

The Heart's Bright and Dark Light

J i l E v a n s



4-12-18

Poussin

32, 40, 53, 35, 10, 1, 23, 34, 43, 28
14, 30, 15, 54, 9, 58, 47, 11, 44, 40
17, 38, 6, 55, 67.



The Heart's Bright and Dark Light

Paintings and Sketches
in response to five masterful paintings

Jil Evans

Essay by

Mason Riddle

November 5 – December 6, 2019

Alice R. Rogers and Target Galleries
Saint John's University Art Center
Collegeville, Minnesota

January 13 – February 7, 2020

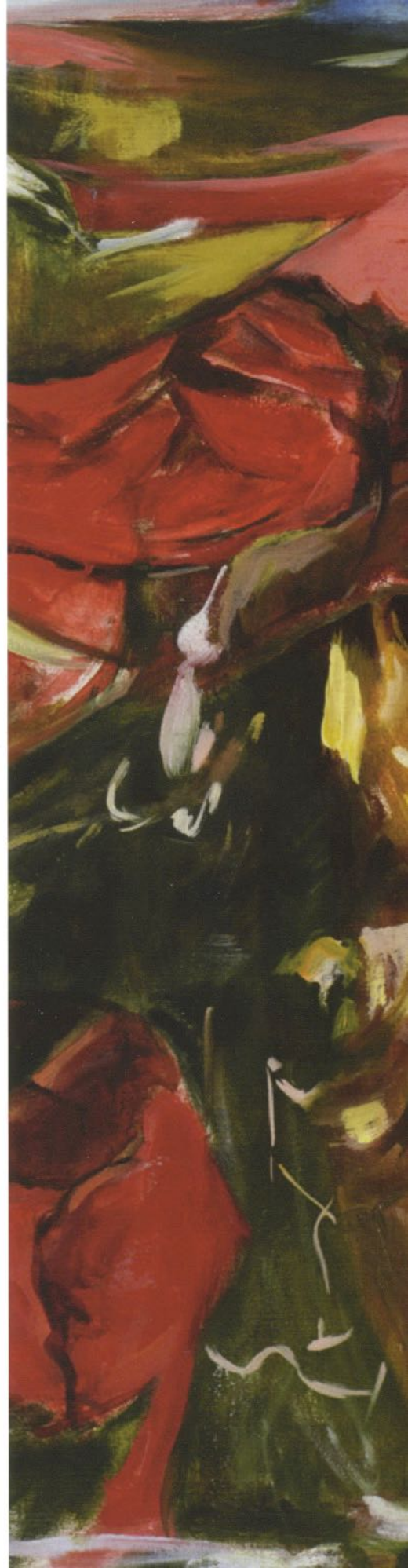
Cummings Art Gallery, Mary D'Angelo Arts Center
Mercyhurst University
Erie, Pennsylvania

April 18 – May 24, 2020

The Catherine G. Murphy Gallery
St. Catherine University
St. Paul, Minnesota

Cover Image: *Heart Bright Dark 11* Oil on canvas. 84 x 60 in. 2019

Inside Cover Image: *Sketch for Poussin's Palette* Pencil on paper. 9 x 12 in. 2018





Heart Bright Dark 1 Oil on canvas. 30 x 32 in. 2018

The Heart's Bright and Dark Light

Jil Evans

Light, when it occurs in painting, reveals a great deal about what is valued and why. The paintings in the *Heart Bright Dark* series were made following a year-long study of light in five paintings in the collection of the Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia). I chose paintings at Mia whose light moved me, in dramatically different ways, to linger in the worlds depicted. I am, like any interested viewer, hungry to meet the mind of the painter revealed in the work, and in this case while spending hours engaged in looking and drawing. My goal with this study was to concentrate on light and the content it carries, and then bring something new to my own work in abstraction.

I chose paintings that engage light involving a mysterious symbolic relationship with the natural world; light used to depict the passing of glory; light arriving to meet the supernatural and natural; light exposing the difference between danger and contented safety; and the power of light to create tension between habitation and alienation. These are not the only ways light reflects our hearts and minds. My work is intended to inspire further investigation into the profound and nuanced power of light in works of art.

The Studies

The light in the Bassanos' painting is hallucinatory to me. It portrays several different sources of light, from the mythological light of Neptune and his chariot blazing across the sky, to dawn's light just breaking in the far distance, to a cool illumination on the fishmongers and the fish almost tipping out of their baskets. In the midst of this commotion, a red-cloaked figure stands under an arch, mysterious in its solitude and stillness.

