



LOUISA

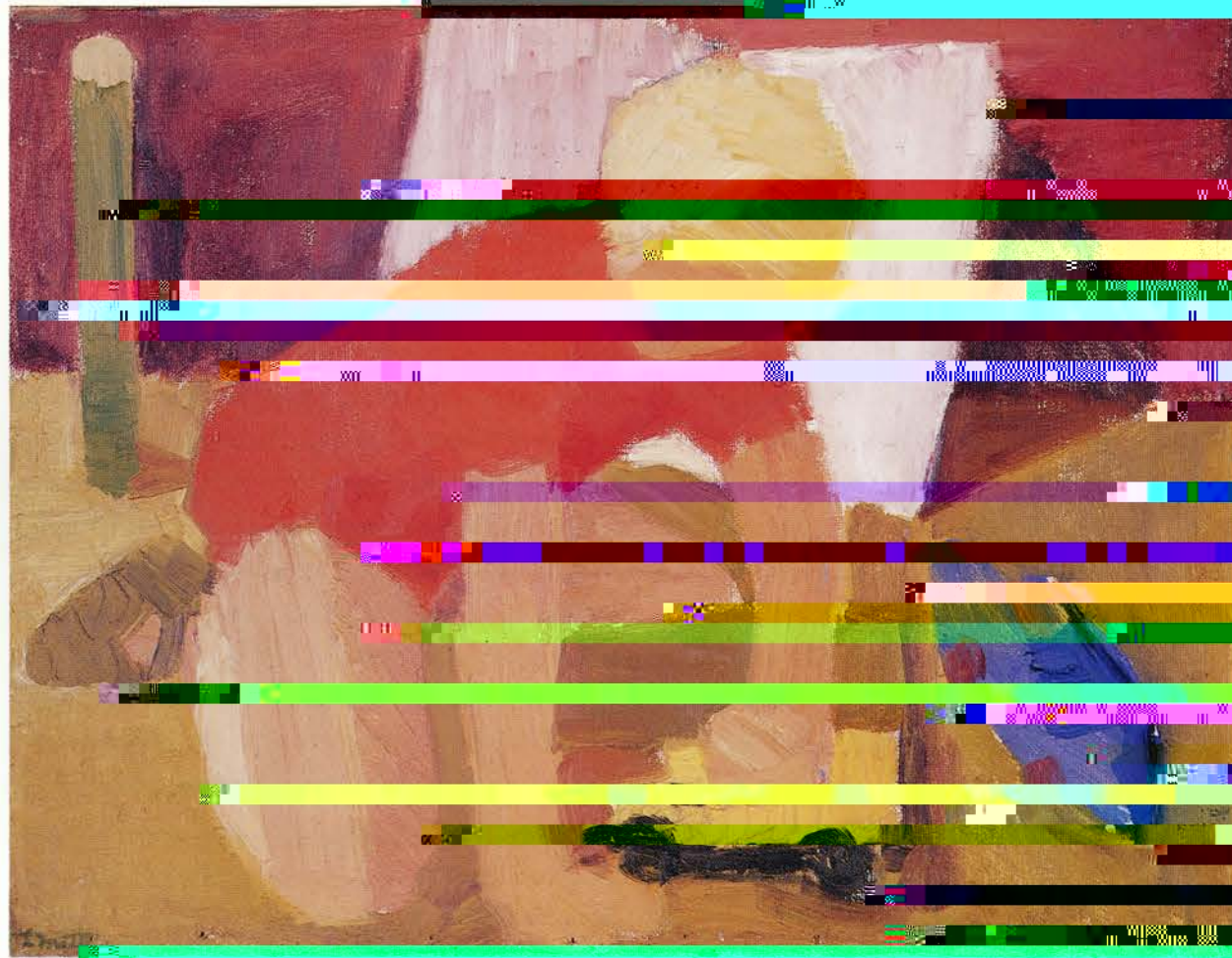
MATTHIASDOTTER

PAINTINGS

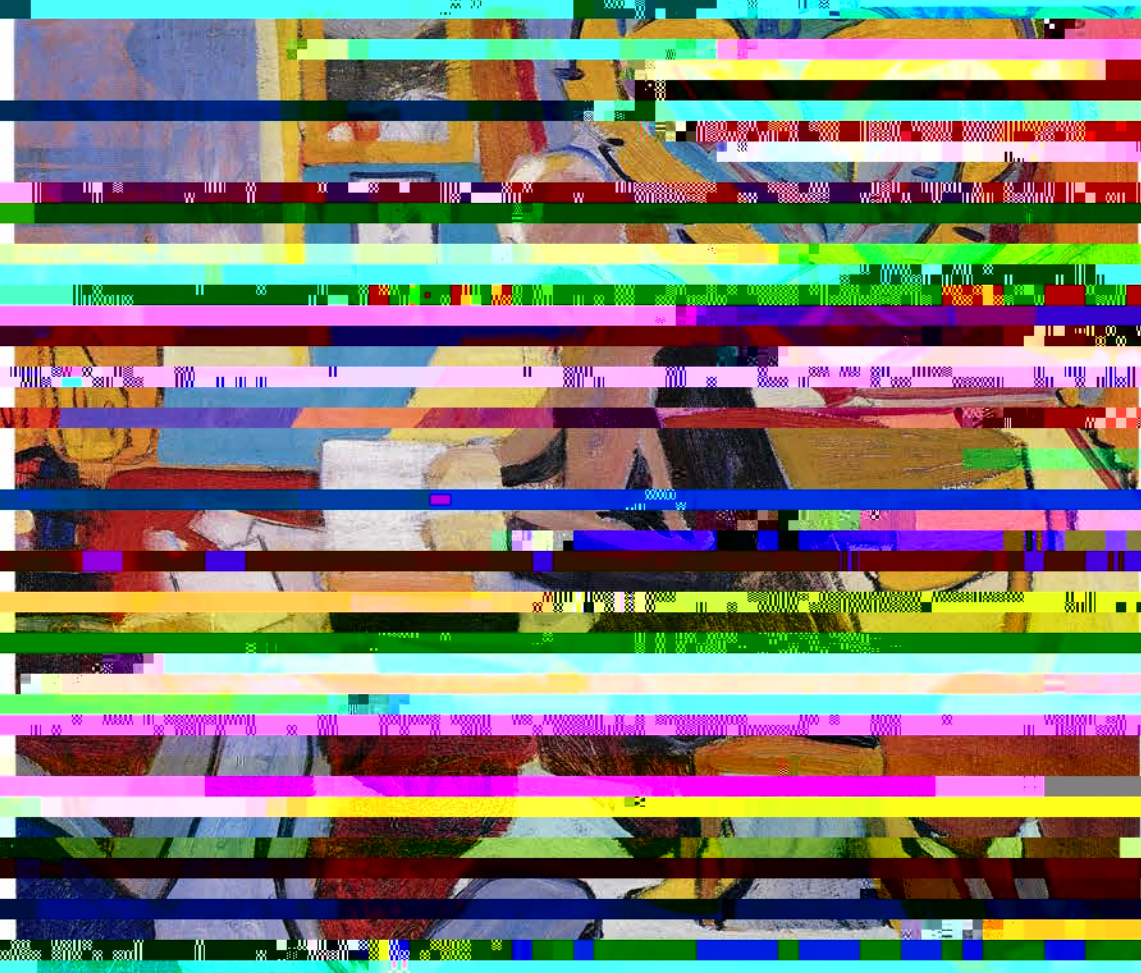
1930's - 1990's



MATTI (BOY PLAYING)  
oil on burlap  
1937  
23 x 31"



MATTHIAS EINARSSON READING  
oil on canvas  
circa 1946  
21-1/2 x 25-1/2"



Matthiasdottir lives in a brownstone, painted a fading French blue, in New York's Chelsea district.

She is the widow of the figurative painter, Leland Bell. Their daughter, Temma is

Nowadays, she inhabits a world primarily populated by

Ulla, as she is called) was born in Reykjavik, Iceland, in 1917. Her father was a well-known doctor

who collected the paintings of local artists. He was very

a painter. Louisa recalls his taking time out

an early painting of almost Matissean

in a painterly jigsaw pattern of colorful arabesque. Already at twenty

own style — a lucid, exuberant way of laying down color that excludes pictorial artifice in favor of

creating what Jean Leymar

parallel to nature.”

