches, signed lower left: *MONAFO 1997*



EGGS, 1995
Pastel on paper, 24 x 37 inches, signed upper left: *MONAFO 95*



ROBIN'S HAT, 1995
Pastel on paper, 17 3/4 x 12 1/2 inches, signed upper left: *Monafo 95*

PARADISE FOUND, 1995
Pastel on paper
58 x 49 inches
Signed upper left: *Monafo 95*





PERSIMMONS AND PEPPERS, 1999

Pastel on paper, 32 7/8 x 32 1/8 inches, signed lower right: *MONAFO 99*



SWEET WILLIAMS, 2016
Pastel on paper, 25 3/4 x 28 5/8 inches, signed upper right: *MONAFO '16*



JANET IN THE AGE OF POLYESTER, 2001
Pastel on paper, 50 x 37 3/8 inches, signed upper right: *MONAFO '01*



BUTTERFISH ON BLUE

Pastel on paper, 17 x 20 inches, signed lower right: *Monafó*



BLUE BOWL AND BONE, 2004

Pastel on paper, 18 1/4 x 23 3/4 inches, signed lower right: *Monafó / '04*



SILVER CLUSTER (EAST), 2007
Pastel on paper, 49 x 37 inches, signed upper left: *MONAFO '07*



GARLIC REFLECTED, 2016
Pastel on paper, 15 x 18 inches, signed lower left: *MONAFO '16*



STILL LIFE WITH GARLIC, 2016
Pastel on paper, 37 x 49 inches, signed lower right: *MONAFO '16*



SUMMER SQUASH AND FLOWERS, 1997
Pastel on paper, 28 3/4 x 25 inches, signed upper left: *MONAFO 1997*



SHASTA, 2004

Pastel on paper, 20 3/4 x 25 3/4 inches, signed lower right: *Monafo '04*



MOLEX WITH SHASTAS, 2001
Pastel on paper, 27 3/8 x 24 3/4 inches, signed lower right: *MONAFO 01*



PILE WITH DIPPERS, 2003
Pastel on paper, 21 3/4 x 20 3/4 inches, signed upper right: *MONAFO 03*



COLORFIELD II, 1998
Pastel on paper, 37 x 49 inches, signed upper right: *MONAFO 98*



PRIME, 2009

Pastel on paper, 10 1/8 x 11 3/8 inches, signed lower right: *MONAFO '09*



GONE-BY, 2009

Pastel on paper, 8 7/8 x 10 1/2 inches, signed lower right: *MONAFO '09*



PERCHED PARAKEET, 2009
Pastel on paper, 51 3/4 x 38 1/4 inches, signed lower center: *MONAFO '09*



*ENAMEL AND EGGS:
IN NORTH LIGHT, 2015*
Pastel on paper
17 1/4 x 25 1/4 inches
Signed upper right: *MONAFO* / \$20.15



*ENAMEL AND EGGS:
IN OVERHEAD LIGHT, 2015*
Pastel on paper
17 1/4 x 25 1/4 inches
Signed upper right: *MONAFO* / \$20.15



*ENAMEL AND EGGS:
IN SUNLIGHT, 2015*
Pastel on paper
17 1/4 x 25 1/4 inches
Signed upper right: *MONAFO* / \$20.15

Janet Monafó: Curriculum Vitae

CAREY L. VOSE

Vose Galleries is pleased to showcase over forty works by Janet Monafó. It has been ten years since her first exhibition at Vose, and my family and the gallery staff have come to treasure our relationship with Janet. Her visits to the gallery, accompanied by her husband Paul, are always something to look forward to, and I cherish my own example of her work, which hangs over the living room mantel in my home.

Since her first major exhibition at the George Walter Vincent Smith Art Museum in 1977, Janet Monafó has used pastel to create masterful figural works, brilliant self-portraits and elaborately choreographed still lifes. She has been the recipient of numerous honors throughout her career, including awards from the National Academy of Design, the Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts. Janet's induction into the Pastel Society of America's Hall of Fame in 2002 placed her in the company of such artists as William Merritt Chase and Mary Cassatt.

Selected Solo Exhibitions:

- 2018 LewAllen Galleries, Santa Fe, NM
Gatherings
- 2013 David Findlay Jr. Gallery, New York, NY
- 2008 Vose Galleries, Boston, MA
Brilliant, The Pastels of Janet Monafó
- 2004 J. Cacciola Gallery, New York, NY
- 2000 GSI Fine Art, Cleveland, OH
- 1999 Hollis Taggart Gallery, New York, NY
- 1996 Sherry French Gallery, New York, NY
- 1994 Sherry French Gallery, New York, NY
- 1993 Louis Newman Gallery, Beverly Hills, CA
- 1992 Sherry French Gallery, New York, NY
- 1989 Sherry French Gallery, New York, NY
- 1987 Sherry French Gallery, New York, NY
- 1984 Allan Stone Gallery, New York, NY
- 1981 Creiger Sesen Gallery, Boston, MA

Selected Grants and Awards:

- 2002 Pastel Society of America Hall of Fame, Honoree
- 1997 Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation, Grant
- 1993 New England Foundation for the Arts, Grant
- 1993 Nat'l Academy of Design, Certificate of Merit
- 1990 MA Artists Fellowship Program, Finalist
- 1988 Nat'l Academy of Design, Ralph Fabri Prize
- 1988 MA Artists Fellowship Program, Finalist
- 1982 National Endowment for the Arts, Fellowship