Poussin's light reminds me of late-summer evening light in the northern hemisphere, when the shadows lengthen and color glows intensely, as if wanting to make a lasting impression of beauty before fading.

In De Hooch's paintings, I am always drawn to the light at the edges of things. In *The Asparagus Vendor*, I go to the window near the woman sewing, where the light collects and hovers along the leaded windowpanes, at the crossing between inside and outside.

I chose Cropsey's *Catskill Mountain Lodge* because it has always disturbed me. The light is bright, and the autumnal colors are warm, and yet I experience a terrible coldness. He is serving up the landscape in a bowl of darkness.

Bonington's small oil sketch has, to me, light itself as subject. It both builds and destroys material forms. The speed of his eye darting in and around moving rays of sunlight being magnified by the reflecting water is captured by his brushstrokes; his urgency almost two hundred years ago is still alive for us now.



JIL EVANS: THE HEART'S BRIGHT AND DARK LIGHT

By Mason Riddle
1 September 2019

Light is the element that fills the visible space and allows precise knowledge of the surrounding reality; traditionally, light is a symbol of knowledge and in these places this metaphor becomes perceptible.

— Giuseppe Panza di Biumo

The Project

As the Italian art collector Giuseppe Panza clearly understood, light makes things visible. Without it, whether natural sunlight or artificial illumination, we would see nothing. For centuries artists have taken on the existential challenge of evoking this intangible phenomenon that gives form, color, and substance to the world around us. Abstract painter Jil Evans, poised on the legacy of other artists, is perhaps the most recent artist to embrace this challenge. Medieval artists wrestled with how to depict Jesus in a veil of light, and Renaissance masters conjured sunlight breaking over the Tuscan hillside. The 19th-century Impressionists sought to reproduce the effect of light on form, and, by the mid-20th century, Mark Rothko seemed to have magically embodied light in his paintings, denying form completely. Such Light and Space artists as Robert Irwin and James Turrell, collected avidly by Dr. Panza, used light itself as a medium to explore our limits of perception. For Evans, the self-imposed challenge was how to express light abstractly with the same emotional and psychological gravitas found in art of the past.

The genesis of the *Heart Bright Dark* series of paintings was in 2010, when Evans compiled a list of twelve things of importance. One was light. Reflecting on this list in 2017, she conceptualized her project where light, based on art-historical precedents, would be the focus of her work. For source material, she identified five paintings, held in the collection of the Minneapolis Institute of Art, by five different artists who depicted light in distinct ways. The five works, all representational in style, spanned a period of nearly 300 years, from 1576-1855. This was not the first time Evans had looked to artists of the past for aesthetic guidance; the Venetian painters Tintoretto and Tiepolo had inspired several earlier series of her works.

The five thematically diverse paintings are by the Italian artists Jacopo and Francesco Bassano, the French artist Nicolas Poussin, the Dutch artist Pieter de Hooch, the British artist Richard Parkes Bonington, and the American Jasper Francis Cropsey. The earliest, the Bassanos' *The Element of Water* (1576-1577), deftly melds an eerily lit nocturnal fish-market scene with the god of the sea,

Neptune, who in a halo of light streaks across the sky in his chariot. Some fifty years later, Poussin executed his commanding *The Death of Germanicus* (1627), a chaotic deathbed scene where the Roman general, as if under a klieg light, faces his end before a throng of mourners. In De Hooch's *The Asparagus Vendor* (1675-1680), the protagonist enters a dark domestic interior from the left, a scene lit by a single clerestory window, whose raking light captures a seamstress against a rear wall hung with paintings. The light makes apparent the Dutch merchant class comforts, which surround the mistress and master of the house who stand mysteriously in the shadowy foreground. De Hooch's skill at conveying light amplifies the psychological drama of the scene. With *Rouen Cathedral, Sunrise* (1825), Bonington seems a proto-Impressionist, as he dissolves the structural aspects of the renowned cathedral in an atmospheric veil of light and color, making us more aware of light and shadow than of form. Cropsey, a second-generation Hudson River School artist, painted the philosophical idea of the sublime — the relationship between humanity's humble existence and the vast power and expanse of the American landscape. In *Catskill Mountain House* (1855), the foreground is cast in deep shadow, other than a barren tree visited by ravens caught in the late-afternoon light. On a distant mountain, the Catskill resort is illuminated by even, omnipotent light, a mere speck when compared with mother nature.