Rather than a fine art academy, she first attended a

years, where she studied the basic mechanics of picture-making. In 1936, she accompanied her father

to a conference in Paris and stayed for a year to study with Marcel Gromaire. Gromaire

to Martica Sawin, “had the good sense to leave his pupils alone.” She came to America in 1941. Along

with another Icelandic artist, Nina Tryggvadottir, she studied

that she met Leland Bell. In 1944, Ulla and

was born in 1945. She and Bell returned to Paris to

the brownstone building in New York that came to define the comfortable perimeter of their world

Pursuing her stated wish to paint what she sees, Louisa paints her pets, her friend

hers

still-life arrangements. The view of the world

mentally. We see her daughter, Temma, portrayed at 14, 17, 20. There are dozens of

Temma. Most often she sits or reclines reading. She has the dark eyes and strong limbs of a Courbet

The Temma paintings often dissolve in a flurry of brushstrokes around the

matthias

get her adolescent

g woman.

The dogs and cats in Matthiasdottir's painting

intimacy with them that she has with family. Some of the

away “Poor Mischka” Lilla remarks sadly, seeing the dog in an early picture. She

Mischka's long-lined silhouette exactly, just as she is able to capture a sheep's simple

is a quality of dress-up of children's play-acting. In *Self-Portrait with Umbrella* 1966 Matthiasdottir

costumes. The background

a dra

the

thirty years she has been painting these self-portraits. Ultimately, we will

acino

long grace. The chunky blues, whites and greys of the background are

and unusual comple

ness. The

matthias

MISCHKA  
oil on panel  
10-1/2 x 10-3/4"



TEMMA  
oil on cardboard  
1962/3  
13 x 16"



comes a theater of light and color. The objects are the dramatic elements. The resultant color harmonies are the drama. These are her most exactly observed and precisely brushed works. Her earlier still lifes were laid out more traditionally, clumped together. Now the arrangements of objects have an almost Japanese formality. Kitchen implements and vegetables are presented on a cloth or counter. Each object has its own distinct sense of placement. The objects are most often separated. When they do overlap, the result has a sense of clarity. In *Still Life* from 1995, several objects float on a blue cloth. Her touch is visceral and direct. We barely glimpse summary and coal outlines. The pink is later than the yellow, the white is later than the blue. The objects are singly larger than life and they have a vivid, visual presence, a luminousness.

The jelly jar is placed off to the side. The ink flows like moving water but there is a papery dryness, like parchment, to the surface. The table appears somewhat upended so that the still-life objects are tilted up and pushed forward. In flattening the picture scene, the image is crammed with life energy. There is a vivid weave between the bright presence of each object and the muted luminosity of the painting.

Through their various versions they ultimately become studio pictures. The result seems mediated, as if filtered through memory. In an interview with Matthias Johannessen, Matthiasdottir said, "I like painting in America... but I understand the Icelandic landscape much better. It's not that it is any more beautiful. But it's my landscape... I'm born into it." In the painting, *Girl and Horse* (Gull being her granddaughter), we see a girl facing a black and white horse across a blue divide. They are standing out over the hill. The encounter between the girl and the horse could have a storybook quality but instead it becomes a metaphor for the activity of seeing. The communion between the girl and the horse could also be that of the painter.

