

THE ZEN CONNECTION

ARTS & CULTURE **drew moss** | APRIL 22, 2016



Fairchild Porter, "Street Scene"

THERE'S SOMETHING GROUNDING and calming about the Parrish Art Museum. Nestled on an expansive swath of Water Mill farmland set back from Montauk Highway, the Parrish is open and airy, creating a Zen-like appeal. With this sense of comfort and self-confidence, its curators have run some golden threads through the permanent collection to arrive at the guiding concept of

Connections and Context, a series of several exhibits on display through October.

By classifying the works into various sub-categories, the exhibitions and the works within them have an opportunity to both stand on their own and connect to each other. “Thinking about a new installation of the permanent collection to open each November is an ongoing process throughout the year,” said Alicia G. Longwell, the Parrish’s chief curator. “Recently acquired works bring fresh ideas to the fore and afford inventive context for pieces already in the collection. Making those connections always animates the galleries in distinct and reinvigorated ways.”



*Margaret Garrett,
“Journal Winter”*

In *Connections and Context*, there exists a sense of ambient shoegaze and nebulous atmosphere

through use of geometry and negative space.

Stephen Antonakos' "Voyage" (acrylic on Versacel, neon, 1999) is both robotic and bucolic as it stacks big gray blocks in a fashion that can only be described as sensual. With thin rods of pink and indigo shimmering on the fringes, it's spacey and soothing at the same time, a Kubrickian nod to the narcotic vastness of the monolith in *2001: A Space Odyssey*. **Dan Christensen's** "Moondowner" (enamel and acrylic on canvas, 1970) has a similar meditative vibe, arrived at through the simplicity of straight lines. Boxes of earth tones are effortlessly broken up by a large lawn of swirling pinkish brown—a lugubrious, unobtrusive detour through the forest of simplicity.



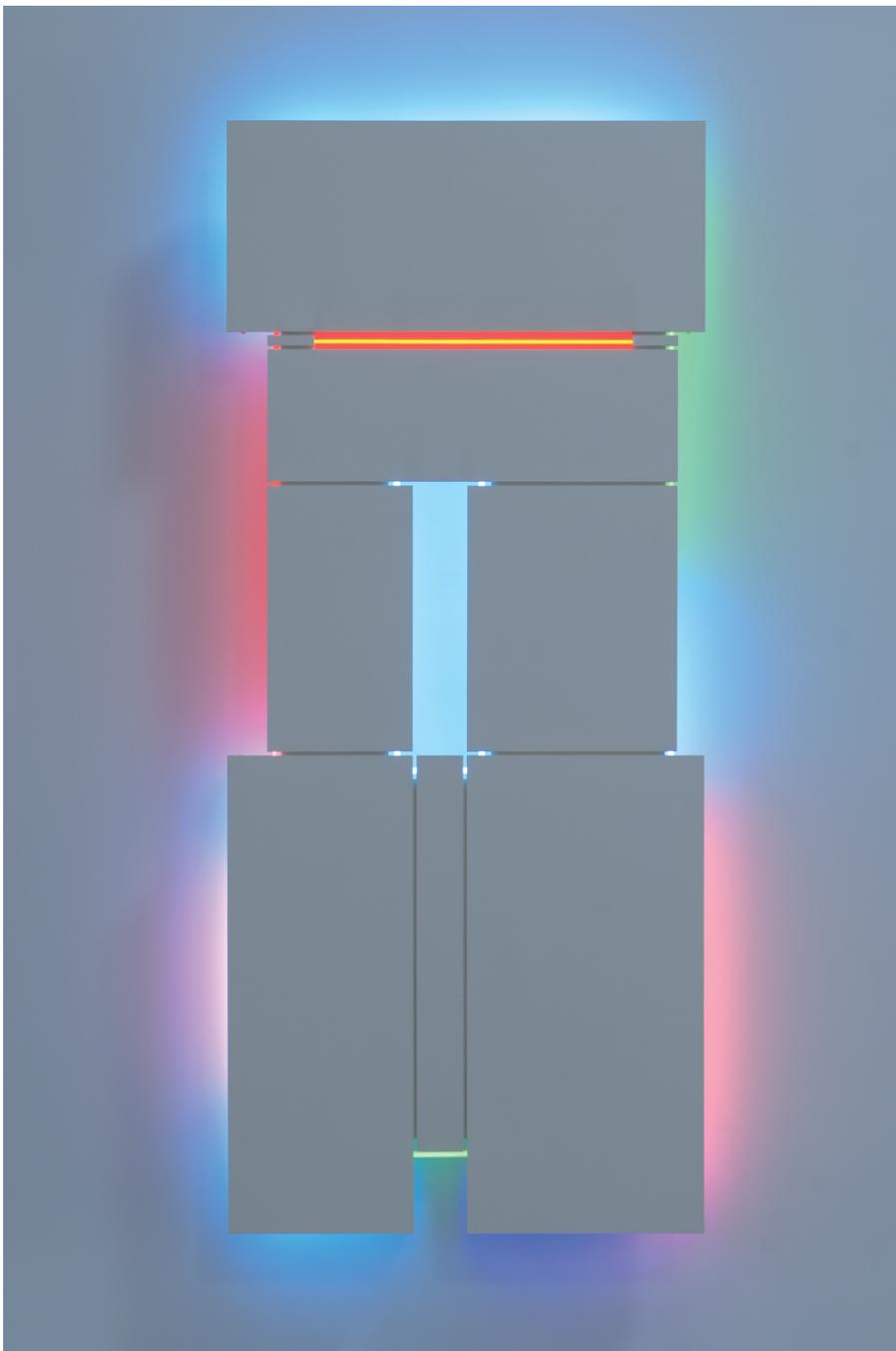
Martin Johnson Heade, "A Florida Marsh"

