

The American Academy in Rome:
Five Painters

5AAR

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So many individuals have freely given of their time, knowledge, and possessions during the organization of this show that it is difficult to know where to begin. We are especially indebted to the artists themselves, who allowed us to ply them with questions and forage for often uncompleted works in their studios. Without their cheerful cooperation, there would have been no exhibition at all. Chauncie McKeever of Davis & Long Co., Joan Washburn and her assistant Maria Rathbone, Robert Schoelkopf, Luise Ross of Terry Dintenfass Gallery, and Bella Fishko and her aide, Lili Gross, of Forum Gallery made possible the inclusion of many works of art in the show and photographs in the catalogue.

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Foreword:
5 Painters
Bill N. Lacy, President

The five artists whose work is shown in this exhibition share in common the seemingly tenuous distinction of having spent time in residence at the American Academy in Rome. This is not to say that they went to school there, for the Academy offers no classes. Nor is it certain that they even studied while there, in the formal sense, for despite its name the Academy is anything but academic in determining its scale of values. It is a place where resident artists and scholars in eleven different professional fields go to do essentially as they please—and to do so unhectored by audiences, markets or timetables.

The “five for Rome” share something else in common: talent. Some went to the Academy as Rome Prize Fellows, the others as recipients of special fellowships. All, however, were recognized as artists of genuine talent and promise at the time of their selection. We may feel confident that this was the case, because their qualifications were evaluated by judges who were themselves artists of renown. Moreover, the competition for Academy fellowships is always stiff; typically, for every painting fellowship offered sixty applications from serious candidates are considered.

This exhibition raises the intriguing question that has perennially been asked since the Academy’s founding: Why Rome?

Does a person become a better painter by virtue of having spent an honorifically-earned year as a fellow at the American Academy in Rome? Or a worse painter? Do some profit artistically while others don’t? Or, finally, would it have made any difference at all if the FIVE had never gone to Rome?

These questions, unanswerable though they may be, nevertheless raise serious implications for those of us who identify with the Academy. For they must be directed not only toward painters but also toward sculptors and composers, art historians, architects and scholars in classical and post-classical studies—all of whom comprise the savory cultural broth at the Academy. Historically, it seems clear that the percentages have treated the Academy respectably, and not solely in the painting field. Among the more than 450 Rome Prize Fellows alone (mostly artists and scholars who spent their Fellowship term while they were in their early twenties), a preponderance may be characterized as having “made good.” And many of these have acquired what amounts to star status in their fields. Yet there have been detractors—not so much detractors of the Academy itself as of its location. At the height of the protest movement, a scant eight to ten years ago, young rebels made the Academy’s very presence in Rome an issue of sorts. A *New York Times* article of the period has a hypothetical young artist saying, “Why an American Academy in Rome, of all Godforsaken places? Why not Paris or London, or better still, New York? That’s where everything’s happening.”

Painters and sculptors at the Academy during the Vietnam years were especially contemptuous of everything that was time-honored. So where better than Rome to give the back of one’s hand to mankind’s cultural heritage? And where *best*, once an American painter-protestor arrived in Rome, to take pot shots at this ancient seat of world empire than from the Academy itself? From the institution’s McKim-designed main building and elegantly arranged gardens on Janiculum Hill, an artist commands a sweeping panorama of a vessel containing twenty-odd centuries of the civilization which many felt so moved to indict. How quickly the pendulum swings! To be sure, Rome today projects its own cultural aberrations for all the world to witness on the late news: aberrations ranging from anarchy and murder to pollution and a lapse of civility. Yet the Rome of this historic moment remains surrounded, suffused, permeated by the Eternal City of timeless fascination. Today’s young painter in residence at the Academy—or, indeed, today’s American tourist—may notice the lire he carries in his pocket. They most often bear the likenesses, not of politicians and incipient scoundrels, but of poets, artists, lyricists. In touring the galleries, today’s young painter may observe that the portraits of the seventeenth-century noblepersons (and, yes, incipient scoundrels) were posed against one or another of Rome’s architectural monuments. That’s because the painters brought their patrons to these sites and positioned them in front of such environmentally-congenial backdrops, presumably on the theory that, when the portrait was finished, *something* of aesthetic importance should have been incorporated.