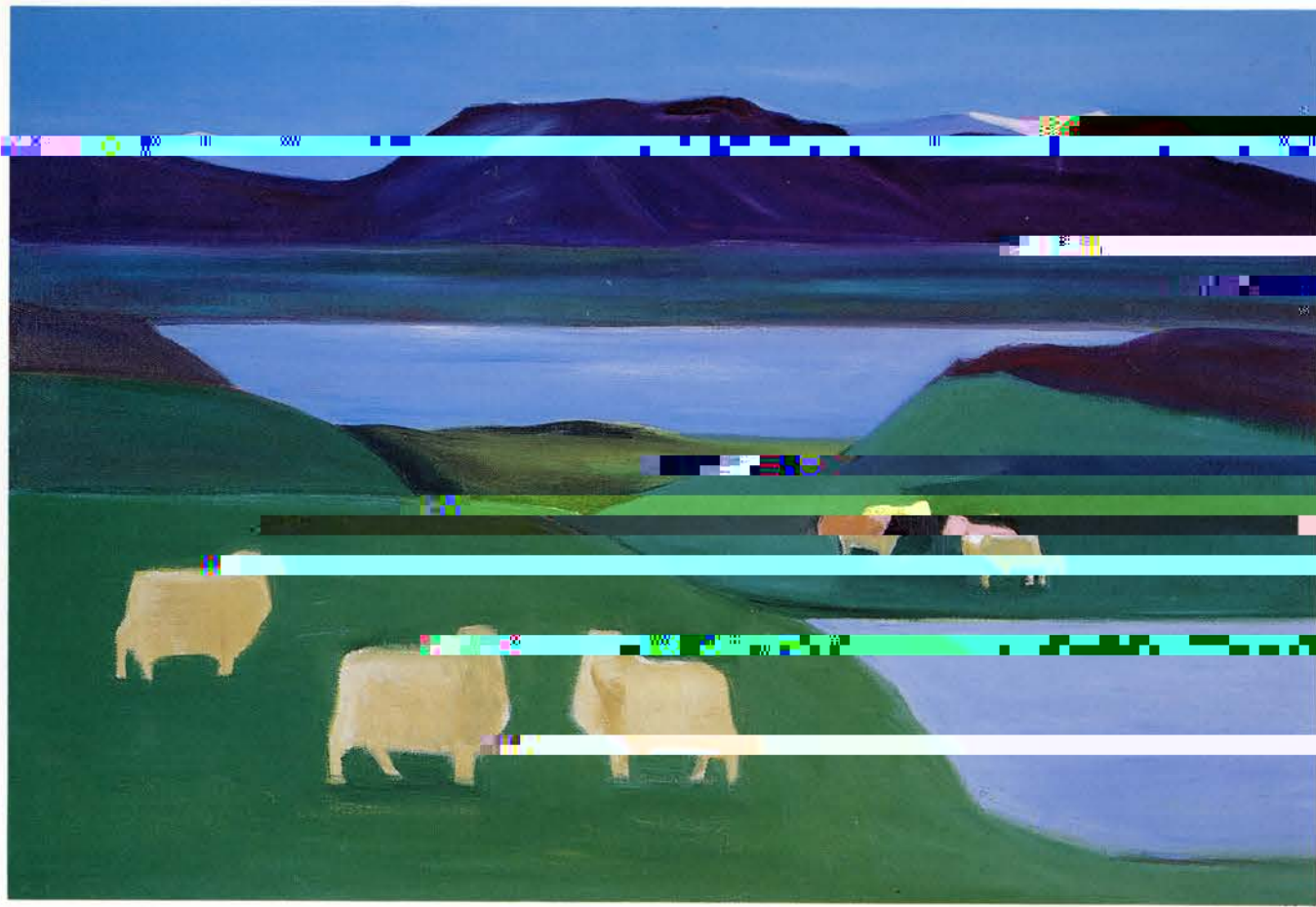
extremely bright element is sun, wrought and moves toward the center of accentuating the central encounter. The harmony of colors seems simple but easily delivers the fresh morning light it depicts. In her mission to seduce us into seeing with a pleasure akin to her own, Matthiasdottir gives us the peripheral vision we have in the sun which is mostly seen in more nearly square canvas formats. Our eyes are much better lenses than those of any camera: we see stereoscopically, with free-ranging flexibility and with profound depth of field. Our eyes are most delightfully engaged and enlivened in the long golden sunlight of a beautiful day. In comparison, cameras are framers of minimal information. It is left to painters to create equivalents to the vastness of the natural world.

Matthiasdottir's landscapes are open. The characteristics of Iceland that I like is the fact that there are no trees to speak of. When there are trees one doesn't really see beyond them, one can't get a sense of the horizon. In Iceland, the landscape is unobstructed, allowing one to see for great distances. Under Matthiasdottir's sun, everything is visible in the sharp clarity of the Nordic light. Matthiasdottir has said, "Here in America there are days similar to those in Iceland, extremely bright days with very sharp, almost hard, light. These are, of course, the good days." <sup>2</sup> And this is the quality of her paintings.