Selected Publications:

- 2014 *Behind the Easel: the Unique Voices of 20 Contemporary Representational Painters*, Robert C. Jackson
- 2008 *American Art Collector*, John O'Hern
"Season of Abundance"
- 2008 *American Artist*, M. Stephen Doherty
"Guided by a Sense of Ourselves"
- 2007 *American Artist*, M. Stephen Doherty
"Object Project"

Selected Group Exhibitions:

- 2017 Vose Galleries, Boston, MA
The Artist's Muse
- 2017 Jerald Melberg Gallery, Charlotte, NC
The Dust on Butterflies' Wings
- 2016 New Britain Museum of American Art, New Britain, CT, *As We See It: The Collection of Gail and Ernst von Metzsch*
- 2016 Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington, DE
Truth & Vision: 21st Century Realism
- 2012 Huntsville Museum of Art, Huntsville, AL
The Red Clay Survey 2012 (juror)
- 2010 Brandywine River Museum, Chadds Ford, PA
Reality Check: Contemporary American Trompe l'Oeil

Selected Group Exhibitions, continued:

- 2009 Gallery 1261, Denver, CO
Beyond the Object Project
- 2009 The Evansville Museum, Evansville, IN
The Object Project traveled to:
Greenville County Museum of Art, SC
Philbrook Museum of Art, OK
Hunter Museum of American Art, TN
Museum of Outdoor Art, CO
- 2008 M.A. Doran Gallery, Tulsa, OK
The Object Project
- 2007 J. Cacciola Gallery, New York, NY
- 2007 Gerald Peters Gallery, New York, NY
- 2006 J. Cacciola Gallery, New York, NY
- 2005 Gerald Peters Gallery, New York, NY
- 2004 Jerald Melberg Gallery, Charlotte, NC
- 2004 J. Cacciola Gallery, New York, NY
- 2004 Gerald Peters Gallery, New York, NY
- 2002 Gerald Peters Gallery, New York, NY
- 2001 Gerald Peters Gallery, New York, NY
- 2000 J. Cacciola Gallery, New York, NY
- 1996 Exhibits USA, Traveling Exhibition
Objects of Personal Significance
- 1996 National Academy of Design, New York, NY
Annual Exhibition
- 1995 Contemporary Realist Gallery, San Fran., CA
Nothing Overlooked: Women Painting Still Life
- 1995 Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY
- 1995 The Arkansas Art Center, Little Rock, AR
Group Exhibition
- 1994 National Academy of Design, New York, NY
Annual Exhibition
- 1994 The Arkansas Art Center, Little Rock, AR
Group Exhibition
- 1993 The National Portrait Gallery, Wash., DC
Contemporary Self-Portraits from the James Goode Collection
- 1993 Sherry French Gallery, New York, NY
- 1993 Federal Reserve Bank, Boston, MA
- 1993 Gerald Peters Gallery, New York, NY
- 1992 Sherry French Gallery, New York, NY
- 1991 Appalachian State University, Boone, NC
Scale and Content: Oversized Paintings
About Life in the Late 20th Century
- 1991 Fitchburg Art Museum, Fitchburg, MA
The Object: Found, Observed, Imagined
- 1991 Sherry French Gallery, New York, NY
- 1990 The Fuller Museum of Art, Brockton, MA
Boston 1990: The Sixth Triennial Exhibition
- 1990 Chicago Navy Pier, Chicago, IL
International Art Exposition
- 1990 Los Angeles Convention Center, L.A., CA
Art LA/90
- 1990 Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY
- 1990 Sherry French Gallery, New York, NY
- 1989 Fitchburg Art Museum, Fitchburg, MA
Monocular Vision
- 1989 Sherry French Gallery, New York, NY
- 1988 National Academy of Design, New York, NY
Annual Exhibition
- 1988 Brockton Art Museum, Brockton, MA
Drawn to Pastel
- 1988 The Arkansas Art Center, Little Rock, AR
Group Exhibition
- 1988 One Penn Plaza, New York, NY
Contemporary Pastel
- 1988 Chicago Navy Pier, Chicago, IL
International Art Exposition
- 1988 Sherry French Gallery, New York, NY
- 1987 The Bayly Art Museum, Charlottesville, VA
Studied from Life
- 1987 The Arkansas Art Center, Little Rock, AR
- 1987 DeCordova and Dana Museum and Park, Lincoln, MA
- 1987 The Newport Art Museum, Newport, RI
- 1987 Duxbury Art Complex Museum, MA
Timeless Tables
- 1987 Sherry French Gallery, New York, NY
- 1985 Boston Arts Festival, Boston, MA
- 1984 DeCordova and Dana Museum and Park, Lincoln, MA
- 1984 Allan Stone Gallery, New York, NY
- 1984 The Newport Art Museum, Newport, RI
Group Exhibition
- 1984 Federal Reserve Bank, Boston, MA
- 1983 American Academy of Arts and Letters, NY
Hassam Speicher Fund Purchase Exhibition
- 1981 Allan Stone Gallery, New York, NY
- 1979 Allan Stone Gallery, New York, NY
- 1977 George Walter Vincent Smith Art Museum, Springfield, MA, *Women on Women*
- 1977 Nasrudin Gallery, Boston, MA



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