1994

Ephraim Rubenstein: The Rilke Series

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Ephraim Rubenstein: The Rilke Series
From *The Sonnets to Orpheus* (1923)

I, 1

A tree ascended there. Oh pure transcence!
Oh Orpheus sings! Oh tall tree in the ear!
And all things hushed. Yet even in that silence
a new beginning, beckoning, change appeared.

— Rainer Maria Rilke

January 28 through February 27, 1994
Marsh Art Gallery, University of Richmond, Virginia

April 7 through May 3, 1994
Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York
Published for the exhibition

*Ephraim Rubenstein: The Rilke Series*

Marsh Art Gallery, University of Richmond, Richmond, Virginia
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The exhibition, part of the Marsh Art Gallery's ongoing "Realism Today" series, is made possible with the generous support of an anonymous donor, Dr. Willie M. Reams, Jr., and the University of Richmond Cultural Affairs Committee.

This exhibition is also part of the University's 1994 Tucker-Boatwright Festival in Music, *Twentieth-Century Reflections of Romanticism in Music, Poetry, & the Visual Arts*, organized with additional support from the University's Cultural Affairs Committee by the Department of Music, in cooperation with the Department of English, Department of Art, and the Marsh Art Gallery.

The poems of Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926): The excerpts from "The Sonnets to Orpheus, I, 1" and "II, 13" (1923), from *The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke*, edited and translated by Stephen Mitchell, are reprinted by permission of Random House, Inc., New York. The excerpt from "Les Roses, XV" (c. 1922), from *The Complete French Poems of Rainer Maria Rilke*, translated by A. Poulin, Jr., is reprinted by permission of Graywolf Press, Saint Paul, Minnesota. The excerpt from "Pink Hydrangea" (1907-08), from *The Best of Rilke*, translated by Walter Arndt, is reprinted by permission of the University Press of New England, Hanover, New Hampshire. The excerpt from "What fields are fragrant as your hands?" (1909), from *Rilke On Love and Other Difficulties*, translated by John J.L. Mood, is reprinted by permission of W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., New York. The excerpt from "The Sap is Mounting Back" (1924), from *Rainer Maria Rilke: Poems 1906 to 1926*, translated by J.B. Leishman, is reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corp., New York.

Cover: *Sonnet to Orpheus*, 1992-93, oil on linen, 38 x 76 inches

Photographs by Katherine Wetzel

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FOREWORD

EPRAIM RUBENSTEIN’S exhibition is part of the Marsh Art Gallery’s ongoing "Realism Today" series, exhibitions we organize that are devoted to issues of contemporary realism. Co-organized with the Tibor de Nagy Gallery, this exhibition features an extended look at a selection of the drawings and paintings that comprise the artist’s Rilke Series, a series of works based on Rainer Maria Rilke’s poetry. Developed from his close readings of the poems, the artist presents us with wonderful visual analogues of his responses to the powerful imagery and feelings evoked by Rilke. Just as we rely on the translator to enable us to hear Rilke’s voice, we are compelled to rely on Ephraim Rubenstein’s works to enable us to hear other aspects of that voice, to visually experience what is expressed in the poetry and to be further moved by those emotions.

Our deepest thanks go first of all to the artist, Ephraim Rubenstein. A faculty member and colleague, his enthusiasm and involvement during the planning and preparation of the exhibition and catalogue have made this a rewarding experience for all of us. The artist wishes to acknowledge the support of research grants from the University’s Faculty Research Committee.

Within the university, our thanks go to Dr. Richard L. Morrill, President; Dr. Zeddie P. Bowen, Vice President and Provost; and Dr. David E. Leary, Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences; for their continuing encouragement and support of the visual arts at the university and, most especially, their deep-felt acknowledgment of the vital role of the programs and exhibitions of its art gallery in fulfilling the academic mission of the university.

Appreciation also goes to the Department of Music and the Department of English for their cooperation in making this Tucker-Boatwright Festival a successful multi-disciplinary collaboration among our departments, with the exhibition serving as a touchstone for the overall theme of this year’s festival: twentieth-century reflections of Romanticism in music, poetry, and the visual arts.

