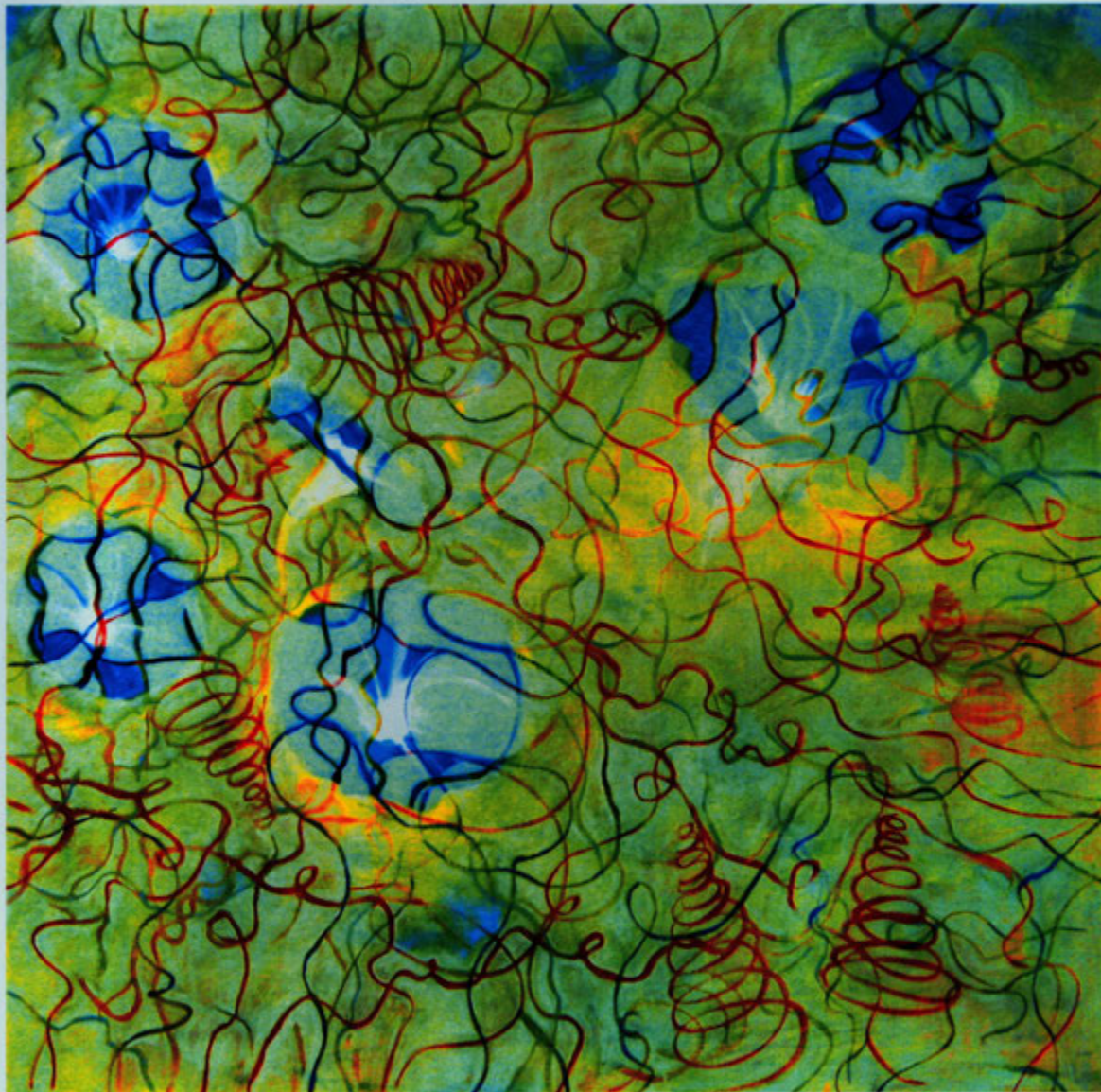


RE-NATURED: ROY NICHOLSON



November 12 - December 17, 2011

UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY
STALLER CENTER FOR THE ARTS
STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY

Cover: Roy Nicholson, *Toxic Garden 5 (Ipomoea)*, 2011, oil on linen, 48 x 48 inches
Photo credit: Roy Nicholson

Re-Natured: Roy Nicholson

by Rhonda Cooper

Pairing the work of Cui Fei and Roy Nicholson in an exhibition presents an opportunity to compare and contrast two very different bodies of work. Despite their distinctive approaches, materials, and philosophical constructs, both artists share a dependence on and reverence for the natural world. Coming from different parts of the world, Cui Fei and Roy Nicholson remain true to their cultural and historical backgrounds while developing their own unique styles within the New York contemporary art world.

Roy Nicholson was born and raised in Britain, and his work reflects his strong interest in nature, especially the English garden. A superb colorist, Nicholson creates lush canvases covered with varying degrees of both abstract and representational forms, displaying a vast range of complex color harmonies and spatial relationships. His paintings not only depict the outward appearance of the garden reality but, invariably, reflect the mind and inner world of the artist as well.

