

R. CALLNER



Richard Callner
50 Year Retrospective







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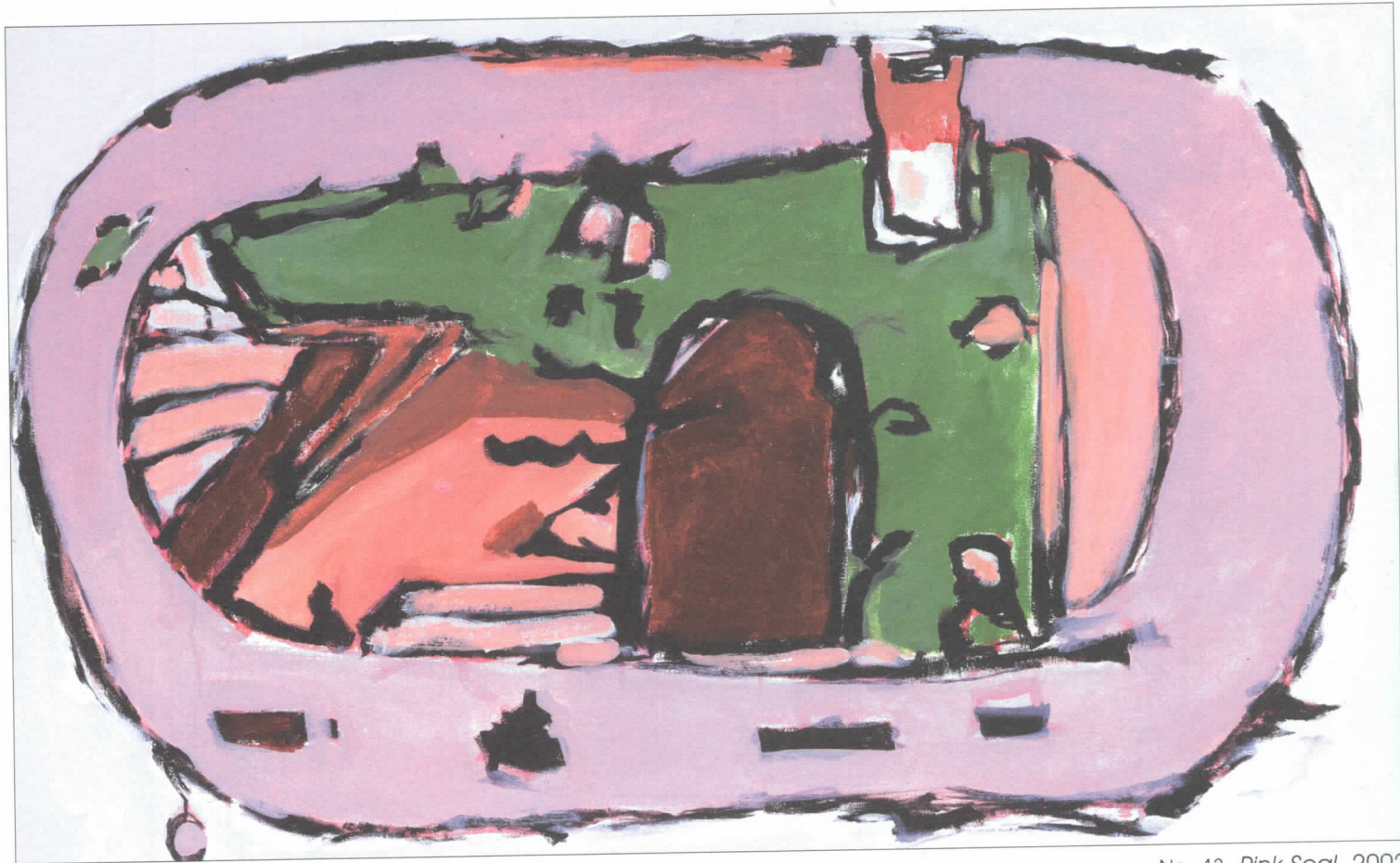


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50 Year Retrospective

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Richard Callner: 50 Year Retrospective

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No. 40 *Twelve Shades of Blue*, 2001

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R. CALLNER



Richard Callner in his studio, 1998
Photo by Luanne M. Ferris

Foreword

Richard Callner: Fifty-Year Retrospective is the first one-person exhibition of contemporary art to be featured in the new Albany Institute of History & Art. This gives me special pleasure for many reasons, but mostly because Richard Callner so fully epitomizes the Institute's intent to collect and exhibit the work of artists that are part of the artistic and cultural fabric of the region.

As a new director, I had the good fortune to meet Dick Callner in 1988 during a formative period for the Albany Institute. At that time we were undergoing a process of self-examination, supported by a special initiative grant from the New York State Council on the Arts entitled, "New Audiences for the 21st Century." This grant provided a basis for long range planning and provided the catalyst for future programming.

To ascertain what direction we should take for the Institute's future, we held many focus groups and community conversations on a variety of subjects. Among the most exciting dialogues were those we had about the heart and soul of our mission: collections development. Dick was one of the artists to participate in these roundtable discussions and he was always very patient, philosophical, and thoughtful in his commentary. In fact, Dick exhibited the very characteristics which have made him such an influential artist and teacher.

The round table discussions that Chief Curator, Tammis Groft and I had with Dick and a number of other artists ultimately led to the Institute's special initiative to collect contemporary art created by artists "who have contributed to the cultural and artistic fabric of our community and region." In 1988, this decision represented a new direction and a substantial commitment to the artists from our region. Today, the Institute's contemporary art holdings are ten-fold what they were just 15 years ago and with work by Dick Callner and many other regional artists represented in the permanent collection they continue to grow.

Richard Callner: Fifty Year Retrospective has been made possible thanks to the time, talent, generosity, and creativity of many people and organizations. On behalf of the Albany Institute of History & Art, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Richard and Carolyn Callner, and all of the funders – especially Mr. and Mrs. William F. McLaughlin – lenders, and staff who have made this exhibition and accompanying catalogue possible.

Tammis K. Groft deserves special thanks and praise for her efforts and expertise as the exhibition curator and catalogue essayist. The Albany Institute is especially appreciative of her generosity in taking on this important project while simultaneously fulfilling her role as Deputy Director for Collections and Public Programs. I would also like to extend my most sincere thanks to Ken Johnson, art critic and writer for *The New York Times* for his erudite and engaging essay.

In closing, I would also like to thank the Board of Trustees of the Albany Institute of History & Art for their dedication and support.

Christine M. Miles
Executive Director



No. 35 Cadmium Red Medium, 1998

Acknowledgments

It has been my great pleasure to work with Richard Callner on this retrospective exhibition. In many ways this project has been ten years in the making. My annual visits to his studio every winter provided insight and awareness to the changes and nuances in his newest work. With the reopening of the Albany Institute in May 2001, the museum adopted a broader exhibition philosophy to include more one-person exhibitions of contemporary artists. Where to begin? Richard Callner, as one of the preeminent artists in the region, came immediately to mind. Spanning a remarkable career, this exhibition features 54 of Callner's major paintings including recent works which have not been shown in the region. This exhibition also provides viewers the opportunity to experience Richard Callner's 50-year journey, savor his art, and enjoy the life and career of this remarkable artist.

The Albany Institute of History and Art wishes to thank the following for generously lending their work to *Richard Callner: 50 Year Retrospective*.

Shirley and Raymond Benson
Geoffrey Bullard
Marijo Dougherty and Norman Bauman
Carolyn Callner
Richard Callner
Joan and Harvey Friedman
Mr. and Mrs. Charles Liddle III
Mr. and Mrs. Robert Maurer
H. Patrick and Sonia Swygert
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Dr. Igal and Bonnie Zuravicky

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to Richard Callner who enthusiastically gave his time, energy, and artistic vision throughout all phases of this project. Many thanks also to Carolyn Callner who provided the "behind the scenes" support. Also critical to the project were Callner's assistants Liz Blum, Marsha Gregory, Val Tran, and Deborah Weinman.

Many thanks to the following Albany Institute of History & Art staff members who spent countless hours to insure the success of the project: Tom Nelson, Exhibition and Graphic Designer; Diane Shewchuk, Registrar; Mary Alice Mackay, Research Curator; Sarah Bennett, Curatorial Administrator; Jennifer Lemak, Curatorial Assistant; Pamela Malcolm, Curator of Education; Stacia Hanscom, Coordinator of School Services and Adult Tours; Scot Morehouse, Visitor Assistant; Marcia Moss, Deputy Director of External Relations; Diane LaVigna Wixted, Director of Development; Penny Vavura, Corporate and Public Relations Manager; Pamela Landers, Membership Manager; Elizabeth Bechand, Shop Manager; Neal Benassi, Assistant Manager of Buildings and Grounds; Daniel Van Hoesen, Maintenance and Art Handler; Bob Severson, Security Supervisor; Jordan Evans, Security Officer; and Tracy Morgan, Security Officer.

In closing, I would also like to extend my thanks to Ken Johnson for his insightful essay on the work of Richard Callner and acknowledge the early guidance and ongoing support for this project from Christine M. Miles, Executive Director; Roberta Bernstein, Albany Institute Trustee and art historian; and Marijo Dougherty, Director Emeritus of the University Art Museum, Albany.

Tammis K. Groft
Chief Curator

rebellious and adventurous personality was expunged from the Bible, clearing the way for Eve. Lilith, in Callner's cosmology, is a personification of creative imagination. She is the mother of artists and inventors, while Eve is the mother of ordinary people.

Callner's interest in myth and literature sets him apart from mainstream art in the 60s, when the laws of Modernism as interpreted most influentially by Clement Greenberg banned symbolism, representation and story-telling – anything that might distract attention from the purely visual experience of form. It was a time when "it's illustrative" was the worst thing you could say about a painting.



