

Danforth
Museum of Art

Arthur Polonsky
A THIEF OF LIGHT

Polonsky



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CATALOG AND ESSAY

Katherine French

ADDITIONAL ESSAYS

Barbara Swan
Arthur Polonsky



ABOVE

Aaron's Staff, 1999, (cat. 12)

LEFT

Sleeping Aaron, 1995, (cat. 6)

COVER

The Light Thief, 1965, (cat. 23)

Arthur Polonsky
A THIEF OF LIGHT

February 10 — May 18, 2008



Marine Samson, 1959
(cat. 17)

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The Landing, 1963
(cat. 3)

FOREWORD

by Barbara Swan
February 1990

Barbara Swan (1922-2003) studied at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston from 1943-1948, and upon graduation received a European Traveling Fellowship, an honor usually reserved for men. Recognized as one of Boston's best known painters, her work appears in numerous public and private collections.

A visionary is defined as one who sees vision; one whose ideas or projects are impractical; one who is a dreamer. I have known Arthur Polonsky and his work for forty-five years and it is appropriate to say that by all three definitions he is a true visionary. Arthur Polonsky may base an idea on an objective reality but he brings to that idea a mystical, mysterious inner life that is unique. Grass moves or is agitated by a strange force — a head emerging or a figure appearing seem symbolic of more than what his titles indicate. One may or may not know that there is a biblical source, but in his images there is a sensibility that can be haunting in its poetry.

Apart from a most imaginative mind nothing is truly resolved without a gift for handling paint. The brush loaded with paint achieves an expressive lyricism when it makes contact with the canvas. Every artist handles paint in a personal way. For some it means clear smooth surfaces; for others it can be a highly agitated surface. Arthur Polonsky has a beautiful sense of brush stroke. You will never find a boring area in one of his paintings. The dialogue between color, texture and subject is always alive.

Of special importance is Arthur Polonsky's remarkable gift as a draughtsman. Drawing remains a true revelation of an artist's command of his skill. An artist who cannot draw is easily exposed. Many artists now rely on photographs to copy rather than risk the adventure of direct eye to hand to paper. Arthur Polonsky's drawings have the excitement of a direct response to a subject, a daring use of line or tone, a sense of charged intensity. His portrait drawings not only have likeness but express a mood that is part artist, part model. To achieve a likeness is a gift in itself. When the gift for likeness is matched by a commanding talent for drawing the result is a masterful work.

In the definition of a visionary there is a second category: one whose ideas or projects are impractical. I would be remiss not to mention

Arthur's various electrical gadgets that for a period consumed much of his time. Some may have had a purpose, but others were delightful little twittering machines mounted on pedestals that moved or had lights that went on or off. Once when I was in the hospital in the heat of the summer he brought me a fan for my nose made from a flashlight to which he attached a small whirling blade. My nose felt quite refreshed.

In 1969, Arthur Polonsky made a portfolio of lithographs based on fragments of thoughts expressed by Léo Bronstein, the art historian. There is such empathy between artist and writer that these thoughts by Léo Bronstein could describe Arthur Polonsky as an artist: *Artisan, I grasped everything with my hand or my extreme body; with the hand of my fingers, the hand of my eyes, of my lips, of my ears and of what else could be added.*

*From mind to heart,
from heart to hand —
from hand to heart,
from heart to mind.*

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Arthur Polonsky
A THIEF OF LIGHT

By Katherine French

For the poet is really a thief of fire...

Donc le poete est vraiment voleur de feu
Rimbaud in a letter to Paul Demyen, 1871



Self Portrait, 1947
(cat. 13)

LEFT
A Stream Mystery, c. 1962
(cat. 20)

Katherine French is the Director of the Danforth Museum of Art where she has curated numerous exhibitions exploring the school of Boston Expressionism. In 2007 she received an award for curatorial excellence from the New England Chapter of the International Association of Art Critics for work on the exhibition *Joan Snyder: A Painting Survey, 1969-2005*.

Arthur Polonsky is a storyteller, in love with words and the ability of language to paint a picture. He speaks eloquently, mixing personal memory with history, philosophy and literature, but ironically rejects the use of language to explain his work. When pressed, he references the unconventional art historian Léo Bronstein, who was more interested in how an artist makes a painting than all the reasons why. For more than seventy years, Arthur Polonsky has ignored conventional narrative, insisting on his right to pursue the idea of making a painting that will surprise him.

To those unacquainted with the unique history of Boston painting, it might be surprising that Polonsky became an artist at all. Born in Lynn, Massachusetts, he was the child of first generation Russian immigrants who worked hard to bring their family out of poverty. But, instead of hardship, Polonsky remembers ample time for reading and drawing, a father who had taught himself to play the violin and then teach his son, and a mother who took her children to the nearby beach and ran back with them laughing – “she was that way.”

His father was a tailor, and the young boy was fascinated by the way he made suit patterns by marking black paper with chalk, creating “descriptive designs that would one day become three dimensional.” Observing his father draw lines that “would later become the contour of a living person,” the boy saw a process that was “interesting and endlessly mysterious to sculptors and artists.”¹ It was natural for him and his sister to also make drawings. Using discarded cardboard from cloth samples, the children switched back and forth between working from photographs and drawing from life. Some work was completely invented, accompanied by stories that Polonsky wrote which served to place imagination at the very center of his work.

He perfected “a magical form of drawing,” by imagining the contours of objects, a practice that

continued after he moved to Roxbury at the age of thirteen.² He called upon this magical drawing to make each day’s walk to his part time job at the public library “a renewable adventure.” Anticipating the sight of remembered views, he would “match them with each new perception,”³ finding wonder in everyday existence and transforming that wonder into marvelous reality.

Like so many of his generation, Polonsky’s real education happened at the public library. During the war years, those quiet rooms “became a refuge from the uncertainty, anxiety, and ultimate tragedy outside.”⁴ It was there he found translations of Carl Jung, Marcel Proust, Thomas Mann and numerous others. As a scholarship student in high school classes at the Museum of Fine Arts, he pursued his aptitude for drawing. But he also attended Hebrew Teachers College, and it was ultimately necessary for him to choose between the two upon graduation from high school. While his religious teachers would have liked their talented young pupil to continue, they supported his decision to accept a scholarship to the Museum School, telling him “You can be a Jew and an artist – go.”⁵

They could not have known how true their words were. To be an artist working in Boston at the beginning of the 1940’s was to be at the very center of a burgeoning art scene populated by first and second generation Jewish immigrants. Boston artists Hyman Bloom and Jack Levine had achieved national success with bodies of work that drew on their Jewish cultural experience.⁶ At the Museum School large numbers of Jewish students found a mentor in Karl Zerbe, a refugee artist who brought European Expressionism to Boston.⁷ Like Polonsky, many were the sons and daughters of recent immigrants. Predominantly secular, but culturally Jewish, many struggled to reconcile their religious identities with an arts community that had been previously defined by a Christian elite. Yet, Polonsky never found this struggle necessary. So fluent in Hebrew that he could even dream

in the language, he was equally inspired by his experience of listening to music, reading poetry or looking at the world. Fellow classmate Barbara Swan recognized him as a visionary, a dreamer whose ideas of reality were tempered by “a mystical, mysterious inner life that is unique.”⁸

