



JOSEPH KEIFFER

COURTHOUSE GALLERY  
FINEART



# JOSEPH KEIFFER

AUGUST 17–SEPTEMBER 10, 2016

A Closer Look by Lynne Barrett  
Notes from the Artist



*Glass of Radishes*, oil on panel, 10 x 8 inches

COVER *Return from Surry Gardens*, detail, oil on canvas, 24 x 20 inches

COURTHOUSE GALLERY  
FINEART

6 court street ellsworth, maine 04605 [courthousegallery.com](http://courthousegallery.com) 207 667 6611





*Burning Fog, Buck's Harbor*  
oil on canvas  
20 x 40 inches

# JOSEPH KEIFFER A CLOSER LOOK

by Lynne Barrett



*Maid's Bath*, oil on canvas, 14 x 11 inches

What compels us to look and look again? When we discover art we're unable to resist, what about it draws us? What within us is responding? I've asked myself these questions through the twenty years that I've been looking at and being taught to look by Joseph Keiffer's paintings.

I'm a fiction writer, so you might think I'd invent a story when I see Keiffer's *Yard in Wisborough*. Whose old car is that? Whose laundry hangs on the line? But what has happened or will happen we're not supposed to know. Instead, we're promised that if we hover here we'll absorb the brimming significance of now: the car's humble endurance, the shaggy greenery and rooftop geometry, the dappled shadows on the umbrella, open attic windows, and everywhere the felt presence of the sun.

Light travels through a Keiffer painting, a messenger of time, here but ever-changing. Often it touches something that has lasted long and known such light before, an old scale, a vase relegated to holding pencils, rocks, a lake. Or it catches what's alive in a moment of transition: Summer flowers in their potting soil, displaced inside before they'll be replanted. Diplomatic nasturtiums negotiating their share of sunshine. Radishes, uprooted, radiant, enjoying their spicy selves, not yet trimmed or tasted. And sometimes,