Nicholson is interested in all aspects of the garden, at different times of the day and different times of the year. His canvases portray not only flowers at their peak but also those elements of the garden that are tangled and misshapen and past their prime. He uses the forms of the garden to produce paintings with multiple layers of meaning, finding distinctly individual solutions for each work he creates.

The passage of time is a recurring theme in Nicholson's work. As the artist has observed, "Everything in the garden is always growing and dying back." And with this endless cycle of life comes the promise of rebirth. One area of the garden that Nicholson is especially interested in is the border area between his cultivated, English-style home garden and the uncultivated wilderness that lies just beyond, viewing this abutting area as a buffer zone between the man-made architectural environment and the organic world of nature. Painting a single canvas every week for a year imposes a set time frame and discipline on the artist that progresses in actual time. Often working in series, Nicholson creates work that builds on itself, continually experimenting with variations on the theme. The large scale of his installation work, made up of multiple canvases lined up in a grid, encourages viewers to experience the work in real time while reading the individual canvases from left to right, stopping and starting at their own pace.

In his first *52 Weeks* (1998), Nicholson produced 52 two-foot-square paintings that focus on the gradual transformation of his own garden as well as his memories of English gardens he had seen in the past. In *52 Weeks II* (2008), shown in the current exhibition, he again restricted himself to painting a two-foot-square canvas each week, accumulating 52 intimate canvases that, when displayed in close proximity, form a large-scale painting. It is worth noting that Nicholson does not strictly limit himself to following specific seasons, although the work as a whole presents a readable year. The configuration of the squares is not arranged by seasons but by the artist's imperative. The artist orders the sequences into different row lengths to fit the site, taking advantage of serendipitous relationships between individual works. An assemblage of varying conceptual plots of land, the constituent elements are re-ordered to become, in effect, a garden.

Time of day is clearly an important element in Nicholson's work. He is especially interested in depicting twilight, or gloaming—the transitional time between the brightness of day and the darkness of night. This is a time that inspires the use of stronger, darker colors coupled with an intense, somewhat mysterious, energy. Nicholson's larger-scale series entitled *Gloamings* feature 4 x 4 foot depictions of larger sections of Nicholson's garden or a conceptual garden, perhaps a pastoral ideal. The expressionistic brushwork and palette reflect the artist's interest in meandering, sometimes calligraphic, forms and intense coloration. In *E.L.'s Gloaming #17* (2001-2006), the intense red of the nasturtiums glows vibrantly at twilight under a beautifully moody setting sun. The flowers are readable as flowers but sit very close to the picture plane, appearing almost abstract and two-dimensional while, at the same time, Nicholson offers a hint of a horizon line and the setting sun. In *E.L.'s Gloaming #31* (2005), the red foreground floral suggestions are much less defined. While the overall effect is more abstract, the burning sunset colors still hint at the time of day. The strong lines and colors, along with the ambiguity of the settings, visually link these paintings to Nicholson's sumptuous *Goldfish* series of the 1980s.

The newest series presented in the current exhibition is the *Toxic Garden* paintings. Here Nicholson focuses on flowers such as foxglove, hellebore, and morning glories—flowers that are as deadly as they are attractive. As Nicholson observes: "The garden plants that I have chosen are beautiful in their own right. Then, of course, things are not always as they seem, and the beautiful can be deadly." To Nicholson, the need of the plants to attract the right creatures to pollinate them while simultaneously defending themselves from attack serves as an intriguing metaphor for human behavior.

Roy Nicholson is an accomplished gardener and a master painter. He approaches both activities with remarkable passion that yields extraordinary results. Visually beautiful and imbued with profound insights, each painting and each series is a unique and individual work of art that stands alone while simultaneously contributing to the coherent expression of Roy Nicholson's underlying artistic vision.



Floating Garden #1, 1995
Acrylic and oil on linen, 68 x 74 inches
Photo credit: Roy Nicholson



52 Weeks II, 2008-2009

Mixed media on linen, approx. 8 feet x 26 feet

Photo credit: Roy Nicholson





E.L's Gloaming #17, 2001-2006
Oil on linen, 48 x 48 inches
Photo credits: Roy Nicholson



E.L's Gloaming #31, 2005
Acrylic and oil on linen, 48 x 48 inches



Toxic Garden I (Aconitum), 2010

Acrylic and oil on linen, 48 x 48 inches

Lent by The Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, New York. Gift of Christopher and Hannelore Schwabacher, 2011.10

Photo credit: Roy Nicholson

BIOGRAPHY

Roy Nicholson was born in Cambridge, England, and was brought up in Scotland and London. He received a National Diploma in Design from Homsey College of Art in London, where he studied with Bridgit Riley and John Hoyland, and attended the Brooklyn Museum Art School, New York, as a Max Beckman Memorial Scholar in painting. He also holds a Master's degree in fine art from Vermont College.