“In every person’s life is a place where their dreams reside. For Arthur Polonsky, those dreams reside in Paris,”⁹ remarked Boston Public Library’s Keeper of Prints Sinclair Hitchings. Like many students at the Museum School, Polonsky was keen to visit Europe. But in his case, desire was fueled by imagination. Viewing the large, black and white lantern slides in art history class, he saw not only the image of Chartres Cathedral, but also a promise that he would someday be there.¹⁰ When awarded a traveling fellowship upon graduation in 1948, this dream became a reality.¹¹

Photographs that appeared in a 1948 issue of *Life* magazine paint a romantic portrait of the artist standing by the window of his garret room – incredibly once occupied by Arthur Rimbaud – and walking along the banks of the Seine. Polonsky learned French well enough to read the fifteen volumes of *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*. He walked past “miles of paintings,” drew every day, and enjoyed “the privilege of unbroken work.” He went to plays and concerts, and after viewing a performance by Marcel Marceau, painted a portrait the next day from memory. He felt inspired by film. “This was not directly, visibly related to anything in my painting, but certainly related. The whole mystery of sitting in the dark and watching this world take place in films, it’s never stopped being mysterious.”¹² For the first time, he was able to see original works by the Symbolist painters. Odilon Redon was important, as was James Ensor, whom he admired for an ability to overthrow classical draftsmanship. “He had it, and he didn’t use it,” observed Polonsky. “In abasing it, it revealed itself in a new way.”¹³ This was personally interesting for an artist whose virtuoso skill in drawing never

failed to impress. Yet, perhaps the most profound part of his stay was his experience reading French poetry.

Even at the age of fifteen, he knew that “poets had given us words for horizons, for oceans, and for the celebrations and laments of our lives...”¹⁴ Once in Paris, Polonsky read the works of Paul Valéry and Rainer Maria Rilke. On a visit to the Rodin Museum, he went to the garden, so that he could stand and look back at the house where Rilke worked. “I’ve not yet finished with Rilke,” he has observed, and over the years this continued regard has inspired imaginary portraits. However, in Rimbaud the former rabbinical student recognized a divine power. “Rimbaud believed that poetry fulfills a role that religion assigns to God,” comments Polonsky. “He believed that the universe could be humanized by art.”

Back in Boston, the young artist needed to make a living, and returned to teaching at the Museum School, before moving on to Brandeis and then Boston University. He continued exhibiting with Boris Mirski Gallery, where he had previously worked as a student. In a strange confluence between science and art, he was hired by the Russell Sage Foundation to make drawings of mentally ill patients at the Metropolitan State Hospital outside Dorchester, which were mounted on cardboard, and used by researchers to conduct various tests.¹⁵ But his most consistent source of commissioned work came through portraiture.

Even as a child, Polonsky’s ability to convey likeness attracted clients. Classmates would give him their lunch tickets for a pencil portrait. At the public library, he was assigned to illustrate displays, and paid one dollar for each pastel made from life. On Sunday afternoons, he performed a similar service for Roxbury neighbors, always “working in the kitchen where the light was good.”¹⁶ But once at the Museum School, he was referred to more affluent clients and his reputation grew. With



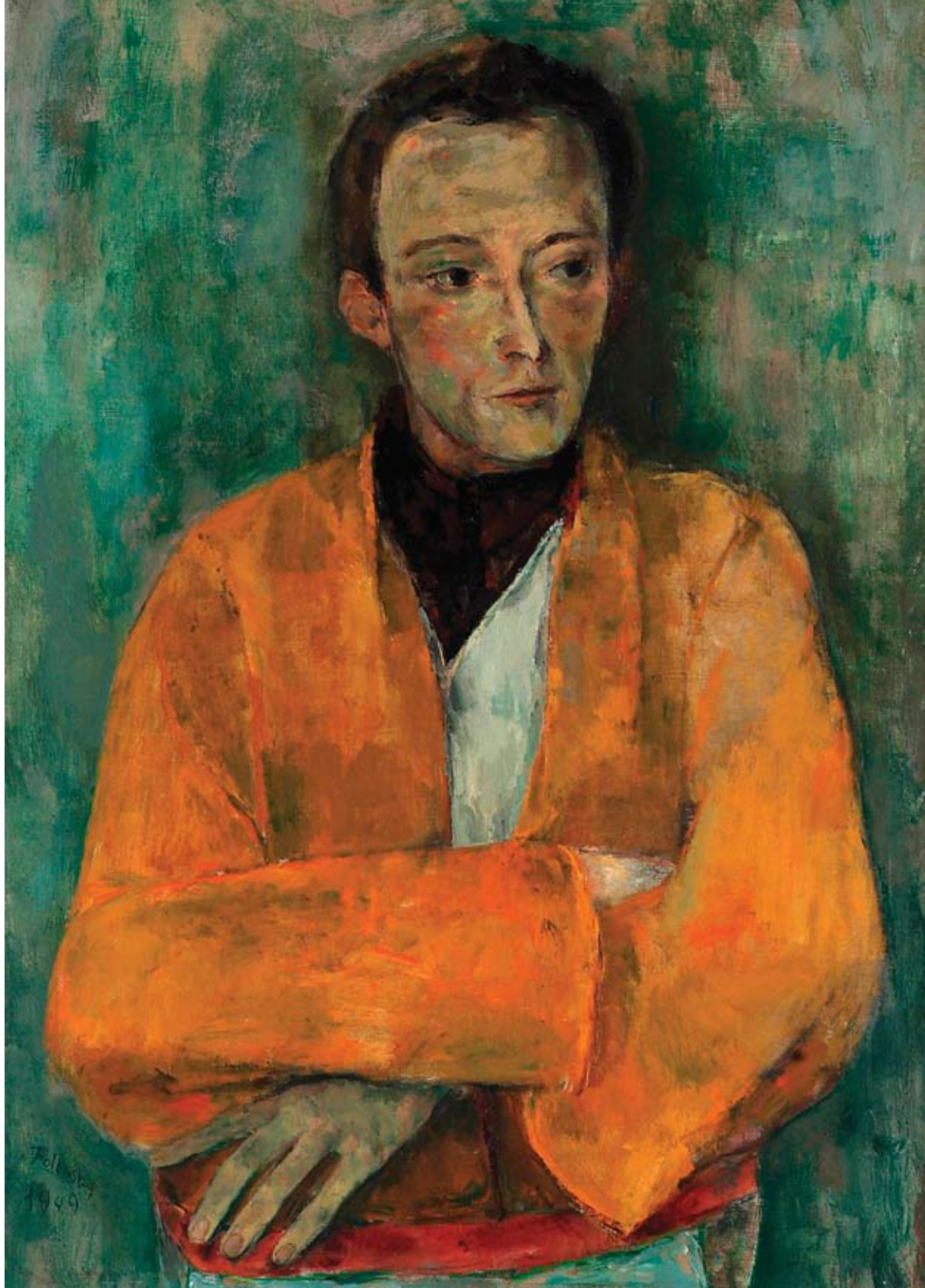
Memory, 1955

(cat. 16)

RIGHT

Marcel Marceau, 1948

(cat. 14)





Raging, 1953
(cat. 15)

some, he developed friendships, as well as working relationships, painting portraits of their sons and daughters growing up, and eventually their grandchildren.