These five paintings came to inhabit Evans' psyche. Her goal to transmute their various qualities of light into her own work was a complex endeavor. If her works were to convey an abstract equivalent of this light, she not only had to understand each compositionally, but she also had to develop an equivalent color palette with 21st-century pigments, not necessarily available to artists in centuries past.

To do so, Evans repeatedly sketched the five works from observation in notebooks and later on an iPad, using the Procreate app. This technology allowed her to take risks, erase mistakes, and solve compositional problems more quickly. With immediacy, she could translate her growing knowledge of light from the museum paintings into her evolving *Heart Bright Dark* series. In essence she had taught herself a new way to paint. Evans developed an analogous color palette by comparing Color-aid swatches with the hues found in the museum paintings. From these tests she created in oils hundreds of small color-range and tonal studies that corresponded to the color palettes of the five paintings. Those colors most identical to the source material were then logged for easy reference by Evans when creating her *Heart Bright Dark* paintings.



*A painting is an occasion for something to happen.
A good painting gives and gives. It's magical.*
— Jil Evans



At heart, Evans is a 21st-century heir to Abstract Expressionism. Her noteworthy practice is filled with paintings whose emotional and psychological content is expressed through a rich matrix of bold markings, undisciplined lines, and spatial incongruities laced together by a sophisticated color sense. Her *Heart Bright Dark* series is no different. Here, Evans transmogrified notions of light from the historical smaller-scale, representational source paintings into her large-scale, abstract works of the present, imparting an emotional and psychological impact. The ongoing series comprises twelve paintings to date, whose evolution can be tracked through her oil-on-canvas/panel sketches and her iPad working drawings reproduced as prints.

Each *Heart Bright Dark* painting is a spirited compositional drama distinguished by Evans' signature shifting spatial relationships,

which are magnified by her uncommon palette that proceeds from murky dark grays and browns, to vibrant blues, greens, and salmon, to electric reds, yellows, and oranges. This staged choreography of form and color reveals her new understanding of how her predecessors interpreted light.

It is difficult to determine which historical painting is the source for each *Heart Bright Dark* work, so abstract and complex are their compositions. But identifying the inspiration is not the point. Rather, Evans' challenge was to transmute the essence of the light conveyed in the earlier works into her own. This was done by interpreting compositional passages of form and color in the historical paintings, scaling them up and combining them with other visual elements to create her own landscapes of light.

Occasionally, assisted by Evans' sketches, the viewer can identify the corresponding painting. In *Heart Bright Dark 4* and *10*, the red-orange passages in the lower-and upper-right areas, respectively, may reference the mysterious figure, clothed in a red, hooded garment, who lurks in the shadows of the Bassanos' *The Element of Water*. Similarly, the dominant red areas in *Heart Bright Dark 1* correlate with the red-robed soldier mourning in Poussin's *The Death of Germanicus*. However, in *Heart Bright Dark 6*, perhaps the series' most powerful work in its resolution of color and shifting spatial relationships, its inspiration in Poussin's painting is far less obvious. Does the fractured blue-white cloud occupying the center of the work symbolize the light that envelops Germanicus? Do the yellow unfolding scrims of color at the edges of the work signify the light reflecting off the mourners?

In an in-studio conversation about the *Heart Bright Dark* series, I was struck by Evans' answer when I asked how she perceived the singular light in De Hooch's *The Asparagus Vendor*. Without hesitation she replied, "I think De Hooch is the light streaming in the window. He's painting himself into the scene." That notion, that light is a metaphor for the artist, aligns Evans' thinking closely to that of Dr. Panza. Does it follow that *Heart Bright Dark 11*, inspired by De Hooch, is a luminous portrait of the 17th-century Dutch artist, with its suspended passages of saturated yellow?

The *Heart Bright Dark* series is Evans' most accomplished and compelling body of work to date. At one level, it symbolizes "the bright and dark lights that inhabit all of us," and prompted Evans to question what she values in the world. During the two-year process of creating this series, she investigated the role of light in art, and the possible content it could hold by studying the works of the Bassanos, Poussin, De Hooch, Bonington, and Cropsey. She wanted to figure out "how to meet their sensibilities about light." For Evans, the activity of using light as subject matter allowed her to express the condition for, and the understanding of, a work of art. It provided her a different way of thinking about how we perceive the object, and all of its complexities and subtleties that are revealed by light. The *Heart Bright Dark* series offers insights into the experience of perception in representational versus abstract paintings. It also conveys how perception is altered through the tenuous balance of light, form, and color. How much information do we need to understand light? To see light is a fleeting and delicate activity, a true metaphor for knowledge.