Without ever leaving the Academy property (not the worst of ideas for an artist or sculptor, since the studio facilities are first-rate), a Rome Prize Fellow may learn to appreciate his or her place in the cultural firmament. A visit to the Academy library may turn up graphic recognition of the Janiculum’s place in the sun: a Piranesi etching captured this great landmark long before anyone remotely conceived of starting an American Academy in Rome there.

One may speculate: How much of such a culturally dense, deeply rooted civilization as Rome’s penetrates the minds of our painters? Rather more, I should like to believe, than commands the eye in an exhibition of post-Academy paintings.

Because new directions in art are perilous to predict, and influences are often elusive, at best, we decided not to give the show an ambitious title such as Realism and Rome, or the Roman Influence, opting instead for the simple, direct banner of *5 Painters*. They worked in Rome. Each of them willingly confesses that the City and the Academy had an effect on his work. The conclusions to be drawn from this show may simply be that Rome is a good place for such things to happen. Good for the artists, and in the long run, good for this country.

William

Introduction:
A Tradition of Diversity
Ellen Schwartz, Exhibition Curator

The word “academy” conjures up visions of musty nineteenth-century ateliers filled with art students struggling to master established techniques and compositional formulas. This image is as inaccurate for the academies of a century and more ago as it is for those of the present day. Looking back, we tend to recall only the revolt of the pioneers of modernism against the more tradition-bound European academies. We have forgotten, it seems, that these same organizations had originally been founded for the benign and indeed noble purpose of providing the space, tools, and sense of community so necessary if the arts are to prosper. In fact, the earliest academies, dating back to the days of the High Renaissance, were in the forefront of innovation on all artistic fronts, literature as well as painting and sculpture.

The American Academy in Rome was likewise created with idealistic goals in mind and it has continued to fulfill them through the changing times. Neither art school nor honorary association like most other contemporary academies, it is a privately endowed center, chartered by Congress, where artists and scholars alike may pursue their own interests in an unpressured but stimulating environment. Bill Lacy, President of the Academy since January 1977, has aptly called it “a forum for interdisciplinary dialogue in the spirit of the Platonic symposium.” Indeed, the Academy today is a true meeting of the minds.



The existence of the American Academy in Rome is due, to an extraordinary degree, to one man’s persistent efforts to make a dream come true. That man was Charles Follen McKim, best remembered as a member of the esteemed nineteenth-century architectural firm of McKim, Mead and White. McKim’s youthful studies and European sojourns had convinced him that Rome’s cultural legacy to the Western world was still unsurpassed. In his own work he often turned to the great monuments of that city, from Empire to Renaissance, for inspiration. In so doing, he made a significant contribution to the history of American architecture, still visible in surviving buildings like the Boston Public Library.

Thus far, McKim’s vision and tastes accorded with those of many of his peers. American writers, painters, architects and sculptors had naturally gravitated to Rome since well before the United States had won its freedom from England. There they formed expatriate colonies as productive and well-entrenched as those of France, Germany, or England. But McKim, dissatisfied with this *ad hoc* method of training, longed for an official establishment that could offer Americans the facilities, instruction and intellectual forum that the French Academy, for example, had provided since 1666. The joint endeavors that produced the Chicago



World's Fair of 1893 confirmed for McKim the tremendous potential of such an Italian enclave; it remained for him to determine its practical feasibility. Just one year later, eighty-five years ago this coming April, the American School of Architecture in Rome was born; John Russell Pope, future designer of the National Gallery of Art building in Washington, D.C., became the first recipient of the coveted Rome Prize.

Years of vicissitude followed, during which the Academy moved three times, struggled to meet operating expenses and yet still managed to expand to include painters, sculptors and, finally, classicists. McKim's enthusiasm and tenacity were largely responsible for the happy resolution of these early difficulties. He was not alive in 1913, however, to see his architecture school merge with the American School of Classical Studies in Rome to become the American Academy in Rome. Nor did he witness this new entity's triumphant move into its new home, an impressive neoclassical *palazzo* designed, appropriately enough, by McKim, Mead and White.