These paintings expressed conventional likeness, but Polonsky liked to introduce a sense of mystery when allowed. In *Portrait of Constance Wallace, Girl with a Pheasant*, a young girl stands before an imaginary village on the Rhine.¹⁷ A young man leans out of the window, a self-portrait of the artist looking down at his subject cradling a male bird. Using a stuffed pheasant that his father had rescued from the trash as a model, Polonsky is reluctant to give the creature any particular meaning. “I was glad for the colors and shapes,” he said. “I looked forward to working with it.” Although the bird had already been incorporated into a previous self-portrait *Man with Pheasant*, there is a small, yet significant, difference. In the drawing the creature squirms uncomfortably, tail extended and wings spread, an object of beauty struggling to evade the painter’s grasp. In the arms of Constance Wallace, the bird rests peacefully.

Polonsky’s metaphorical portrait of his friend the poet Claude Vigée, shows that beauty can triumph.¹⁸ Instead of the Biblical strong man we read about in the Old Testament, we see an effeminate boy sitting “in victory over the slimy, primordial creatures that have crawled up out of the ocean.” The screeching bird, a pincher crab and the roiling sea are reminiscent of a childhood spent playing near the salt marshes in Lynn, but the jawbone of an ass makes the painting truly bizarre. Polonsky’s desire to combine strange and irrational imagery comes as much from his need to escape the mundane requirements of commissioned work as his love of the metaphysical. While he does not set out to illustrate the story of Samson and his unlikely weapon, Polonsky has appropriately chosen a poet to slay the Philistines.

In speaking of Polonsky’s close connection to

Symbolist poets, fellow artist Sidney Hurwitz makes the point that “...his most fanciful paintings came close to poetry. In fact, that was what he was trying to do...”¹⁹ This poetic sensibility comes as much from his desire to combine strange and from irrational images as the way he applies the paint. Like a talented writer in command of language, Polonsky has great freedom to invent. His emotional palette is full of hot colors set against each other. His brush strokes are broad and spontaneous. In the words of curator Nicholas Capasso, they are “ferocious.”²⁰

This ferocity does not prevent him from creating works of great elegance. Both *The Surveyor* and *The Light Thief* depend upon an agitated surface to convey their disturbing tranquility. “My loyalty is to the first sensation of the manual,” he says, insisting that “words are incidental to the painting.” However, a careful viewer can discern Polonsky’s wide-ranging interests by listening to his stories, and then looking closely at his subject matter. In speaking about *The Surveyor*, or perhaps himself, the artist sees “a sort of historical figure, wearing extravagant goggles, coming to earth from another existence. He looks around, and is dismayed.” In *The Light Thief*, he begins by addressing formal contrast, pleased with the muted colors in the parts of the figure behind glass and “the pictorial way that he is outside looking in.” But then he begins speaking about early French cinema and the Prometheus myth, the importance of Rimbaud as a poet and his 1871 letter to Paul Demeny in which Rimbaud says that “the poet is really a thief of fire...”

Polonsky was able to create a visual metaphor for this fire. Nearly all of his paintings feature a source of light – perhaps because of the artist’s delight in contrast, perhaps in reference to a creative spark that must be stolen from the gods. He registers desire and caution for this inspiration through a complicated allusion to poetry and myth. Rimbaud wanted to be “the son of the sun,” and Samson’s name means “of the sun.” Both were powerful, but



Untitled, 1951
(cat. 34)

eventually lose their strength. Rilke describes Narcissus pulled through a watery mirror by his destructive love of self. Prometheus is punished for stealing fire, and Icarus falls into the sea by flying too close to the sun. The lesson which can be inferred is that an artist must carefully nurture inspiration – which is perhaps why Polonsky is so reluctant to name sources, and is similarly cautious when speaking about other artists. Although numerous critics have compared his disembodied spirits to Hyman Bloom's, Polonsky does not see them as closely connected. "I treasure Bloom's possibility of shape and color and all that he could do best," he says when questioned. "*Inspire* is not the right word to use. Instead, I would say that Bloom alerted me to certain possibilities."

American artists working in the 1950's were alert to numerous possibilities. The art world had moved from Paris to New York where Abstract Expressionists were beginning to forge a recognizably different style – a style not far removed from Boston's painterly expressionism.²¹ Like many of his contemporaries, Polonsky remained loyal to the idea of representing the natural world. However, his world was filled with dream-like imagery – outwardly descriptive, but touching upon the same kind of intellectual abstraction that fueled New York painting. Called "a recording angel,"²² for his ability to portray likeness, Polonsky is even better known for his exploration of the unconscious mind.

In a series of drawings made around the time of his mother's death, he concentrated on the sleeping figures at a Jewish Rehabilitation Center where she spent her last days. Lying back against the twisted sheets, his mother has the look of a dreaming angel, and Polonsky exaggerates lines and shapes to create wings that allow his elderly subject to fly. The same kind of poetic association occurs in his portrait of sleeping Aaron, a Biblical prophet to whom God spoke in a dream. Aware that Aaron is the Hebrew version of his own name, Arthur Polonsky presents

the mystical flowering of Aaron's rod as metaphor for his own artistic ability. But this is not an ability that he takes for granted.

Within the Dream, "a painting that describes me or some other imaginary being," shows a man teetering on the edge of a cliff. Set against an abstraction of light and dark, the small figure introduces not only formal tension, but also the kind of menace and foreboding found in "dreams where you avoid one danger by escaping into another far greater." Like Icarus trying to gear up for flight, he is "a man deciding to fall into the abyss, or to be consumed by flames." Polonsky knows that stealing inspiration from the gods can be dangerous business, but it is a risk he is willing to take.

ENDNOTES

1. Arthur Polonsky, interview with Robert Brown, Oral History Interview with Arthur Polonsky, Newton, MA, April 12, 1972, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.
2. Arthur Polonsky, *On Drawing and Childhood's Prophecy*, December 1, 1996. Heron Press, Boston Public Library, 1996.
3. Arthur Polonsky, "Memories of 1941 and 1942, when I was a high school student, and worked in the Roxbury Memorial Branch of the Boston Public Library..." Unpublished Journal, 1973. Collection of Arthur Polonsky.
4. Ibid.
5. Arthur Polonsky, interview with Judith Bookbinder, March 27, 1997, quoted in Judith Bookbinder, *Boston Modern: Figurative Expressionism As Alternative Modernism* (Lebanon, NH: University of New England for UNH Press, 2005), p. 212.
6. Bloom and Levine presented a threat to the previous generation of Boston painters. When working briefly as a studio assistant for Ives Gammell, Polonsky was given catalogs featuring them and told "Here, Polonsky, take them or put them in the garbage where they belong." Polonsky, quoted in Bookbinder, *Boston Modern*, p. 211.
7. In addition to Karl Zerbe, Polonsky also studied with Ture Bengz, and was teaching assistant to Ben Shahn in the Museum's Tanglewood Program in the Berkshires in 1947. Inspired by Shahn's interest in egg tempera, he purchased an egg a day from a local farmer to complete a self-portrait during that summer, but was disappointed to find that he could not duplicate the results upon returning to Boston due to the lack of available fresh eggs.
8. Barbara Swan, exhibition pamphlet *Arthur Polonsky: Selected Works 1944-1990*, issued by the Fitchburg Museum of Art in 1990.