No. 10 *Lilith Metamorphosis or Lilith Leaving Eden*, 1973



No. 17 *Still Life with Four Tables*, 1983

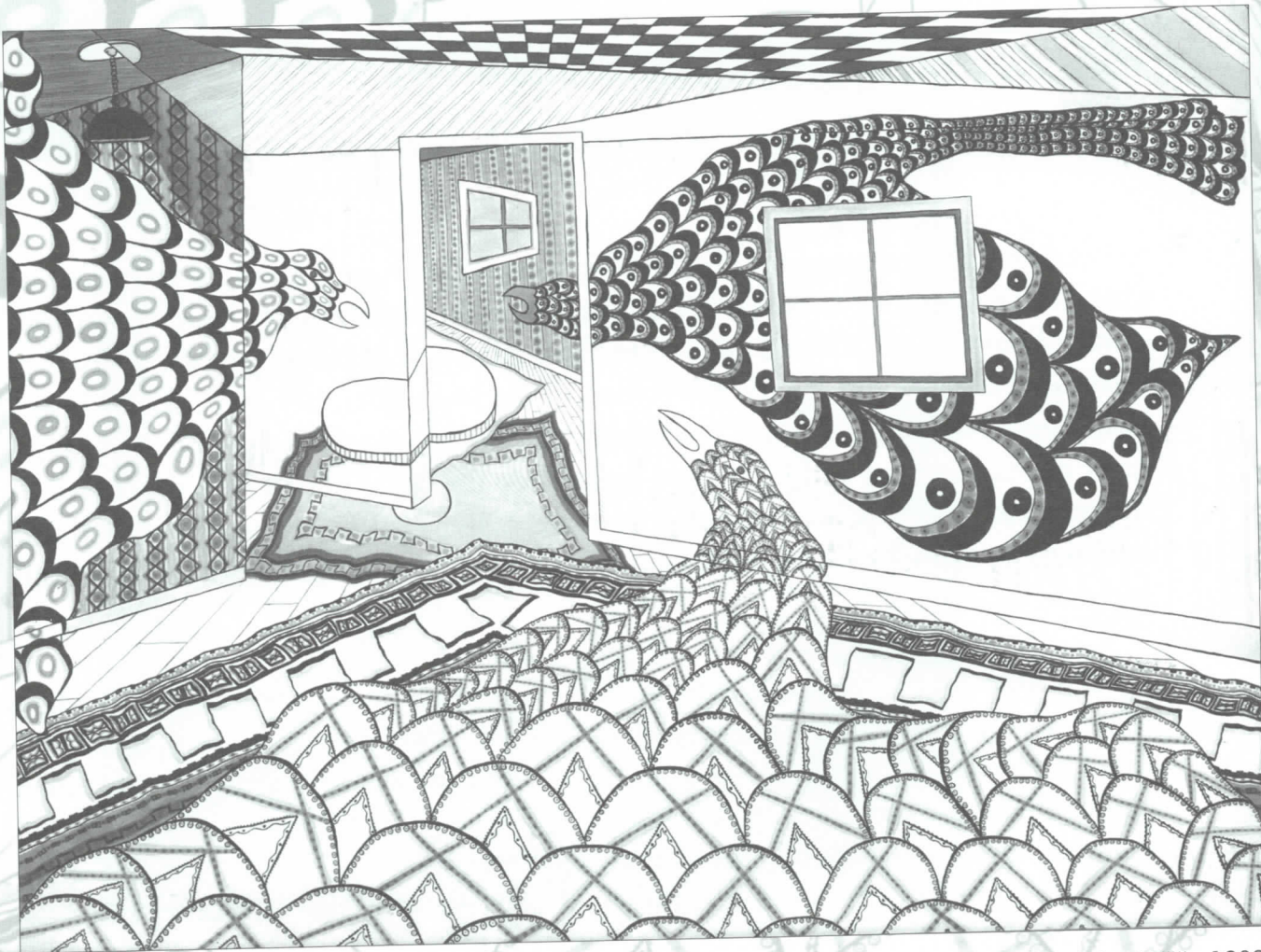
For Callner, however, Lilith and her sisters Artemis and Pandora were not characters to illustrate so much as inspirations for a certain kind of imagination and a way of painting. The female figures in these paintings are never passive, fleshy odalisques lazing about for the delectation of the male gaze; they are curiously busy – long-legged, slender, sinuous silhouettes, who run, fly, and dance; they shift shape, grow multiple breasts and limbs, and metaphorphize into animals. It is this active, unpredictable spirit of invention that animates Callner's painting not only in its otherworldly imagery but in its material dimension – in the teeming, swirling, pulsating surfaces.

Other artists were captivated by the female figure in the 1960s. Andy Warhol's Marilyn, Roy Lichtenstein's distraught comic book heroines, Tom Wesselman's *Great American Nude*, and Richard Lindner's amazons, are some of the decades most powerful icons. Some of these verge on pornography – Mel Ramos's pin-ups, for example. Others, like John Wesley, veered toward a Pop-inflected erotic surrealism. Pop Art's ambivalent embrace of movies and advertising certainly influenced this

development, as no doubt, did the new mood of sexual freedom that swept the 60s culture. So while many of Callner's references were to things antique, in his approach to the erotic as a gateway to new imaginative possibilities he is very much of his time.

Times change, however, and one of the changes that came along in the 70s and collided with the sexy girl artists of the 60s was feminism. Paintings open to accusations of sexism began to disappear from the artworld. One might wonder to what degree if any this accounts for the disappearance of Lillith and her sisters from Callner's paintings in the mid-70s. But another explanation is suggested by one of the artist's most intriguing works, a large ink drawing from 1980 called *Three Birds in Search of Lilith*.

Drawn in bold black lines, *Three Birds in Search of Lilith* is a dream-like picture of three giant, luxuriantly feathered birds swooping into a mysterious, empty, oddly skewed room with richly patterned walls. As though in a vision from



No. 15 *Three Birds in Search of Lilith*, 1980

The Arabian Nights, doorways open up to rooms further back, implying a warren of hallways continuing to unknown distances. Strangely, the birds are not flying freely through the air; rather, they have merged into the floors and walls, as though they'd been projected there or hallucinated. The paradoxical conflation of figure and ground is a typically delightful Callnerism, but it is also a clue to Lilith's whereabouts. A prosaically minded visitor searching for Lilith would wander through ever-receding hallways and empty rooms and never find her because, as the birds know, she has left her body and blended into the fabric of space and time.

So while the change from figurative imagery to interiors, still-lives and landscapes is the most visible development, what happened might better be termed a shift from paganism to pantheism – from psychic energies personified to a world animated through and through by spiritual energies. In some of his landscapes, Callner has slyly feminized topographical features like lakes and mountains, invoking the age-old trope of landscape as woman's body. Pictures of chambers richly decorated by Oriental rugs and containing altar-like arrangements of vases and bottles have a haunted air, tilted walls and floors, trapezoidal windows and undulating carpets seem to reverberate in response to an unseen presence. In more recent, abstract work, that animating spirit inhabits the elements of painting itself, generating a kaleidoscopic jazz dance of color, shape and line.

Do such unseen presences really exist in the world? Some great minds have thought so – William Blake, William Butler Yeats and Carl Jung, to mention just three. Most of us today, indoctrinated in the beliefs of modern, empirical science, would view them as fantasy, relegating the mystical to the realm of entertainment, the stuff of Hollywood movies. And so contemporary prejudice would view Callner's art as a whimsical diversion from reality.

But what is reality if not the product of collective imagination? And not just one collective imagination but many, a plurality of imaginations dreaming a multiplicity of realities, many in murderous competition with all the others. This particular world we inhabit – the world of modern America – is no less haunted by ghostly presences than Callner's: the presences of power, competition, speed, money, greed, cruelty and guilt. It's a man's world, some might say, where might makes right, where abstract certainties trump intuitions and sensuous pleasures, where sex is hard and fast rather than blurry, soft and lingering. It's not Lilith's world, but Callner has been in touch with her and in his own valiant way he has made a place for her. So if you want to know where's Lilith, look no further than the surface – she's right there hiding in plain sight.



No. 13 *Parade to Heaven or Hell*, 1973

Richard Callner: Artist and Mythmaker

Tammis K. Groft

Awareness of all experience is to be savored. Anything that is savored is precious enough to be translated into art.

Richard Callner

To spend an afternoon, a day, or a lifetime with Richard Callner is to savor his intellect, his passion for art, and his wonderful sense of self and humor.

Callner's journey through life has taken him from the gritty streets of Chicago, to the sunny hillsides of southern France, the interiors of Japanese temples, the fields of Yugoslavia, the olive groves of Spain, and the mountains and waterways of New York's Hudson Valley. Callner's visual world features a plethora of monsters, mythological figures, magical interior rooms with changing perspectives, sensuous still lifes, mysterious portraits, vivid landscapes – both real and fanciful – and, more recently, after a lifetime of study, masterful abstractions of ideas. While the narrative quality of his artwork is always present, more often than not it is shrouded in luxurious colors woven together with intricate lines and patterns.

A 50-year retrospective exhibition is a momentous achievement for any artist. The Albany Institute of History & Art is very proud to present this exhibition highlighting the life and work of Richard Callner, an artist and mythmaker. The exhibition includes 54 major works from 1957 to the present, with over half the works dating from the past 10 years. Callner's mature work begins with a series of dark monster figures, which emerged from his experiences during the Depression. With the discovery of the Goddess "Lilith" in the early 1960s, Callner embarked on a 10-year journey into the mythological world. By the early

1980s, the mythological figures receded as Callner turned his attention to creating interior and exterior views, still lifes, landscapes, and abstractions using his mastery of color, line, and pattern. Also included in the exhibition, but not in the catalogue, is a selection of over 50 prints, drawings, and color studies that provide insight into his artistic ideas and working methods.