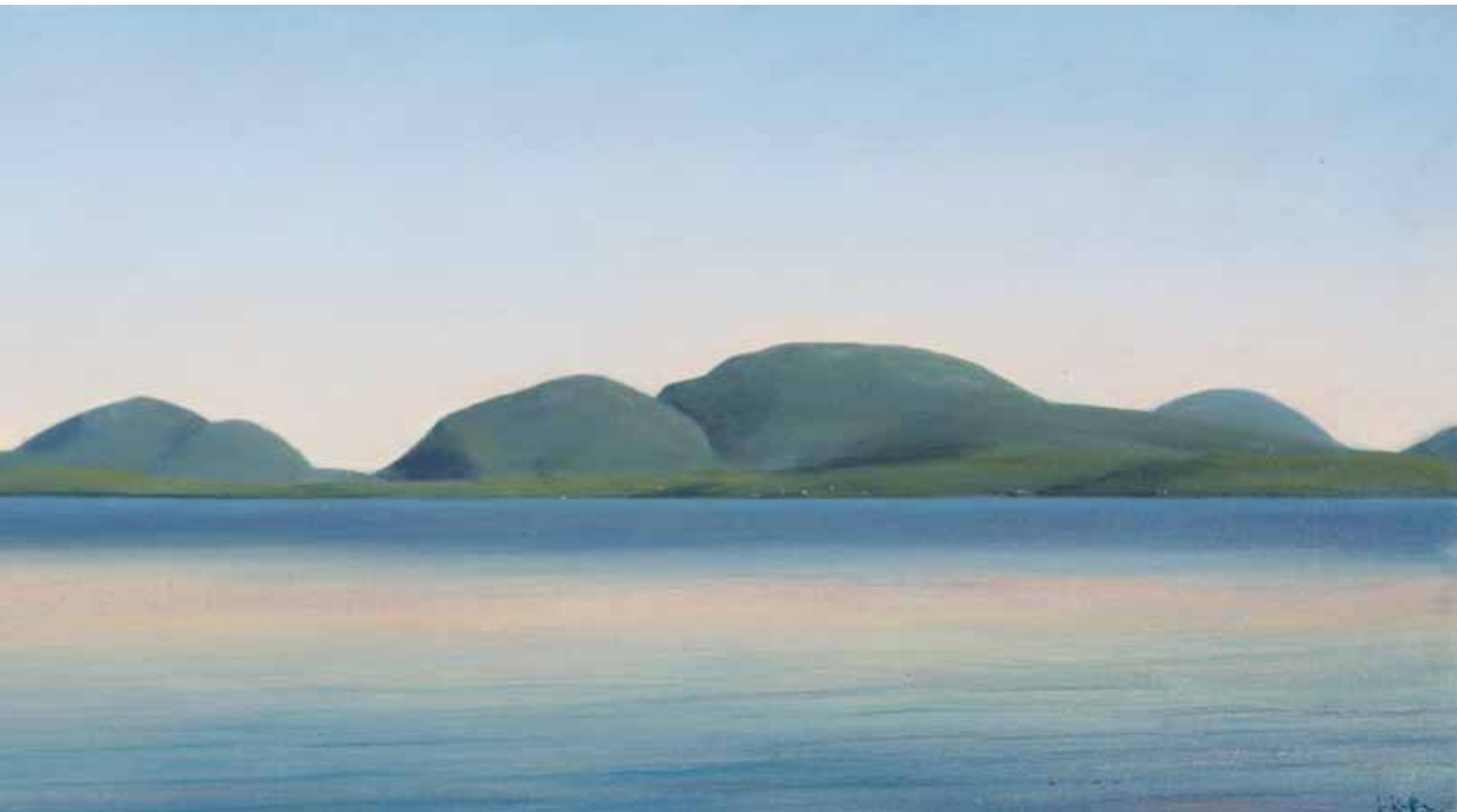


*Blue Stairs, Somesville, oil on canvas, 16 x 12 inches*



*Mount Desert Island*, oil on canvas, 14 x 50 inches







*A Dealer's Study*, oil on canvas, 16 x 8 inches

when no one's there, light finds enamel cups and funnels turned acrobatic. Everything has strength. The fragile element is us, onlookers who too often rush past and pretend we'll have forever.

In Keiffer's paintings, it matters what's in view and not, his choice of edges. At night, in *Maid's Bath*, artificial light falls from above. In the sink's shadow, centered, we see the pipes that prudishness says not to notice. What's that blush patch on one wall? Why just this slice of tub? We're left to contemplate our own curiosity, our yearning to peek at what's private. In *The Kitchen* the down-lights, the dishes, the oven, even the bushes outside will witness a gathering. Don't we want to stay? Aren't we all hungry and lonely? Immersed in *Somes Sound* at sunrise, we wish we could inhale and store up exhilaration.