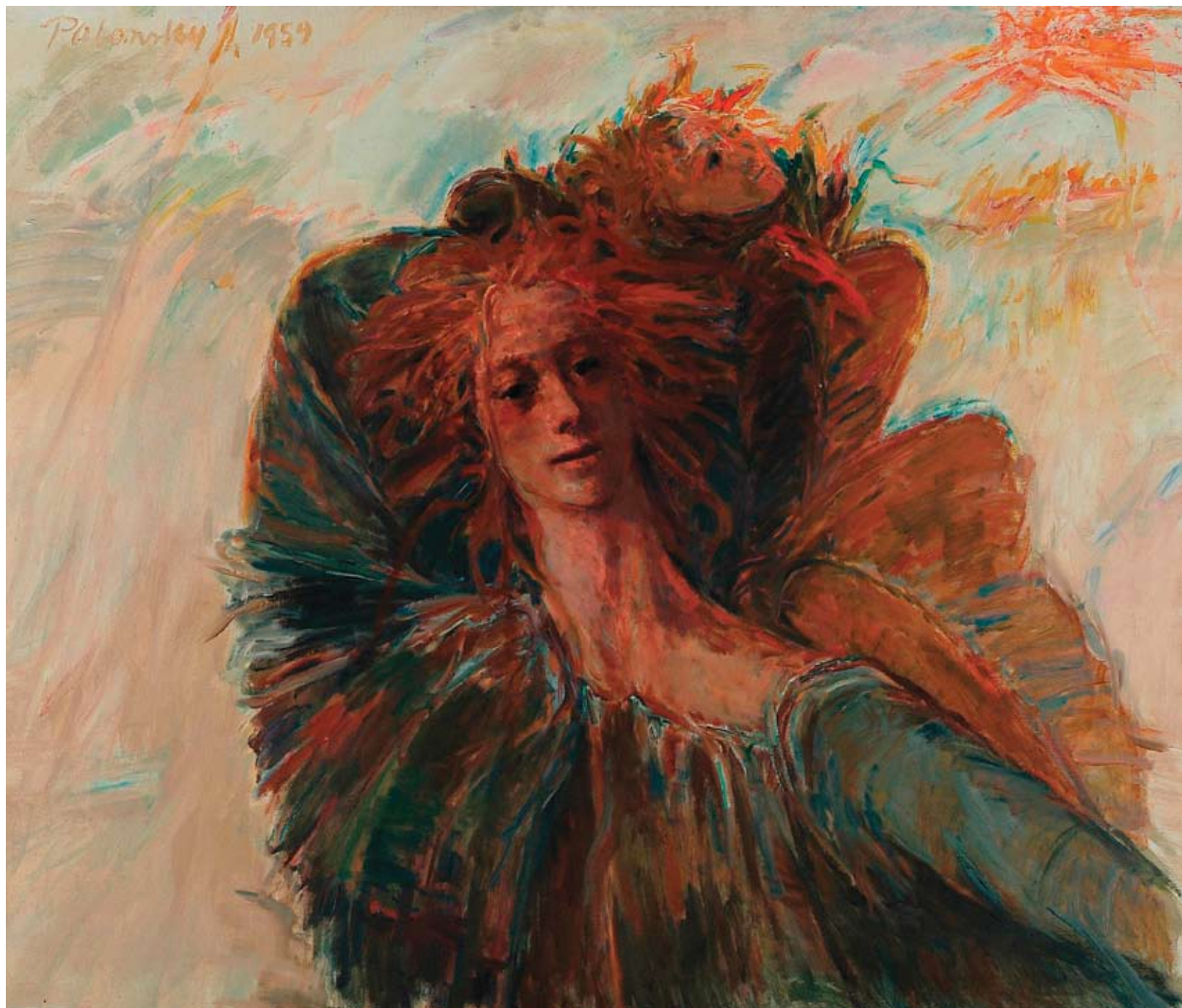
Man with Pheasant, c. 1955

(cat. 1)

RIGHT

The Survivors, 1959

(cat. 18)





The Surveyor, 1966
(cat. 24)

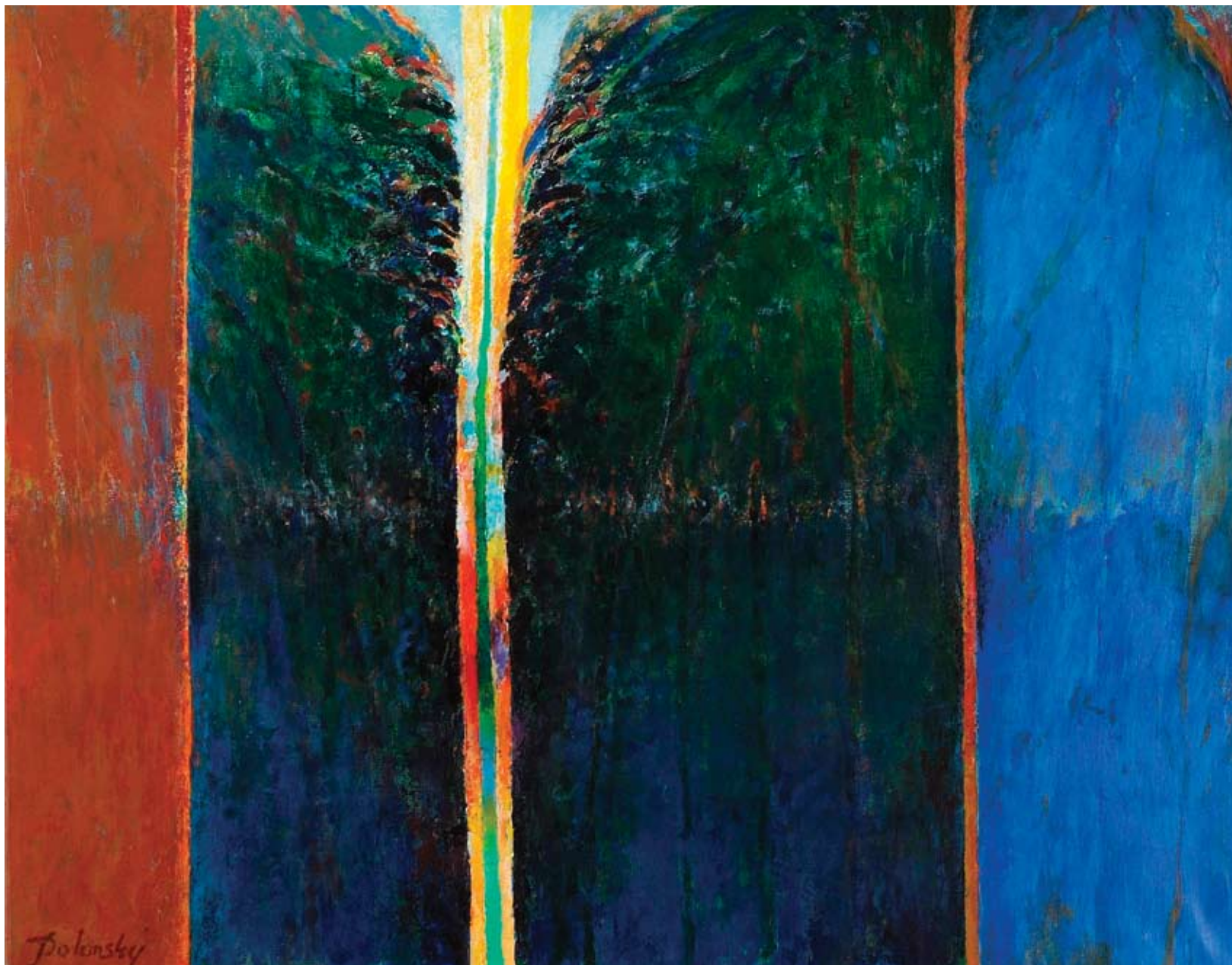
RIGHT

The History Magician, 1990
(cat. 28)