In 1988 a 30-year retrospective exhibition, curated by Marijo Dougherty, was held at the University Art Museum at the State University of New York at Albany. This exhibition established Callner as the preeminent painter in the region according to Albany critic Timothy Cahill.¹ In that same year, clearly a high point in his artistic career, Callner was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. When queried in 1996 by *Times Union* reporter Frances Ingraham about whether he ever felt sorry for himself, his reply was characteristically short and to the point. "Feeling sorry for myself would be a waste of time, when I could be painting."² Although the disease has undoubtedly affected his life, it has not interfered with his passion for painting and life. In a *New York Times* review of his 2001 exhibition at the Monique Goldstrom Gallery in New York City, art critic Grace Glueck writes "Freedom reigns. At 75, his possibilities seem wide open."³

Callner was born on May 18, 1927. Both sets of his grandparents immigrated to the United States from the same small village in Lithuania and settled in the Midwest during the late nineteenth century. When Callner was four years old his parents moved to Chicago, where he spent his early childhood during the Depression living in a working class neighborhood with his brother, Jerry, who became a filmmaker. Big for his age and shy as a child, Callner avoided the street gangs in his neighborhood, and preferred to stay inside and draw.⁴ Callner attributes his early visits to the Field Museum of Natural History as having a strong influence on his early monster paintings. Another favorite museum was the Art Institute of Chicago, where Callner later took drawing classes.

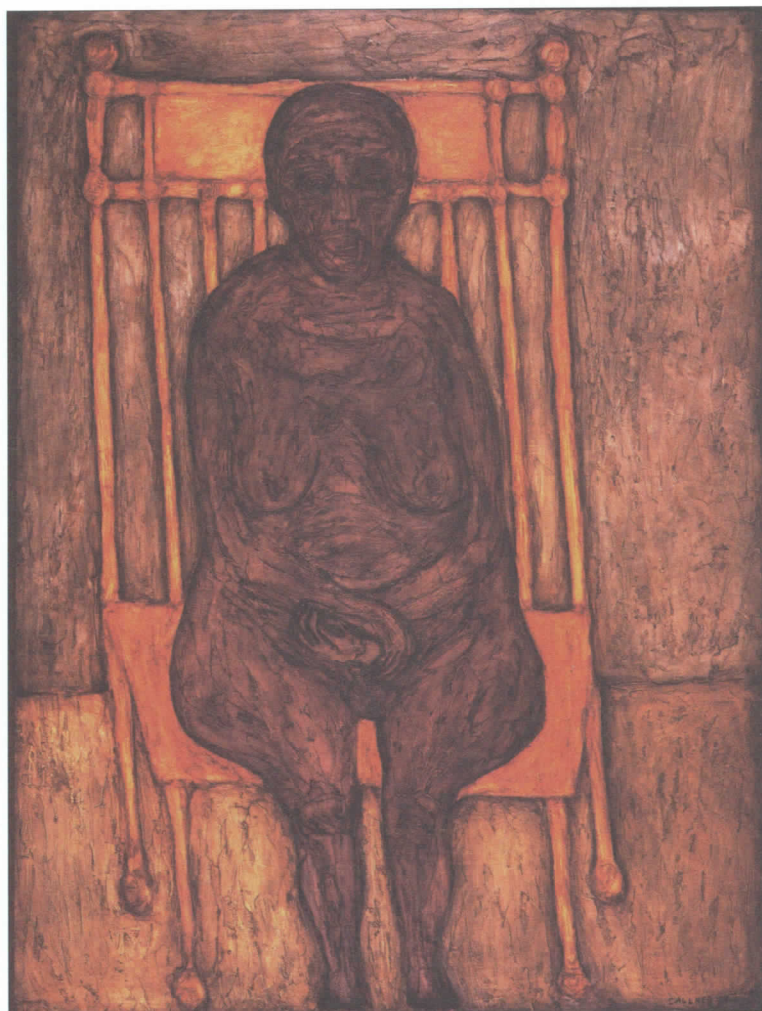
At age 17, Callner dropped out of school and joined the Navy during World War II. His strongest memory from this period is sitting on a ship in the middle of the ocean observing the formation of clouds, the rising and setting of the sun and moon, and most of all the changing weather, an experience that provided ideas for later landscape paintings. After leaving the Navy in 1946, his first formal study of art began in 1946-48 through the G.I. Bill at the University of Wisconsin, Madison under the direction and guidance of printmaker Warrington Colescott, who remains

a close friend. Callner, who was making abstract sculpture at the time, also studied painting, printmaking, drawing, ceramics and jewelry-making.

From Wisconsin Callner moved to Paris and he studied art at the Académie Julian, also through the G.I. Bill. Callner returned to Wisconsin for a year before moving to New York City to study at the Art Student's League. In 1952 he was awarded a M.F.A. degree from Columbia University. A John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship enabled Callner to travel in England and France from 1959-1960 with his family including his wife Carolyn, and two

young children. (Today, Carolyn, is Deputy Commissioner of Public Health in Schenectady. Son David, a writer, translator, and English teacher, lives in a rural village in Japan with his wife and two children. Daughter Joanna is an attorney living in Olympia, Washington.) Although he received a rigorous and formal art education, his life and work have been greatly influenced by his family and cadre of friends including Raymond Benson and David Castillejo along with a whole host of poets, intellectuals, musicians, and artists Ted Halkin of Chicago and Byron Browne of New York. Other opportunities included a Fulbright professorship in Yugoslavia and residencies in Finland, Hungary, Turkey, and Russia.

In 1952 Callner began his long and distinguished teaching career at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana where he remained until 1959. He taught at



No. 2 *Seated Woman or Eve*, 1957





No. 5 *Tyson's Auction*, 1963

Olivet College in Olivet, Michigan from 1960-1964. In 1964-1965 Callner taught at the Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia. A year later he moved to Italy for five years and served as the founding director of the Tyler School of Art in Rome. In 1975 Callner came to Albany to head the art department for the State University of New York at Albany, a position he held until 1981. Callner played a pivotal role in the establishment of the university's M.F.A. program in 1977. Callner continued to teach graduate level courses until he retired in 1991.

After retirement, Callner built a spacious, light-filled studio and devoted his energies to creating art full time. His studio space, 30 feet long by 20 feet wide and 16 feet high, is connected to his home. For about 10 years the only light in the studio came from eight 4-foot by 8-foot clerestory windows, high pitched to take advantage of the northern light, and two sets of French-style glass doors over-looking Shaker Creek. Later, Callner added some additional track lighting for dark days and night work. Upon entering his studio one is immediately transported to Callner's world. Drawings and color sketches are pinned on the stark white walls in an orderly fashion, palettes rest on shelves, and there are at least three paintings standing on easels in various stages of completion. But the most striking display is the 200 or so paint brushes standing upright like flower stems with soft petals in specially designed wood block holders made by close friend and sculptor Hugh Townley.

Callner has an impressive roster of one person and group exhibitions in this country and around the world to his credit. In fact, friends muse that Callner is better known abroad than in the United States. His works are in many prestigious private and public collections including the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia; Museum of Painting and Sculpture, Istanbul; the Gallery of Modern Art, Pristina, Yugoslavia; the Albany Institute of History & Art, the Art Institute of Chicago; The Detroit Institute of Arts; the Philadelphia Museum of Art; the New York Public Library; Yale University Art Gallery; Cincinnati Art Museum; Worcester Art Museum; and the University Art Museum, State University of New York at Albany.

Although Callner began his career as an abstractionist, the earliest mature work included in this retrospective exhibition dates from 1957-1963. His paintings from this period are often described as being on the "edge of the Chicago Monster School" in part because of the imagery of grotesque men, women, and animals. The Chicago Monster School traces its roots to artists such as Leon Golub and Ted Halkin who were working in Chicago in the early 1950s. Like Callner, these artists often cite the collections of ethnographic artifacts in the Field Museum of Natural History as hav-

ing a strong influence on their art along with classic European Surrealism.⁵ Yet Callner's work, with its distinctive palette of muted browns, greens, and gold and richly textured surfaces, is not derived from the same set of regional sensibilities. Instead Callner's subject matter and painting style are drawn from within and derived from his personal life experiences and ideas.

Callner often refers to these early works as his "Dark Paintings." He describes the figures as "fat adults with weak hands and feet, showing a power that was somehow incomplete." In *Meal* (1957), Callner characterizes the people as being brutish and unable to sustain strong relationships.⁶ They are all ominous figures, nonetheless. They were significant paintings for Callner because the images were "a form of absolute truth. They told me I could execute an idea and that the image belonged only to me."⁷ In retrospect, Callner now says that these paintings are related to his feelings about the horrors of war, post-war depression, and frustration with people in power.

Early titles for some of these paintings provide direct narrative links to the Bible. For example, *Fat Man* (1957) was once entitled *Adam*, while *Seated Woman* (1957) was first called *Eve*; and *Meal* (1957) was formerly known as *The Last Supper*. According to Callner, "the changes in titles years later does not reflect a change of heart, but are simply more descriptive, the fat man is still Adam."⁸

For Callner these grotesque figures also reveal the greedy side of human nature, a theme Callner expands on in *Tyson's Auction* (1963). "At Olivet, the banker Tyson was dying upstairs in his home while they were auctioning his possessions on the ground floor. I found this horrendous, and did an etching and a painting showing the auctioneer as a monster and the purchasers as demons."⁹ The central image in the painting is a large open mouth with a menacing toothy grin. It is not clear whether it is a man or woman. Above the mouth are two bright eyes surrounded by a poignant tapestry of collage images related to Mr. Tyson's life. A picture of a clock symbolizes that time has run out. Images of a shoe, a fork, and a sewing machine speak to aspects of every day life. A print of a woman with curls along with a photograph of a dresser top filled with framed family photographs show evidence of a life filled with memories. These images of life are interspersed with messages such as "sold" or "\$1."