The Academy building, the focal point of a complex of earlier and later structures now used for living quarters and studios, sits atop Janiculum Hill, overlooking the Tiber and the glory that is Rome. The location was originally named after the god Janus, who looks forward to the future and backward to the past—a felicitous symbol for the dual countenance of the Academy itself as a community of both artists and scholars. Although McKim envisioned an Academy with a set curriculum, formal structure has long since been abandoned in favor of independent work, study and travel. Every year, between 25 and 30 Fellows (as finances permit) are chosen by distinguished panels in eleven different fields: painting, sculpture, musical composition, architecture, environmental design, landscape architecture, creative writing, classical studies, post-classical humanistic studies, Italian studies and art history. Rome Prize Fellows, of whom there have been over 450 to date, receive a stipend and allowance, working and living quarters, travel expenses to and from Rome and within Europe and opportunities for exhibition, performance, or publication of completed works. They also have use of the Academy's 85,000-volume library, one of the great non-Italian libraries in Rome and the only one to bridge the entire span of the arts. Fellowships are normally awarded for one year so that the Roman experience may be extended to as many different talented individuals as possible.

Since World War II, a Residents and Visiting Artists Program has brought professionals of repute to the Academy for periods ranging from a few weeks to a year. This influx of mature creators and thinkers has helped to revitalize the dynamic interchange that has always been so much a part of the Academy. They now join the more than four generations of Americans who have returned home to help shape this country's intellectual and cultural destiny—including Samuel Barber, Aaron Copeland, Robert Penn Warren, Thornton Wilder,

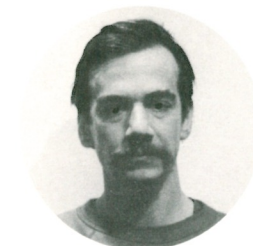
Robert Venturi, Louis Kahn, Philip Guston and Paul Manship.

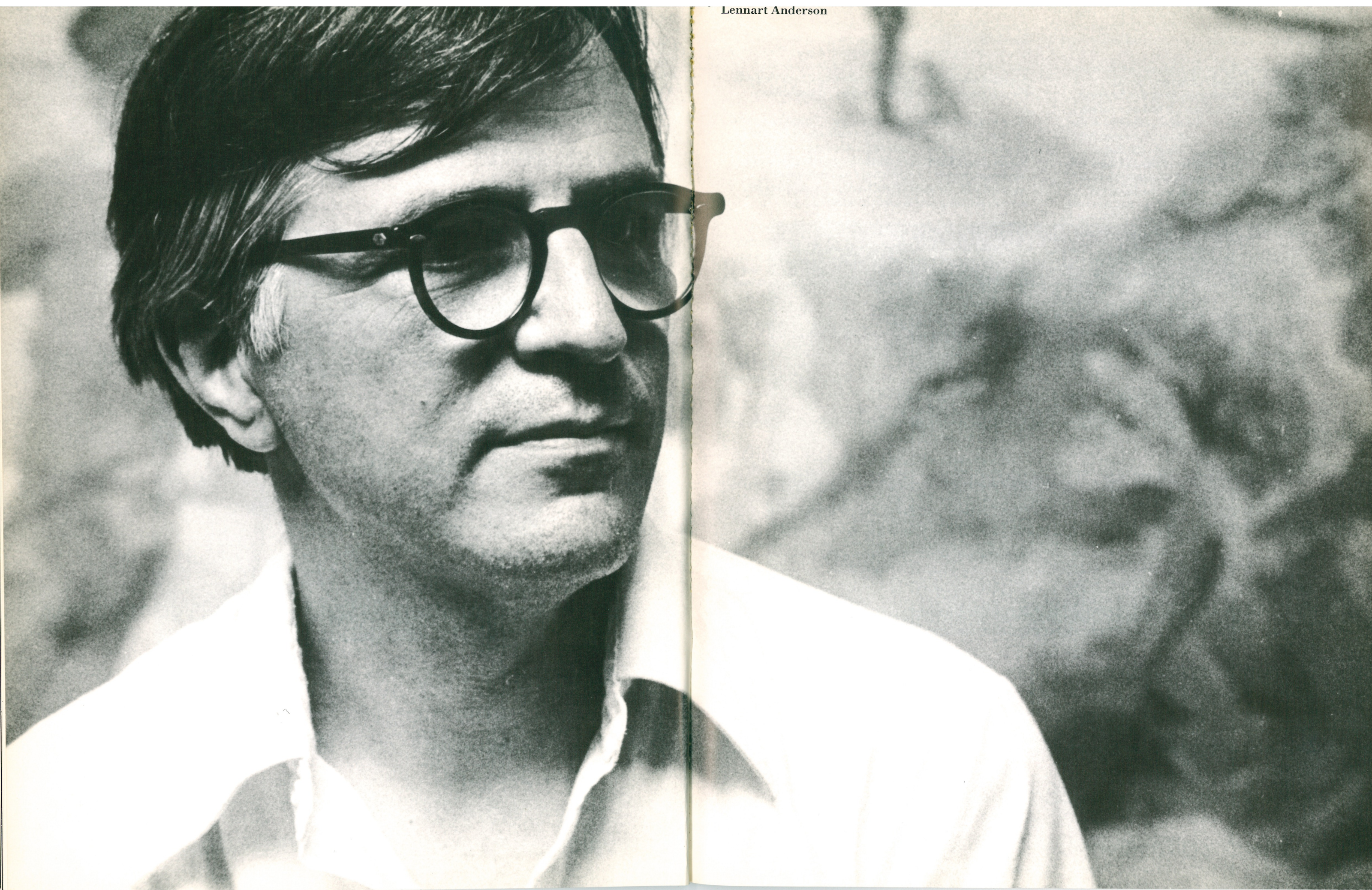
Given its location, it is not surprising that the American Academy in Rome has enjoyed little visibility on this side of the Atlantic, although its eminence is recognized in professional and university circles. In view of this fact, the present exhibition was conceived as an introduction, both to the Academy and to the superlative achievements of several former fellowship recipients. Rather than a cross-disciplinary or historical approach, we have chosen to limit ourselves to five painters (from a roster of over 120) presently at the height of their artistic maturity: Alan Gussow, Lennart Anderson, Raymond Saunders, Gregory Gillespie and William Bailey. Gussow was the first to live at the Academy, at age 22 in 1953; Bailey has been there the most recently, at age 46 in 1976. All were Rome Prize Fellows with the exception of Bailey, who was sent to the Academy as a Visiting Artist. Together, the group represents a wide variety of styles, from the nature-inspired abstractions of Gussow through Saunders' post-Pop montages to the classical reminiscences of Anderson's recent work, Bailey's limpid still lives, or the intensely personal realism of Gillespie. This diversity is indicative of the Academy's willingness to forswear fashionable trends in favor of a more objective appraisal of quality—a difficult task, particularly since fellowship applicants are generally young and still in the throes of initial self-definition. The five painters in this show are examples of the many who have more than justified the Academy's confidence.