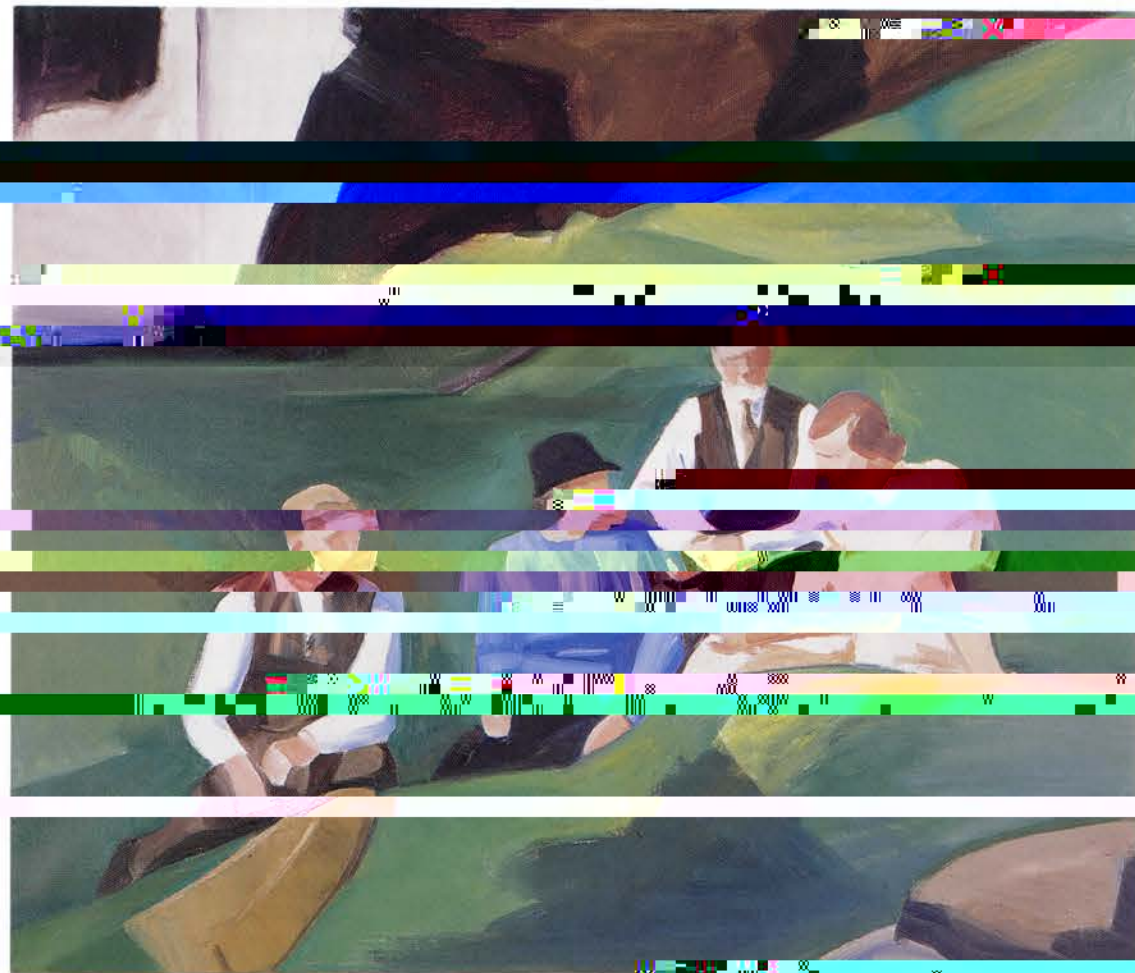
Because of the quality of self-reliance evident in all of Matthiasdottir's production, it is difficult to find outside referents for her work. When we do find affinities we are finding coincidences rather than influences or allusions. With Diebenkorn and Matiseo she shares an equal

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pg. 161

FIVE SHEEP  
oil on canvas  
1990  
42 x 62"



PICNIC  
oil on canvas  
45-1/2 x 53-1/2"



ing azure structure, constructed with blue under-drawing, set up like a stained-glass window with simple curves, diagonals and verticals. The color structure of Matisse's *Morgun* can be seen in the way Louisa paints the streets of Reykjavik — with she allows her rich blues and greens to bump up against each other. Underneath the imagery in her painting, the color matter always seems paramount in her pictures. Over the years, her approach to picture-making. The urban work of her earlier years was busier, in the eighties the paintings became thicker and more boldly formed. In the last year or so, she seems to be turning back a bit to her earlier rougher facture. Dating her work seems unimportant to Matthíasdóttir and so without reliance on the context of “periods” she prompts us to make our evaluations of each individual canvas based on the visual experience.

Perhaps it will be easier to comprehend the true achievement of Matthíasdóttir's originality when we are able to see past the subject matter and understand her as a kind of abstract painter, or rather an orchestrator of color forms. Because there is no literary component in her art demanding our attention, it is left up to us to do the visual work. When we bring open eyes to her work, we can share her account of the pleasures of seeing, just as we can feel the rightness of her painted forms and appreciate the solid invention of her paintings. Her paintings are not just to be seen, they really encourage conversation. They are reticent and comfortable and they reward our being there.