Callner almost always begins a painting by making a series of preliminary drawings and watercolor sketches before creating a larger preliminary sketch and – if it works – a final painting. This method of working remained fairly constant



No. 7 *Lilith as Artemis of Ephesus Creating the Garden of Eden*, 1966

throughout his career as evidenced by the thousands of drawings he keeps in his studio. To create the richly textured surfaces of the early paintings Callner began with a sheet of untempered masonite and painted at least six layers of underpainting white and sanded the surfaces in between. Callner added fine sand or marble dust to give more body to his paint. The textures and dark, rich colors were created by adding a series of glazes to the surface of the painting.

After 10 years of creating dark, somber paintings filled with anger and rage, Callner embraced a new mythological figure he called Lilith, which gave birth to a body of imagery that focused on freedom, humor, and independence and an entirely new color palette. Callner concludes that the new palette was a direct result of his stay in France during his Guggenheim Fellowship. "The light in southern France shattered my vision of color, which until then had been dark and gray and it took me

some time to embrace my new vision of color.”¹⁰ Also important to the new direction of his imagery and palette was his stay in England where he spent time studying the repetitive patterns, and decorative qualities of illuminated medieval manuscripts. “With the Lilith paintings, Callner’s style shifted to one of refinement and elegance of form. He began to include highly detailed surfaces, clearly outlined shapes, and brighter colors, features that are still characteristic of his work today,” writes art historian Roberta Bernstein.¹¹

According to Callner, the Lilith image began appearing in his work before he realized who the mythological creature was. “Lilith was an amazing creature: beautiful, intelligent, strong, and open to change and adventure.”¹² For Callner she was feminine, independent, and irreverent. She also had the ability to invoke and control evil and was a master of transformation. Of Lilith Callner writes: “She was the angel that brought Adam to paradise, was Adam’s first wife, Satan’s wife, a medieval destroyer of children, and is said to have created an alternative line of children in opposition to the begotten of Adam and Eve”.¹³ In the Hebrew myth, (there are many variations) Lilith was created from the same dust as Adam and she demanded to be treated equally. After Lilith left the Garden of Eden, God created Eve who was subservient to Adam. It is important to note that Callner’s Lilith is not the Lilith of the Jewish tradition or the Lilith of the feminist movement, but instead Callner, as mythmaker, created his own version of the story of the goddess Lilith for his paintings and combined her with other mythological figures.

In the painting, *Lilith as Artemis of Ephesus Creating the Garden of Eden* (1966), Lilith appears as her sister Artemis, and is depicted with multiple breasts and wings. A small egg tempera painting on a medieval music score in the music library of the Cathedral of Siena inspired this image of Lilith. Here she is portrayed as sitting on the moon and giving birth to a tree bearing fruit. Adam, depicted here as a bird, is attracted to them both.¹⁴ Callner considers this to be “one of the most passionate paintings I have done.” It is an important picture because it represents a “technical break away from heavy impasto oil to thin direct painting with some glazes. From this point on my paintings were executed with very thin glazes of semi-opaque and translucent glazes of color over a thinly prepared ground of lead white. When dry they present a rich luminous surface that is technically very safe.”¹⁵ This complexity will become more and more prominent over the years.

In *Lilith Metamorphosis* (1973) or *Lilith Leaving Eden*, Lilith, though still in the Garden of Eden, is getting ready to leave as she grows wings laden with jewels.



No. 11 *Marriage of Lilith or Lilith Metamorphosis or Lilith Transformed*, 1973



No. 8 Heaven, Purgatory,
Hell, and Two Limbos, 1967

According to the myth, she is also becoming more beautiful and sensual as she prepares to leave and marry Satan. In this painting Lilith is surrounded by screaming birds, which represent angels, telling her not to go. In *Marriage of Lilith* (1973), Lilith has grown a full set of bejeweled wings with multiple strings of pearls, and is shown marrying the devil. The devil's head is shown in profile on either side of Lilith's head and her outer wings appear to take the form of the devil's hands. Here Lilith stands on a globe representing the earth and the devil's legs appear on either side of a shield-like circle, which protects the devil standing on the moon. In *Three Birds Searching for Lilith* (1980) Lilith has transformed herself into the interior architecture and the birds sent by God to find her cannot see her.

In a polyptych, called, *Heaven, Purgatory, Hell, and Two Limbos* (1967), the top main panel includes a double figure suspended below a bird with two heads. On either side are pairs of flying figures draped over two bulls, representations of Europa, standing on blue striped clouds. The middle panel features the soul of Lilith in the center with Lilith as Argos having multiple eyes on the left and Lilith as provocateur in blue on the right. The bottom panel shows Lilith battling Adam. One limbo scene shows suburbia the other shows food. According to Callner, these can be hung in any order. The one at the bottom will always be Hell, the one at the top - Heaven, and purgatory and the two limbos in between. *Parade to Heaven or Hell: Depending on Which Way You Are Going* (1973), includes the people and creatures of the world such as birds, demons and centaurs, some carry banners and flags while others ride bulls or scooters, all moving counter-clockwise. Perhaps Callner's favorite figure is the art historian who carries a flag in the center, because she is propelled by a stream of yellow gas. The center of the painting is Hell, and the lower half is Lilith's garden where Lilith's face is hidden in the lower left.¹⁶

During the 1980s Callner's subject matter shifted to include landscapes, interior and exterior views, still lifes, and portraits. These striking new works featured strong colors and extravagant lines and patterns, which created penetrating, and often-distorted perspectives. Until this time, Callner's preferred medium was oil on canvas, but with these new pictures he enthusiastically embraced new materials including a unique overlay of watercolor and gouache on paper which helped him to achieve stunning color combinations that appear to vibrate across the surface of the paintings. Although Callner has a traditional approach to using watercolors, quality paper, brushes, and colors, he also advises one to "break as many rules as suits your imagery." Callner favored this new medium because it enabled him to work faster and produce more work.



No. 20 *Separate Views/Spain*, 1987

Callner's distinctive interior rooms are chock full of complex and contradictory perspectives. What may appear at first to be a window overlooking a landscape may also be a painting hanging on the wall or a mirror reflecting another wall. Many of these rooms contain distinctive vases, a selection of fruit or flowers on tabletops covered with patterned cloths, and curtains with tiebacks framing windows. The walls are covered with decorative wallpapers, the floors and ceilings are covered with painted patterns, and multiple tapestries and carpets drape the floors and walls. It is interesting to note the absence of chairs and figures in these rooms. Callner likes to infer that someone has either just left or is about to enter the space. He achieves this by creating movement or action in the carpets. Who are these mysterious people? Are they inhabitants or voyeurs or both?



No. 19 *Interior with Six Vases*, 1985



No. 21 *Red Mountain with Two Vases*, 1987

For example, in *Separate Views/Spain* (1987), the blue carpet in the foreground appears to have just been walked on. According to Callner, "It is impossible to see both sides of the room at the same time. So you are dealing with two separate realities at the same time." *Still Life with Four Tables* (1983), include a large array of overlapping carpets, some inspired by Turkish prayer rugs. Callner's *Interior with Six Vases* (1985), features rather sensual vases. For Callner these vases are female vessels that provide a counter point to his suggestive tables. This painting also depicts the distinctive flowers that resemble the erect brushes populating his studio. Another recurring element from this period are the opulent and curvaceous curtains resembling a woman's body tied at the waist with a large ribbon as seen in *Red Mountain with Two Vases* (1987). Many of these interiors still have images of Lilith, such as *Altar* (1980). In this painting, inspired by the architecture of Buddhist temples in Japan, Callner has created three separate rooms. The room farthest away includes an image of Lilith as a beautiful bird woven in a tapestry.

Callner's landscape paintings are clearly influenced by time spent in Yugoslavia, Spain, Russia, Japan, Turkey and the Hudson Valley. The ordered fields of Yugoslavia between Novisad and Belgrade stimulated the first landscapes series. The brightly colored stylized lollipop trees marching from hillside to hillside are certainly reminiscent of the enchanting Yugoslavian folk art paintings from this period. Landscapes featuring the distinctive olive orchards near Granada, the hills surrounding Madrid, and the distinctive red Spanish Mountains soon followed suit. Another series includes the bright yellow fields of rape in England. At some point, Callner admits, he began to combine elements from all of these landscapes in his paintings.

Callner attributes his carpet-like landscape as a visual gift from Van Gogh. Adding that he was absorbed with Van Gogh's ability to manipulate productive fields based on one point perspective, as a brilliant device, which gave meaning and an easily understood solution for a problem of penetrating space.¹⁷ The brilliant colors and one point perspective in *Red Fields, East of Madrid* (1988) is an excellent example of how Callner has mastered the problem of penetrating space.