The Element of Water, c. 1576-1577

Francesco and Jacopo Bassano

Oil on canvas. 56 11/16 x 74 5/8 in.

BEQUEST OF MISS TESSIE JONES, BY EXCHANGE, THE ETHEL MORRISON VAN DERLIP FUND, AND THE JOHN R. VAN DERLIP FUND 94.45

Photo Minneapolis Institute of Art



After Bassano 1

Oil on canvas

14 x 16 in.

2018



Bassano 3 iPad Sketch

10 x 13 in.

2018

1/5



After Bassano 2

Oil on canvas

18 x 20 in.

2018



Bassano 4 iPad Sketch
17 x 22 in.
2018
1/5



Bassano 1 iPad Sketch
13 x 17 in.
2018
1/5



After Bassano 3 Oil on canvas. 18 x 20 in. 2018



The Death of Germanicus, 1627

Nicolas Poussin

Oil on canvas. 58 1/4 x 78 in.

THE WILLIAM HOOD DUNWOODY FUND 58.28

Photo Minneapolis Institute of Art



After Poussin 1
Oil on canvas
14 x 11 in.
2018



After Poussin 4
Oil on canvas
18 x 20 in.
2018

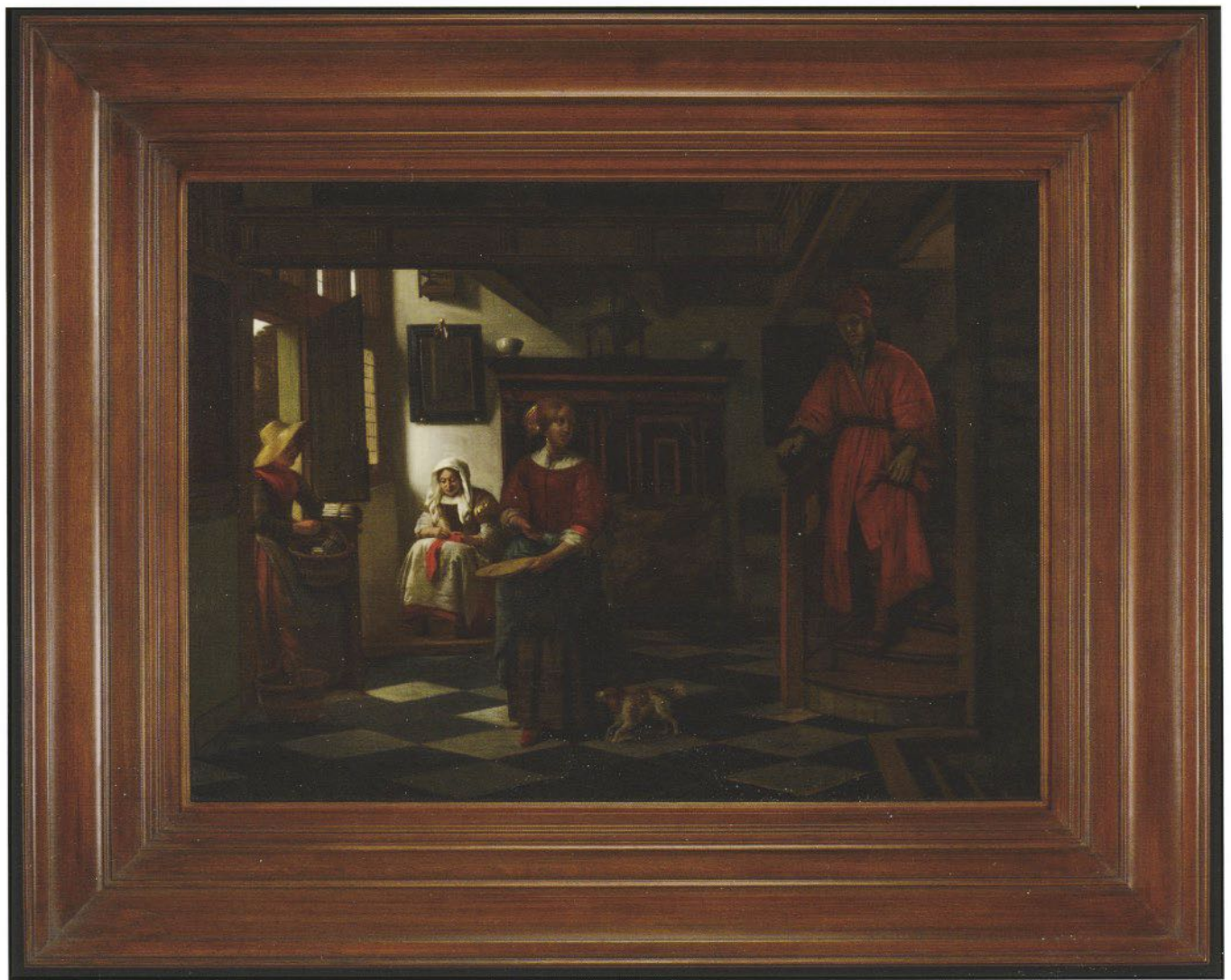


After Poussin 2
Oil on canvas
14 x 16 in.
2018



After Poussin 3 Oil on canvas. 14 x 16 in. 2018





The Asparagus Vendor, 1675–80
Pieter de Hooch
Oil on canvas, 30 x 41 in.
GIFT OF CHARLES B. AND MARGARET L. SWEATT 82.46
Photo Minneapolis Institute of Art

Top: *After De Hooch 2* (detail) Oil on canvas, 11 x 14 in. 2018
Bottom: *De Hooch 1 iPad Sketch* (detail) 17 x 22 in. 2018 1/5



Catskill Mountain House, 1855

Jasper Francis Cropsey

Oil on canvas. 29 x 44 in.

BEQUEST OF MRS. LILLIAN LAWHEAD RINDERER IN MEMORY OF HER BROTHER,
WILLIAM A. LAWHEAD, AND THE WILLIAM HOOD DUNWOODY FUND 31.47