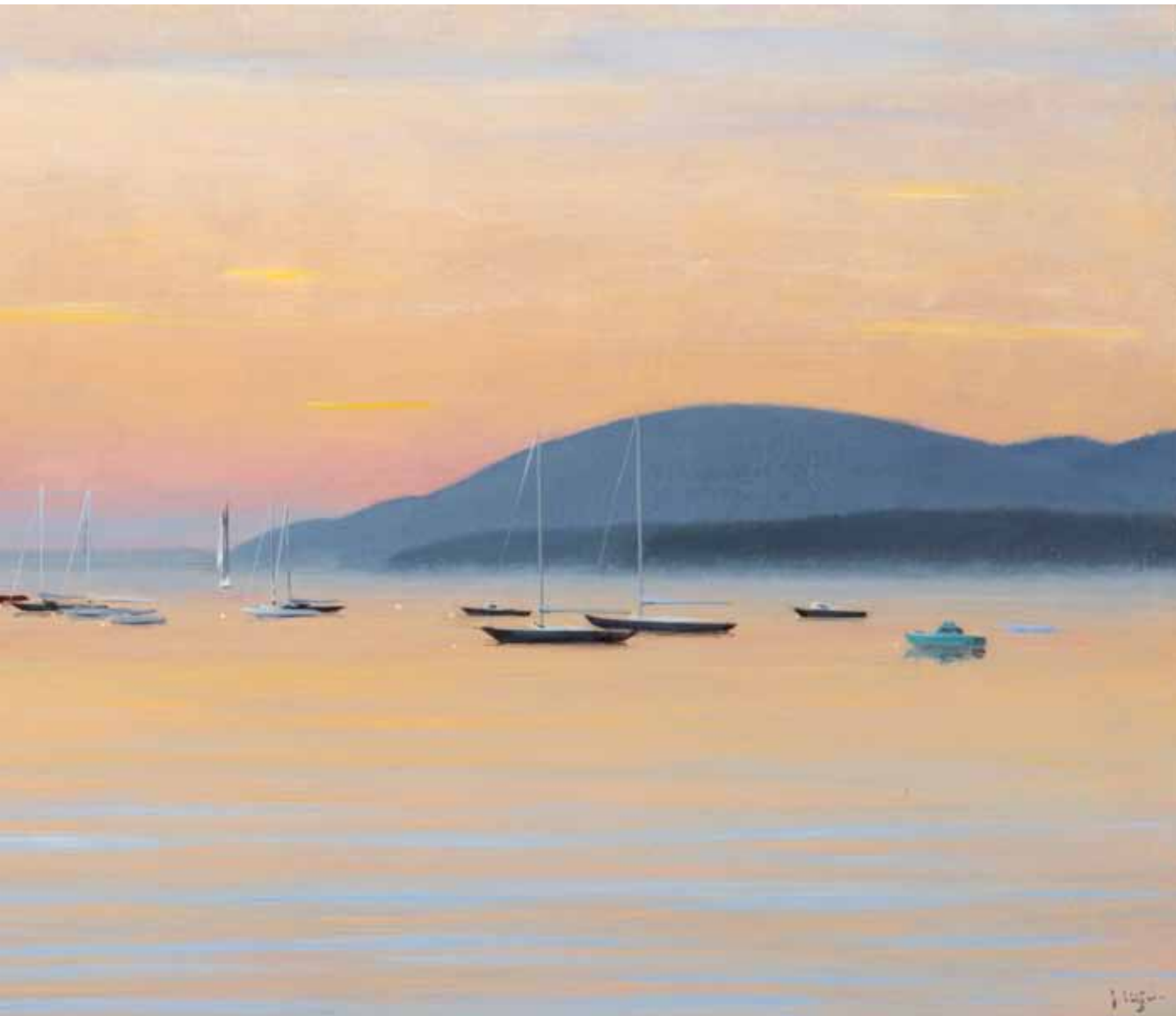
After you've looked long at Keiffer's paintings, a strange thing will happen, or at least it has to me. In a familiar room, you'll find you're appreciating a corner, its angles and odd charm. And standing outdoors at twilight, picking out the deepening hues of foliage and sky, you'll discover you're awake in a world waiting to be perceived.

Lynne Barrett's most recent story collection, *Magpies*, received the Florida Book Awards fiction gold medal. She teaches in Miami, edits the *Florida Book Review*, and writes in Maine in the summer.



