The Lasting World:

Simon Dinnerstein and *The Fulbright Triptych*

Museum of Art and Archaeology

University of Missouri

July 25-December 22, 2017
The Lasting World: Simon Dinnerstein and The Fulbright Triptych

Presenting fifteen works of art spanning three decades, ranging from painstakingly realistic works, dense in graphic detail, to more dreamlike and painterly works equally dense in their imagery and symbolism, this exhibit celebrates the artistic practice of Simon Dinnerstein.

At first glance these paintings, drawings, and prints seem conventionally representational, and everyday interiors are depicted in such detail that figures compete with their settings for our attention, only emerging to the forefront in dreams. But all is not what it seems. Dinnerstein’s works change constantly yet subtly in perspective; what at first appears simple one-point perspective breaks down into multiple perspectives and different approaches when we examine them closely. This exhibit approaches his works in the same way, offering the differing perspectives of seven scholars, each with their own background and disciplinary expertise.

Over the course of his career, Dinnerstein has been a Fulbright Fellow, a Lazarus Fellow of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and a Fellow of the American Academy in Rome. He was elected to the National Academy of Design in 1992, in the midst of the creative arc these works trace.
Perspectives are offered by:

**Matthew Ballou** is a draftsman, painter, and printmaker, as well as Associate Teaching Professor of Art at the University of Missouri. He holds an MFA in Painting from Indiana University and a BFA in Painting and Drawing from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. His works are presented in solo, group, and traveling exhibitions around the country. In addition to producing images, writing has been a significant part of his artistic output for almost two decades.

**Rabia Gregory** is Associate Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Missouri. Her research and teaching focus on the history of Christianity in medieval and early modern Europe. Dr. Gregory’s scholarship and publications examine Christian faith and practice through book history, material culture, and theories of gender. She is currently working on a study of German Christianity of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century as told through the life and art of Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528).

**Brick Johnstone** is Professor of Health Psychology in the University of Missouri School of Health Professions, as well as a professed lover of art. His primary research interests are the neuropsychology of spiritual experiences and the
intersection of religion, spirituality, and health. Since 2006, he has been Project Director for the Spirituality and Health Project through the MU Center for Religion, the Professions, and the Public, funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts.

**Rachel McBride Lindsey** is Assistant Professor of Theological Studies at Saint Louis University. She holds a Ph.D. and M.A. in Religion from Princeton University. Her scholarship crosses disciplinary frameworks of visual studies and focuses on material and visual cultures of religion, particularly in relation to constructing racial and national identities. Her book on religion and photography in nineteenth-century America will be published later this year.

**W. Arthur Mehrhoff** is Academic Coordinator at the Museum of Art and Archaeology and an adjunct faculty member in Architectural Studies at the University of Missouri. Dr. Mehrhoff holds a Ph.D. in American Studies from Saint Louis University, and his varied scholarly interests include culture studies, civic and urban architecture and design, community development, agricultural reform, and the multicultural heritages of America.

**Anne Rudloff Stanton** is Associate Professor of Art History at the University of Missouri. She studies and teaches the art of medieval and early modern northern
Europe. She researches the decoration, patronage, and use of illuminated manuscripts from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, in order to explore the complex relationships between storytelling, devotional practice, and book design.

James Van Dyke is Associate Professor of Art History at the University of Missouri. His research interests include European Modernism, twentieth-century and contemporary art, art theory, and the social history of art. His areas of specialization are German art and politics from 1900 to 1945, and he is currently preparing a book on German painter Otto Dix (1891–1969).
Matthew Ballou

Much has been said about Dinnerstein’s masterpiece, *The Fulbright Triptych*. My suggestion is to look at it as a pictorial Venn diagram, one that manifests a pattern of influences and associations integral to the relationship between the two adult figures. They appear at right and left, but in the stillness of the middle panel we see their unified life. Through the depictions of art historical masterworks—one can see Edwin Dickenson, Ingres, an Indian court painting, a Vermeer—a poetic understanding emerges. As viewers, we hold a privileged perspective and are invited to see the progeny of this pair: a child and a painting.
Rabia Gregory