As the artists' separate catalogue entries show, each values his Academy experience, but in radically different ways. Some were most impressed with the wealth of art or architecture the city had to offer, while others were more grateful for the time and studio space in which to work single-mindedly. Many mentioned the rich friendships begun on Academy premises. One was especially affected by his exposure to alternative contemporary life styles. In every case, the period spent at the Academy was warmly remembered as seminal to personal as well as artistic growth. We have included one painting for each of the five executed either at or immediately after Rome, along with several of his most recent works, many of which are being shown here for the first time. Through this juxtaposition we hope to suggest what the artist was drawn to while in Italy, what he may have gleaned from his European interlude and whether or not it remains relevant to his present concerns.

Above all, the work itself amply justifies an exhibit of this kind. Beneath its diversity lies the strength of conviction, a welcome reminder of the vital impulses animating painting today in America.

Note: Unless otherwise indicated, the artists' statements printed in the entries were culled from interviews with the author during the summer of 1978. The biographical data is not intended to be complete, but to highlight some of the most significant activities and accomplishments.





Lennart Anderson
 Born 1928, Detroit, Michigan
 Rome Prize Fellow 1958-60

Lennart Anderson studied at the Chicago Art Institute School, Cranbrook Academy of Art and the Art Students' League. Upon returning from the American Academy in Rome, he was given his first one-person show at the Tanager Gallery, the most renowned of the early 10th-Street artists' cooperatives. Anderson has taught at Pratt Institute, Finch College, the Art Students' League, Yale, Columbia, Princeton and Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, among other institutions. He is presently on the faculty at Brooklyn College. Of the many awards he has received, the most recent is his membership—since 1976—in the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. Anderson's work is in public and private collections across the country, including the Cleveland Museum of Art, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Museum of Fine Arts (Boston) and Whitney Museum of American Art. He is represented by Davis & Long Co.

