



LOUISA
MATTHIASDOTTER

PAINTINGS

1930's - 1990's

Exhibition Schedule

The Kendall Campus, University of Miami-Dade Community College, Miami, Florida

January 5 - 26, 1996

The American University, Washington, District of Columbia

October 6-26, 1996

Sordani Art Gallery, Wilkes University, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania

January 12 - February 23, 1997

The New York Studio School of Drawing, Painting and Sculpture, New York, New York

March 6 - April 19, 1997

Nordic Heritage Museum, Seattle, Washington

July 8 - August 31, 1997

This catalogue was funded by a generous grant from the American-Scandinavian Foundation, New

York, New York. The Foundation encourages programs that will enhance the American people's ap-

preciation of Scandinavian life, art, and culture.

All paintings in the exhibition are on loan from the artist's collection.

New York.

The exhibition curator is Steven Harvey.

Seeing and Painting

The Art of Louisa Matthiasdottir

"The reason I paint is because I want to paint what I see. But to paint what I see I must build from color. I don't do shapes and colors without seeing them in nature.

I don't do things like a Japanese or a Chinese landscape. I don't do a painting of a woman or a child or a landscape, it's a more colorful and more expressive. It has to be a painting.

— Louisa Matthiasdottir

Over the last

Perhaps because she works in the traditional genres of landscape, still life and figure painting, and

possibly due to a sense of her own reticence, it has been too easy to overlook the importance of her contribu-

tion. Considered alongside other American figurative painters of the mid-20th century, such as

Robert Rauschenberg, Celand Bell, Paul Georges and Robert Rauschenberg, whose loosely affiliated school of

early figuration

in Balthus, Giacometti, and Derain. Matthiasdottir's work is a blend of the traditional and the modern.

ity. From her earliest work, one can see Matthiasdottir's own approach to painting. In

boy painting,

of a child's figure. Always admirably succinct in her pictorial shorthand, she does exactly what is

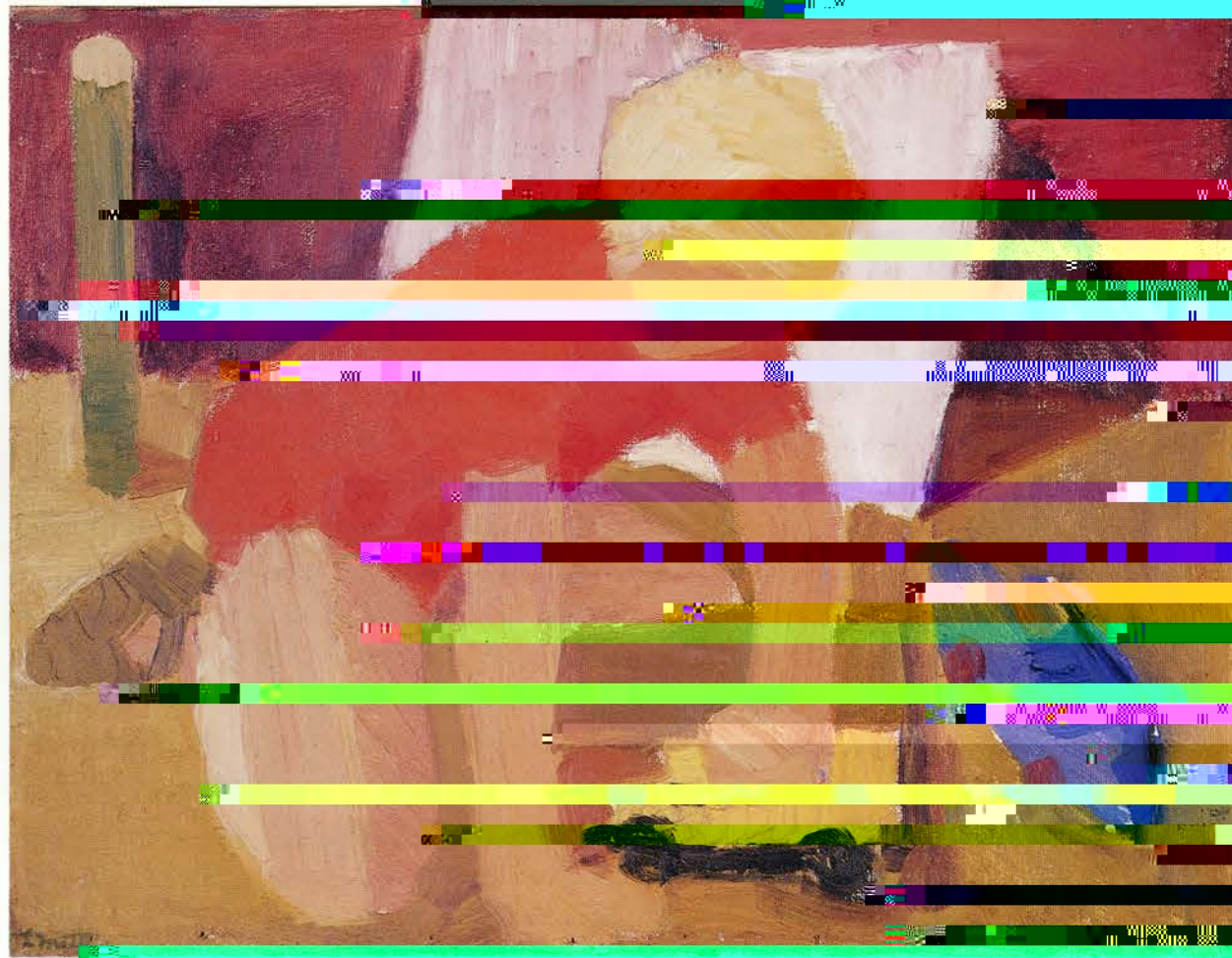
necessary to fix an image, and nothing more. The character of her work is remarkably straight