A triptych is, perhaps obviously, typically a format associated with Christian devotional art produced in medieval and early modern Europe. It is a moveable art-object that is designed to be manipulated to tell different stories according to season, liturgy, or current theology. Thus the “wings” of a triptych are also doors with hinges, made to open and close, and the meaning of the whole may change according to the position of the three connected parts. Often the doors would include scenes of contemporary life or portraits of living people. Here, this is underscored by Dinnerstein’s position of a modern family portrait into positions typically reserved for medieval saints and his incorporation of fragments of famous Renaissance triptychs into his own composition. As a modern and seemingly secular collage, Dinnerstein’s triptych seems to argue that only *immortal art*, not the holy dead, could be worthy of veneration. Absent from this painting is any explicit reference to the Holocaust, yet a careful viewer will note the *presence* of a church and the explicit *absence* of any synagogues or other evidence of Jewish culture in the verdant village scene at the center of the painting. A similar tale of *absence* could be discerned through a careful reading of the Renaissance paintings fragmented into this triptych, most of which were composed in a period when Jews were being forced from their homes across Europe. The narrative of Dinnerstein as a Jewish artist in post-war Germany is an
important aspect of understanding Dinnerstein’s artistic formation and The Fulbright Triptych.

Brick Johnstone

What to think? Where to focus? What to feel? The multiple feelings/thoughts initially evoked may represent the beauty of The Fulbright Triptych. There is so much to take in, to feel. What’s in each panel? How do they relate? Do they relate? After the initial perception of disconnected activity, increased focus allows us to see and feel so much. A family, a husband, a wife, a child. An ordinary city with ordinary folks. Art. Old art, new art, historic art, abstract art. Routine, abstraction, comfort, discomfort. Viewing The Fulbright Triptych is almost like eating an ice cream sundae with fifteen flavors, tasting many to find the flavors that appeal most to one’s sensibilities.

W. Arthur Mehrhoff

In his celebrated memoir Man’s Search for Meaning, the distinguished Austrian psychiatrist and Auschwitz survivor Viktor Frankl meditated upon the quest for meaning—a process he called logotherapy—which he believed sustained those who survived their ordeal. According to Frankl, meaning issued from three possible sources: purposeful work, love, and courage in the face of challenge. The
*Fulbright Triptych* celebrates the artistic process with the finely detailed copper plate at its center and the nascent Dinnerstein family (with not-yet-conceived infant daughter) depicted in the venerable and venerated triptych form, while enlisting the emerging young artist’s entire life experience and Western art historical tradition to pursue a daring new vision and direction while dwelling as strangers in a strange land. This monumental work seems to me a masterpiece of logotherapy as well as of art.

**Anne Rudloff Stanton**

This work reads as a portrait of three subjects/groups: Renée and Simone, the work table and its tools, and Simon. Standing well back, consider its large-scale symmetries, from the inherent symmetry of the triptych format to the composition of each panel. But also note how the artist rejects symmetry in some way within each panel—for example, by placing the black-and-white print of the Mesopotamian sculpture at the far right slightly lower than the color detail from a Netherlandish painting on the other side of the figure, or setting the copper plate for Angela’s Garden just off center. Stepping closer, examine the way that the images on the wall behind the three subjects interact with them through their compositions or iconography. Like the Renaissance triptychs that are part of its
art-historical background, *The Fulbright Triptych* demands immersive and slow looking.

**Rachel McBride Lindsey**

In Simon Dinnerstein’s *Fulbright Triptych*, beholders stand in an apartment, face a family portrait arranged against an exterior wall bedecked with images and objects, and finally, through the window, look out into a picturesque German village. Across these three spatial fields—the beholder’s position, the compositional arrangement of the family portrait, and the distant horizon—Dinnerstein invites contemplation of time, space, and the central role of objects and spaces—indeed, of the material world—in facilitating these deeply human experiences of community, intimacy, and loss. Beyond adopting the compositional structure of the triptych, which has been a popular visual form of Christian theological narrative since the middle ages, Dinnerstein conscripts even the most seemingly banal artifacts of daily life—his artist’s tools, childhood art, newspaper articles, government IDs—into a visual narrative of spiritual contemplation. This, indeed, is a recurring theme across his substantial body of work: There is not only beauty, but also intimate power in daily life that cannot be captured or conveyed in theological creed, liturgical idiom, or even divine law. Shadows, flowers, bodies, sunlight, children, kitchen sinks, and the artist’s palate are places where
we find God, whatever that designation means for the beholder, because that is
where we find ourselves. For his own part, Dinnerstein is cautious if not outright
skeptical about the role of religion in the noisy clamor for truth in the modern
world. He concludes that “art is a religion” divorced from story, that is, a religion
that is not reducible to or contained in words. For all of its much-deserved
celebration as a triumph of American art, the Triptych is also a profoundly
spiritual, even religious, object; albeit an object that stretches rather than affirms
conventional boundaries of what religion is and can be in the modern world.