As the Visual Arts Officer for Northern Arts, a large arts council in the North of England, he organized exhibitions of paintings by Claude Lorrain and Paul Cézanne watercolors, among other major exhibitions. He immigrated to the United States in 1974 and is now Professor Emeritus at Long Island University after teaching at Southampton College for twenty-four years. He received the Trustee's Award for Scholarly Achievement in 2000.

Nicholson's first solo exhibition in New York was at Kingsborough Community College, Brooklyn, in 1978. Since then he has had more than twenty solo exhibitions, including four in New York City. His work has been included in numerous group exhibitions, notably "AdoRnmenTs," which originated at the Bernice Steinbaum Gallery in SoHo and traveled nationally; a touring show to American consulates in Brazil; a print exhibition in Germany; the Parrish Art Museum in Southampton; Guild Hall Museum and Spanierman Gallery in East Hampton; and, under the auspices of the Katharina Rich Perlow Gallery, at international art fairs at Miami and Los Angeles. He is represented in public, corporate, and private collections in the United States and the United Kingdom.

His work is illustrated and discussed in *Long Island Landscape Painting: Volume II, The Twentieth Century* (Little, Brown, 1990), *Long Island* (Crescent Books, 1986), *Studios by the Sea* (Abrams, 2002), *Hampton Gardens: A 350 Year Legacy* (Rizzoli, 2004), and *Along the Way: MTA Arts for Transit* (Monacelli Press, 2006). His exhibitions have been reviewed in *The New York Times*, *Newsday*, the *East Hampton Star*, the *Southampton Press*, the *Philadelphia Enquirer*, *Artspeak*, *Art & Antiques*, *Los Angeles Downtown News*, and *Long Island Life*. Feature articles about him and his work have appeared in *Hamptons Country* magazine, *Dan's Papers* (featuring his painting on the cover), and *Hampton Jitney Magazine*. Video interviews with him have been broadcast on BBC Television, LTV Channel 27 (East Hampton) and Cablevision (Riverhead), deposited in the Archives of American Art, Washington, DC.

His first yearlong project, *52 Weeks*, was exhibited at the Heckscher Museum of Art in 1998. Following its purchase by the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, the series is now installed in the bank's headquarters. In 2002 he completed two 7 x 33-foot glass mosaics in the Long Island Railroad's Hicksville station, for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's Arts for Transit program. The project was among those honored by the Municipal Arts Society of New York's Masterworks Award to the MTA in 2003. Other public projects include a 28 x 20-foot installation of nine paintings in the lobby of the Meridian Building in Columbia, South Carolina, and a major commission from Metro Art Los Angeles for two 55-foot long glass mosaics and a large skywell in the Gold Line Portal at Union Station, Los Angeles, installed in 2006.

As an extension of his work as a visual artist, Nicholson has collaborated on four major dances with the choreographer Karla Wolfangle, a former principal dancer for The Paul Taylor Company. *Petit Sensations*, for which he created costumes and a twenty-four-foot folding screen stage setting, was performed at three locations in New York and elsewhere. He also designed the décor and costumes for Ms. Wolfangle's *Temperaments* and *Strata*. Ms. Wolfangle's dance titled *Roy Nicholson* with projections of the artist's *Gloomings* and *52 Weeks II* series, was premiered by The Stockton Dance Company at The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey in 2009 and revived with a larger company in 2010 at Hofstra University in Hempstead, New York.

STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY



CENTER FOR THE ARTS



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The 2011-2012 University Art Gallery exhibition schedule is made possible by a generous grant from the Paul W. Zuccaire Foundation. Additional funding has been provided by the Friends of Staller Center. We are extremely grateful to our sponsors for helping us present our exhibitions to our students and faculty as well as to the local and regional community.

I also want to express my appreciation to members of the Staller Center for the Arts staff: Joe Esser, Pat Moran, and Pete Pantaleo, for installation assistance; Olga Lomshakova, Gallery Assistant; Cristina Cruz, Manami Hotta, Elena Alexandra Iosub, Sally Lau, Elizabeth Lee, Alex Mei-Yang Liang, Eileen Quaranto, Jessica Rybak, Amy Tanzillo, Qiumeng Wang, and Jason Yim, Gallery Interns; Liz Silver, Staller Center Production Manager, Liz Lamendola, Technical Director, and the Staller Center Technical Crew for exhibition lighting; Katie Stockhammer, Staller Center Director of Development, for Gallery fundraising; and Aubrey Szczygiel, Gallery Secretary.

Most of all, I want to thank the artists, Cui Fei and Roy Nicholson, for sharing their work with the Stony Brook community.

Rhonda Cooper
Director

University Art Gallery
Staller Center for the Arts
Stony Brook University
Stony Brook, New York 11794-5425
Tel: 631.632.7240 Fax: 631.632.1976
www.stallercenter.com/gallery

© 2011 University Art Gallery, Stony Brook University

Back cover: Roy Nicholson, *Toxic Garden 2 (Digitalis)*, 2008-2010, oil on linen, 48 x 48 inches
Photo credit: Roy Nicholson