Matthiasdottir brings to her work a sense of the tradition of artists obsessed with the philosophical problems

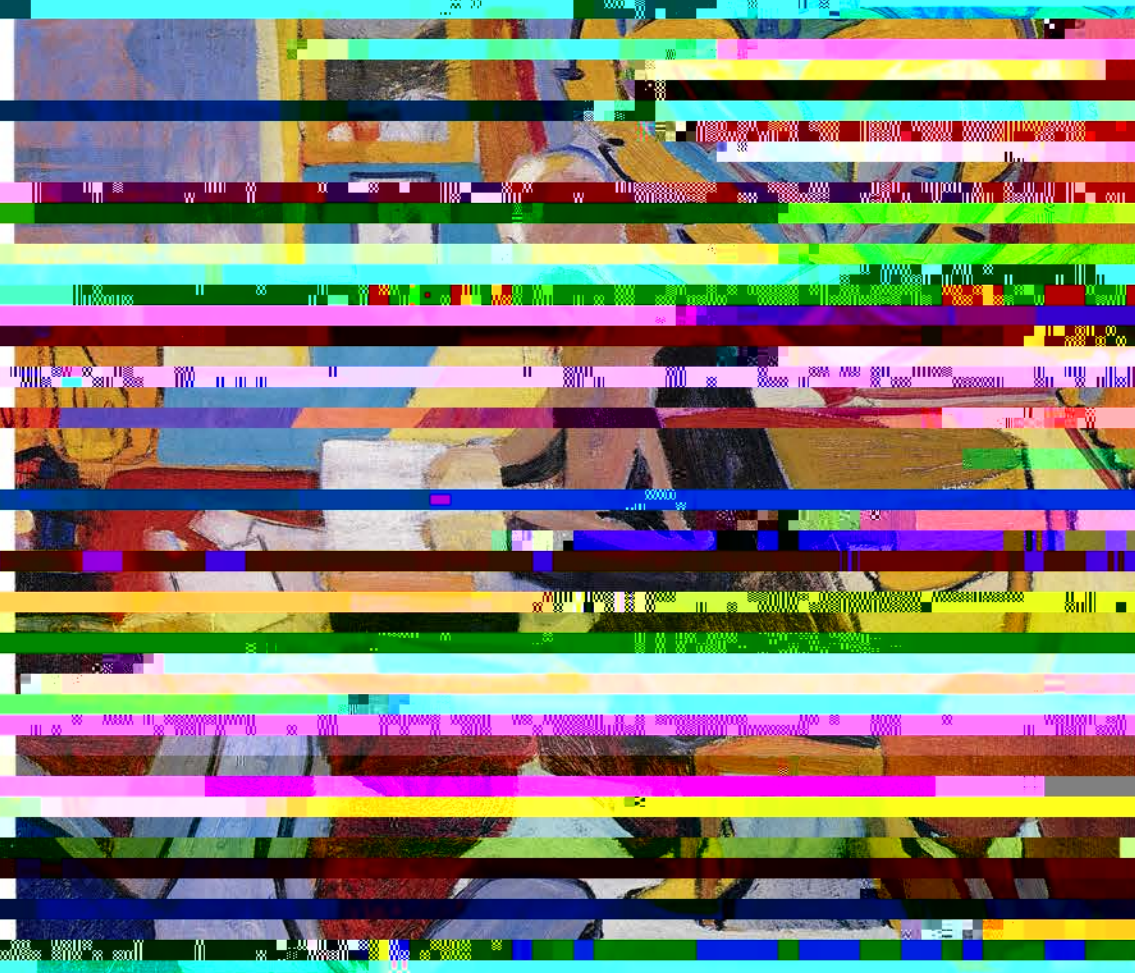
and historical traditions of art, she is, as she remarked to Janet Hobhouse, "just a painter."