*Tropism*, oil on canvas, 16 x 20 inches





*Somes Sound from  
Manset*

oil on canvas  
20 x 50 inches

# The Joy of Color

by Joseph Keiffer



*Peonies on Kitchen Counter*, oil on canvas, 16 x 16 inches

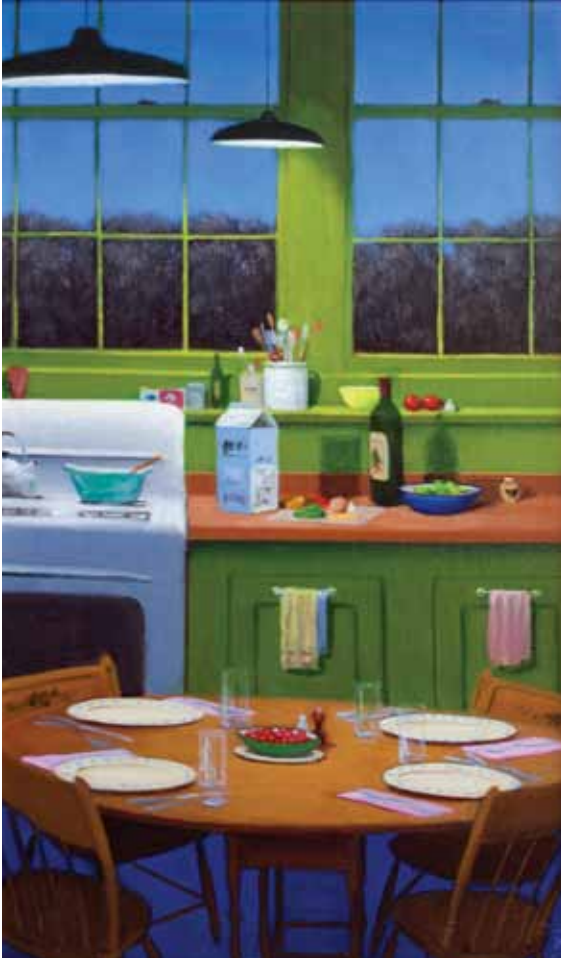
Different paintings are motivated by different impulses, just as an individual has complex aspects to his or her personality and a range of moods. For me the principal, overriding motivation is to make a painting communicate something. Let me give some examples from this catalogue.

I enjoy painting still lifes because they combine and intertwine several motivating features. The subjects—whether they are weapons or flowers—come with their own psychological associations. They also have individual intrinsic forms and colors. The still-life painting composes these “given” features into a work that should be more than the sum of its parts. The “successful” still life may evoke memory (kitchens), it may amuse (radishes), it might amuse and create tension (enamel cups), or it may enable a color scheme so charming or beautiful that it stays in your heart like a melody.

The enamel cups are a good example. I bought my first one about thirty years ago in a flea market. Such a humble object, and so old! What was its history, I wondered? It had a poignancy and a dignity, a proportion that somehow evoked feelings. I was so pleased with this purchase I started to buy more enamel objects until I had many dozens, and they were taking up significant space. My general theme of “Topsy Cups” evolved from this obsession. My first few compositions of enameled objects comprised five to seven



*Not-So-Still Life*, oil on canvas, 28 x 30 inches



*The Kitchen Table*, oil on canvas, 20 x 12 inches

coffee cups, measuring cups, flasks, and picnic cups. And, now, as you can see from the catalogue, I have embraced fantasy with paintings like *Not-So Still Life*.

Flowers intrigue me as a still-life subject because they seem to have a will of their own, their own society, even in captivity, as this group from Surry Gardens does. They seem to make room for each other, and they somehow compose themselves in ways that compel me to stop doing whatever I might have planned and start a new painting—of them. These auto-compositions are better than anything I could make up intentionally. And like a great and beautiful landscape, my goal with paintings flowers is to convey the excitement I felt when I put the box down on the dining room table, turned my back for a minute, and then beheld the experience.

With landscape painting my objective is to capture the light as it falls across the landscape. At the beginning of the American landscape tradition, an important goal of the painter was simply reportorial, to show what a previously unseen part of the American landscape looked like. In the modern era, this information is readily available through photography, so my intention has shifted to re-present a given landscape in a certain light—to bring the experience of being there to the viewer.

My general practice is to paint an oil sketch of the place, one or more times, and get to know how the sun (or lack of it) behaves on the subject, and then decide on any compositional changes during the course of the sketch. Later, I may decide to do a larger, more finished painting.