Special thanks go to the Department of Art faculty members for their support and counsel in making the gallery an integral part of the teaching and experience of the visual arts, and an essential part of the cultural and intellectual life, at the university. Thanks also go to our student workers in the gallery, for their assistance during the exhibition, and to Lynda Brown, the gallery’s assistant, for her endless help and patience.

We are extremely indebted to all the lenders, who were willing to part with works from their collections for this exhibition.

We also extend our grateful thanks to the Tibor de Nagy Gallery: especially to Tibor de Nagy, for his guidance and support of this exhibition; and to Andrew Arnot and Eric Brown, Co-Directors, for their enthusiastic assistance in making this exhibition a reality.

The exhibition is made possible with the generous support of an anonymous donor, Dr. Willie M. Reams, Jr., and the University’s Cultural Affairs Committee.

Richard Waller
Director
Marsh Art Gallery, University of Richmond
From *Les Roses* (c. 1922)

XV

All alone, O abundant flower,
you create your own space;
you gaze at yourself in a mirror
of fragrance.

Your fragrance swirls: more petals
around your teeming calyx.
I hold you back, you sprawl,
marvellous actress.

— Rainer Maria Rilke

*Les Roses I*, 1993, oil on linen, 60 x 30 inches
THE FIRST TIME I MET Ephraim Rubenstein, some eight years ago, and looked at his early paintings I immediately sensed a powerful poetic quality coming out of his paintbrush. This ambitious exhibition not only confirms my initial feeling, but surpasses anything I could have thought of at that time. It is rare these days to find a young artist inspired, not by pop culture or the mass media, but by a classic of literature. I find it interesting and refreshing to see such good work deriving out of one of this century's greatest European poets, Rainer Maria Rilke.

One of my favorite analogies in describing a great artist is to compare him or her to a priest, a nun, or a rabbi. God speaks through these religious leaders to nourish us, the parishioners, with his spirit. I have seen a few moments like that take place during my forty-three years of running a contemporary art gallery. The story as to how Rilke started the Duino Elegies is legendary. As Rilke walked along the Duino Castle in Trieste, a strong wind whipped by and whispered the first lines to him. Truly a case of God speaking through an artist. This collection of paintings and drawings makes me think of Ephraim Rubenstein in a similar manner.

The works are beautiful visual complements to the words of Rilke's poetry. Each of these two have concerned themselves with two important themes: truth and harmony. And though these goals are shared, their specific results may be different. Rubenstein's landscapes are of the area he now knows best: Richmond, Virginia.
ARTIST'S STATEMENT: THE RILKE SERIES

For the past three years I have been working on a series of paintings and drawings based on the poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke. The paintings and drawings are not illustrations, per se, but rather visual responses to the mood, imagery, and rhythms of the poems. Rilke’s poetry has always struck me as intensely visual. The verses themselves were born frequently out of visual experiences — often responses to specific paintings and sculptures — and have provided me, in turn, with images of great power and sensitivity. Rilke wrote that it was his "inner conviction that even for what is most delicate and inapprehensible within us, nature has sensuous equivalents that must be discoverable." This seemed to me to be very much a painter’s thought, and one which was completely consonant with my own feelings as a representational painter.

My first responses to Rilke’s poetry were seen in terms of the landscape. He is of particular interest to me in this regard because his imagery is so beautifully concrete and because it is grounded to such a large extent within the landscape or within landscape associations. He often uses as his starting point descriptions of such natural phenomena as distance, vastness, minuteness, the weather, times of day, and the changing effects of the seasons. From these visual effects, he is then able to connect immediately to intimate matters of the human heart, such as growth, transformation, decay, solitude, and love. Rilke lived for a period among a group of landscape painters in an artists colony at Worpswede. His time there culminated in a beautiful essay, "Concerning Landscape," in which he reveals his enormous sensitivity to the genre. He understood almost instinctively that the struggle of man to find his place within "Nature," was echoed and developed by painters seeking to place figures within their landscape compositions, not as dominant or as incident, but as an equally eloquent, coexisting yet solitary part.