¹ Mark Strand, editor, foreword by Robert Hughes, *Art of the Real: Nine American Figurative Painters*, (New York, NY: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1983), p. 169

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 1938, 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 described in her paintings has developed

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 edges

matthias

get her adolescent daughter

g woman.

The dogs and cats in Matthiasdottir's paintings are close friends

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 dramatic

the

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

acino

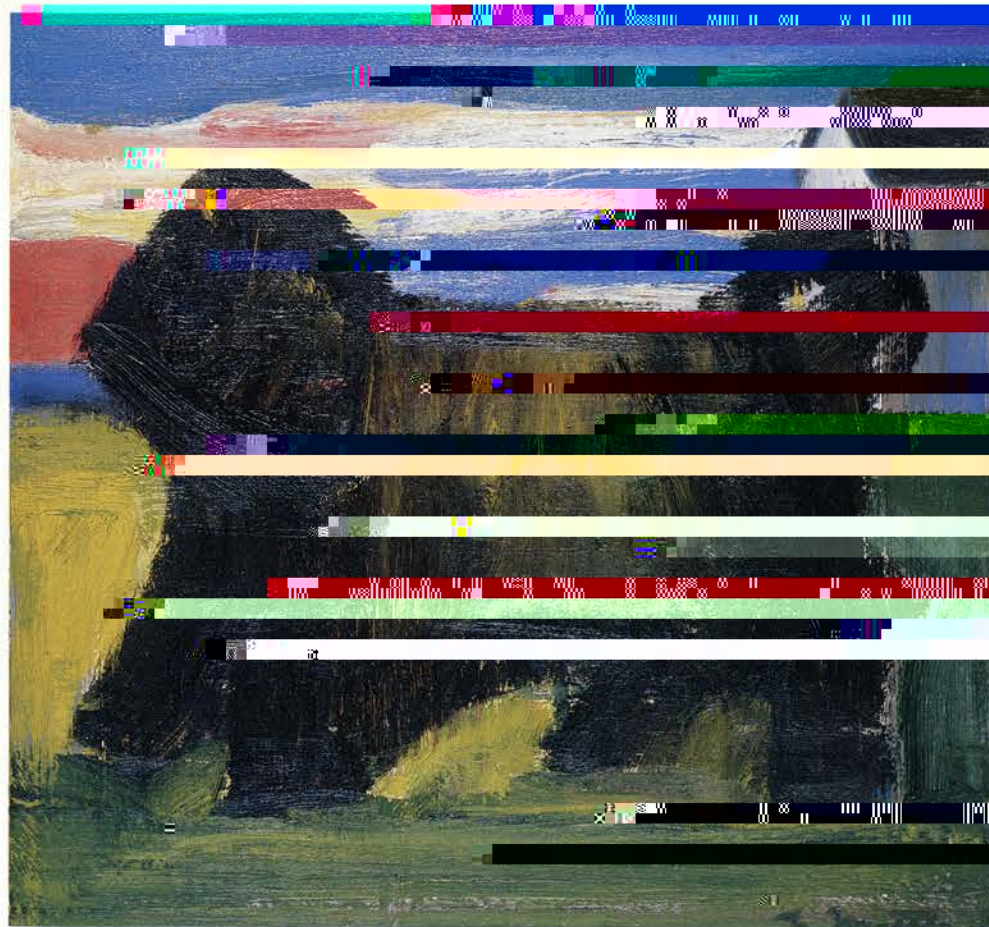
long grace. The chunky blues, whites and greys of the background are