Last summer, I experienced a wonderful morning painting in a blueberry barren near Sedgwick, Maine. The rocks and boulders in these fields reminded me of grains





*Return from Surry Gardens*  
oil on canvas  
24 x 20 inches



*Castine Bay*, oil on canvas, 20 x 40 inches



of salt hurled down from the heavens, and they fascinated me. In this case, the scene began overcast, and after about two hours a fog bank moved in off the water. I didn't want to lose all the work I had done describing the distance, but I also found the fog and wind very dramatic, so I incorporated both.

On a very different order of magnitude are paintings like *Castine Bay*. I absolutely love long panoramic views, and I love studying the details of these views. Especially deciding what makes the scene interesting—the warmth of the sun, the gentle breeze, the quiet, the occasional passage of a bumblebee. My goal with these large paintings is to convey how I felt when I stood there—how exhilarating it was to stand before that particular view, at that time.

Interiors are the most difficult of the three subjects I paint. For all the homes I visit, very few are beautiful. Functional, probably . . . but seldom organized with beauty as a priority. And, of course, the drawing of the architecture can be unforgiving—one mistake, and the entire painting is out of control. In addition, light can change the mood, shadows can change the lines . . . . Despite the challenges, I would paint more interiors if I could find subjects worthy of the effort. *Blue Stair, Somesville* is a house I know well. I have painted all of its principal rooms, partly because of its attractive architectural lines, and surely because



*Deux Chevaux*, oil on canvas, 16 x 12 inches



*Wisborough Green*, oil on canvas, 16 x 11 inches

of the bold and jolly colors. Kitchens are bustling places at the heart of any house. This one attracted me because of the colors, the interior architecture, and the pleasant association of an autumn dusk. A meal soon to be enjoyed. But where are the people? That is for viewers to imagine for themselves.

In general my goal is to “take you there.” An equally important motivation is to manipulate colors. I only want to paint things I consider to be beautiful in some way. Musicians like sounds, painters like color. Seldom does one ask a musician why he makes music. It is understood that he enjoys sounds, at least when properly orchestrated. Painters, on the other hand, are thought to be a little eccentric.

It is true that over the centuries there have been changing reasons and purposes for paintings to exist. Speaking only for myself, my strongest motivation for doing any given painting is to communicate my joy and pleasure in looking at the subject at hand. It’s about the joy of color, the pleasure of *looking*. I like a painting to communicate that pleasure using the language of line and color—without the aid of a lot of explanatory verbiage, hype, or explication. Each color “behaves” or “looks” different according to the context in which you see it. So the “art” of color is to use color—or to place color—in a context where it looks and feels “right.” Just as a composer uses the highest or lowest notes to communicate the crescendo of his composition, a painter is aware of the high points, the rhythms, tones, resonances, and even the “volume” within his composition.



