1989

Francis Cunningham: Painting and Drawing

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The University of Richmond Department of Art and Art History presents “FRANCIS CUNNINGHAM: PAINTING AND DRAWING” as the inaugural exhibition in its series, REALISM TODAY, which is made possible through the generous support of:

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Cover: Hewins Barn, oil, 25" × 39", 1983
REALISM TODAY

FRANCIS CUNNINGHAM

Painting and Drawing

March 14–April 5, 1989

An Exhibition Organized by Ephraim Rubenstein

Marsh Gallery
Modlin Fine Arts Center
University of Richmond
Realism is an attitude toward life that affirms the beauty and significance of the visible world. Realism starts outside with the surfaces of things and travels inward to their meaning. Everything in this process has to do with selection. What has the object told a particular artist about itself, about its relationship to other objects and to the surrounding space?

In life one takes in things at a glance, but the artist looks at an object for hours, weeks, months, even years. Premier coup painting is done in one sitting. It is comparable to haiku; it takes one aspect of nature, summarizes it and is done. Sometimes a landscape premier coup will call for the closest, most minute aspects of drawing and composition; sometimes only for the posture of a few large shapes. Sometimes the subject is instantly recognizable; sometimes, as in mossy places in deep woods, it is not.

Nature presents a variety of shapes for the artist to select, infinitely surprising and unexpected. Among them are landscape and still life objects which share many qualities of the human nude. Trees and rocks, gourds or a scythe—as with the nude—consist of shapes made up of arcs, angles and areas of color-value on the flat surface of the canvas. These shapes can be made to communicate properties of volume, weight, space, depth and movement. When this happens, the objects represented are no longer flat symbols of the visible world. One can feel their heft, their springiness or their repose. One is drawn outside oneself into experiencing the objects, and this shared vision unites the artist and his audience.

I regard the human nude as the most beautiful, various and fascinating instrument of expression. Among all the forms in nature we can identify most readily with the nude for it is us, our limbs, our movement, our energy.

Objects, and the nude, have a story to tell. Their stories are more basic than those of descriptive reporting, prose narration or the sung stories of opera. Their stories are pre-mythic, for the objects speak of themselves, free from the associations of other people, other things. Their meaning is determined by you, for you are the storyteller.

It seems a miracle so much can happen on the flat surface of the canvas. But this is only a shadow of the miracle of the forms as they exist in nature, or the significance you may bring to them out of your own life experience.

Francis Cunningham
January 1989
Meditation, oil, 68" x 84", 1988
Chime Knife, Barking Spud and Gourds, oil, 28” × 44”, 1970
Staircase, Lenox, oil, 76" × 38", 1986
Moment, oil, 90" × 78", 1988
Turning, oil, 66” × 58”, 1985
Forest Tools, oil, 72" × 46", 1984
Lenox Interior, oil, 36" × 48", 1986
Tyringham Valley, oil, 40" × 64", 1981
CHECKLIST OF THE
EXHIBITION

1. Pink Phlox, 1984
   Oil, 11" × 9"
   Collection of Mary Carswell

2. Monica Schwartz, 1981
   Oil, 62" × 28"

3. Turning, 1985
   Oil, 66" × 58"

4. Moment, 1988
   Oil, 90" × 78"

5. Walking, 1988
   Oil, 87" × 101"

6. Meditation, 1988
   Oil, 68" × 84"

7. Chime Knife, Barking
   Spud and Gourds, 1970
   Oil, 28" × 44"

8. Forest Tools, 1984
   Oil, 72" × 46"

9. Harvest Tools, 1973
   Oil, 60" × 44"

10. Lenox Interior, 1986
    Oil, 36" × 48"
    Anonymous Loan

11. Staircase, Lenox, 1986
    Oil, 76" × 38"
    Anonymous Loan

12. Tyringham Valley, 1981
    Oil, 40" × 64"
    Collection of Mr. & Mrs. Brian Urquhart

13. Hewins Barn, 1983
    Oil, 25" × 39"
    Collection of Dr. & Mrs. Christian Beels

14. Mimi Scherb
    Charcoal, 25" × 18" ¾"

15. White Pine, Sheffield
    Charcoal, 17½" × 12"

16. Nude
    Charcoal, 11½" × 9"

17. Reclining Nude
    Charcoal, 19¾" × 25"

18. Sheffield Landscape
    Charcoal, 18¾" × 25"

19. Portrait Head of Mimi Scherb
    Pencil, 16" × 11½"

20. Cles, Italy
    Pencil, 9" × 11½" ¾"

21. Reclining Nude
    Pencil, 11" × 9"

22. Lava Fields, Hredavatn, Iceland, 1986
    Oil, 11" × 24"

23. Lundehøj (Stone Age Mound)
    Jutland, Denmark
    Oil, 10" × 27"
    Anonymous Loan

24. Firth of Clyde, Fisherton,
    Scotland, 1988
    Oil, 11" × 27"
    Anonymous Loan

25. Near the Beach, Martha’s
    Vineyard, 1985
    Oil, 20" × 16"

26. Cattails, Sheffield, 1985
    Oil, 18" × 16"

27. Hraunsnefsóxl, Hredavatn, Iceland, 1986
    Oil, 20" × 25"

28. Fall, Sheffield, 1986
    Oil, 26" × 30"

29. Churchyard, Heltborg, Denmark, 1986
    Oil, 18" × 27"

30. Rock, Sheffield, 1987
    Oil, 12" × 14"

31. Toward Woods Hole, Martha’s
    Vineyard, 1985
    Oil, 8" × 16"

32. Dried Goldenrod and Rock,
    Sheffield, 1985
    Oil, 11" × 18"
BIOGRAPHY
Francis Cunningham was born in 1931 in New York City. He grew up in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, and graduated from Harvard College in 1953. After two years on active duty as a lieutenant in the U.S. Marine Corps, he attended the Art Student’s League of New York, where he studied painting with Edwin Dickinson and drawing and anatomy with Robert Beverly Hale.

Cunningham has had one-man shows in Washington, Chicago and in New York City, where he has exhibited at the Waverly, Salpeter and Hirschl & Adler Galleries.

He taught for 18 years at The Brooklyn Museum Art School and for three years at the Art Student’s League. He co-founded the New Brooklyn School of Life Drawing, Painting and Sculpture, Inc., with John Mason Harding and the sculptor Barney Hodes.

Cunningham currently maintains studios in New York and Mill River, Massachusetts. Primarily a painter in oil, his earlier work was divided between landscape, still life and figure. More recently he has concentrated on life-sized figure compositions and landscape painting done premier coup from nature in one session. Included in this exhibition are premier coup landscapes from Denmark, Iceland and Scotland.

LENDERS TO THE EXHIBITION
Anonymous Lender
Dr. and Mrs. Christian Beels
Mary Carswell
Mr. and Mrs. Brian Urquhart

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Ephraim Rubenstein, Assistant Professor of Fine Arts, University of Richmond, whose interest and planning made this exhibition possible.

Jeff Burke, Sharon Chalem, Tom Johnson and Monica Schwartz: From the beginning, my figure pieces have resulted from a collaboration with the model. Far from merely being a physical presence, they have worked with me on the selection of pose, choice of landscape and often on the finest decisions of composition, anatomy and color-value. Their presence in the painting is the result of their concern and sharing on the emotional and intellectual level as well as the physical.