and unusual comple

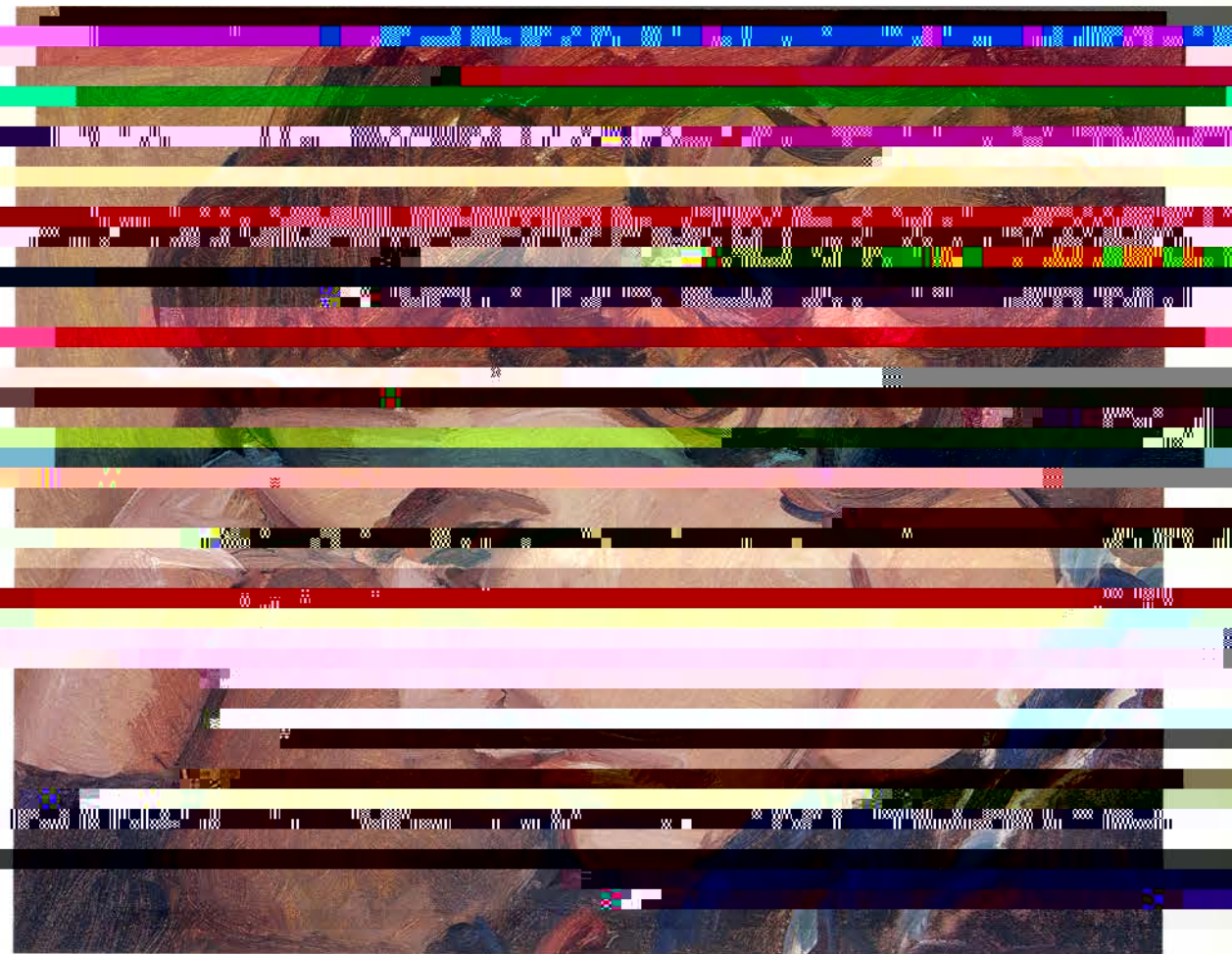
ness. The

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 over a table or counter. Each object has its own distinct sense of placement. The objects are most often white. When they do overlap, the result has a sense of delicacy. In *Still Life* from 1995, several objects float on a blue cloth. Her still lifes are a glimpse summary and coal outlines of a world. The paint is later than in the eighties: The objects are singly larger than me 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 space, 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, Matthiassdottir 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* (she 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.