—Steven Harvey 1995

# Louisa Matthíasdóttir

rainun 1937-1995

Catálogo

All works are oil on canvas unless noted

dates

sizes are stated in inches

1. Tomatoes with Green and Yellow Squash and Black Pot 36 X 68
2. Still Life with Cabbage, 1988 37 X 52
3. Still Life with Ketchup Bottle, 1983 38 X 54
4. Blue Cloth Still Life, 1989 38 X 54
5. Still Life with Frying Pan and Red Cabbage, 1979 52 X 60
6. Untitled (Still Life), 1995 18 X 22
7. Landscape, 1990 20 X 50
8. Street in Blue Landscape, 1991 40 X 52
9. Elongated Horse Picture with Red House 27-1/2 X 87
10. Ulla and Horse 6
11. Self-Portrait with Green Shoes, 1993 70 X 42
12. Arnarfelln, 1989-90 54 X 180, (triptych)
13. Self-Portrait with Green Shoes, 1993 70 X 42
14. Self-Portrait, 1982 72 X 38
15. Self-Portrait with Umbrella, 1966 68 X 32
16. Self-Portrait with Eggplant 52-3/4 X 44
17. Self-Portrait, pastel on paper 19-1/2 X 28
18. Matti (Boy Playing), 1937, oil on burlap 23 X 31
19. Matthias Einarsson Reading, c. 1946 21-1/2 X 25-1/2



UNTITLED STILL LIFE  
oil on canvas  
1995  
18 x 7



STILL LIFE WITH FRYING PAN AND RED CABBAGE  
oil on canvas  
1979



20. Temma, 1962-63, oil on cardboard, 13 X 16
21. Temma, 1961, oil on cardboard, 18 X 15
22. Portrait of Lee, 1958 X 21
23. Reykjavik, 1961, 42 X 66
24. Aegrsagata, 1980 52 X 62
25. Crossing 52 X 60
26. Picnic 45-1/2 X 53-1/2
27. Bicycle Rider, oil on board 10-1/2 X 13-3/4
28. Kisa, 1978 8 X 10
29. Frank and Ed, 1978, 11 X 13
30. Horse, 1978 9 X 14
31. Mischka, on oil, 10-1/2 X 10-3/4
32. Rider - Iceland, 1976 13 X 14
33. Girl and Dog 10 X 10
34. Sheep and Lamb
35. Reykjavik Bus Stop Study, 10 X 14
36. Study for Men in Landscape
37. Study for Blaze and Mischka 9 X 12
38. Study for the Crossing, 10 X 11
39. Lake Landscape 10 X 14
40. Art
- 41.
42. Picnic (Iceland Landscape), 12 X 14
43. Street Scene 10 X 15
44. Horse 14 X 10
45. Study for Girl on Bicycle, oil on board, 12 x 10
46. Keilir 8 x 14

## LOUISA MATTHIAS DOUTT

Louisa Matthiasdottir

New York City in 1945, where she studied with Hans Hofmann in New York City.

### Solo Exhibitions

- |      |   |
|------|---|
| 1948 | Jane Street Gallery, New York City  |
| 1958 | Tanager Gallery, New York City  |
| 1960 | University of Connecticut, Storrs   |
| 1964 | Robert Schoelkopf Gallery, New York City  |
| 1966 | Robert Schoelkopf Gallery   |
| 1968 | Robert Schoelkopf Gallery   |
| 1969 | Robert Schoelkopf Gallery   |
| 1970 | Abreart Art Museum, Saint Joseph, Missouri  |
| 1972 | Robert Schoelkopf Gallery<br>Litchfield Art Center, Connecticut<br>Windham College, Putney, Vermont             |
| 1974 | Robert Schoelkopf Gallery   |
| 1976 | Robert Schoelkopf Gallery   |
| 1978 | Robert Schoelkopf Gallery<br>University of New Hampshire, Durham  |
| 1980 | Robert Schoelkopf Gallery   |
| 1982 | Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, South Hadley, Massachusetts<br>Robert Schoelkopf Gallery                      |
| 1983 | Robert Schoelkopf Gallery   |
| 1984 | Robert Schoelkopf Gallery   |
| 1985 | Robert Schoelkopf Gallery   |
| 1988 | Bryggens Museum, Norway<br>Meredith Long and Company  |
| 1989 | Robert Schoelkopf Gallery   |
| 1991 | Robert Schoelkopf Gallery   |
| 1993 | The Reykjavik Municipal Art Museum, Iceland   |
| 1994 | Donald Morris Gallery, Inc.<br>AHI Gallery, "Songs of the Earth: twenty-two American painters of the landscape" |