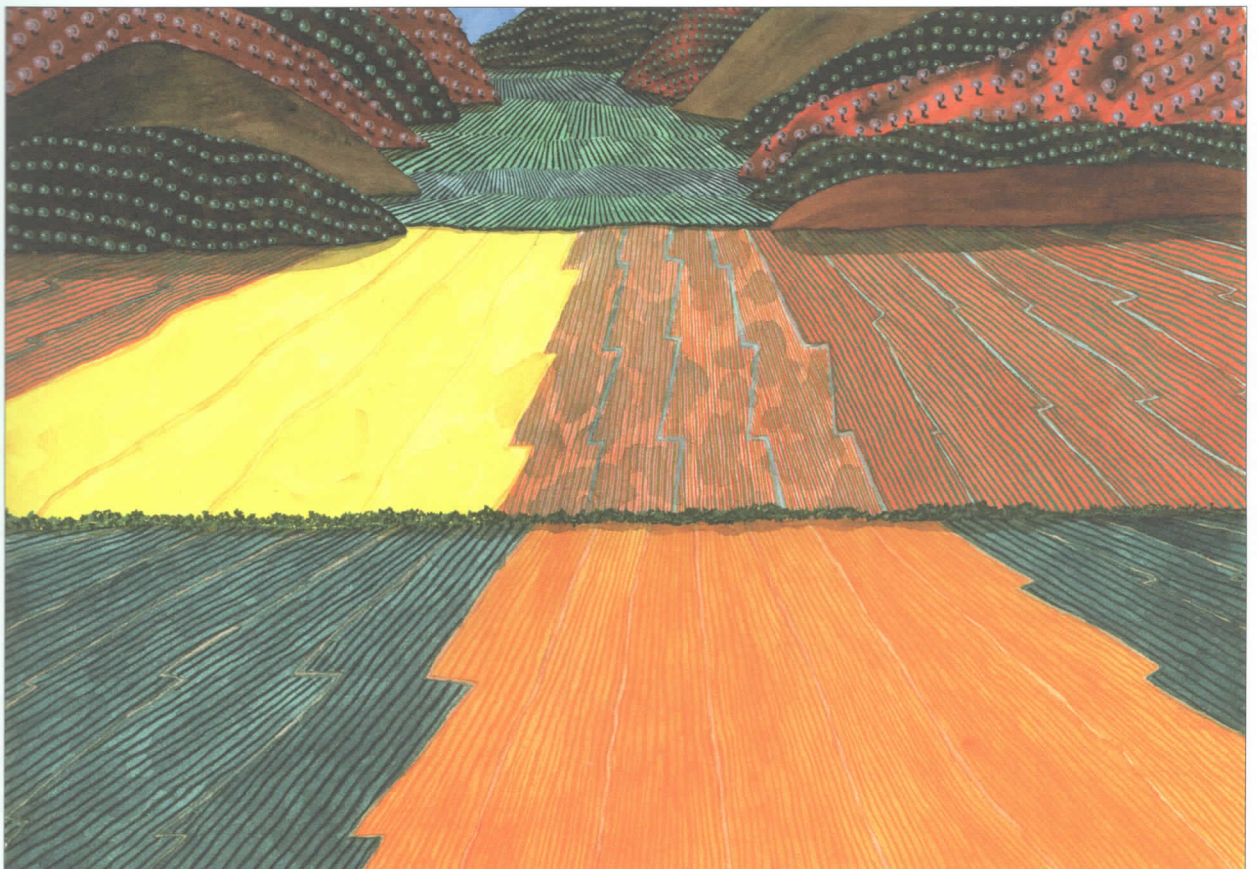
After years of painting the landscapes of Europe, Callner turned to the waterways and mountains of the Hudson Valley and Adirondacks. "It hadn't occurred to me before, but shortly after that we went out in a boat on the Hudson and I did some drawings and that started it all, I found that the landscape had a tremendous range of lush imagery and very subtle color and a particular abstract pattern between the trapped water and, the fields and mountains. I hadn't seen the attitude that water had here in Europe; here it has a sense of its own energy."¹⁸ In *Hudson River North of Catskill* (1987), Callner depicts the river in a familiar manner, much like the body of a woman with a mountain in the background.



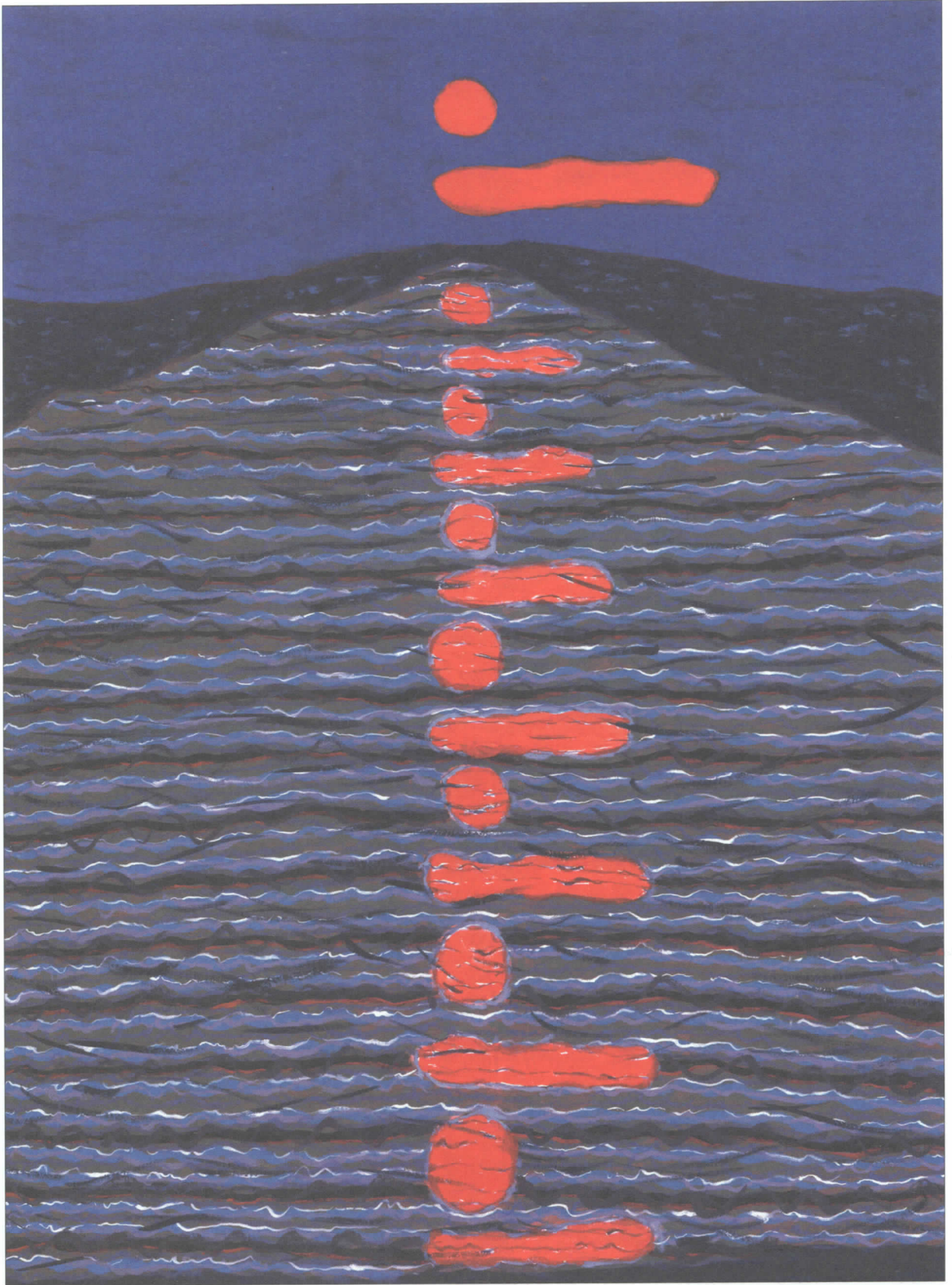
No. 16 *Altar*, 1980



No. 24 *Hudson River North of Catskill*, 1987



No. 25 *Red Fields, East of Madrid*, 1988



No. 28 *Red Moon*, 1993



No. 29 *Pink Sky*, 1995

Another interesting body of work is Callner's series of red moon paintings. Pinned to his studio walls are two striking posters showing the different phases of the moon over a year's time. While white moons are too mundane for Callner, blue moons and red moons appear frequently in his paintings. He uses these moons to light his landscapes. In *Red Moon* (1993), the red moons refer to a cycle and were inspired by the German artist, Lucas Cranach's (1472-1553) series of paintings depicting women surrounded by moons. This painting has a wonderful rich surface texture giving it a soft painterly quality.

Callner's fascination with water began in the 1990s and brought forth a new and dramatic subject, images of waves, and falling water. Water flows up, down, over, and around in these pictures which employ Callner's characteristic and luxurious accumulation of white upon white dashes and dots and spots to create the illusion of splash and spray of water. In *Oriental Window/Wave* (1997) the water leaps from one side of the painting to the other stopped only by the curtain on the left and the patterned border surrounding the outside of the painting.

More recently, with his Parkinson's disease progressing steadily, Callner has again, embarked in another direction. His new paintings are as innovative and exciting as anything that has come before. Admittedly, his brush strokes are broader, his color fields are larger, and his subject matter more abstract, but his paintings continue to surprise and delight. According to Callner, his new work has a "wild and noisy attitude." Although these paintings may appear to be more simplistic, the complexity of the imagery, and the use of vibrant color and line are all Callner. Parkinson's disease has not slowed his work, nor his output or genius for painting.

For Callner, his paintings from the past 10 years are a sign of maturity. "To make mature art there has to be an element of freedom and sometimes these things can take 70 years to work out. I see the new work as being completely uninhibited. I am attacking an idea and I am trying to invent something about this idea."¹⁹

Callner likes to present himself with an idea and then conquer or master the idea in his painting. For example, to conquer the color yellow, he worked with five shades of yellow in one painting. While Callner's preferred colors are earth tones, over the years he has successfully mastered the full range of color and color combinations. Recently, it would appear that Callner wanted to master the color pink as there are a variety of paintings from the last several years with shades of pink as the predomi-