However, as I continued to read and study Rilke’s work, particularly his extraordinary letters, I began to see immense possibilities for still-life compositions as well. In his letters, he took the same penetrating eye with which he observed the landscape and turned it on the familiar objects that made up so much of his everyday life: flowers particularly, but houses, rooms, windows, and the objects of his craft — books, letters, writing materials. I saw his late cycle of French poems, Les Roses, quite clearly as a series of interior, still-life compositions. His feeling for shape and meaning was so profound that he wrote about every object as if he were a painter composing a still-life painting. There is always reference to the visual experience — to form, space, light, color, texture, and movement — all used as a means of eliciting an intense interior presence from the object.

The cross-fertilization between painting and poetry is extremely exciting to me. Rilke has helped me see how the simplest of objects can vibrate with intensity. He was deeply involved in the visual arts, so it seems completely appropriate for him, in turn, to help deepen a painter’s vision. Rilke developed much of his thinking about the concreteness of visual imagery from his association with Rodin and his respect for the plastic aspects of sculpture. He wrote extensively about Cézanne,
and Rilke's love for the energy of El Greco prompted a prolonged trip to Toledo which bore fruit in many of the images in the Duino Elegies. In his commentary on Rilke's poetry, Robert Bly has suggested that in Das Buch der Bilder (The Book of Pictures), "Rilke wanted to provide readers with a book that would be like a big room full of paintings." My desire is to create just such a room of paintings and drawings, "sensuous equivalents" not only for the poetry but for "what is most delicate and inapprehensible within us."

The Rilke Series is still in progress. I realize now that when I first began to paint and draw in response to Rilke's poetry, I had little idea what his work would come to mean to me, what an immovable place he would occupy in the center of my feeling. The work in the current exhibition represents the first significant clearing from which I can survey the effect he has had on my own inner landscape. Like one of his own "abundant" roses, his work continues to open and unfold, revealing ever more beautiful and vulnerable insides:

Abandon surrounds abandon, tenderness touches tenderness . . .
You'd think your center would caress itself on and on and on . . .

I do not know what the final shape of the series will be. Rilke continually urges us on to greater and more receptive patience — to not demand answers, but to live fully in life's questions. And one thing Rilke does for us — so much like painting and drawing — is to locate us in the immediacy of these questions, in the full intensity of our current feelings.

Ephraim Rubenstein

From Pink Hydrangea (1907-08)

Who thought such pink could be? Who knew it there
Accumulating in each blushing cluster?
Like gilded things which by and by unluster
They gently grow unred as if from wear.

— Rainer Maria Rilke

Pink Hydrangea, 1993, oil on linen,
20 x 26 inches. Collection of Bonyln Hall.
From *What fields are fragrant as your hands?* (1909)

What fields are fragrant as your hands? / You feel how external fragrance stands upon your stronger resistance. / Stars stand in images above. 
Give me your mouth to soften, love; / ah, your hair is all in idleness.

— Rainer Maria Rilke

*What Fields are Fragrant as Your Hands?*, 1992, oil on linen, 50 x 68 inches.
From *The Sonnets to Orpheus* (1923)

II, 13

Be ahead of all parting, as though it already were behind you, like the winter that has just gone by. For among these winters there is one so endlessly winter that only by wintering through it will your heart survive.

— Rainer Maria Rilke

*Be Ahead of All Parting II*, 1992-93, oil on linen, 22 x 46 inches.
From *The Sap is Mounting Back* (1924)

The sap is mounting back from that unseenness
darkly renewing in the common deep,
back to the light, and feeding the pure greenness
hiding in rinds round which the winds still weep.

— Rainer Maria Rilke

The Sap is Mounting Back II, 1992, oil on linen, 50 x 38 inches.