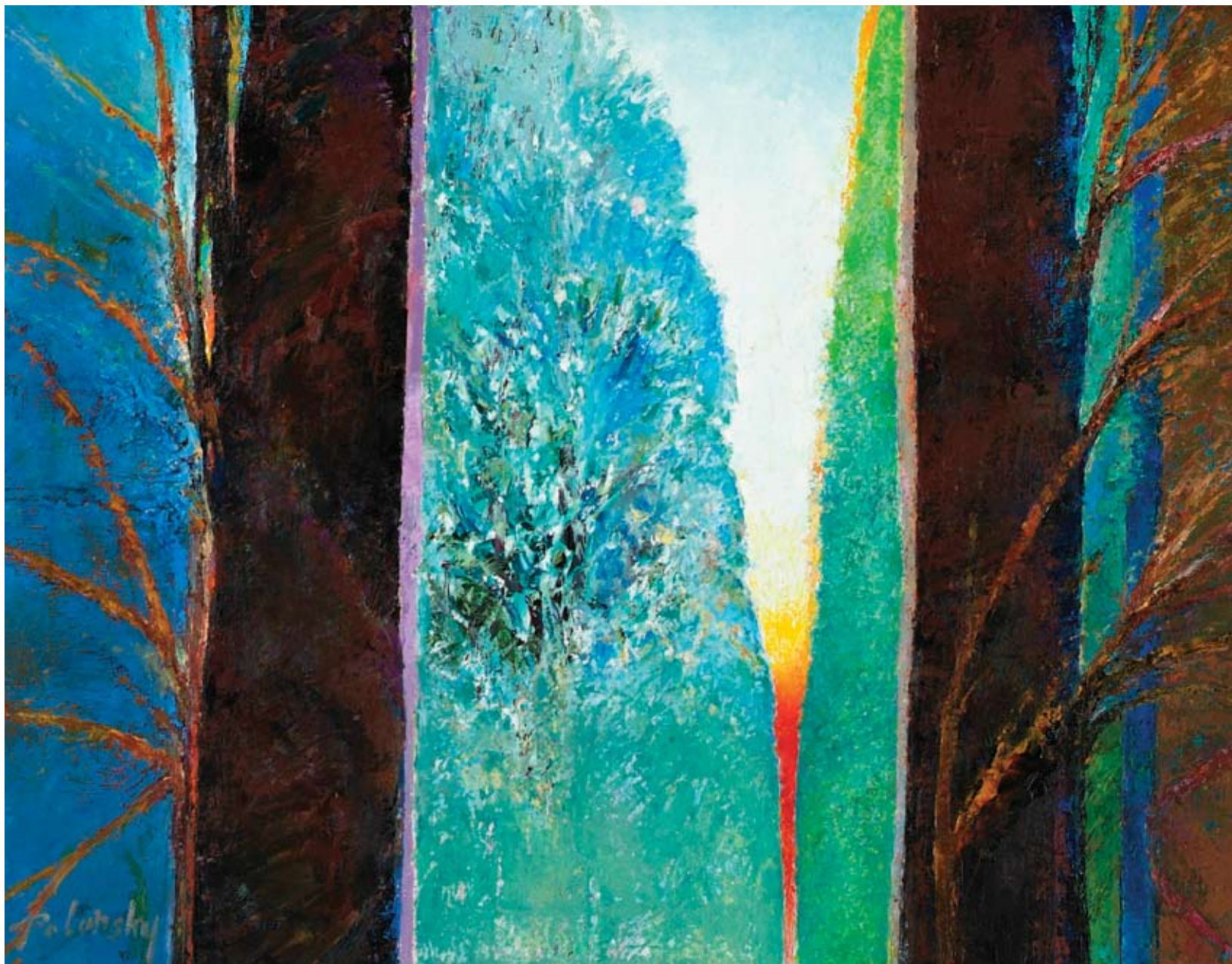
9. Sinclair Hitchings, conversation with author, January 10, 2008.
10. Polonsky, interview with Brown, Archives of American Art.
11. Since Fellowship funding had accumulated during the war, an unusually large number of Museum School graduates found themselves together in Paris between 1947 and 1950. During the peak year of 1949 "more than fifteen young artists from Boston lived and painted in Paris." Sinclair Hitchings, "Boston's Visionary Decade," in *The Visionary Decade: New Voices in Art in 1940's Boston*, (Boston, MA: Boston University Art Gallery in cooperation with the Boston Public Library, 2002), p.26.
12. Polonsky, interview with Brown, Archives of American Art.
13. Ibid.
14. Polonsky, quoted in Bookbinder, *Boston Modern*, p.212.
15. *Raging*, 1953 (cat. 16) was created with a polymer tempera paint especially formulated by Karl Zerbe and Alfred Duca, and manufactured briefly in Somerville, MA.
16. Polonsky, "Memories of 1941 and 1942." One such client was his high school French teacher George Hennessy who commissioned portraits of his three children. Hennessy's daughter Helen later became Helen Vendler (née Hennessy) and is now a Harvard professor and poetry critic for *The New Yorker*.
17. The commission portrait had come about as the result of a dream that Mrs. Wallace had after seeing her daughter Constance cradling a chicken in her school play at the Putney School. The use of the pheasant was Polonsky's idea, but the self-portrait resulted when the girl shyly made the request to her mother that the artist place himself in the finished painting.
18. Born in northern Alsace in 1921, Claude Vigée was a Jewish poet active in the resistance during WWII. He later came to the United States where he taught at Brandeis for eleven years before moving to Israel, and then back to France where he has lived in Paris since 2001.
19. Sidney Hurwitz, conversation with author, January 10, 2008.
20. Nicholas Capasso, "Expressionism: Boston's Claim to Fame," in *Painting in Boston: 1950-2000*, (Lincoln, MA: DeCordova Museum and Sculpture Park, 2002), p.152.
21. When seeing the work of Bloom and Levine at a 1942 exhibition in the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Willem de Kooning remarked that he and Jackson Pollack considered Bloom to be "the first Abstract Expressionist painter in America." Willem de Kooning, quoted by Bernard Chaet, "The Boston Expressionist School: A Painter's Recollection of the Forties," *Archives of American Art Journal* no. 1 (1980), p.25.
22. Hitchings, "Boston's Visionary Decade," p.27.