No. 31 *Oriental Window/Wave*, 1997



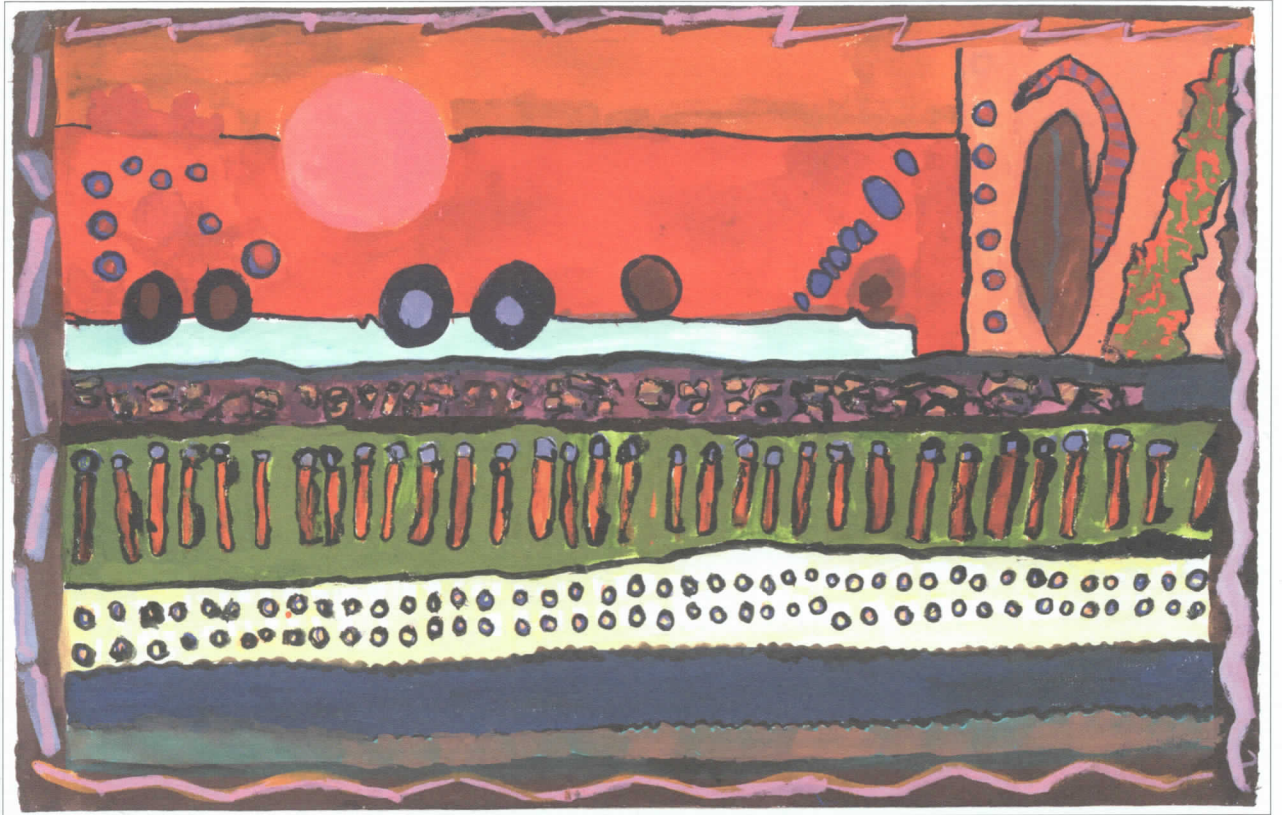
No. 34 *Pink Sky with Blue Clouds*, 1999

nate idea. One good example is *Pink Sky with Blue Clouds* (1998), a painting which was inspired by Matisse. In another painting, *Pink Sky* (1995), Callner's single idea was to explore flowered fields. Inspired by a French impressionistic landscape, he painted fast and loose to get a particular flamboyant brush stroke. As Callner's work moved even closer to pure abstraction, he was still conquering ideas. In the case of the painting *Cadmium Red Medium* (1998), the idea was trees. Over the years Callner has developed a variety of signature trees and in this rather aggressive painting he was determined not to make a Christmas tree.

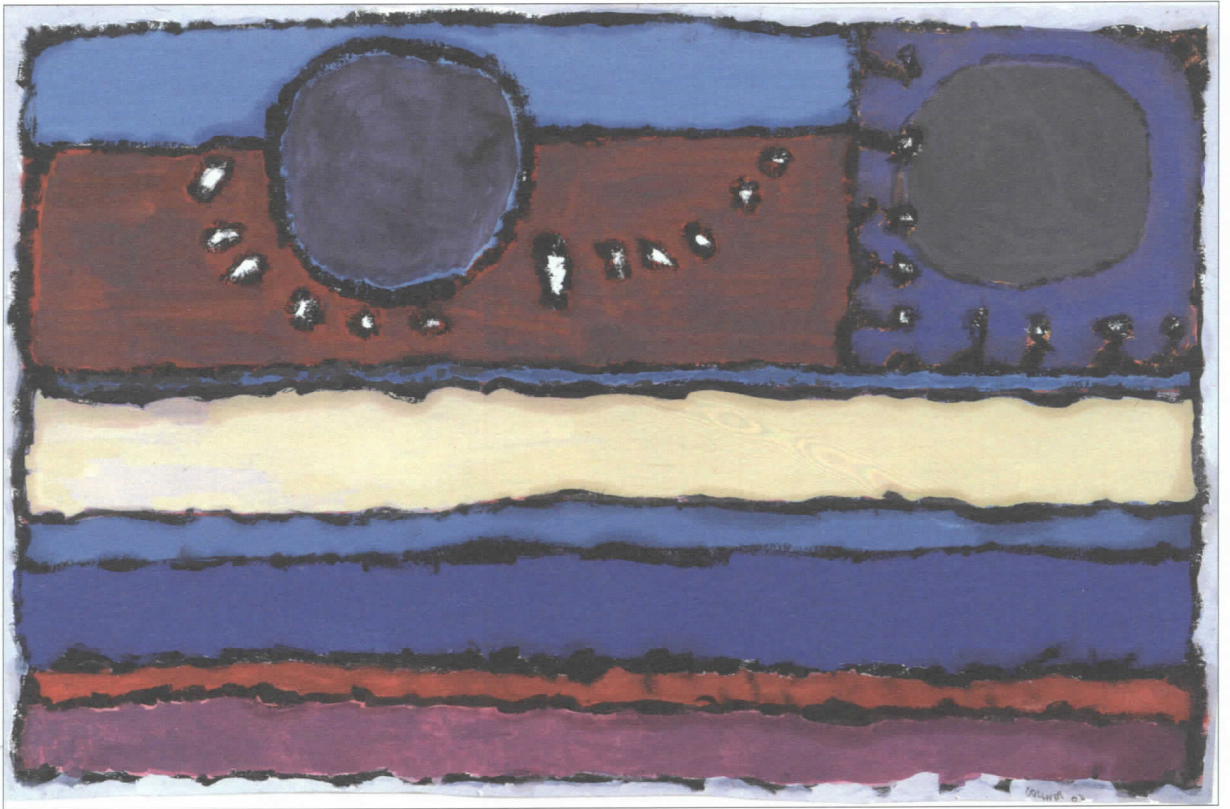
Callner considers *Premiere* (1999), to be one of his most important works because "it represents total freedom with color, imagery, and idea. It happened very fast. I did not make a preliminary study. For the first time I did not start with a series of drawings, a combination of images or a logical sequence of forms."²⁰ In *Twelve Shades of Blue* (2001), Callner's primary idea is abstract structures, particularly stairways. Whereas, freedom certainly reigns in paintings like *Dangerous Green* (2002) and *Swinging Red* (2002).

More recently Callner has begun to reintroduce some realistic imagery back into his paintings. In 2001 Callner did a series of paintings that at first seemed like rather large animal-like creatures. In *Fantasy* (2001), these figures look more like otherworld creatures or monsters marching through the painting. Another example is *Five Bands of Color* (2002), with its distinctive green border and dark shapes or figures looking out over an eerie landscape. Callner comments that, "demons and monsters live more comfortably with green." In, *Flag Forms I* (2002) and *Flag Forms II* (2002), Callner used rich and dreamy colors bordered by black lines. "They are very impulsive, and include sensuous imagery influenced by images from Eastern Europe and Spain."²¹

M. S. II (2002) is a significant work according Callner because "With this painting I finally did something I thought I would never do! I wanted to paint something very strong, totally abstract and with no suggestion of narrative. These are the goals I set for myself." Another important painting from the time is *Pink Seal* (2002) that Callner describes as being "very calm, feminine, not aggressive and well-conceived in abstract thought, and it only took two days to paint."²²