"I liked the contact with art historians at the Academy: Donald Posner, Eugene Carroll, Kathy Garris, Craig Smyth. It was nice to talk to someone about painting who wasn't a painter. . . . I was already hep on Piero, so it was great to see his work around. . . . I have a kind of homesickness for the place. I couldn't have seen Venice or Paris if I hadn't gone to the Academy. It spoiled me. . . ."

"Caravaggio in Rome was staggering—I wasn't prepared for that, somehow. I came from a walk-up on the Lower East Side, then there I was at the Academy—elegant, to say the least. There was something appealing about the whole environment. I didn't feel I had nothing in common with the others there because my currency was my own painting and my love of painting."

"I had a predisposition toward Renaissance and other traditions—Pompeii, Poussin, Piero, Degas. In the 50s, I had to make up my mind about what I wanted to paint and the Academy made it easier. I came out of the New York School, but I just identified with certain things that happened to belong to 'past' traditions. I didn't see why Veronese's Mars and Venus at the Metropolitan Museum couldn't be New York School; the way the figures are disposed is very close to a De Kooning."

"Street Scene was painted to improve on an earlier New York scene, but the large studio at the Academy permitted me to paint a larger picture for the first time. Poussin also became more important to me, and Raphael. I wanted to do grand figure painting in a clear space. It was the nicest thing that ever happened to me."

Other works included in exhibition:

View from American Academy, Rome, 1975
 Oil on board, 9" x 12"
 Davis & Long Co., New York

View from the Window of the American Academy, 1975
 Oil on board, 10" x 10"
 Collection of Wolf and Emily Kahn, New York

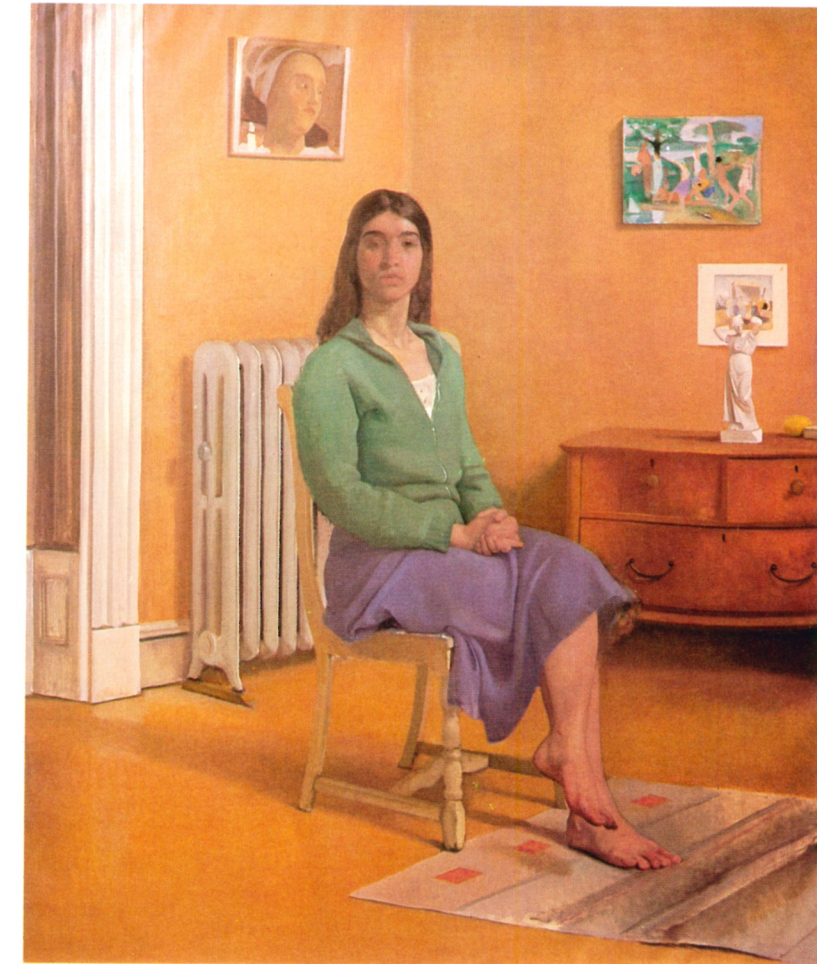
Still Life with Strainer, Egg Carton, and Fruit, 1977
 Oil on canvas, 25" x 33"
 Private collection