Inscape—the Inner Nature of Things features 12

artists' diverse approaches to using abstraction outside to articulate the emotional realm within. "Artists work abstractly to express gesture, color and compositional form," said Terrie Sultan, Parrish Art Museum Director. "Inscape refers to the early abstract expressionists' exploration of psychological states of being through abstract gestures." **John Ferren's** "New York Summer Landscape" (oil on Orlon, 1953) pushes these boundaries. It is thick blotches and streaks of yellow and red, strokes of black curvature and a congested collection of scrawls and primary color puddles—its title invites us to attach meaning where there may be none; otherwise the viewer is free floating in the painting's inviting formlessness. It's an interesting moment in which we can contemplate not only the power of paint but also the power of suggestion behind words, titles and labels. In **Margaret Garrett's** "Journal, Winter" (acrylic on linen, 2013) the dots are a little easier to connect: thin wisps of dandelion-like strokes, shimmering little hydras, snake their way down the canvas to create the serenity of untouched winter weather. And the choice of linen is comforting, adding texture and a sense of feathered quiet. The piece feels like it does curling up with a good book on a

snow day.

The 19th and early 20th century landscapes in *American Views* offer up a more traditional context. Many of the works here are classic “painters’ paintings,” figurative and literal at the core, but with hints of impressionism starting to filter in. “The work of the artists featured in *American Views* reflects a post-Civil War focus on heightened naturalism in the approach to painting, as well as a more intimate view of the American landscape,” Longwell said.



Stephen Antonakos, "Voyage"

Martin Johnson Heade's *Florida Sunset, with Palm Trees* (oil on board, ca. 1895–1904) is a bucolic, spiritual watershed. Packed into a 6 x 12-foot panel, the piece explodes with radiant, psychedelic oranges, yellows and pinks. They descend, blur and bend to the soft will of brown silhouetted palms as the beatific "el sol" gently

gives way and leaves its love shimmering on the glass surface of a tropical lake. The vibe falls somewhere between the precision of Rembrandt and the daydream haze of Monet—tinged with the intensity, ephemera and strange magic of the surreal.

Two artists are presently getting specific attention. The sketches and abstract drawings of New York artist **James Brooks** are featured. Two of his untitled pieces from 1946 conjure images of both the abstract shape shifting of Picasso and the subdued textures and gentle mind bending of Joan Miró. The aviary photography of **Jean-Luc Mylayne**, in all of his oversized prints, depicts his beloved birds embedded in lazy rural scenes (abandoned farms, stretches of scorched prairie dying in the sun...). Mylayne's skewed perspective evokes desolation, mixed with perverse ennui and subversive strangeness for an overall effect that is narcotic and hypnotic—some sort of “sunshine daydream” rife with solitude and sadness.

The Parrish's permanent collection has breadth, scope and variation. The works can stand on their own as signposts or act as synapses, inviting the viewer to connect the dots in ways

that are unique to them. “The world is full of many diverse modes of creativity and the Parrish is proud to hold more than 3,000 works in public trust that we can present to our public within the context of themes and concepts that have been important to artistic exploration for centuries,” said Sultan. “By taking a fresh look at the permanent collection each year, we have the opportunity to create new contexts and bring new ideas to the public.”



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