Unless specifically noted, information for this essay was drawn from conversations with Arthur Polonsky during October-December, 2007 and January, 2008.





Entrance, 2002, (cat 30)



Morning Light, 2002, (cat. 31)

ON DRAWING AND CHILDHOOD'S PROPHECY

by Arthur Polonsky
December 1, 1996



Still Now, 1998
(cat. 11)
RIGHT
Patient: Shielding Eyes, 1998
(cat. 9)

REMEMBERING, I SEE MYSELF as a very young child practicing a magical form of drawing: with an imaginary pencil I would follow the contours of ornamental moldings, the fluted black legs of a cast-iron stove, the arabesques of lace curtains framing the sky.

Drawing has also been the generating origin of my works on canvas, metal plate, and stone. I selected a certain surface, charcoal, or pen, aware of its compliant or defiant nature, and, as it has happened for more than sixty years, I anticipate the suspension of reflective thinking, the willing engagement of eye and hand, and the familiar, yet future-bound discoveries of each new drawing. Line limiting the boundaries of perceived form. Line making visible motion, that would otherwise never been seen. Line as demarcation, tangent, urgency and grace.

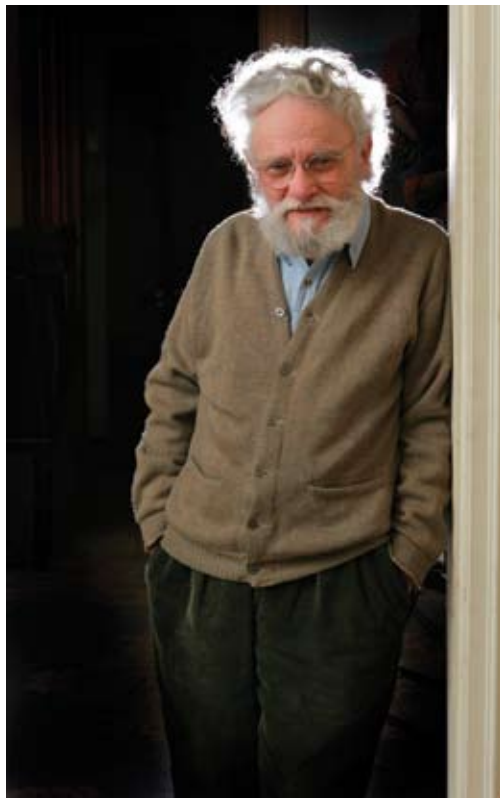
Shading as an ordering of values of light, from its degrees of darkness releasing light-struck volume inventing equivalents for color in gradations of gray, generating illusionary depth and resemblance. My works have always incorporated a duality of expressive means. Images of objective figuration, and images of purer translations of visual experience. Whether from observation, or from visual memory and imagination, they share a common genesis.

What is seen as profoundly personal in artists' creations is beyond our pride and planning. It is inevitable as the sound of our voice, and the mysterious fulguration of images in our dreaming.

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From an edition of 300 monotypes printed by Heron Press, Boston
for the Boston Public Library in 1996.



ARTHUR POLONSKY



RIGHT
Marine Elegy, 1992
(cat. 29)

Arthur Polonsky was born in Lynn, Massachusetts in 1925, the son of a Russian tailor and seamstress who had come to the United States as part of the wave of late 19th-century immigration that was to change the face of Boston's cultural history. As a high school student in Roxbury, Massachusetts, he studied drawing at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and later received his diploma from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts where he studied with Karl Zerbe from 1943-1948. During the summer of 1947 he was a teaching assistant to Ben Shahn at the Museum School's Tanglewood Program the Berkshires, and subsequently traveled to France when awarded the Museum School's European Traveling Fellowship. Living in Paris from 1948 until March 1950, he was part of a loose community of other Museum School graduates all intent upon absorbing the lessons of European Masters from Rembrandt to Picasso to Soutine. However, for Polonsky, the Symbolist movement was particularly important. Drawn to the artist Redon, as well as the poets as Rimbaud and Rilke, he eventually learned French well enough to read and translate work by his favorite writers – a practice that continues to the present day.

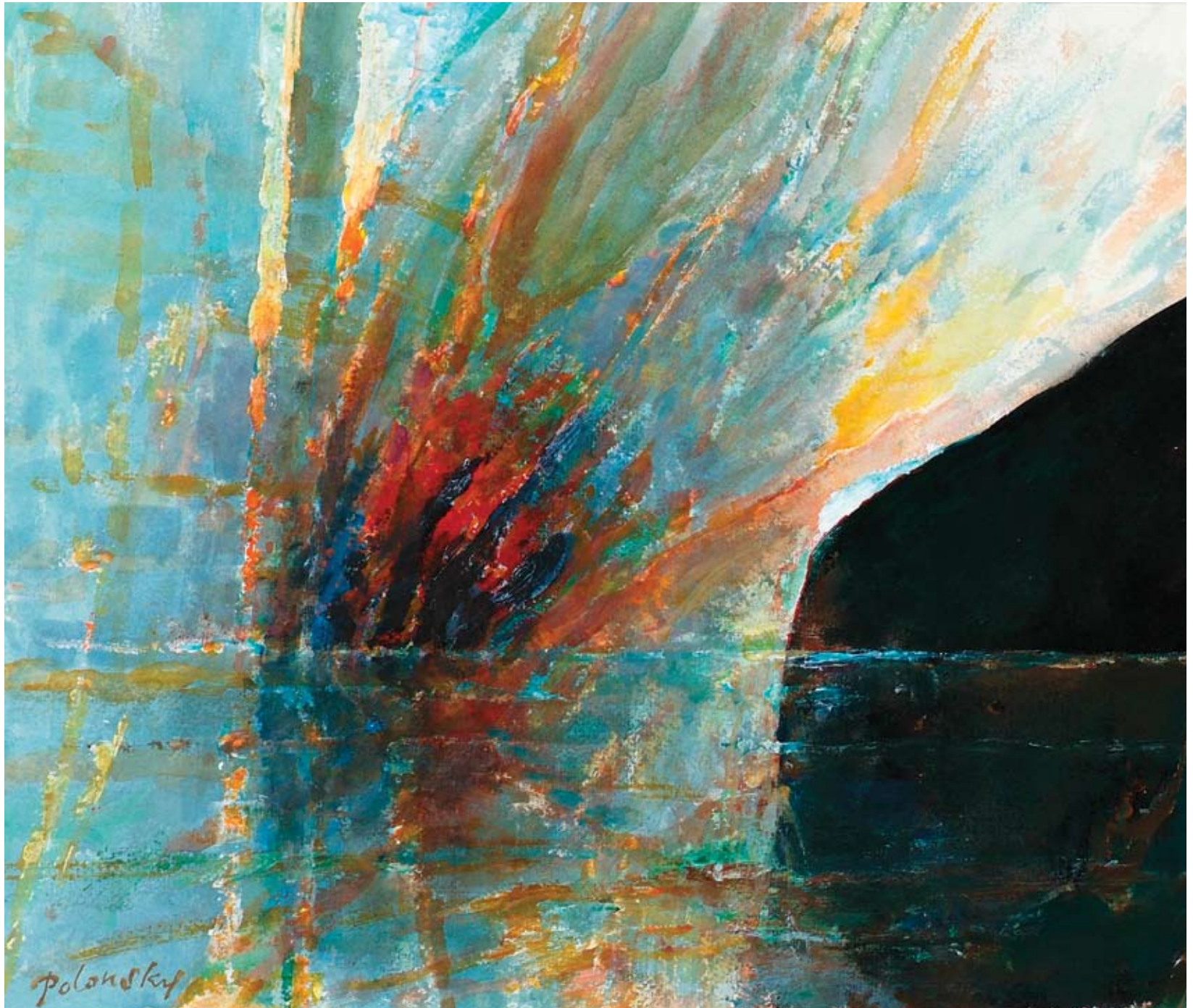
Success came early to the young artist. Even before leaving for Paris, he'd had one person shows at Boris Mirski Gallery, Boston and Downtown Gallery, NYC. In Europe he exhibited in Salon des Jeunes Peintres, Paris; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; and Chateau des Rohan, Strausbourg. In 1948 articles about him appeared in both *Time* and *Life* magazines, and in 1950, he was featured in the Parisian review *La Revue Moderne des Arts*. His work was exhibited at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston in 1949, and upon return to America, he was represented by Boris Mirski, who gave him five solo exhibitions between 1951 and 1966. A feature about him appeared in *The New Yorker* in 1956, and he was given a one-person show in New York's prestigious Durlacher Gallery in 1965. He has been reviewed in *Art Digest*, *Art in America*, *Arts Magazine*, the *Boston Globe* and