The Promise Collection of David A. Bickimer.
BIOGRAPHY

Born 1956 in Brooklyn, New York
Currently Associate Professor of Art,
University of Richmond, Virginia

EDUCATION
B.A. 1978, Columbia University, New York (Art History, Columbia College)
Museum Art School, New York
1979, National Academy of Design,
School of Fine Arts, New York
1981, The Art Students League, New
York (studied with Francis Cunningham)
1981-84, attended anatomical dissections,
Columbia University, College of
Physicians and Surgeons, New York
M.F.A. 1987, Columbia University,
School of the Arts, New York

SELECTED AWARDS
1993
Distinguished Educator Award,
University of Richmond
Research Grants, Faculty Research
Committee, University of Richmond
Summer Stipends, Faculty Research
Committee, University of Richmond
1992
Faculty Study Seminar to West Africa
(Ghana and Senegal), University of
Richmond
Program for Enhancing Teaching
Effectiveness Grant, University of
Richmond
1980
Dr. Ralph Weiler Prize, National Academy
of Design, School of Fine Arts, New York
1979
Merit Scholarship, National Academy of
Design, School of Fine Arts, New York
1978-79
Max Beckmann Scholarship, The
Brooklyn Museum Art School, New York

SELECTED
ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS
1994
The Rilke Series, Marsh Art Gallery,
University of Richmond (travels to Tibor
de Nagy Gallery, New York)
Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York
1991
Peninsula Fine Arts Center, Newport
News, Virginia
Marsh Art Gallery, University of
Richmond
1985
Nicholas Roerich Museum, New York
1979
Long Island University, Brooklyn, New
York

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS
1993
The Allegorical Table, Peninsula Fine Arts
Center, Newport News, Virginia
The American Landscape: Selected
Contemporary Paintings and Works on
Paper, Keny Galleries, Columbus, Ohio
Audubon Artists, 51st Annual Exhibition,
National Arts Club, New York
The Art Show, 5th Annual Exhibition,
Seventh Regiment Armory, New York
Faculty Exhibition, Marsh Art Gallery,
University of Richmond
Hampton Bay Days, Charles H. Taylor
Arts Center, Hampton, Virginia

1992
Portraits/Self-Portrait, McGraw-Page
Library, Randolph-Macon College,
Ashland, Virginia
The Art Show, 4th Annual Exhibition,
Seventh Regiment Armory, New York
1991
American Panorama, Tibor de Nagy
Gallery, New York
Picturing Families, Wilson Arts Center,
Rochester, New York
Drawing: The Figure, Olin and Smoyer
Gallery, Roanoke College, Virginia
The Art Show, 3rd Annual Exhibition,
Seventh Regiment Armory, New York
1990
Harmony and Discord: American
Landscape Painting Today, Virginia
Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond
79th Annual Exhibition, Maier Museum
of Art, Randolph-Macon Woman’s
College, Lynchburg, Virginia
Salon 1990, New York Academy of Art,
New York
1989
10th Annual Chicago International Art
Exposition, Chicago
53rd Annual National Midyear Show: A
Tribute to Tibor de Nagy, The Butler
Institute of American Art, Youngstown,
Ohio
Festivals and Festivities, Krasdale Foods
Art Gallery, Lehman College, Bronx,
New York
Tributary: 3000 Years in the Course of Art,
Peninsula Fine Arts Center, Newport
News, Virginia
New Romantics, Williams Center for the
Arts, Lafayette College, Easton,
Pennsylvania
Drawing in Virginia, An Invitational
Exhibition by Artists Who Teach, Second
Street Gallery, Charlottesville, Virginia
(traveled 1989-92 throughout Virginia)
through the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond)

1988

The Face of the Land, Southern Alleghenies Museum, Loretto, Pennsylvania

Mark Rhodes and Ephraim Rubenstein: Sculpture, Painting, and Drawing, Marsh Art Gallery, University of Richmond

1987

Still Life: Painting, Sculpture, Drawing, Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York (traveled to Rahr West Art Museum, Manitowoc, Wisconsin)

1986

Religion: Painting and Sculpture, Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York

Landscape/Elements, Jan Baum Gallery, Los Angeles

Allied Artists of America, 73rd Annual Exhibition, National Arts Club, New York (award)

Plein Air: An Exhibition of Landscape Paintings and Drawings, Bank of Boston, Boston

1985

Manifestations of the Figure, Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York