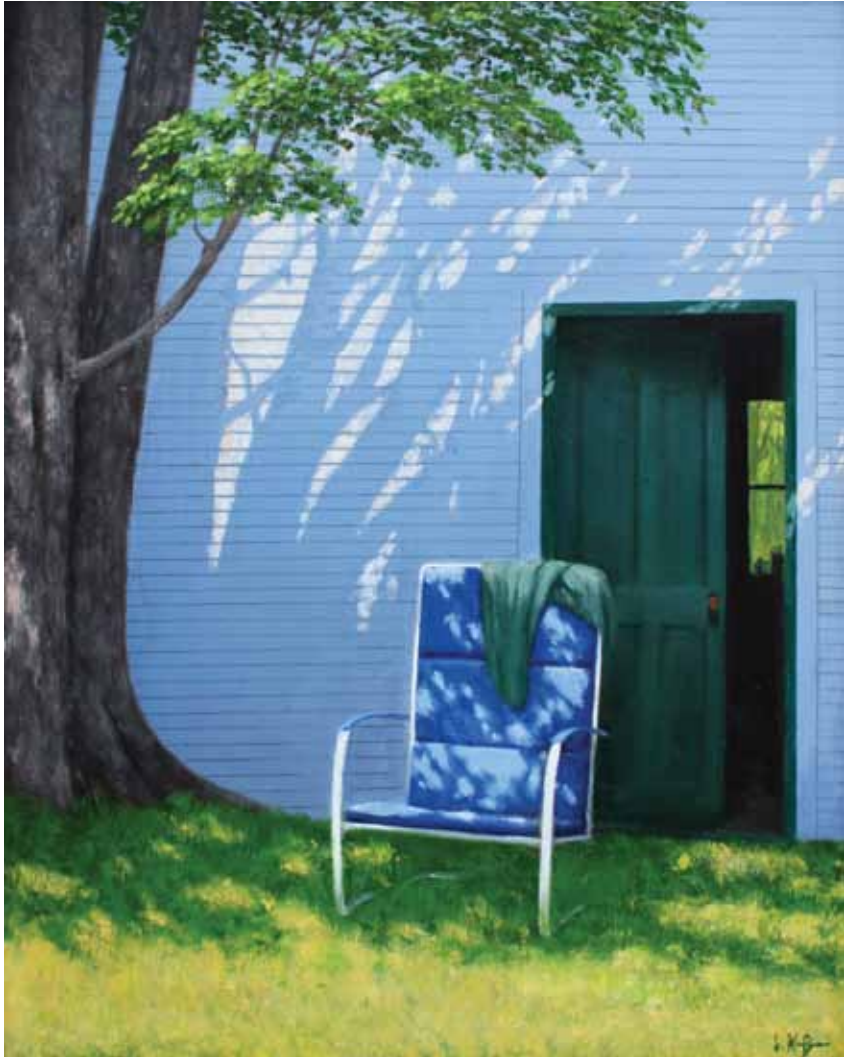
*Coutance, Normandy, oil on canvas, 12 x 24 inches*



*Blue Barren, Sedgewick, oil on panel, 10 x 20 inches*



*Eagle Lake, Mount Desert Island, oil on panel, 10 x 20 inches*



*Mid-Afternoon*, oil on panel, 20 x 16 inches



*Strauss Garden, Somesville, oil on panel, 10 x 10 inches*



*Party Shoes, oil on canvas, 11 x 9 inches*



*Thunder Pounding a Bay*  
oil on canvas  
30 x 20 inches





*Yellow Bath, Scale*  
oil on canvas  
17 x 12 inches



*Homeward Bound*, oil on canvas, 28 x 30 inches



*Red and Black*, oil on panel, 17 x 11 inches



*Tabletop, Hydrangeas*, oil on canvas, 16 x 10



*Verbena, Geraniums, etc.*, oil on canvas, 14 x 17 inches



## JOSEPH KEIFFER

BORN New York, New York 1952

### SOLO EXHIBITIONS (selected)

Courthouse Gallery Fine Art, Ellsworth, ME 2013, 2014, 2016  
Jane Roberts Fine Art, An American Eye, Paris, France 2015  
Pamela Burns Presents, Recent Paintings, NY 2011  
Kaaterskill Fine Arts Gallery, Catskills Retrospective, Hunter, NY 2009  
The Armoire, *While the Sweet Fields...*, Ellsworth, ME 2009  
Arlington Art Gallery, Hudson River Views, Poughkeepsie, NY 2008  
Wingspread Gallery, Northeast Harbor, ME 2006, 2008  
Jones/Clark, New Paintings, NY 2007  
The Century Association, Recent Observations, NY 2007  
Gallery @510, Joseph Keiffer, Harrisburg, PA 2006  
The Armoire, Ellsworth, ME 1994–2009  
Beauregard Fine Art, Landscape, Still Life, Interiors, Rumson, NJ 2005  
Hubert Gallery, Recent Paintings, New York, NY 2004  
Beauregard Fine Art, Rumson, NJ 2003  
Hubert Gallery, Recent Paintings, New York, NY 2002  
Hubert Gallery, As Far As I Can See, New York, NY 2000  
The Southern Alleghenies Museum of Art, Ligonier, PA 1999