Photo Minneapolis Institute of Art

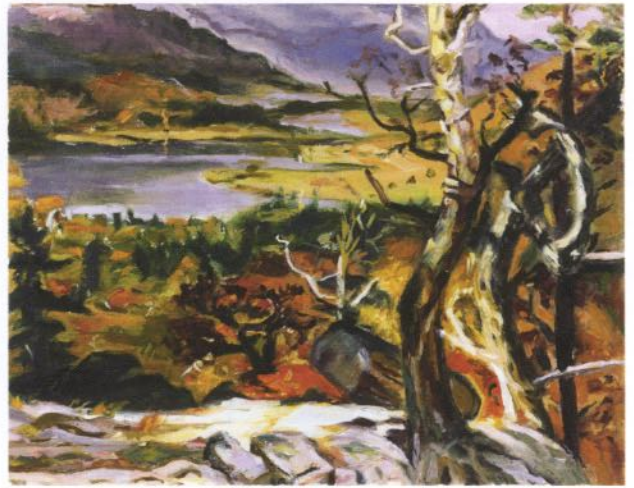


Above: *Cropsey 2 iPad Sketch* 17 x 22 in. 2018 1/5

Right: *Cropsey 3 iPad Sketch (detail)* 17 x 22 in. 2018 1/5



After Cropsey 2
Oil on canvas
8 x 10 in.
2018



After Cropsey 3
Oil on canvas
11 x 14 in.
2018





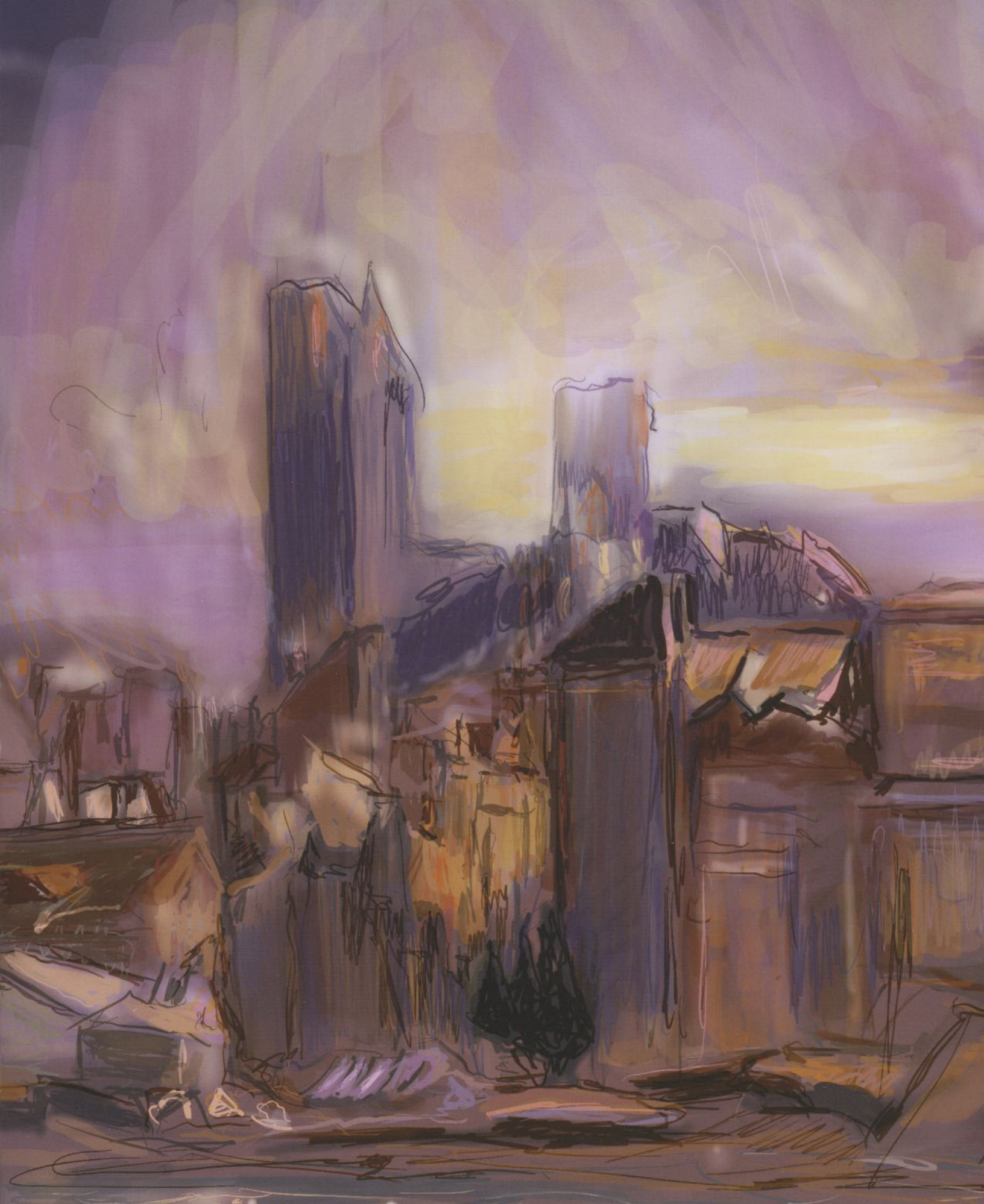
Rouen Cathedral, Sunrise, 1825
 Richard Parkes Bonington
 Oil on millboard. 11 5/16 x 8 15/16 in.
 THE SHEILA C. AND JOHN L. MORGAN ENDOWMENT
 FOR ART ACQUISITION 2012.44
 Photo Minneapolis Institute of Art



P. Bonington 2 iPad Sketch
 17 x 13 in.
 2018
 1/5



P. Bonington 3 iPad Sketch
 17 x 13 in.
 2018
 1/5





Heart Bright Dark 4 Oil on canvas. 30 x 32 in. 2018
Courtesy of Anita Sue Kolman and Marvin L. Marshak