1984

48th Annual National Midyear Exhibition, The Butler Institute of American Art, Youngstown, Ohio

Paper in Particular, Columbia College, Missouri

Second National Drawing Competition, Berkeley Gallery, Meriden, New Hampshire

The Expert Eye, Wansch Art Center, Long Island, New York

1980

In Plain Sight, Numeroff Gallery, New York

Allied Artists of America, 67th Annual Exhibition, National Arts Club, New York

Drawing Defined, National Arts Club, New York

1979

Sixth Graphics Exhibition, National Arts Club, New York

Brooklyn '79, The Brooklyn Museum, New York

1976, 1975

Annual Exhibitions, Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences, New York (1976, first prize in landscape painting; 1975, Dickinson Award)

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


SELECTED PUBLIC AND CORPORATE COLLECTIONS

Florida Power and Light Company, Juno Beach

John Jay College of Criminal Justice, New York

Kingsborough Community College, Brooklyn, New York

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Mutual Insurance Company of New York, New York

The E. Carlton Wilton Center for Interfaith Campus Ministries, University of Richmond, Virginia
Dimensions are in inches, height precedes width. The works are from the collection of the artist, courtesy of Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York, except where otherwise noted.

**The Rilke Series PAINTINGS**

**The Loveliest of Fields**
1991, oil on linen, 26 x 40
Collection of Frances A. and Richard S. Underhill (illustrated)

**The Sap is Mounting Back I**
1991, oil on linen, 48 x 72
Collection of John Goodman (illustrated)

**The Sap is Mounting Back II**
1992, oil on linen, 50 x 38
The Promise Collection of David A. Bickimer (illustrated)

**What Fields are Fragrant as Your Hands?**
1992, oil on linen, 50 x 68
(illustrated)

**Be Ahead of All Parting I**
1992, oil on linen, 25 x 35
Collection of Deborah Pease (illustrated)

**Be Ahead of All Parting II**
1992-93, oil on linen, 22 x 46
(illustrated)

**Sonnet to Orpheus**
1992-93, oil on linen, 38 x 76
(illustrated, cover)

**Pink Hydrangea**
1993, oil on linen, 20 x 26
Collection of Bonlyn Hall (illustrated)

**Window I**
1993, oil on linen, 42 x 26

**Summer**
1993, oil on linen, 36 x 30

**Les Roses I**
1993, oil on linen, 60 x 30
(illustrated)

**Les Roses II**
1993, oil on linen, 60 x 30

**The Rilke Series DRAWINGS**

**Landscape Study for "The Sap is Mounting Back I"**
1991, charcoal on gray paper, 19 1/2 x 25

**Figure Study for "The Sap is Mounting Back II"**
1991, graphite and white chalk on blue-gray paper, 24 x 18
Collection of Remak Ramsay

**Rose**
1991, silverpoint on prepared paper, 13 x 10

**Figure Study for "What Fields are Fragrant as Your Hands?" (Mark and Elizabeth)**
1992, graphite on green-gray paper, 12 x 20

**Figure Study for "Sonnet to Orpheus"**
1992, graphite and white chalk on blue-gray paper, 19 1/2 x 25

**Sarah II:**
Study for "Core of the Rose"
1992, graphite on pink paper, 19 x 25

**Sarah III:**
Study for "Core of the Rose"
1992, graphite and white chalk on blue paper, 19 x 25

**Sarah IV:**
Study for "Core of the Rose"
1992, graphite on pink paper, 19 x 25

**Sarah V:**
Study for "Core of the Rose"
1993, graphite on pink paper, 19 x 25

**Figure Study for "Autumn Day"**
1993, graphite and white chalk on green-gray paper, 19 1/2 x 25

**Perspective Drawing for "Autumn Day"**
1993, graphite, ink, and charcoal on white paper, 22 x 30 1/4

**Yellow Rose:**
Study for "Les Roses"
1993, graphite on yellow prepared paper, 11 1/2 x 15

**Palm**
1993, graphite on pink paper, 13 x 19 1/2
EPHRAIM RUBENSTEIN: THE RILKE SERIES