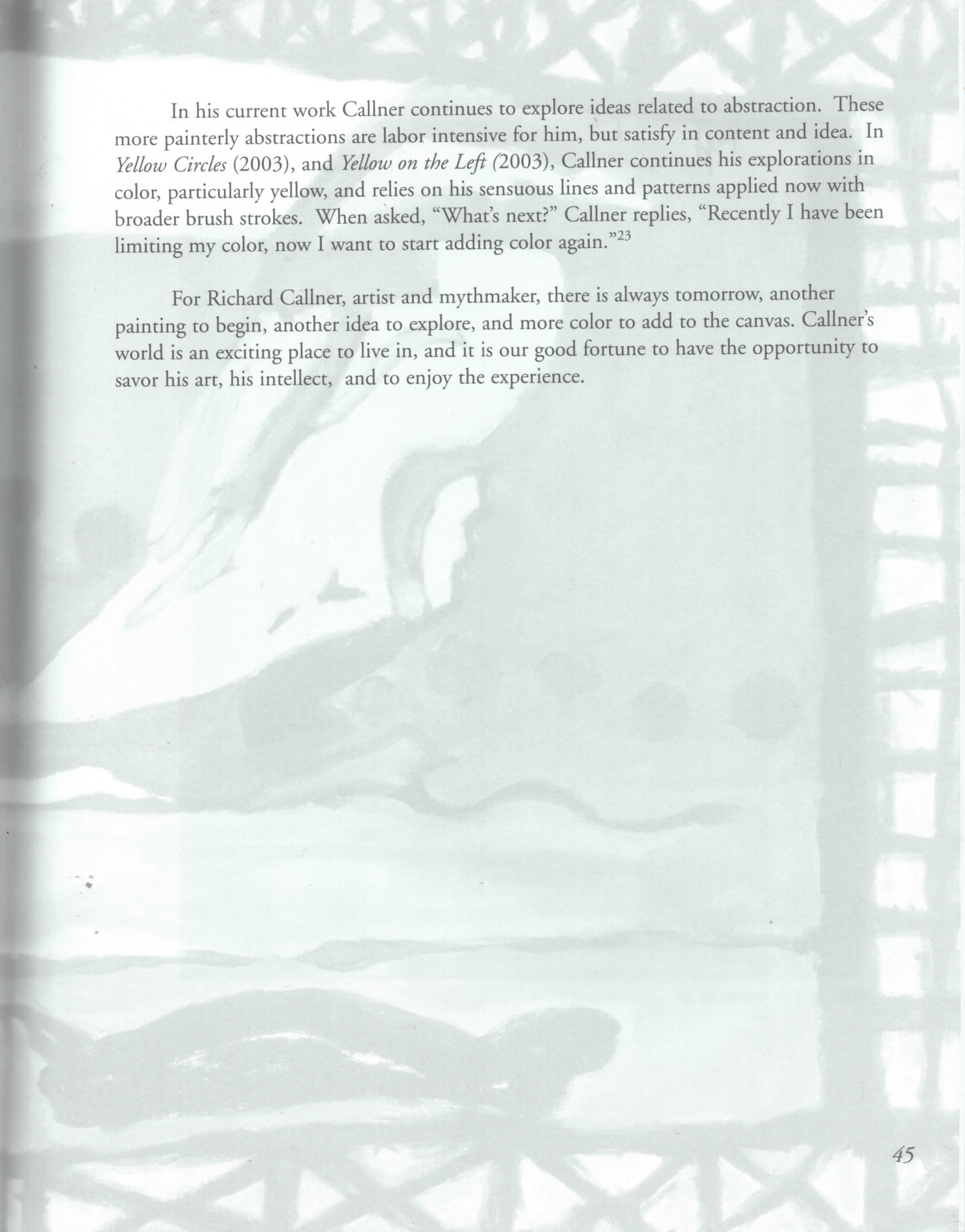
No. 49 *Flag Forms I*, 2002



No. 50 *Flag Forms II*, 2002



No. 42 *Five Bands of Color*, 2002



In his current work Callner continues to explore ideas related to abstraction. These more painterly abstractions are labor intensive for him, but satisfy in content and idea. In *Yellow Circles* (2003), and *Yellow on the Left* (2003), Callner continues his explorations in color, particularly yellow, and relies on his sensuous lines and patterns applied now with broader brush strokes. When asked, "What's next?" Callner replies, "Recently I have been limiting my color, now I want to start adding color again."²³

For Richard Callner, artist and mythmaker, there is always tomorrow, another painting to begin, another idea to explore, and more color to add to the canvas. Callner's world is an exciting place to live in, and it is our good fortune to have the opportunity to savor his art, his intellect, and to enjoy the experience.



No. 54 *Yellow on the Left*, 2003



No. 53 *Yellow Circles*, 2003



No. 37 *Premiere*, 1999

- 1 Timothy Cahill, *Times Union*, April 5, 1998
- 2 Frances Ingraham, *Times Union*, June 16, 1996
- 3 Grace Gluck, *The New York Times*, October 19, 2001
- 4 Ken Johnson, "The Fantastic World of Richard Callner", *Hudson Valley*, February, 1990
- 5 Edward Lucie-Smith, *American Art Now*, New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1985. pp. 122-123
- 6 David Castillejo, unpublished manuscript, "A Guide to the Work," 1988, p. 23
- 7 *Ibid.* p. 23
- 8 Author interview with Richard Callner, February 14, 2003
- 9 *Op. Cit.*, Castillejo, p. 52
- 10 *Op. Cit.*, interview with author
- 11 Roberta Bernstein. "Richard Callner", *Albany Institute of History & Art: 200 Years of Collecting*, New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1997, p.146
- 12 Marijo Dougherty, ed., *Richard Callner: Selected Works: 1957-1988*, Albany: University Art Gallery, University at Albany, State University of New York, 1988, p. 22
- 13 Richard Callner, *Richard Callner*, Albany: University Art Gallery, State University of New York of Albany, 1977
- 14 *Op. Cit.*, Castillejo, p. 86
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 *Op. Cit.*, Interview with author
- 17 *Op. Cit.*, Castillejo, p. 199
- 18 Ken Johnson, *Op. Cit.*, p. 84
- 19 *Op. Cit.*, Interview with author
- 20 *Ibid.*
- 21 *Ibid.*
- 22 *Ibid.*
- 23 *Ibid.*

Exhibition Checklist

1. *Fat Man or Adam*
1957
oil on masonite
48 x 36
Collection of the Artist
2. *Seated Woman or Eve*
1957
oil on masonite
48 x 36
Collection of the Artist
3. *Meal or The Last Supper*
1957
oil on masonite
36 x 48
Collection of the Artist
4. *Romulus and Remus*
1963
oil on linen
37 3/4 x 47 3/8
Collection of the Artist
5. *Tyson's Auction*
1963
oil on linen
48 x 64
Collection of the Artist
6. *Birth of Venus*
1963
oil on linen
48 1/4 x 36
Collection of the Artist
7. *Lilith as Artemis of Ephesus Creating the Garden of Eden*
1966
oil on linen
39 1/2 x 39 1/2
Collection of Raymond and Shirley Benson
8. *Heaven Purgatory, Hell, and Two Limbos*
1967
oil on linen
60 x 28, polyptych
Collection of the Artist
9. *Lilith Mirror*
1968
oil on linen
37 1/2 x 26 1/4
Collection of the Artist
10. *Lilith Metamorphosis or Lilith Leaving Eden*
1973
oil on linen
48 1/4 x 40
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Liddle III
11. *Marriage of Lilith or Lilith Metamorphosis or Lilith Transformed*
1973
oil on linen
24 x 22
Collection of the Artist
12. *Lilith Island*
1973
oil on linen
40 1/4 x 42
Collection of the Artist
13. *Parade to Heaven or Hell, Depending on Which Way You Are Going*
1973
oil on linen
44 x 40 1/4
Collection of Raymond and Shirley Benson
14. *Group*
1975
oil on linen
36 x 42
Collection of the Artist
15. *Three Birds in Search of Lilith*
1980
Sumi ink on paper
33 3/8 x 45 1/2
Collection of the Artist
16. *Altar*
1980
watercolor and gouache on paper
30 x 22 1/2
Collection of Carolyn Callner
17. *Still Life with Four Tables*
1983
watercolor and gouache on paper
30 1/2 x 40
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Maurer
18. *Interior*
1984
watercolor and gouache on paper
29 x 39
Collection of Dr. Igal and Bonnie Zuravicky
19. *Interior with Six Vases*
1985
watercolor and gouache on paper
25 x 40
Private Collection

20. *Separate Views/Spain*
1987
watercolor and gouache on paper
29 1/2 x 42
Collection of Dr. Harvey and Joan Friedman
21. *Red Mountain with Two Vases*
1987
watercolor and gouache on paper
25 x 40
Collection of the Artist
22. *Hudson River Interior*
1987
watercolor and gouache on paper
30 x 23
Collection of Geoffrey S. Bullard
23. *Hudson River, View from the "Old Friend"*
1987
watercolor and gouache on paper
40 3/4 x 25 3/8
Collection of Marijo Dougherty and Norman Bauman
24. *Hudson River North of Catskill*
1987
watercolor and gouache on paper
29 1/2 x 42
Collection of the Albany Institute of History & Art
25. *Red Fields, East of Madrid*
1988
watercolor and gouache on paper
29 1/2 x 42
Collection of the Albany Institute of History & Art
26. *Red Fields in Spain*
1986
watercolor and gouache on paper
25 x 40
Collection of the Artist
27. *Mountain View*
1991
oil on linen
43 x 111, triptych
Collection of the Artist
28. *Red Moon*
1993
oil on linen
40 x 30
Collection of H. Patrick and Sonia Swyger
29. *Pink Sky*
1995
oil on linen
48 x 54
Collection of the Artist
30. *Mt. Fuji*
1996
oil on linen
48 x 40
Collection of the Artist
31. *Oriental Window/Wave*
1997
oil on canvas
43 x 36
Collection of University Art Museum, State University of New York, Albany
Gift of the Florshiem Foundation
32. *Yellow Field*
1997
watercolor and gouache on paper
30 x 22 1/2
Collection of the Artist
33. *Blue Moon*
1997
watercolor and gouache on paper
28 1/2 x 43
Collection of the Artist
34. *Pink Sky with Blue Clouds*
1998
watercolor and gouache on paper
22 x 30
Collection of the Artist
35. *Cadmium Red Medium*
1998
watercolor and gouache on paper
40 5/8 x 25 3/8
Collection of the Artist
36. *Many Symbols*
1999
oil on linen
66 x 46
Collection of the Artist
37. *Premiere*
1999
watercolor and gouache on paper
39 x 70
Collection of the Artist
38. *Crete*
1999
watercolor and gouache on paper
40 x 90 1/2
Collection of the Artist
39. *The Yellow Painting*
2001
watercolor and gouache on paper
26 x 40 1/4
Collection of the Artist

40. *Twelve Shades of Blue*
2001
acrylic on paper
45 x 60
Collection of the Artist
41. *Fantasy*
2001
watercolor and gouache on paper
30 x 22
Collection of the Artist
42. *Five Bands of Color*
2002
oil on linen
36 x 48
Collection of the Artist
43. *Pink Seal*
2002
oil on linen
23 1/2 x 40
Collection of the Artist
44. *M.S. I*
2002
watercolor and gouache on paper
30 x 22 1/2
Collection of the Artist
45. *M. S. II*
2002
oil on linen
30 x 30
Collection of the Artist
46. *M.S. III*
2002
oil on linen
Collection of the Artist
47. *Dangerous Green*
2002
watercolor and gouache on paper
30 x 22
Collection of the Artist
48. *Swinging Red*
2002
watercolor and gouache on paper
22 1/2 x 30
Collection of the Artist
49. *Flag Forms I*
2002
watercolor and gouache on paper
26 x 40 1/2
Collection of the Artist
50. *Flag Forms II*
2002
watercolor and gouache on paper
22 1/2 x 34 1/4
Collection of the Artist
51. *Nine Plus Numbers*
2002
oil on linen
24 x 36
Collection of the Artist
52. *Medallions*
2002
oil on linen
48 x 36
Collection of the Artist
53. *Yellow Circles*
2003
oil on linen
40 x 32
Collection of the Artist
54. *Yellow on the Left*
2003
oil on linen
36 x 32
Collection of the Artist



