



SUSAN LICHTMAN

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THE ELEANOR D. WILSON MUSEUM

**HOLLINS**  
UNIVERSITY

# **SUSAN LICHTMAN**

2017 Frances Niederer Artist-in-Residence

March 9 - May 9, 2017

Eleanor D. Wilson Museum at Hollins University



*Off*, 2016  
Oil on linen  
52 x 40"

*Heroic artists... conjure up gods and heroes and mythological worlds... But it is the ability of more circumscribed artists to slow our systems, calm our minds, and show us reality as we have probably not considered it that inspired Marcel Proust to say, "Great Painters initiate us into a knowledge and love of the external world."*<sup>1</sup>

Susan Lichtman is a figurative painter of domestic spaces. She realized early that she didn't want to be an artist, she wanted only to be a painter, and this has been her focus now for forty years. Since 1987, the first floor of her home, her large studio a few steps away, and the daily comings and goings of her family have been her main source for compositions based on observation and imagination. She and her husband, painter Dennis Congdon, built their house and studios in the woods of southeastern Massachusetts on land adjacent to the property where Lichtman grew up. This rural home has become her center of place, and family, her muse.

Lichtman considers as influences European and American painters of interiors Pieter de Hooch, Johannes Vermeer, Edward Hopper, and Fairfield Porter. A great admirer of paintings by Edouard Vuillard, the Nabis, Pierre Bonnard, and Gwen John, Lichtman comments about her own use of color: "To me, close-valued color is magical... A palette of close values gives the picture a kind of envelope into which everything is placed. It's a way for the paint to imply the fiction of light and air... I have liked this sense of distance, especially when painting my own home and family, as a way to avoid sentimentality."<sup>2</sup>

Lichtman's paintings fluctuate between intense acidic colors to more somber brown, black, and red tones. In the past decade her palette has brightened. She hides important things, including figures, in these close-value passages, wanting the painting to reveal itself slowly. It is easy to get caught up in the non-objective color blocks that create a multitude of "paintings within a painting." Everyday objects such as an unfinished blue pitcher, a vacuum cleaner with its arching suction hose, or a can of "OFF" insect spray become fascinating still lifes and studies of color, shape, and light. Playing with reflection, she employs an array of positive and negative shapes; the juxtaposition of warm and cool tones effortlessly moves the viewer's eye to the front of the picture plane and back into illusory depth. Seen especially in the paintings *Coffee Outside* and *Under Grapes*, the viewer feels as though they must duck under the grape leaves to wind their way onto the sun-dappled porch.

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<sup>1</sup> Kimmelman, Michael. *The Accidental Masterpiece: On the Art of Life and Vice Versa*. New York: The Penguin Press, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Groff, Larry (2016, January). *Interview with Susan Lichtman*. Retrieved from <http://paintingperceptions.com/>

A distinguishing feature between Lichtman's paintings and those of historical and contemporary perceptual painters is the way she interlaces the element of time and the movement of figures. Lichtman states, "I want to make paintings that are more like cinematographic passages than like still photographs, where the eye can move around and apprehend things slowly."<sup>3</sup> The viewer gets a sense of the artist as director on a set with her family, their day-to-day life the screenplay. Lichtman observes and then recreates these scenes from memory, constructing the interior and combining fragments of fact with fiction. Lichtman's figures are frank and unposed, their gestures active. Time is suggested by her use of diffuse, shifting figures and objects. This is especially apparent in *Rosa Moves Out* where all the figures, but most noticeably Lichtman's oldest daughter Rosa (figure to the right), seem almost unfinished, creating both an absence and a presence. Lichtman states, "[it] takes a great deal of personal restraint to not over paint" and that sometimes this gestural treatment is an exercise in asking herself "how simply can I paint something?"<sup>4</sup>

Lichtman's organic method of building and deconstructing a painting prevents her style from becoming formulaic. She begins a composition by painting some small thing from direct observation and then imagining what might encircle that object. As the artist describes her process, it may be "another object, a piece of light on the floor, the dog. It's as if I was zooming out from a close-up of particular form, slowly revealing what might be in the periphery. I can only do this with places I know well, where I know how light falls and how figures interact with things. But the process is totally arbitrary – if I feel like I want a piece of yellow, then I put in a daffodil or a lemon, or a yellow dress I saw in a magazine."<sup>5</sup> In a reverse method from most artists, Lichtman creates small paintings or studies while the larger works are in progress, allowing her to play with the elements in a scaled-down version, helping her process and proceed.

Through her paintings, Susan Lichtman invites us into the world of her home and studio. Realism or abstraction, fiction or fact, we are encouraged to slow down and move through her thoughtfully constructed complex spaces, luxuriate in a peaceful sun-drenched moment, and be a welcome voyeur into her family idylls.

