

(An Appropriate Distance)
FROM THE MAYOR'S DOORSTEP
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Report from the Front

Art criticism, sometimes with context, occasional politics. Published in hard copy 5-7 times a year. New shows: "events;" hard-copy rates & how to support the online edition: "works."

SOCIAL (& ESTHETIC) NOTES FROM ALL OVER

October 26, 2016

(Excerpted)

[...]

“PERSONALIZED: FRIENDSHIP, CELEBRATION, GRATITUDE”

[...]

This jewel of an exhibition features 34 mostly small works that were given by the artists who created them to friends—fellow artists, dealers, collectors, curators and critics.

Most of the entries on the checklist list the owners demurely as “private collection,” but some of the inscriptions are more revealing.

Thus we have a colored postcard with a **Kenneth Noland** target image, cleverly decorated with verticals on either side of the target to suggest (to my twisted mind, at least) the impression of a place setting, with fork, plate and knife.

It is inscribed, in pencil, “FOR KAREN FROM KEN/ON A SUNNY AFTERNOON/IN SO. SALEM/6.18.92.”

Another gustatory treat is a hand-colored collage by **Helen Frankenthaler** with the label from a sauvignon blanc bottle, and an affectionate inscription to Freedman herself.

It reads, “1 June 77/Cheers!/To more!!/Ann Dear/Remember
30March? “Enfin” (Amer. Trans./for American [good] wine: “at/last”)!
Painting the studio/floor and found encl., worked on/for you. Love Helen”

Less clearly identified but still illuminating is a mellow-toned piece of glazed stoneware, entitled “Yellow Pearl” (1980). According to the checklist, it is signed on the verso, “To Jules + Chris May ‘86/with love + gratitude from **Darby.**”

Another entry with personal associations for me is an uncharacteristically gentle ink drawing on paper inscribed “For John + Bob/**Philip Guston** 1966.” **John Heliker & Bob LaHotan** were both representational longtime teacher-artists, Heliker at Columbia University’s School of Painting and Sculpture, LaHotan at my alma mater, Dalton.

[...]

... I do remember he gave me a pretty little oil painting for my birthday one year, a sweet study of clouds and pigeons, all pink and blue and white. Don’t know whatever happened to it, alas.

Most of the rest of the work doesn’t betray to whom it was given or when, but a lot of it is nonetheless exquisite. Among the standouts I include “Rondo #40” (1985), a fierce little **Robert Motherwell** India ink on paper with atypically sharp and narrow shapes; and the best **Lee Bontecou** I’ve ever seen, a terse little study of tight curlicues in colored pencil on black paper.

There's a large and handsome, light gray and very characteristic **Susan Roth** entitled “Ghost Dancer” (1983), with acrylic on two layers of canvas; an expert, small and very representational **Richard Diebenkorn**, “Untitled (Nude Woman in Blue Chair)” (1959); and the best **John Walker** that I can remember, a very small untitled, thickly impastoed oil on paper dated 2003 and

suggesting a white moon in a dark sky with a long reflection of it reaching down into a dark sea.

Also a neat small & nubbly, many shades-of-gray untitled 1983 **Larry Poons**; and finally, a hauntingly pale untitled 1970 **Adolph Gottlieb** “burst.” It’s only a gouache on paper, and measures only 11 ³/₄ by 9 inches—but it’s monumental.

[...]

...The show—as the Guide Michelin might say---rates at least three & maybe four stars.