the *New York Times*. After Mirski Gallery closed in 1974, the artist exhibited with Shore Gallery, Boston and Kantar Fine Arts, Newton, MA.

Over the years, Polonsky had a profound affect on generations of art students. Beginning his academic career at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, where he taught from 1950 to 1960, he later taught at Brandeis University from 1954 to 1960, and Boston University from 1965 to 1990, where he is now Professor Emeritus.

He has had one person exhibitions at numerous institutions, including the Art Complex Museum, Duxbury, MA; Mills Gallery, Boston Center for the Arts, Boston, MA; Boston Public Library, Boston, MA; Fitchburg Art Museum, Fitchburg, MA; Fogg Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge, MA; Fuller Museum of Art, Brockton, MA; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA; Newton Art Center, Newton, MA. In addition to the above collecting institutions, his work is in the following permanent collections: Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, MA; Danforth Museum of Art, Framingham, MA; DeCordova Museum and Sculpture Park, Lincoln, MA; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA; High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA; New York Public Library, NYC; Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN; The Art Gallery, UNH at Durham, Durham, NH; and Zimmerli Museum, Rutgers University, Rutgers, NJ. His work is also represented in numerous private collections.

In addition to the European Traveling Fellowship from the School of the Museum of Fine Art, Boston, Polonsky has received several awards, including a Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Grant in Painting from 1951-1952, and a Copley Master Award from Boston's Copley Society in 1981. The artist currently lives and works in Newton, MA.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



Icarus, c. 1970's
(cat. 32)

RIGHT
Rising Light, 1978
(cat. 26)

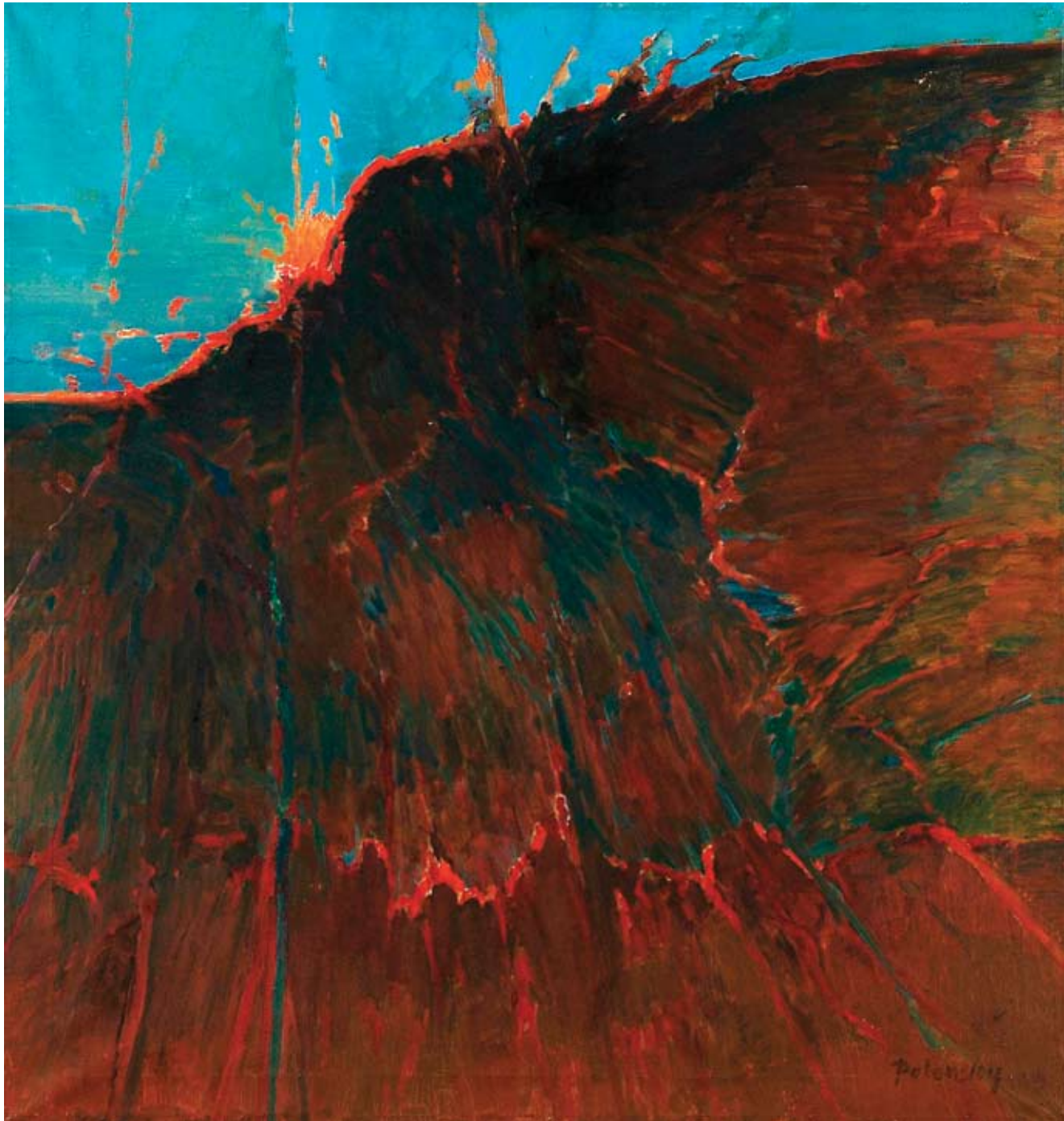
We are grateful for the trust and cooperation of Arthur Polonsky, who graciously took time away from his studio to review work from the beginning of his long career until the present time. Conversations with the artist in his proved uniquely illuminating as regards the creative process. His memories and observations provided a thoughtful commentary not only on his own artistic development, but also on the history of Boston painting and the nature of art itself. Without him, this exhibition would not have been possible, and we are extremely appreciative.