Heart Bright Dark 2 Oil on canvas. 30 x 32 in. 2018



Heart Bright Dark 3 Oil on canvas. 30 x 32 in. 2018



Heart Bright Dark 6 Oil on canvas. 72 x 96 in. 2019



Heart Bright Dark 8 Oil on canvas. 96 x 72 in. 2019



Heart Bright Dark 12 Oil on canvas. 84 x 60 in. 2019



Heart Bright Dark 5 Oil on canvas. 60 x 84 in. 2019



Heart Bright Dark 7 Oil on canvas. 60 x 84 in. 2019



Heart Bright Dark 10 Oil on canvas. 96 x 72 in. 2019



Heart Bright Dark 11 Oil on canvas. 84 x 60 in. 2019



Heart Bright Dark 9 Oil on canvas. 72 x 96 in. 2019

B i o g r a p h y

Jil Evans

Jil Evans (M.A. University of Iowa, M.F.A. Stanford University) has exhibited her paintings, drawings, and prints nationally and internationally in the Twin Cities, Chicago, New York, Memphis, Washington, D.C., Paris, and Rome. Her work is in many public and private collections, including the Minneapolis Institute of Art, Halle Ford Museum of Art, Stanford University, Valparaíso University Museum of Art, Flaten Art Museum, Harry and Margaret Anderson Collection of Art, Healthmark Inc., Minnetonka Corp., Piper Jaffray and Hopwood, Central Lakes Colleges, Winthrop and Weinstein, Coca Cola Inc., and Walker Art Center. She has received grants, including the Jerome Foundation Grant, Arts Midwest/National Endowment for the Arts, two Minnesota State Arts Board grants, the Pew Grant to study and paint in Italy, and residencies at the American Academy in Rome and the Atlantic Center for the Arts. She is co-author of *The Image in Mind* (London: Bloomsbury Press) and co-editor of *Turning Images in Philosophy, Science, and Religion: A New Book of Nature* (Oxford University Press). She lives in Minneapolis with her husband, Charles Taliaferro, and their sheltie, Pip. She is a member of Traffic Zone Center for Visual Art where she has a studio. Evans is represented by Kolman & Pryor Gallery in Minneapolis.

Mason Riddle

Mason Riddle is a writer who covers the visual arts, architecture, applied arts, and design. She is a member of the International Society of Art Critics. Over three decades, she has contributed to a range of publications, including *Architectural Record*, *Architecture MN*, *Artforum*, *Arts Magazine*, *Dwell*, *Elle Decor*, *Hyperallergic*, *Metropolis*, *Modern Magazine*, *photograph*, *Public Art Review*, *Rain Taxi*, *Sculpture*, *Star Tribune*, *Surface Design Journal*, and Walker Art Center magazine. Riddle has a Master of Arts degree in Art History and Museum Practice from the University of Minnesota. She has written numerous artist exhibition essays for galleries and museums, and she penned the McKnight Foundation Distinguished Artist award essay for Kinji Akagawa. Formerly, Riddle served as the interim director of the Goldstein Museum of Design, director of the Minnesota Percent for Arts in Public Places program, director of Two Rivers Gallery at the Minneapolis American Indian Center, and visual arts curator at Intermedia Arts. She was president of VACUM, the Visual Arts Critics Union of Minnesota. Riddle is also an appraiser of fine and applied arts and a member of the International Society of Appraisers. She lives and works in Saint Paul, Minnesota.