James Van Dyke
What is most striking about Dinnerstein’s pictures of the early 1970s is their
powerful sense of carefully crafted order. One-point linear perspective organizes
shallow interior spaces, with a few wrinkles. Compositions are symmetrical and
centralized, with a few variations. The figures usually at their center are frontal,
closed off, and unsmiling, recalling somber photographic portraits made before
the rise of the spontaneous family snapshot. They are situated in tidy interiors in
which beds are made, tools are fastidiously arranged, and arrays of small
reproductions of canonical works of art, family photographs, and children’s
drawings hang neatly. In the Fulbright Triptych, a barefoot woman in a skirt holds
a child in the left panel, while a bearded man wearing boots and pants sits in its
counterpart on the right. Through the windows of a studio described in the triptych and *Renee*, tidy rows of post-war West German suburban tract housing recede into the distance – the nature, so to speak, filtered through the culture pinned to the interior walls. Traces of lamentation and catastrophe may be discernible, but they are kept under control.

When looking at and thinking about Dinnerstein’s pictures, one might not only admire them as fascinating products of considerable technical skill, but also recall recent artistic developments and contemporaneous historical events. These pictures are assertions of traditional materials and polished craftsmanship despite the radical expansion of art – as sublime abstraction, as irreverently ambiguous assemblage, as ironically realist appropriation of mass media imagery, as formless idea, as phenomenological experience, as crude video, as embodied performance – that had occurred since the 1950s. They are depictions of orderly domesticity, structured by clearly defined categories, after over a decade of political, economic, social, and cultural confusion, upheaval, violence, and occasional, fitful progress.

The years 1971 to 1974 were the years of the gradual end of the Vietnam War, the Watergate hearings, the oil crisis, and the rise of feminism as a powerful movement in the United States. In Germany, the Red Army Faction, which violently opposed the post-war effort to restore normalcy and to forget the horrors of the Holocaust, began to make itself felt. One might ask what these pictures had
to do with all of that. Why were they made? What did they signify? To whom did
they appeal?
Matthew Ballou

How wonderful to see the striking continuity across a number of the images here—a continuity not only in terms of the artist but also in terms of depictive and symbolic structure. In this beautiful print, we see the end result of the process under way on the central table in The Fulbright Triptych. The jaunty angle of the pathway and the effervescent flora seen in this work seem to be a unique strategy for Dinnerstein, who so often reveled in impeccable order.

Rabia Gregory

Angela’s Garden is a print and plate paired together, fashioned using a technique perhaps only ever truly mastered by Albrecht Dürer. Funded by the Fulbright
Agency, Dinnerstein had traveled to Germany to study the techniques of Renaissance artists like Dürer, and even gained special permission to travel into East Germany to view and examine one of Dürer’s surviving copperplates. Considering *Angela’s Garden* through Dinnerstein’s interest in Dürer’s printmaking, rather than the simple subject-matter of a garden with walkway, two important issues become clear. First, as with Dürer’s prints, both the plate and the print are textured and three-dimensional, not flat objects. This will be difficult to see through the protective frames and glass of the museum’s exhibition, but the force of printing onto paper introduces a three-dimensional textural quality to the paper, so that the white un-inked spaces pop up from the darker inked lines. If you look closely you should be able to see the white garden path physically emerging out of the lines of leaves and branches. Second, Dinnerstein, like Dürer, had a dexterous and light hand able to render with exact precision the tiniest details using a technique that left no room for clumsy errors. Each leaf and intersecting detail should be understood as both emulating Dürer and showing Dinnerstein’s own ambition and self-confidence in believing he might be able to do so in the first place. Dinnerstein seemingly acknowledges this by incorporating a painting of the same copperplate into *The Fulbright Triptych*, as if it were not a tool for art-making but an object of veneration.
Brick Johnstone

Ah, how interesting. We are informed that this is a garden of Angela. Without the title it may be difficult to determine the nature of the drawing. However, with this guidance we perceive that someone has a small, beautiful garden in an urban setting full of brick walls and buildings. However, this little space allows Angela, and us (?), to escape from the concrete walls and streets of our lives and find solace in the small, gentle trees with beautifully shaped leaves that reconnect us with nature and hide us from the concrete settings of cities. Escape.