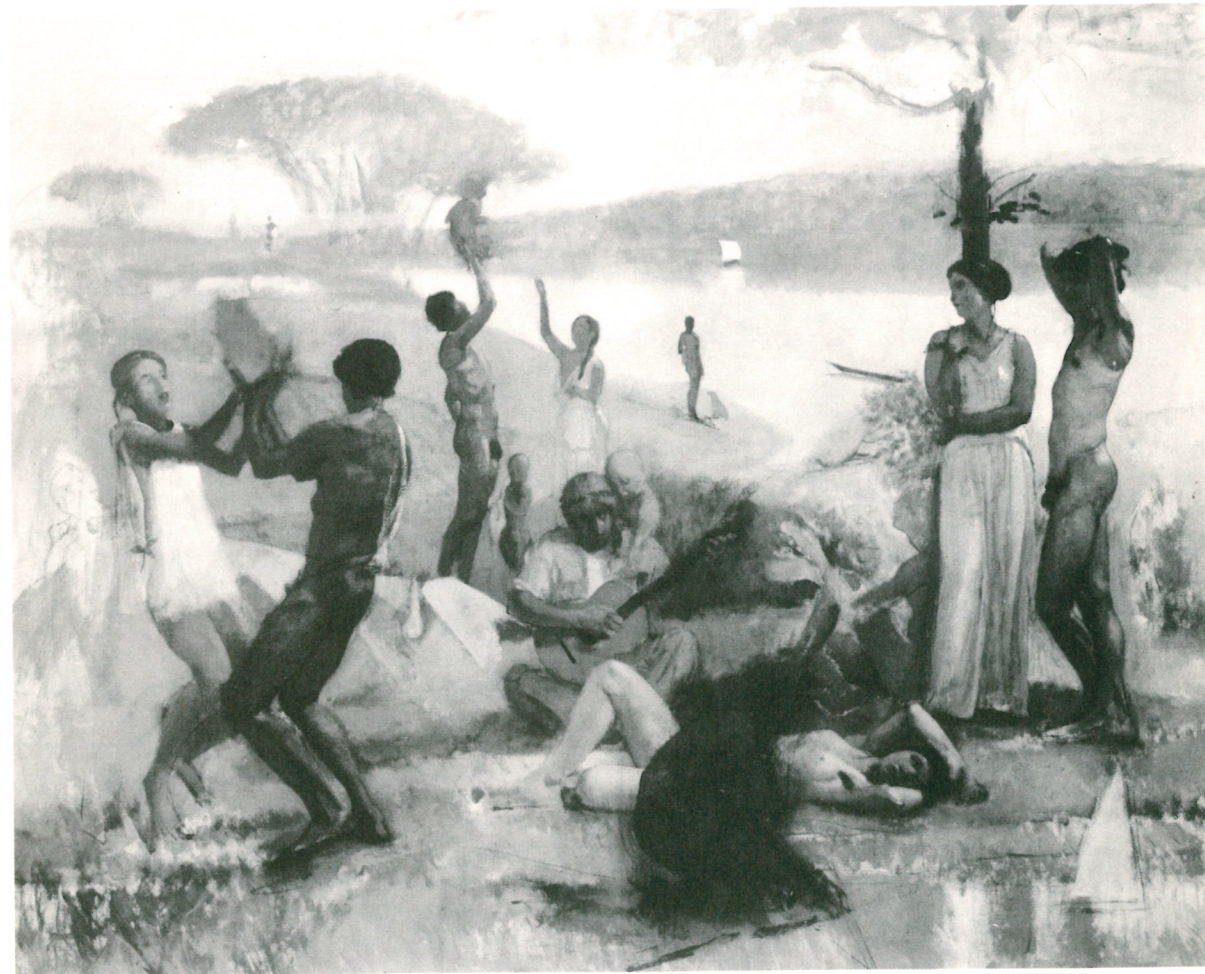
Street Scene, 1961
Oil on canvas, 77" x 99"
Davis & Long Co., New York



Portrait of Barbara S., 1976-77
Oil on canvas, 72" x 60"
Davis & Long Co., New York



An Idyll, 1978
 Acrylic on canvas, 68" x 84"
 Collection of the artist, New York



Prospect Park, 1978
 Oil on canvas, 14" x 17"
 Davis & Long Co., New York

Landscape with Two Houses, Vermont, 1969
 Oil on canvas, 17" x 21"
 Davis & Long Co., New York