Jenine Culligan, Director  
Eleanor D. Wilson Museum at Hollins University

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<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> "Interview with Susan Lichtman." Personal interview. 23 Jan. 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Groff (2016, January).

*Studio Doors with  
Vacuum, 2016*  
Oil on canvas  
64 x 58"









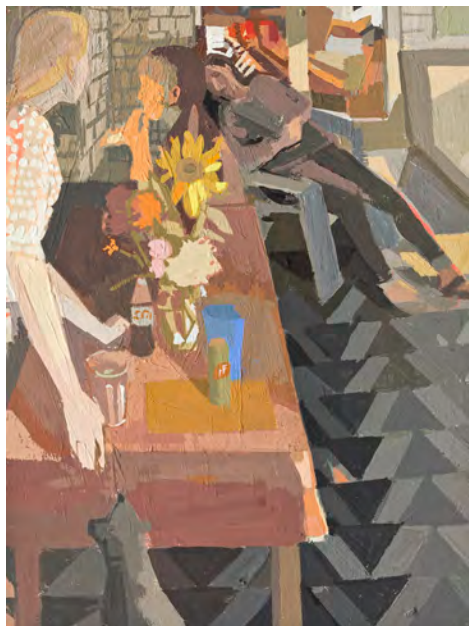
Left:  
*Coffee Outside*, 2016  
Oil on linen, 60 x 44"

Right:  
*Under Grapes*, 2016  
Oil on linen, 60 x 44"





*Equinox Meal*, 2016  
Oil on linen, 40 x 66"



Upper left:  
*Porch with Black and White Rug*, 2016  
Acrylic gouache on panel, 12 x 9"

Lower left:  
*Equinox Meal Study*, 2016  
Acrylic gouache on panel, 9 x 12"

Below:  
*Small Green Studio*, 2016  
Acrylic gouache on panel, 12 x 12"

Opposite:  
Lichtman's studio wall, 2016







Left:  
*The Long Call*, 2013-17  
Oil on linen, 79 x 48"

Right:  
*Cookout*, 2016  
Oil on linen, 64 x 58"





*Rosa Moves Out*, 2016  
Oil on linen, 40 x 66"



**Susan Lichtman**  
**2017 Frances Niederer Artist-in-Residence**

**Exhibition Checklist**

*The Long Call*, 2013-2017  
Oil on linen, 79 x 48"

*Father's Day*, 2014  
Oil on linen, 40 x 66"

*Father's Day Study*, 2014  
Acrylic gouache on panel, 12 x 9"

*Stove pipe*, 2015  
Ink and acrylic gouache on  
stretched paper, 66 x 48"

*Study for Rosa Moves Out*, 2015  
Ink and acrylic gouache on  
stretched paper, 66 x 48"

*Study of Rosa's Chair*, 2015  
Ink and acrylic gouache on  
stretched paper, 66 x 48"

*Coffee Outside*, 2016  
Oil on linen, 60 x 44"

*Cookout*, 2016  
Oil on linen, 64 x 58"

*Equinox Meal*, 2016  
Oil on linen, 40 x 66"

*Equinox Meal Study*, 2016  
Acrylic gouache on panel, 9 x 12"

*Off*, 2016  
Oil on linen, 52 x 40"

*Porch with Black and White Rug*, 2016  
Acrylic gouache on panel, 12 x 9"

*Rosa Moves Out*, 2016  
Oil on linen, 40 x 66"

*Small Green Studio*, 2016  
Acrylic gouache on panel, 12 x 12"

*Studio Doors with Vacuum*, 2016  
Oil on canvas, 64 x 58"

*Under Grapes*, 2016  
Oil on linen, 60 x 44"

All works courtesy of the artist.

## Susan Lichtman

### Education:

MFA Yale University School of Art, 1980

AB Brown University, 1978

### Selected Solo Exhibitions:

2018 Gross McCleaf Gallery, Philadelphia, PA (upcoming)

2017 Steven Harvey Fine Art Projects, New York, NY (upcoming)

2017 Eleanor D. Wilson Museum, Hollins University, Roanoke, VA

2016 Virginia Thompson Graves Gallery, Barton College, Wilson, NC

2015 Candita Clayton Gallery, Pawtucket, RI

2014 Orsman Gallery, Smith College, Northampton, MA

2004 Drury Gallery, Marlboro College, Marlboro, VT

2003 Sarah Doyle Gallery, Brown University, Providence, RI

2001 Upper Jewett, Hopkins Center, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH

1997 Lenore Gray Gallery, Providence, RI

1991 Wheeler Gallery, Providence, RI

1987 John Hartell Gallery, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY

1985 More Gallery, Philadelphia, PA

### Selected Group Exhibitions

2017 *Three Friends Represent: Susan Lichtman, Ruth Miller and Gwen Strahle*; Don Smith, Curator. Bannister Gallery, Rhode Island College, Providence, RI