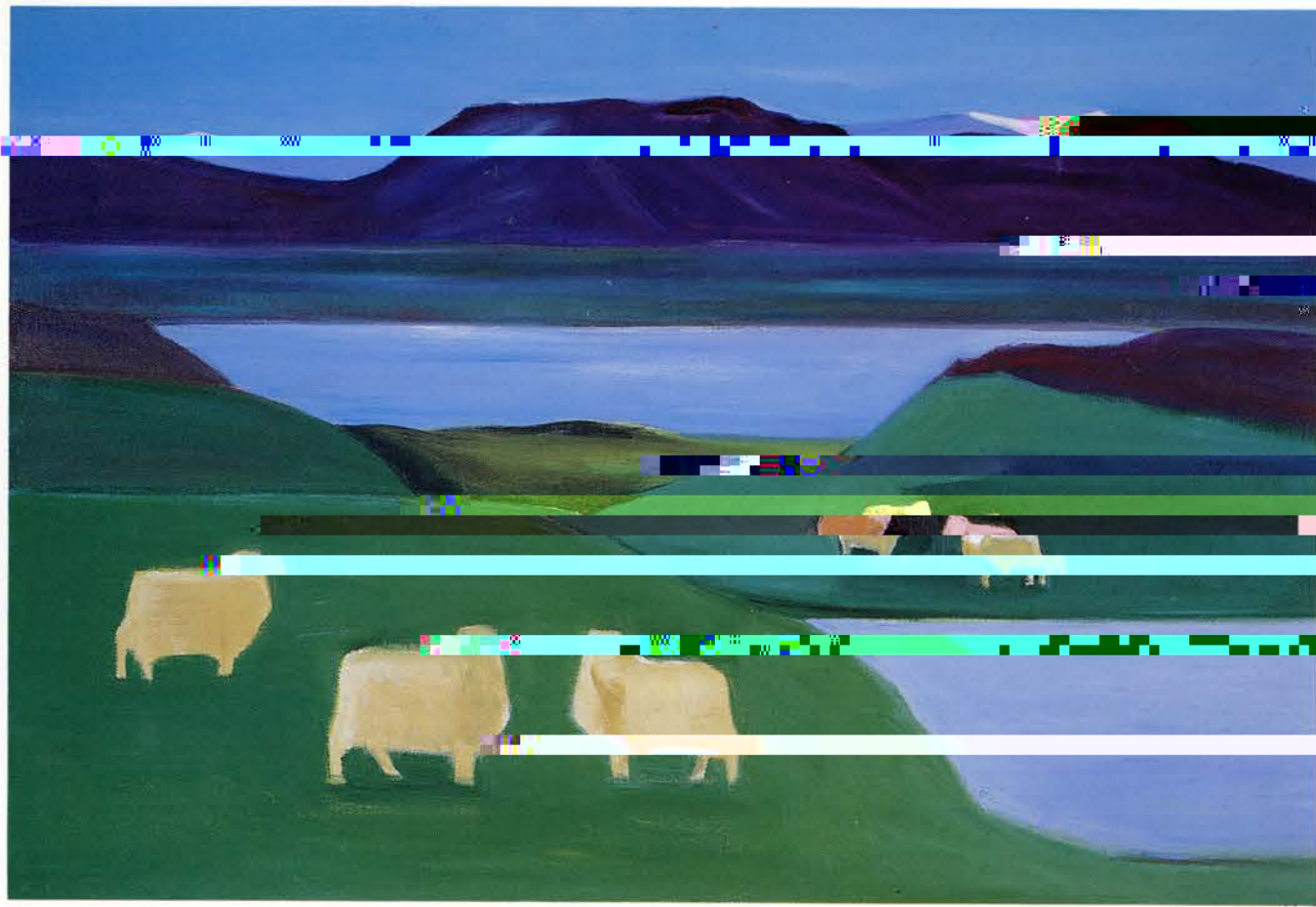
extremely pure. The element is sun, wrought and moves toward the goal of accentuating the central encounter. The harmony of colors seems simple but easily delivers the fresh morning light it depicts. In her mission to seduce us into seeing with a pleasure akin to her own, Matthiassdottir gives us the peripheral vision we have in nature but which is mostly denied us 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 dignitarily 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.

Matthiassdottir'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 Matthiassdottir's sun, everything is visible in the sharp clarity of the Nordic light. Matthiassdottir 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." ² And this is the quality of her paintings.

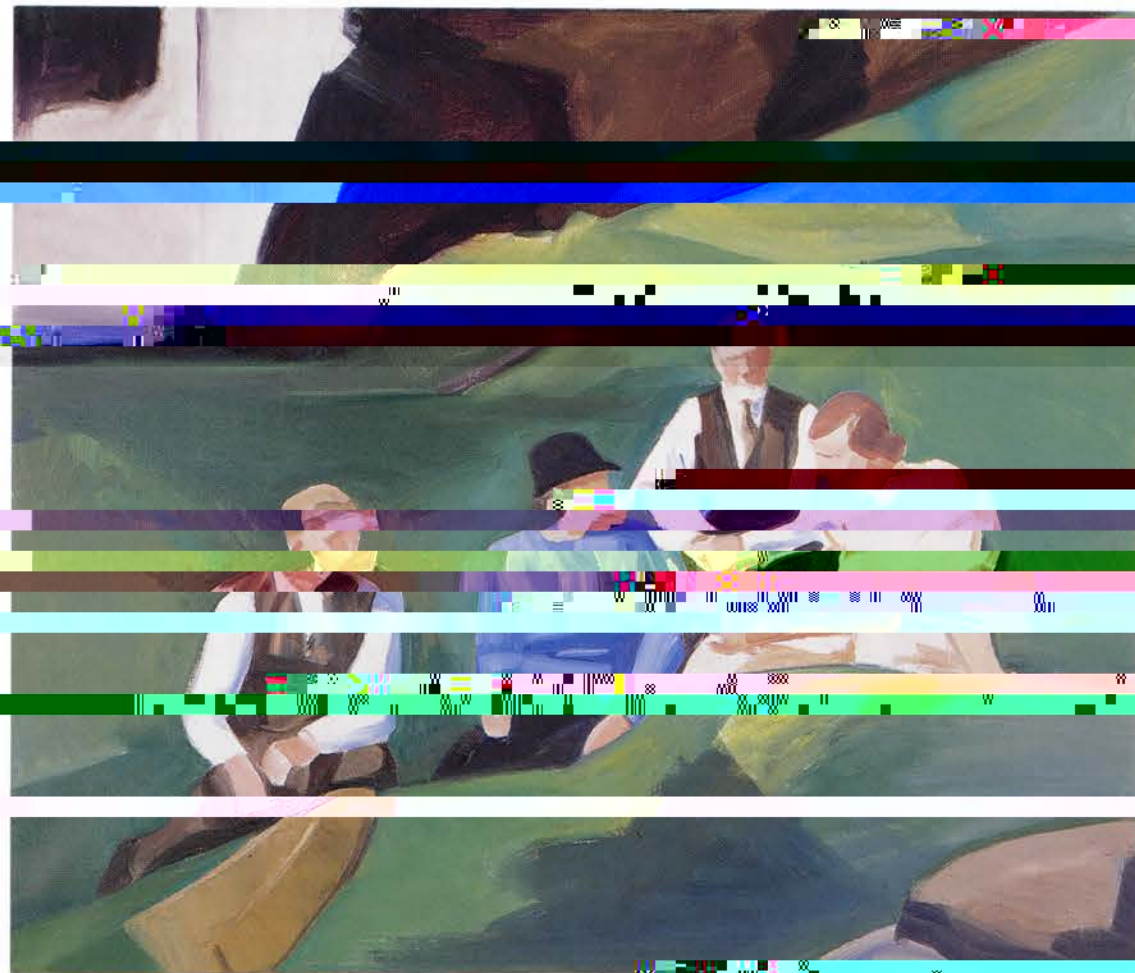
Because of the quality of self-reliance evident in all of Matthiassdottir's production, it is difficult to find outside referents for her work. When we do find affinities we are finding coincidences rather than influences or allusions. With Diebenkorn and Metzger she shares an equal