St. John's College Art Gallery, Santa Fe, NM 1999  
70th Street Art Gallery, New York, NY 1995–99  
Meadow Creek Gallery, Edina, MN 1996  
Capstick-Dale Fine Arts, NY 1993  
Tiglietto, Kent, CT 1992  
Blue Mountain Gallery, New York, NY 1992  
Garrison Art Center, Garrison, NY 1990

### GROUP EXHIBITIONS (selected)

Courthouse Gallery Fine Art, Ellsworth, ME 2013, '14, '15, '16  
Spanierman Gallery, New York, NY 2011, '12, '13, '14  
The Gallery at Frenchmen's Bay, Mount Desert Island, ME 2011–12  
Midtown-Payson Gallery, Transport, Hobe Sound, FL 2010  
Hoorn-Ashby Gallery, Landscape, NY 2007–08  
Hubert Gallery, *The Painted Gift*, NY 1999–2004  
The Century Association, Professional Painters, NY 1997–2007  
Wingspread Gallery, Northeast Harbor, ME 1999–2001  
Sherry French Gallery, New York, NY 1998–99  
Spring Bull Gallery, Summer Invitational, Newport, RI 1999  
Sherry French Gallery, *Mainely Maine*, NY 1997–98  
Peter Hastings Falk, Madison, CT 1997  
Gleason Gallery, Boothbay Harbor, ME 1997  
The Schoolhouse Gallery, Croton Falls, NY 1995–97  
Bert Gallery, Providence, RI 1994–95  
Closson's Gallery, Cincinnati, OH 1993–95  
Connoisseur Gallery, Rhinebeck, NY 1992–95  
Montgomery Gallery, San Francisco, CA 1993  
Alexander Gallery, New York, NY 1992  
Blue Mountain Gallery, New York, NY 1990–91  
Garrison Art Center, Garrison, NY 1987–90  
Sherry French Gallery, NY 1989, 1990

### COLLECTIONS (selected)

Adelphi University, Garden City, NY  
Ms. Eleanor Alter/Dr. Allan Lans, NY  
Mr. W.M. Brady, NY



*Tipsy Heap*, oil on canvas, 16 x 20 inches



Ms. Dominique Browning, NY  
Ms. Candace Carpenter, NY  
Ms. Jane Curtin, Egremont, MA  
Mrs. F.E. Dixon, Lafayette Hill, PA  
Mrs. Richard B. Fisher, NY  
Mr. and Mrs. Rudolph Giuliani, NYC, NY  
Mr. and Mrs. Ben Ali Haggin, NY  
Mr and Mrs. Stuart Janney, Baltimore, MD  
Mr. and Mrs. William I. Koch, Palm Beach, FL  
Mr. and Mrs. E.J.Landrigan, NY  
Mr. Nicholas Lemann, NY, NY  
Mr. and Mrs. A.D. McCulloch, Bryn Mawr, PA  
Mr. and Mrs. Armour Mellon, Ligonier, PA  
Mr. and Mrs. Jeremiah Milbank, NY  
Ms. Joan Morgan, Washington, DC  
Mr. and Mrs. Robert Nederlander and Pat Cook, New York, NY  
Ambassador and Mrs. John Ong, OG  
Mr. John Whitney Payson, Hobe Sound, FL  
Pfizer Art Collection  
Mr. Marc Porter, New York, NY  
Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Puccio, NY  
Mr.and Mrs. George Segal, Kent, CT  
Mr. G. Remak Ramsay, NY  
Mr. and Mrs. Peter Rathbone, New Canaan, NY  
Mr. and Mrs. Robert Sillerman, NY  
Southern Alleghenies Museum of Art, Greensburg, PA  
Mr. Jerry Speyer/Katherine Farley, NY  
Ms. Linda Vester, NY  
Mr. and Mrs. Eric Widing, Ligonier, PA

#### EDUCATION

Brandeis University, BA  
New York Studio School  
Sotheby's Works of Art Course

*Topsy Tower*, oil on panel, 36 x 12 inches







*Sparklers*, oil on canvas, 18 x 20 inches