W. Arthur Mehrhoff

I was taken by Angela’s Garden as both an individual work of art as well as by its central place (literally and figuratively) in The Fulbright Triptych. Upon viewing both plate and print, my mind raced back several decades to the Frans Hals Museum courtyard in Haarlem, a temenos and sacred garden suggesting psychological and cultural unity. That surprising connection reminded me that Frans Hals and other Dutch artists of this period not only depicted but celebrated ordinary landscapes, an approach that Simon Dinnerstein also employs throughout his early works. At an ever deeper level, Angela’s Garden evoked for me the mandala image found in many cultures, an image of The Lasting World that I think it also serves in The Fulbright Triptych.
Anne Rudloff Stanton

The central subject of *The Fulbright Triptych*, which rests on the lap of the table like baby Simone on Renée’s lap, is the copper plate here, with its printed product nearby. Between the painting, the plate, and the print, we have the full set of subject, object, and product, and can see not only the completed engraving, but also the process and the material that produced it.
**Renée, 1970**
Charcoal
Lawrence and Irene Lezak, Monroe, New York

**Matthew Ballou**

In *Renée*, Dinnerstein crafts an image of his wife that features the same landscape seen out the windows of *The Fulbright Triptych*. On her polka-dotted lap Renee holds a book opened to a reproduction of Dürer’s *Melancholia*, a reference that might suggest an emotional component, a formal effort, or both. The work arrests Renée, bringing a kind of silence and stillness to her pose that feels strange and slightly awkward. Is this a memory, a return to the trip to Germany of the previous year? And is this Renée as she existed before she became a mother, or afterward?
The strong post and lintel structure of the windows and radiators constrains the pattern of her dress, not to mention our eye.

**Rabia Gregory**

This composition shares many elements with *The Fulbright Triptych*. Noticeable similarities in the landscapes glimpsed through casement windows and the radiator coils are obvious connections. Less explicit, but also interesting, is the way the female subject is positioned after depictions of pious women in Renaissance art. While *The Fulbright Triptych* adopts the iconography of the Virgin, here Renée turns to face the viewer like a pious noblewoman, with a book open in her lap.

**Brick Johnstone**

The subject is simple, a woman sitting in a chair with a magazine overlooking an ordinary town of ordinary houses for ordinary people. However, the woman is not so ordinary. Her face is familiar, familiar in the sense of one who has been and is loved for who she is.
W. Arthur Mehrhoff

Theologian Martin Buber wrote about the importance of what he called I-Thou relationships, to “be there” with another person in real dialogue that transcends words. For Buber, music, poetry and art such as Renée offer venues for such I-Thou experiences. Or, as Alfred, Lord Tennyson, wrote in “Flower in the Crannied Wall”:

“If I could understand what you are, root and all, and all in all,

I should know what God and man is.”

I still vividly recall viewing Albrecht Dürer’s 1500 Self-Portrait (or perhaps being viewed by it) and thinking to myself, “There is a real person in this picture.” That same feeling of encountering personhood occurs when I view Renée. Like Dürer’s Self-Portrait, this figurative painting suggests both careful observation and subtle composition. The horizon line brings my eye to Renée’s head, the horizontal lines of the windows to her heart, while Dürer’s famous Melancholia rests on her lap. Despite its intricacies, Renée dwells at the very heart of this visual dialogue.

Anne Rudloff Stanton

This drawing builds on the same matrix as The Fulbright Triptych, replacing the worktable of its central panel with Renée, seated between the two radiators and windows but turned to the side, holding a book open to a Dürer print. The wood-
grained surface the walls of the room have in the painting is here covered by a delicate floral wallpaper, and the sky above the village beyond the windows is heavy with clouds. Textures and patterns are very important, contrasting the ‘natural’ patterns of sky, flora, and wood with the manufactured patterns of radiator pipes and polka dots.