No. 41 *Fantasy*, 2001



No. 47 *Dangerous Green*, 2002



No. 48 *Swinging Red*, 2002

Richard Callner

EDUCATION

University of Wisconsin, Madison, B.F.A., 1946-48
Academie Julian, Paris, Certificate, 1948-49
Columbia University, New York, M.F.A., 1952

1980 Cork Arts Society, County Cork, Ireland
1975 Bristol Museum, Bristol, Rhode Island
1974 National Academy of Science, Washington, D. C.
1970 Tyler School of Art, Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
1964 Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana

RETROSPECTIVE EXHIBITIONS

2003 *Richard Callner: 50 Year Retrospective Exhibition*, Albany Institute of History & Art, Albany New York
1997 *Richard Callner, A Retrospective Exhibition*, Bertha V. B. Lederer Gallery, State University of New York College of Geneseo, Geneseo, New York
1988 *Richard Callner: Thirty Year Retrospective*, University Art Museum, State University of New York at Albany, Albany, New York
1970 *Richard Callner: Ten Year Retrospective*, Tyler School of Art, Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
1963 *Richard Callner: Ten Year Retrospective*, Chatham College, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
1960 *Richard Callner: Eight Year Retrospective*, Milwaukee Jewish Cultural Center, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

SELECTED ONE PERSON EXHIBITIONS

2001 *Richard Callner*, Monique Goldstrom Gallery, New York, New York
1999 *Richard Callner: Then and Now*, Yates Gallery, J. Spencer & Patricia Standish Library, Siena College, Latham, New York
1998 *Richard Callner: Exhibition of Paintings, Watercolor, Gouache, and Oil*, Art Gallery, Snowden Library, Lycoming College, Williamsport, Pennsylvania
1995 *Richard Callner '95: Oils and Watercolors*, Concordia College Art Gallery, Bronxville, New York
1994 *Richard Callner: Small Works, Paintings and Drawings*, Russell Sage College Art Gallery, Troy, New York
1990 *Richard Callner: Selected Works*, Haenah-Kent Gallery, New York, New York
1988 *Richard Callner: Selected Works 1951-1988*, University Art Museum, University at Albany, Albany, New York
1984 Alpha Gallery, Split, Yugoslavia
1984 Atrium Gallery, General Electric Corporate Research and Development Center, Schenectady, New York

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

1998 *Works On Paper*, Kendall Art & Design, Hudson, New York
1997 *The Contemporary Landscape*, Philip and Muriel Berman Museum of Art, Ursinus College, Collegeville, Pennsylvania
1997 *Drawings*, The Pelham Arts Center, Pelham, New York
1997 *Memory and Mourning*, University Art Museum, University at Albany, Albany, New York
1997 *Invitational Exhibition*, Phoenix Insurance Company, Albany, New York
1997 *Artists of the Mohawk Hudson Region*, University Art Museum, University at Albany, Albany, New York
1995 Haenah-Kent Gallery, New York, New York
1995 Rensselaer County Council for the Arts, Troy, New York
1995 Albany Institute of History and Art, Albany, New York
1994 *Creating After Teaching: Three Faculty Emeriti*, University Art Museum, University at Albany, Albany, New York
1993 *The Atmosphere: Art, Native Wisdom and Science*, University Art Museum, University at Albany, Albany, New York
1984, 85, 87 *Premio Internazionale Per L'Incisione*, Biella, Italy
1981, 83, 85 Print Biennale, Ljubljana, Yugoslavia
1963 *Walker Art Institute Invitational*, Minneapolis, Minnesota

1958, 59, 61, 63

*Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts
Annual Exhibition, Philadelphia,
Pennsylvania*

1983-84 USIA grant, Hungary and East Germany
1981 Fulbright Professorship, Yugoslavia
1980-81 USIA grant, Yugoslavia
1973 USIA grant, Turkey
1958-60 John Simon Guggenheim Painting Fellowship,
England and France

SELECTED PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut
The Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, Michigan
Worcester Art Museum, Worcester, Massachusetts
Cincinnati Art Museum, Cincinnati, Ohio
Museum of Painting and Sculpture, Istanbul, Turkey
Herbert E. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca,
New York
Walker Art Institute, Minneapolis, Minnesota
Albany Institute of History and Art, Albany, New York
University of Michigan Museum of Art, Ann Arbor, Michigan
Kalamazoo Art Center, Kalamazoo, Michigan
Gallery of Modern Art, Pristina, Yugoslavia
University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin
New York Public Library, New York, New York
Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia

COMMISSIONS

Three Tapestries (Gobelin-style) completed at Mambush
Tapestries, Ein Hod, Israel

FELLOWSHIPS/GRANTS

1998 Richard Florsheim Art Fund Foundation
1985 USIA grants, Soviet Union and Finland (Ampar
Grant)
1984 USIA grant, Soviet Union (Ampar Grant).
Lectured at the Hermitage Museum and Pushkin
Museum.

FACULTY POSITIONS

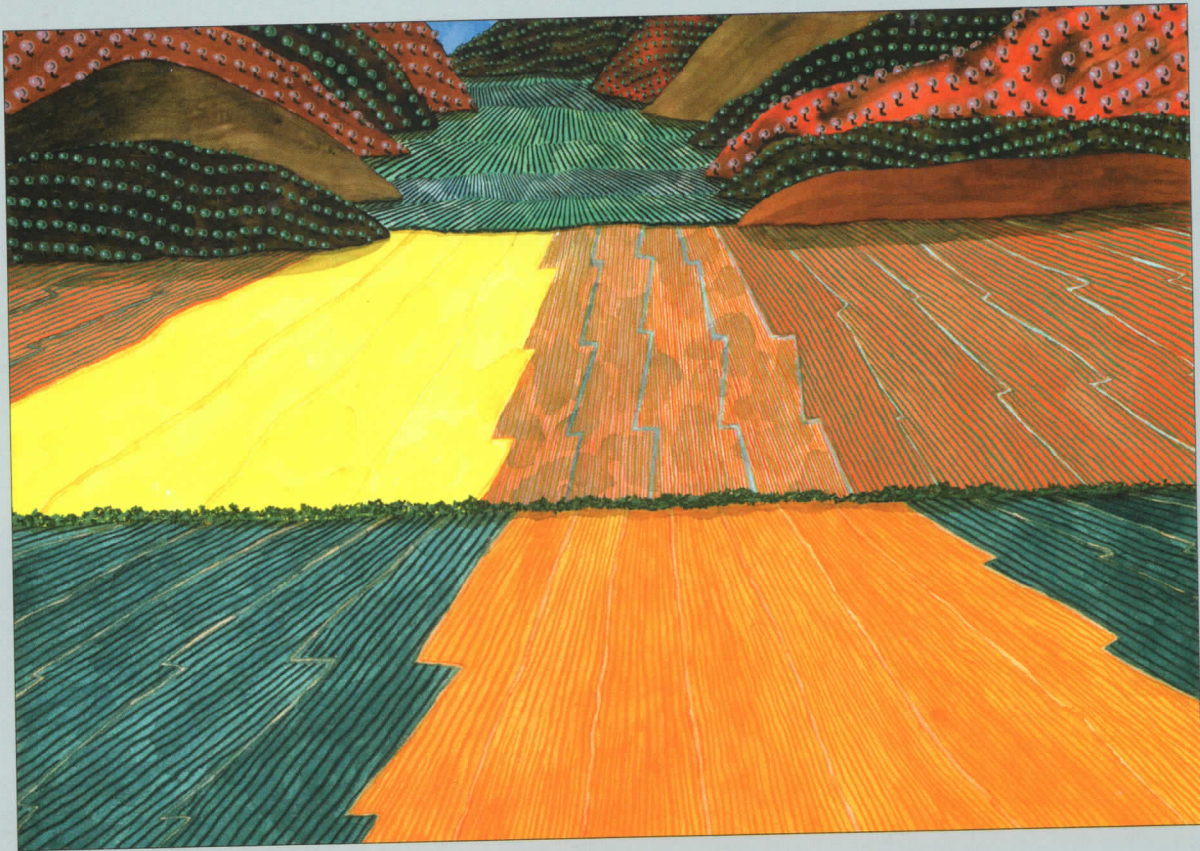
University at Albany, State University of New York (Chairman
of Fine Arts Department, 1975-81)
Tyler School of Art, Rome, Italy (Founding Director)
Tyler School of Art, Temple University, Philadelphia, Professor
Olivet College, Olivet, Michigan, Professor
Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana Instructor

VISITING ARTIST and/or LECTURER

State Department Visiting Artist, U.S.I.S. Turkey
Kalamazoo Art Institute, Kalamazoo, Michigan
Olivet College Fine Arts Workshop, Olivet, Michigan
University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin
Cambridge University, King's College, Cambridge, England
Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island
Academy of Fine Arts, Istanbul, Turkey
University of California at Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz, California
University of Houston, Houston, Texas
University of Washington, Seattle, Washington
Poets & Painters Society, Cote d'Azur, France
Rhode Island School of Design, Rome, Italy
Museum of Fine Arts, Skopjia, Yugoslavia
Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts
Skowhegan School of Art, Skowhegan, Maine
Invited seminar participant in the *15th Jubilee International
Biennial of Graphic Art*,
Ljubljana, Yugoslavia
Guest Lecturer at the Repin Art Institute, Moscow, and the
Hermitage, Leningrad, USSR
Project Director for 1984 USIA Grant to organize an exhibi-
tion of American Graphics for the Leningrad residence of the
US Consul General







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