2015 *Fun*. Gross McCleaf Gallery, Philadelphia, PA

*Revealing Identity*; Audrey Pepper, Curator. Concord Art Association, Concord MA

2014 *Tone Poems and Shape Notes, Catherine Kehoe and Susan Lichtman*. List Gallery, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA

*Color: Observed & Imagined*; Nicole Santiago, Curator. College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA

2012 *The Romantic Impulse*. Gross McCleaf Gallery, Philadelphia, PA

Galleria ISA, Montecastello di Vibio, PG Italy

2011 *Fresh Flowers*; Dana Frankfort, Curator. Sherman Art Gallery, Boston University, Boston, MA

2010 *Tenants*; Vera Iliatova, Curator. 106 Green, Brooklyn, NY

*Recent Paintings: Susan Lichtman & Celia Reisman*. Gross McCleaf Gallery, Philadelphia, PA

2009 Two person exhibition. Lenore Gray Gallery, Providence, RI (also 1995, 2000, 2002, 2005, 2007)

2008 *Color Key*; Patrick Webb, Curator. Painting Center, New York, NY

*Rooms and Voices*. Gross McCleaf Gallery, Philadelphia, PA

2006 *Spot On*. Rose Art Museum, Waltham, MA

2001 *Interiors*. Washington Art Association, Washington Depot, CT

2000 *An Artist's Choice: Figurative Painting in New England*; William Bailey, Curator. Lyme Art Assoc., Old Lyme, CT

1994 *Hardly Academic*. Rose Art Museum, Waltham, MA  
1992 Two person exhibition. 55 Mercer Gallery, New York, NY  
1988 *Newly Elected Members and Recipients of Awards*. American Academy & Institute of Arts and Letters, New York, NY  
1984 *Small Landscapes*. More Gallery, Philadelphia, PA  
1982 *New Talent*. Alpha Gallery, Boston MA  
*Four*. Rose Art Museum, Waltham, MA

#### S e l e c t e d P u b l i c a t i o n s

Groff, Larry. Interview with Susan Lichtman. Web. *Painting Perceptions*, January 21, 2016  
*Tone Poems and Shape Notes, Catherine Kehoe and Susan Lichtman*. Essay by Andrea Packard, List Gallery, Swarthmore College, PA. 2014  
*Celia Reisman & Susan Lichtman*. Catalog. Gross McCleaf Gallery, Philadelphia, PA, 2010  
Schorr, Ingrid. "Seeing the Light," *Catalyst Magazine*, Brandeis University, Sept. 2009  
Parks, John A. "The Power of Suggestion: The Paintings of Susan Lichtman." *American Artist*, September 2008  
*Ten Figurative Painters in New England, An Artist's Choice*. Catalog, Essay by Andrew Forge, Lyme Art Assoc., 2000  
"Elizabeth Condon, Susannah Coffey, Susan Lichtman," *The New Art Examiner*, Nov. 1992  
Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Awards 1987. Catalog. New York, 1988

#### A w a r d s a n d H o n o r s

Frances Niederer Artist-in-Residence, Hollins University. 2017  
Guest of Honor, JSS Civita Program, Civita Castellana, Italy. 2016  
Charles Bloom Chair in the Arts of Design, Brandeis University, 2015  
Theodore and Jane Norman Faculty Research Grant, Brandeis University. 2011, 2013, 2016  
Senior Artist-in-Residence, International School of Painting and Sculpture, Montecastello di Vibio, Umbria, Italy. 2012  
Brandeis University Leonard Bernstein Creative Arts Achievement Award. 2012  
Mazer Research Grant, Brandeis University. 1982, 1985, 1991  
American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, Richard and Hinda Rosenthal Award. 1988  
Lewis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Award. 1987  
Ellen Battell Stoeckel Fellowship to Yale Summer School of Art. 1977

Susan Lichtman is grateful to the visual arts faculty and museum staff of Hollins University for their invitation, welcome and support; and also to Brandeis University for the support of a Theodore and Jane Norman Award. Portions of this exhibition will move to Steven Harvey Fine Art Projects for *In My House*, June 7-July 9, 2017. 208 Forsyth Street, New York, NY.

Front cover detail: *Off*, 2016. Oil on linen, 52 x 40"

Back cover detail: *Cookout*, 2016. Oil on linen, 64 x 58"