Albrecht Dürer (German, 1471-1528)

Melancholia I, 1511

Engraving

Image in the public domain

Albrecht Dürer (German, 1471-1528)

Self-Portrait at Age 28, 1500

Oil on panel

Munich, Alte Pinakothek

Image in the public domain
**Marie Bilderl, 1971**  
Charcoal, conté crayon  
Minnesota Museum of Art, Saint Paul

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**Matthew Ballou**

Dinnerstein’s drawings deftly deploy a tension between observation and invention. This work is a *tour de force*, showing Dinnerstein’s intense eye as well as his desire to heighten the experience of seeing into a kind of reverie. We feel his investigation of the wood grain, various patterns, and even the musculature of Marie’s forearms. There is something here that touches on the same range that master drawings by James Robert Valerio do, where seeing passes into dreaming.

**Rabia Gregory**

In connection with *The Fulbright Triptych*, *Marie Bilderl* shows Dinnerstein’s skill at incorporating portraits into larger studies, and of compressing curios and conundrums into conventional artistic subjects. This is a full-body portrait of a wrinkled figure in a dress or housecoat standing in a bedroom. On the wall, neatly positioned against intricately textured wallpaper, are several other portraits. More interesting, perhaps, is Dinnerstein’s attentive detail-work in the textured
handwork coverlet on the bed and the crochet doily covering the electric radio on the nightstand. These are also, I think, portraits within a portrait, showcasing that Dinnerstein recognized the technical skills of work an artform often derided because it is typically done by women. It is not hard to imagine that these textiles were made by the room’s owner. The long strong oaky forearms of Marie Bilderl echo the patterns of the wooden floor planks and perhaps are on display to emphasize the work of her hands.

**Brick Johnstone**

This drawing evokes the essence of aging: stability, symmetry, plainness, simplicity. In this image we see an elderly woman, very plain, very simple. She is wearing the dress of a woman who has worked for years in simple labor, accepting and appreciating the nature of her work, existence, and being. The room, radio, small family photos, wood planks, and dry wall paper all accentuate the routine, but meaningful, existence of a beautiful, elderly woman.

**W. Arthur Mehrhoff**

German poet Rainer Maria Rilke observed about the masterfully depicted hands by his mentor Auguste Rodin, “Hands are a complicated organism, a delta into which many streams of life rush together in order to pour themselves into a great
storm of action.” This keenly observed and detailed drawing with its profusion of patterns also brought to my mind the prints of the great Käthe Kollwitz, who celebrated the beauty and strength in “the gestures of the common people.” In Marie Bilderl, especially in the form of her outsized hands, I re-view my own grandmothers scrubbing the stone steps of their old north Saint Louis tenements, kneading the thick, brown dough that would become the legendary rolled-oats bread, or ruffling the close-cropped heads of their ever-hungry grandsons, as I drift across a delta of memory.

Anne Rudloff Stanton

The use of different textures and patterns in this drawing is staggering. The box-like shape of verticals, horizontals, and diagonals that holds Marie’s figure is thickened with different patterns against which smaller objects, like the photographs and other objects on the wall behind her bed, act like notes of punctuation.
Arnold, 1972  
Charcoal, conté crayon, lithographic crayon  
National Academy Museum, New York  
Robert Dale Jones in loving memory of Mary Catherine Gray Jones

Matthew Ballou

The abstract bands of wall and floor space in this astoundng drawing produce the wonderful sense of a subject being locked in that Dinnerstein is known for. This quality is an extension of the northern European paintings that he loved: pictorial space that is compressed yet pivots into a whole world. Dinnerstein’s large drawings are, in some sense, ideal works of art. They provide an immediacy and reward repeated attention over time. In that way viewers are invited into the artist’s experience of the work and given time to take in the subject while simultaneously coming to a greater understanding of the media as well.

Rabia Gregory

As a portrait, Arnold is at first unremarkable. The posture and clasped hands, the paneled walls of the interior space, even the details of fabric folds and precisely laced shoes suggest Dinnerstein has adopted a naturalistic approach to portraiture.
But *Arnold* isn’t simple. The seated male figure is positioned in a rocking chair that contorts space. The chair is balanced on a small wooden step or platform that is too narrow to support rocking and the subject’s feet rest on ground level. *Arnold* on a pedestal, and, perhaps, enthroned. I think the realistic details of the subject’s face compel the viewer to look away from the mystery at his feet. Perhaps this is Dinnerstein’s own playful critique of the conservative conventions of portraiture?