² 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 compared to the way Louisa paints the streets of Reykjavik — with something in common with 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 paintings, 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 things to be seen, they really encourage conversation. They are reticent and comfortable and they reward our being there.

—Steven Harvey 1995

Louisa Matthíasdóttir

rainunn 1937-1995

Catálogo

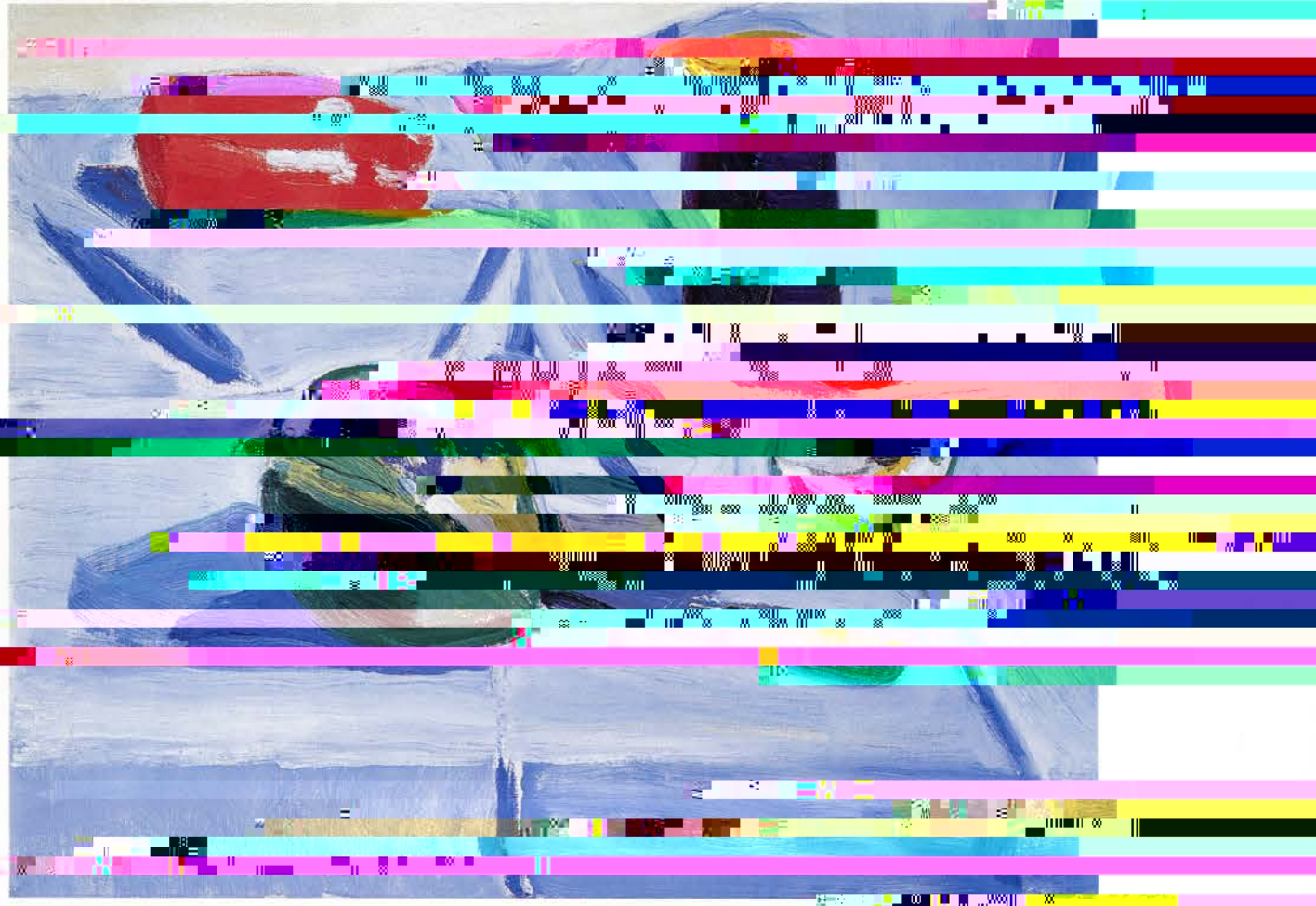
All works are oil on canvas unless noted