S e l e c t e d E x h i b i t i o n s

- 2020 *The Heart's Bright and Dark Light*, Cummings Art Gallery, Mary D'Angelo Arts Center, Mercyhurst University, Erie, PA SOLO, traveling to The Catherine G. Murphy Gallery, St. Catherine University, St. Paul, MN
Color Show: Part 3, Yellow, Kolman & Pryor Gallery, Minneapolis, MN
Traffic Zone Center for Visual Art, Minneapolis, MN SOLO
- 2019 *The Heart's Bright and Dark Light*, Alice R. Rogers and Target Galleries, Saint John's University Art Center, Collegeville, MN SOLO
Color Show: Part 2, Red, Kolman & Pryor Gallery, Minneapolis, MN
Pulse Art Fair, Kolman & Pryor Gallery, Miami Beach, FL
- 2018 L/Ross Gallery, Memphis, TN
Landscape: Natural Fit, Imagined Prospects, Kolman & Pryor Gallery, Minneapolis, MN
Color Show: Part 1, White, Kolman & Pryor Gallery, Minneapolis, MN
- 2016 *Summer Group Exhibition*, L/Ross Gallery, Memphis, TN
Tiny Art Show, Kolman & Pryor Gallery, Minneapolis, MN
- 2015 *Ghost of the Figure*, Kolman & Pryor Gallery, Minneapolis, MN SOLO
Inside Sensation, Form + Content Gallery, Minneapolis, MN SOLO
No Boys Allowed, Kolman & Pryor Gallery, Minneapolis, MN
- 2013 *FLOOD*, Form + Content Gallery, Minneapolis, MN SOLO
30" x 30": New Abstract Painting in the Twin Cities, Kolman & Pryor Gallery, Minneapolis, MN
Curious Passions: The Diverse Inquiries of Traffic Zone Artists, Minnetonka Center for the Arts, Minnetonka, MN
- 2012 *Painting the Place Between*, Inaugural Exhibit, Minnesota Museum of American Art, St. Paul, MN
Landscape of the Mind, Katherine Nash Gallery, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN
Mapping Spectral Traces, Katherine Nash Gallery, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN
- 2011 *Breaking Light*, Form + Content Gallery, Minneapolis, MN SOLO
- 2010 *This, Here, Now: Nature and Human Consciousness*, Flaten Art Museum, St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN
Movement-Process-Reflection, with Margaret Wall-Romana, Bethel University, St. Paul, MN
- 2009 *Galapagos Cactus Wars*, m55art Gallery, Long Island City, NY SOLO
Galapagos Cactus Wars, Form + Content Gallery, Minneapolis, MN SOLO
- 2008 *Prints in Time*, Flaten Art Museum, St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN
Intimate Immensity, Form + Content Gallery, Minneapolis, MN
- 2007 *Dutch Opera*, Form + Content Gallery, Minneapolis, MN SOLO
Current Trends in Abstraction, Flanders Gallery, Minneapolis, MN
Painters Painting, College of Visual Arts, St. Paul, MN
- 2005 *Abstract Painting in Minnesota, 1930-present*, Minnesota Museum of American Art, St. Paul, MN
Unframed Prints, curated by Jeff Wetzig, Ninth Street Entry Gallery, St. Paul, MN
- 2004 *Abstraction and Figurative Narrative: Recent Paintings and Drawings by Jil Evans and T.L. Solien*, Foster Gallery, University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire, WI
Abstraction in Minnesota, 1930-present, curated by Thomas Barry, Rochester Art Center, Rochester, MN
The Weight of Paper, curated by Anne Davey, Delta Axis at Marshall Arts, Memphis, TN