**Brick Johnstone**

Like *Marie Biderl*, *Arnold* is a simple drawing of a complex man. He may be simple in his seated position in his sturdy chair, with folded hands and stoic expression, but his well-worn work clothes, thick entwined hands reflective of years of hard, manual labor, and deep, intense gaze suggest the life of a man who lived a hard but meaningful existence. Accomplished and accepting, even after toiling at a hard job for years without variation, all to support family and fulfill his promise to be what was expected of him.

**W. Arthur Mehrhoff**

For *The Lasting World* exhibition, the Museum Associates’ book club is reading author John William’s cult classic novel *Stoner* (1965) about a fictional University of Missouri professor. In a rare interview, Williams remarked about his unusual
protagonist: “I think he’s a real hero. A lot of people who have read the novel think that Stoner had such a sad and bad life. I think he had a very good life…He was doing what he wanted to do, he had some feeling for what he was doing, he had some sense of the importance of the job he was doing…The important thing in the novel to me is Stoner's sense of a job…a job in the good and honourable sense of the word. His job gave him a particular kind of identity and made him what he was.” What John Williams captured in lines of type, Simon Dinnerstein here captures in graphic lines: *homo faber*, the person who creates an identity through meaningful work, a valuable counterpoint to today’s sense of ‘selfie’…

**Anne Rudloff Stanton**

This drawing is reminiscent of some of Jan van Eyck’s paintings of the Virgin and Child, majestic in effect even when smaller in scale. Arnold sits facing the viewer, his rocking chair placed at the convergence of forms created by the paneling behind him, a knot of forms emphasized by the knot of his clasped hands. The stability inherent in this kind of symmetry is however knocked off center by the placement of his feet, an instability further emphasized since—as cast shadows make clear—his feet rest on a lower plane than the rockers of his chair. Again, slow looking rewards the viewer.
**Matthew Ballou**

Dinnerstein’s *The Sink* is a significant work—and my favorite in the exhibition—that immediately calls to mind the powerful qualities of the best work of Ivan Albright and Antonio López-Garcia. The strange, shallow, amorphous space of this painting is unique in Dinnerstein’s oeuvre. I am particularly drawn to the curling floor mat at the bottom of the work. Its translucence and aged brittleness are examples of the startling virtuosity Dinnerstein has been able to achieve. The interlocking compositional structures of this painting form an odd abstraction of architectonic shapes and curves—the mirrored chunk of wall, the firm doorjamb, the perspective of the sink—that hold the viewer inside the world of the painting.
It is at once quotidian and mysterious, striking a magical tone that reminds of Gregory Gillespie’s fantastic paintings.

**Rabia Gregory**

A stained porcelain and cast iron sink, a mirror, cans of abrasive cleaning products, a roll of patterned material (perhaps a strip of wallpaper? Or a textile rug?) and a roll of toilet paper create a sense of busy clutter in the dark vertical center. Reflected whiteness in the spattered mirror and the framing walls provide balance. I am most interested in the skillful attention given to the hinges. They suggest a door has been removed and we are glimpsing a space where work is being done. What work? Renovation? Destruction? Routine cleaning? This part is up to the viewer’s imagination.

**Brick Johnstone**

A sink in a small bathroom: old, rusted, dirty, cramped. Tattered mirror. Cheap toilet paper. These are some of the images one is immediately drawn to in *The Sink*. This painting shows a common living space for the common routines carried out by the common “everyone” in blue collar towns everywhere. Nothing fancy, only accurate observation of the routine places for routine life events experienced
by common people. This painting evokes feelings everyone can identify with, comfort in routine spaces and activities.

W. Arthur Mehrhoff

In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, English mystic poet and artist William Blake declared: “If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man [sic] as it is, Infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern.” We seldom reflect upon the “otherness” which lies behind the structures of everyday life until a poet like Emily Dickinson or an artist like Simon Dinnerstein opens the doors of our narrow chinks and makes the quotidian mysterious, in Matthew Ballou’s marvelous turn of phrase.
Matthew Ballou

This wonderful work uses a window casement as frame for a gray scale interior that simply sings with associations and mood. From the hanging wires and ephemera scattered on every surface to the expressive rendering of ceiling tiles and linoleum patterning, *N’s Kitchen* shows an overall willfulness on the part of the artist. We follow his attention with our own. This work strongly relates to Antonio López-Garcia’s graphic work, especially in the sense of detail and use of the window space.