### Selected Two-Artist and Group Exhibitions

- |      |   |
|------|---|
| 1963 | Manhattanville College, Riverdale, New York<br>"Five American Realists," Knoedler Gallery, New York City  |
| 1964 | Indiana University, Bloomington (with Leland Bell)  |
| 1965 | Kansas City Art Institute, Mercurio Gallery, Leland Bell<br>Procter Art Gallery, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York (with Leland Bell) |

ULLA AND HORSE  
oil on canvas  
6 x 30-3/4"



REYKJAVIK HARBOR  
oil on canvas  
1991  
43 x 65"



- 1972 Austin Art Center, Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut (with Leland [redacted])
- 1972 "Painting and Sculpture Today," John Herron Art Museum, Indianapolis, Indiana
- 1972 Swain School of Art, SUNY at Buffalo, Buffalo, New York (with Cecilia Leberer Bell)
- 1973 "A Family of Painters," Canton Art Museum, Canton, Ohio (with Leland [redacted])
- 1974 Biennial Exhibition, Reykjavik
- 1974 Haustsýning F.I.M., Reykjavik
- 1975 "Painterly Representation," Ingber Gallery, New York City
- 1978 "Drawing and Painting on Paper," Kemper Gallery, Kansas City Art Institute, Missouri
- 1981-82 "Contemporary American Art," Pennsylvania Academy of the Arts, Philadelphia, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond; Oakland Museum, California
- 1982 "Perspectives on Contemporary American Art," Academy of Fine Arts, Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois
- 1983 "American Scene in the Painting, 1945-1963," Contemporary Art Museum, New York
- 1984 "New Vistas - Contemporary American Landscapes," Hudson River Museum, Yonkers, New York
- "American Art Today: Still Life," Visual Arts Center, International University, Miami
- "Nine Realists Revisited, 1963-1984," Robert Schoor, New York
- "10 Gestir Listahatidar 84," Reykjavik
- 1987 Stoppenbach and Delestre, London, England
- 1991 "Twentieth Century and Contemporary American Art," Callen McLunkin, Charleston, West Virginia
- 1992 "Color as a Subject," The Artists' Museum in association with the Tibor de Nagy Gallery and Staempfli Gallery, The Police Building, New York City
- 1994-95 "Relatively Speaking," Snug Harbor Cultural Center, Staten Island, New York; Museum of Art, Illinois, Rahway, Wisconsin; Emily Lowe Gallery, Hofstra University, Hempstead, New York (November/December 1996)
- 1994 "Transport," Maier Museum of Art at Randolph-MacDonnell College, Randolph, Virginia
- 1995 "Unstill Still Life," University of Rhode Island
- "Louisa Matthiasdottir/Jane F. Maclellan Paintings," Walker-Kornbluth Gallery, Inc., Fair Lawn, New Jersey

**Artistic Institutions**

- Albrecht Art Museum, Saint Joseph, Missouri
- Keefer M. Huntington Art Gallery, University of Maryland
- Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, District of Columbia
- Indiana University Art Museum, Bloomington, Indiana
- Listasafn Kopavogs, Reykjavik, Iceland
- Reykjavik Municipal Art Museum, Iceland
- New Jersey State Museum, Trenton
- Weatherspoon Art Gallery, University of North Carolina, Greensboro

**Corporate Collections**

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- Chemical Bank, London, England
- The Continental Corporation, New York City
- Reader's Digest, Pleasantville, New York
- H.J. Heinz & Company, Pittsburgh
- Mitsubishi Corporation, New York City
- Mellon Bank, Pittsburgh
- Miller, Tabak & Hirsch, Inc., New York City
- Flugleidir (Icelandair), Reykjavik, Iceland



a long time. We are extremely pleased that it is now available and that it will be shared with at least four other communities. We wish to thank the donors of these wonderful paintings to the Scandinavian-American Foundation, whose grant adds luster to the exhibition in the form of this catalog.

ASSOCIATION

Robert J. [redacted]  
Director  
Kendall Campus Art Gallery

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front cover: SELF-PORTRAIT WITH GREEN SHOES

oil on canvas

1966

back cover: SELF-PORTRAIT WITH

oil on canvas

1966

68 x 32"