dates

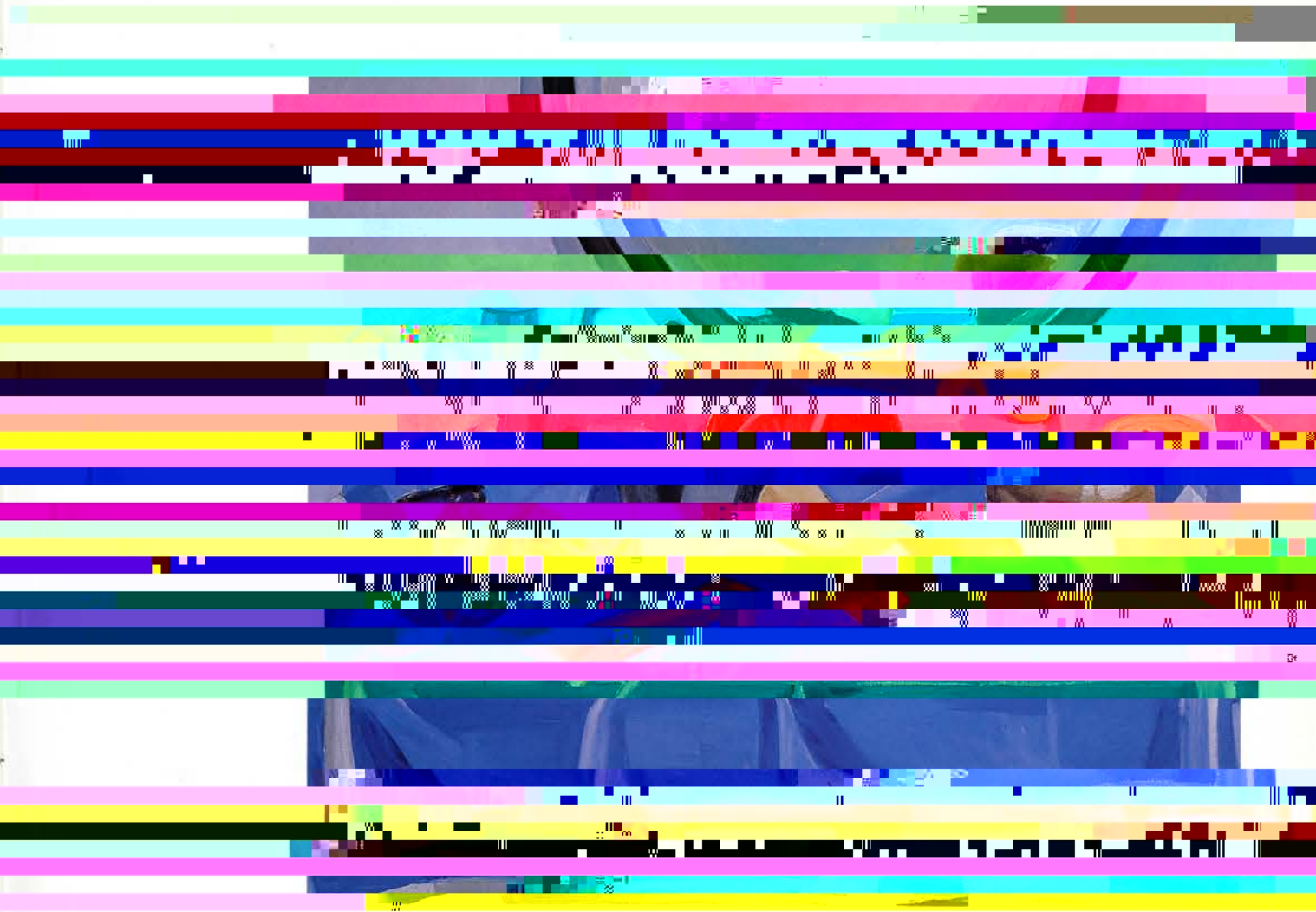
sizes are stated in inches

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, 11 X 14
23. Reykjavik, 1961, 12 X 16
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 cardboard, 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, oil on cardboard, 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, 10 X 14
35. Reykjavik Bus Stop Study, 10 X 14
36. Study for Men in Landscape, 10 X 14
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, 10 X 14
41. Study for the Crossing, 10 X 11
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 MATTHIA DOTTE