- 2002 *In Situ: Fallen Angels, Stripes and Spots, Holes and Tentacles, New Paintings by Jil Evans, James Holmberg, and Cristi Rinklin*, Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis, MN
- 2001 *Tiepolo's Cloud*, Steensland Museum, Northfield, MN, SOLO, traveling to Conkling Gallery, Minnesota State University, Mankato, MN, and Hendrix College, Conway, AR
Concordia University, St. Paul, MN SOLO
George Billis Gallery, New York, NY
Second Floor Contemporary, Memphis, TN
- 2000 Doug Flanders Contemporary Art, Minneapolis, MN SOLO
Center Art Gallery, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, MI
Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis, MN
Rochester Art Center, Rochester, MN
- 1998 *Inaugural Exhibition*, Halle Ford Museum of Art, Salem, OR
School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN SOLO
- 1997 *Two Painters*, with Maria Santiago, College of Visual Arts, St. Paul, MN
Muse, Sommers Gallery, Minneapolis, MN
- 1996 *Earth, Water, Air and Fire*, Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis, MN
Inaugural Gifts, Valparaiso University Museum of Art, Valparaiso, IN
- 1995 *New Acquisitions*, Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis, MN
Four Degrees of Abstraction, Steensland Museum, Northfield, MN
Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH SOLO
Six Crossings Field, Thomson Gallery, Minneapolis, MN
CROSSROADS: Recent Abstract Painting, Minneapolis College of Art and Design, Minneapolis, MN
- 1994 The Painting Center, New York, NY SOLO
Walter Wickiser Gallery, New York, NY
- 1993 *New Additions*, Willamette University Art Museum, Salem, OR
Musée-atelier ADZAK, Paris, France
Thomson Gallery, Minneapolis, MN SOLO
- 1991 Franz Bader Gallery, Washington, D.C. SOLO
Thomson Gallery, Minneapolis, MN SOLO
Sazama Gallery, Chicago, IL SOLO
Minnesota Metaphor, Rochester Art Center, Rochester, MN
Black and White, Sazama Gallery, Chicago, IL
- 1990 Tweed Museum of Art, University of Minnesota, Duluth, MN SOLO
- 1989 *Prints and Drawing Show*, Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis, MN
University of Wisconsin, River Falls, WI SOLO
Jerome Fellowship Exhibit, Minneapolis College of Art and Design, Minneapolis, MN
Sazama-Brauer Gallery, Chicago, IL SOLO
- 1988 Thomson Gallery, Minneapolis, MN SOLO
4' Square, Sazama-Brauer Gallery, Chicago, IL
- 1987-92 *Chicago International Art Exposition*, Thomson Gallery, Minneapolis, MN

A c k n o w l e d g m e n t s

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Photographic documentation of final paintings and oil-on-canvas studies by Rik Sferra

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Heart Bright Dark 11 (detail) Oil on canvas. 84 x 60 in. 2019