The exhibition and catalog have been realized through the generosity of many individuals. We are especially grateful to Herbert P. and Marylou Gray, important collectors of Boston Expressionism whose support was key. Special thanks go to Jack and Carol Kline, as well as Anne Elvins, who not only provided support, but helped locate works that became central to the exhibition. Thanks are also due Laura Elvins, Constance Kantar, Mark Kohler and Tom Shapiro, and a number of Boston artists. These include Arthur Polonsky's former students Arthur Beale, Judith Brassard Brown, Audrey Cayne, Linda Pearlman Karlsberg and Ellen Wineberg, as well as his contemporaries Joseph Ablow, David Aronson, Bernard Chaet, Alan Fink, Esther Geller, Suzanne Hodes, Sidney Hurwitz, Reed Kay, Iso Papo, Lois Tarlow, Cleo Webster and John Wilson. The list of these names would have only grown, if time had permitted continued research on an artist whose work and individuality have touched so many in a significant way.

We are extraordinarily grateful to the scholarship of the growing number of curators and art historians interested in Boston Expressionism. Central to any serious consideration of this important time is Dr. Judith Bookbinder's *Boston Modern: Figurative Expressionism as Alternative Modernism*. Nicholas Capasso's essay *Expressionism: Boston's Claim to Fame*, which appeared in the DeCordova Museum's *Painting in Boston: 1950-*

2000, also provides many insights. Linda Poras must be congratulated for her work on the exhibition *Arthur Polonsky: Selected Works, 1944-1990*, which opened at the Fitchburg Art Museum while she was curator there. Special thanks to Peter Timms, Director of the Fitchburg Art Museum, as well as Barbara Swan's husband Alan Fink and daughter Joanna Fink, for generous permission to reprint an essay by the late artist, which appeared in a catalog for that show. Sinclair Hitchings, former Keeper of Prints at the Boston Public Library, was able to speak from his long experience in working with Arthur Polonsky, and to provide original material related to numerous exhibitions of the artist's work. Special thanks are also due Dorothy Abbott Thompson for her intelligent observations. As always, we are extremely appreciative for the advice and support of Boston University's Professor Patricia Hills whose support has proved invaluable.

John Colan deserves special recognition for catalog design, and thanks are due to Mark Karlsberg for the artist's photograph. Finally, we would like to thank the many individuals in the Danforth Museum of Art community whose work contributed to the exhibition and catalog, including Associate Curator and Museum Registrar Lisa Leavitt and Curatorial Assistant Janet Zipes.



CHECKLIST



Waves Forming, c. 1975
(cat. 25)

DRAWINGS

1. *Man with Pheasant*, c. 1955, pigment on paper, 34½ x 27½ inches, courtesy of Anne Elvins
2. *Prospero*, 1962, ink wash on paper, 29 x 38½ inches, courtesy of Mark Kohler
3. *The Landing*, 1963, ink wash on paper, 25 x 38 inches, courtesy of the Artist
4. *Interior Music*, c. 1971, charcoal and pastel on paper, 23½ x 30½ inches, courtesy of the Artist
5. *Portrait of Rilke*, 1983, ink on paper, 38 x 29 inches, courtesy of Judith Brassard Brown
6. *Sleeping Aaron*, 1995, ink wash on paper, 27½ x 35½ inches, courtesy of the Artist
7. *Enrobed*, 1997, ink wash on paper, 27½ x 21½ inches, collection of the Danforth Museum of Art, gift of the Artist. 2006.33
8. *Patient: Dream Flight*, 1998, ink wash on paper, 39½ x 29½ inches, courtesy of the Artist
9. *Patient: Shielding Eyes*, 1998, ink wash on paper, 27½ x 35 inches, courtesy of the Artist
10. *Sleeping*, 1998, ink wash on paper, 27 x 36½ inches, courtesy of the Artist
11. *Still Now*, 1998, ink wash on paper, 22 x 30 inches, courtesy of the Artist
12. *Aaron's Staff*, 1999, ink wash on paper, 22 x 29½ inches, courtesy of the Artist

PAINTINGS

13. *Self Portrait*, 1947, egg tempera on masonite, 30⅞ x 23⅞ inches, courtesy of the Artist
14. *Marcel Marceau*, 1948, oil on canvas, 38 x 30 inches, courtesy of Tom Shapiro
15. *Raging*, 1953, tempera on board, 22 x 30 inches, courtesy of the Artist
16. *Memory*, 1955, tempera and pastel on paper, 34½ x 27 inches, courtesy of the Artist
17. *Marine Samson*, 1959, oil on canvas, 53½ x 43½ inches, courtesy of the Artist
18. *The Survivors*, 1959, oil on linen, 40 x 48 inches, courtesy of Anne Elvins

19. *Portrait of Constance Wallace, Girl with a Pheasant*, 1960, oil on linen, 40 x 30 inches, courtesy of Anne Elvins
20. *A Stream Mystery*, c. 1962, oil on canvas, 43 x 49 inches, courtesy of the Artist
21. *Within the Dream*, 1963, oil on canvas, 30½ x 24½ inches, courtesy of the Artist
22. *Sentinel*, 1964, oil on canvas, 26 x 18 inches, courtesy of the Artist
23. *The Light Thief*, 1965, oil on canvas, 46½ x 58 inches, courtesy of Audrey Cayne
24. *The Surveyor*, 1966, oil on canvas, 29 x 29 inches, courtesy of Jack and Carol Kline
25. *Waves Forming*, c. 1975, oil on canvas, 31 x 38 inches, courtesy of the Artist
26. *Rising Light*, 1978, oil on canvas, 44½ x 42 inches, collection of the Danforth Museum of Art, gift of Dorothy Thompson in memory of her husband, Lawrence Thompson. 2006.31
27. *Leaving the Mirror*, 1990, watercolor, 38 x 30 inches, courtesy of Tom Shapiro
28. *The History Magician*, 1990, oil on linen, 42½ x 42 inches, courtesy of Anne Elvins
29. *Marine Elegy*, 1992, gouache, 14 x 18½ inches, courtesy of the Artist
30. *Entrance*, 2002, acrylic and tempera on canvas, 27 x 34 inches, courtesy of the Artist
31. *Morning Light*, 2002, oil on canvas, 24 x 31 inches, courtesy of the Artist
32. *Icarus*, c. 1970's, gouache, 32 x 25 inches, Private Collection
33. *Morning*, c. 1970's, gouache, 22 x 29½ inches, courtesy of Mark Kohler

PRINTS

34. *Untitled*, 1951, monotype, 28 x 23½ inches, courtesy of the Artist
35. *The Clay Silence*, 1969, lithograph, artist proof, 29 x 24 inches, courtesy of the Artist



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Patient: Dream Flight, 1998
(cat 8)

BACK COVER

Within the Dream, 1963
(cat. 21)