Rabia Gregory

An antique-yet-modern kitchen (I’m dating the appliances to 1940-60) is presented using a modern reinventing of ancient techniques of tempera, gouache, and silverpoint. I think this is my favorite piece in the exhibition. I feel as if the
patterned linoleum and the gap between the table and stove are inviting me in to N’s home. Dinnerstein gives us a long view of a domestic space in a moment of quiet emptiness. No one is cooking or washing up, but the home’s residents have marked their presence by the chair slightly pulled back from the table and the pots left out on the stove. Considering the large sink and the appliances in particular, I am reminded of the layouts used by advertisers in Women’s magazines. I am intrigued by the question of whether N’s kitchen is new and expensive, or rundown and ready for a renovation. Like The Sink, N’s Kitchen makes me wonder: Is this about the past? Or poverty? Or both?

**Brick Johnstone**

What a beautiful picture. A simple kitchen, site of N’s daily tasks (aren’t we all “N?”). Cooking, cleaning, serving, washing, thinking, worrying, dreaming. It is small but clean, simple but full of energy. Small and cramped but lighted from above by windows that allow rays of sun on beautiful days. This picture captures the wonderful feelings we all experience in our special spaces, wherever they are and whatever they are.
W. Arthur Mehrhoff

If we are what we eat, then who exactly are we? Around the time of this drawing, Francis Moore Lappe published her influential *Diet for a Small Planet* to argue for environmental vegetarianism as optimum for both human and planetary health. Needless to say, Lappe’s book wasn’t the last word on this controversy. Although we often take our daily bread for granted, food from farm to fork lies at the beating heart of The Lasting World, and *N’s Kitchen* deceptively opens the door to this vast and growing field of cultural study. Can a kitchen be iconic? Food for thought, anyway…

Anne Rudloff Stanton

In this work, Dinnerstein uses a steep perspective to create the illusion of a deep space beyond the frame, full of the textures and patterns that he so often evokes. The large size of the work invites the viewer to step into this deep space.
Matthew Ballou

Dinnerstein’s architectural studies are often simple and direct. Here, the building. There, the trees. Here and there are dotted various details—a running fence, broken bricks, or an angled shadow. The special part of this piece, however, is the quirky, naked tree branches. They splay and sway in winter light, and the sense of line quality is both exacting and playful. The array of branches becomes a scene all its own, taking over the top half of the piece and making the regularity of the apartment building below look dreary in comparison. Nature’s idiosyncrasies always outstrip the built world.

Brick Johnstone

the autumn fall represented. The trees and buildings are similarly stark and simple, showing no individuality of architecture, nature, or inhabitants. Anyone could live in these buildings on this street with these trees. Just beautiful in its simplicity and clarity.

W. Arthur Mehrhoff

Americans in general seem hell-bent on escaping big cities, but Polhemus Place asks us to reconsider our default cultural position. In Tristes Tropiques, Claude Levi-Strauss observed that “the city…stands at the point where nature and artifice meet…It is both a natural object and a thing to be cultivated; something lived and something dreamed. It is the human invention par excellence.” The City weaves like an obbligatto throughout The Lasting World…

Anne Rudloff Stanton

In this engraving, Dinnerstein places two nearly leafless, wintry trees in the foreground, their curving and angular shapes providing the screen through which the viewer sees the building. The height of the trees traverses the entire print, so that their trunks and branches create an almost crazed surface, like cracked ice, in contrast to the rhythmic verticals of the building in the lower half of the print.
Night Scene, 1982
Conté crayon, colored pencil
Smithsonian American Art Museum,
Washington, DC
Gift of the Sara Roby Foundation

Matthew Ballou

This work resonates with Antonio López-Garcia’s own night window paintings. This is a subject that Dinnerstein has returned to a number of times. Darkness and distant points of light in the evening often strike a note of mystery and, perhaps, melancholy. The city at night is, for many, a time of turning inward and drawing close. The reality of what happens beyond each shaded windowpane is both banal and charged with possibility. Those windows stand in for individual lives, and Dinnerstein’s gaze is one of recognition and yearning.
**Rabia Gregory**

The tree in the foreground fills the courtyard, a self-illuminating bare-branched tree serving as a central point of focus. But anyone who has ever tried to look at a building with lit-up windows in the darkness of night—or to photograph one—will remember that the bright lights through the windows will blind the eye to anything else. I have tried not to be confused by the swirls of winter sky and the light on the branches and appreciate this as an imaginative architectural study, but I keep on searching for the missing source of light. Perhaps it is on the other side of the framing window. The lighting in this courtyard is impossible. This scene could only exist in art.