Louisa Matthia Dotte

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 Antrient Art Museum, Saint Joseph, Missouri
- 1972 Robert Schoelkopf Gallery
Litchfield Art Center, Connecticut
Windham College, Putney, Vermont
- 1974 Robert Schoelkopf Gallery
- 1976 Robert Schoelkopf Gallery
- 1978 Robert Schoelkopf Gallery
University of New Hampshire, Durham
- 1980 Robert Schoelkopf Gallery
- 1982 Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, South Hadley, Massachusetts
Robert Schoelkopf Gallery
- 1983 Robert Schoelkopf Gallery
- 1984 Robert Schoelkopf Gallery

Robert Schoelkopf Gallery
Bryggens Museum, Norway

Chapman, Reykjavik, Iceland
1988 Meredith Long and Company

1989 Robert Schoelkopf Gallery

1991 Robert Schoelkopf Gallery

1993 The Reykjavik Municipal Art Museum, Iceland

1994 Donald Morris Gallery, Inc.

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
"Five American Realists," Knoedler Gallery, New York City
- 1964 Indiana University, Bloomington (with Leland Bell)
Kansas City Art Institute, Kansas City, Missouri (with Leland Bell)
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 Art from the Americas," Smithsonian Academy of Art, 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 International University, Miami
- "Nine Realists Revisited, 1963-1984," Robert Schoor Gallery, 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, New Jersey; Wisconsin, Emery University, Madison, Wisconsin
- 1994 "Transport," Maier Museum of Art at Randolph-MacDonnell College, Randolph, Virginia
- "Unstill Still Life," University of Rhode Island
- 1995 "Louisa Matthiasdottir/Jane F. Maclellan Paintings," Walker-Kornbluth Gallery, Inc., Fair Lawn, New Jersey

- Art Locations**
- 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, New Jersey
 - Weatherspoon Art Gallery, University of North Carolina, Greensboro, North Carolina

- Corporate Collections**
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 - The Continental Corporation, New York City
 - Reader's Digest, Pleasantville, New York
 - H.J. Heinz & Company, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
 - Mitsubishi Corporation, New York City
 - Mellon Bank, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
 - 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 the wonderful paintings to the Scandinavian-American Foundation, whose grant adds luster to the exhibition in the form of this catalog.

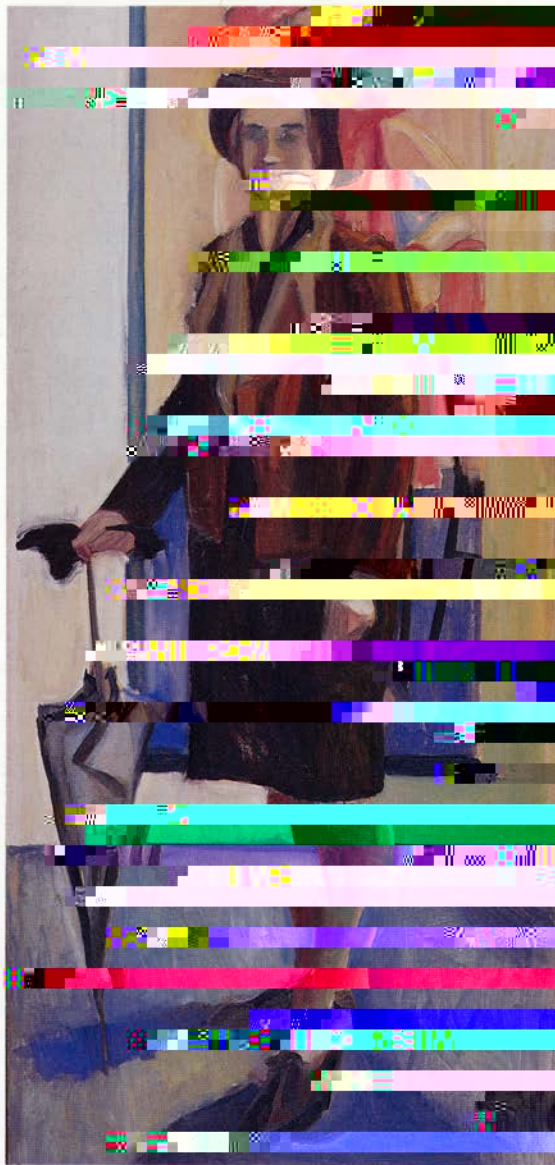
Robert J. [redacted]
 Director
 Kendall Campus Art Gallery

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front cover: SELF-PORTRAIT WITH GREEN SHOES

oil on canvas



back cover: SELF-PORTRAIT WITH

oil on canvas

1966

68 x 32"