**Brick Johnstone**

This drawing differs from Dinnerstein’s other works in this exhibition. Rather than representing human nature and our relation to our surroundings in terms of simplicity, *Night Scene* immediately causes a sense of confusion. What is this building? What is going on behind all these lighted windows which show nothing? A hospital? A psychiatric ward? Who knows? The lone tree in the court yard only exacerbates feelings of uncertainty and unease, and particularly when focusing on the sky. Is it a sky? What is “in” the sky? Is it a web, a frame, a skeletal frame that engulfs the building? Is this sinister? Yes. No. Not sure. The abstract nature of this
drawing brings about a sense of unease, primarily because of the uncertainty of what is represented.

**W. Arthur Mehrhoff**

“There are eight million stories in The Naked City. This has been one of them.” *Night Scene* evokes not just that memorable line from that 1948 film noir classic but the entire film noir genre with its shadowy interplay of light and darkness, each window opening to an entire world. Director Jules Dassin remarked that “what you see in my films, this mixture of documentary and poetry, is my modest investigation of an expression of truth.” Dassin might also be describing *Night Scene*…

**Anne Rudloff Stanton**

A similar approach to *Polhemus Place* in the contrast between the bare limbs of the tree that defines the foreground of the drawing, and the rhythmic grid of the lit windows that define the front of the building. Here Dinnerstein plays more with tonal qualities, so that the careful modeling of the tree’s trunk and limbs create an almost vein-like texture, particularly in the top half of the work; our attention is called to this part of the drawing by the lack of the top part of the fictive framing.
In Sleep, 1983
Conté crayon, colored pencil, pastel
Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC
Gift of the Sara Roby Foundation

Matthew Ballou

These three works form, in my estimation, a suite. In each drawing, the artist establishes a pictorial structure that functions like a frieze or even as a Renaissance-era predella, creating a narrative through bands of different scales, perspectives, and figural groupings. These three drawings press to the background through a strong, large-scale figure, and that background space has its own pictorial logic distinct from the foreground. Dinnerstein wants us to rest deeply within the figural space but have a sense of a wide horizon above us. Repetition,
symmetry, and shimmering, ethereal chromatic effects are used to craft an otherworldly effect. As with other Dinnerstein drawings, there is a strong dream-like quality. The syncopation of figures, whether in sleep or in action, forms an implied storyline that can be read in multiple temporal directions throughout the works. I understand these pieces as whole artworks in the sense that they collapse time, space, and place to remark on personal and cultural memory, and do so by attempting to present the entirety of life at once.

Rabia Gregory

A narrative of tiring agricultural labor forms either the backstory or the dreaming memory of a sequence of sleeping figures. Each woman—the same woman—touches the next, a chain of bodies showing the body in sleep over weeks and months. The series of sleeping bodies, is so close, so overcrowded, that this could also be read as a scene of abused laborers deprived of even the most basic comforts by an exploitative landowner, but the resting body sleeps on a clean sofa with plump cushions. There is a longer story on the Smithsonian’s website about this painting that relates how the model was one of Dinnerstein’s students and the farming scenes are stories she told during posing sessions. This account raises the artist’s objection to the exploitative stories of labor viewers wanted to find in this
painting and the inappropriate ways white people are drawn to (and want to draw) black women’s hair.

**Brick Johnstone**

Beautiful. A woman sleeps. Her face is relaxed, beautiful. Her form, shapely, curvaceous, lovely. Her face, dress, hair, all simple but beautiful. If we could only be there. Curves on curves on curves, much like her dream, flowing seamlessly as her mind traces seemingly relevant events and people in her life: her father (?), her family, her home, her community. Yes, sleep is represented well as it conveys the pleasant nature of a flowing, meaningful dream of disconnected but connected memories.

**Anne Rudloff Stanton**

Three realms seem to be depicted in this large drawing. At the bottom, which we read as closest to the picture plane and closest to the viewer, is the outward form, the woman sprawled in sleep on a sofa. Above her, in the middle range of the drawing and the background, we see the head and upper portion of the same woman repeated in different attitudes of sleep, turning as one does, her repeated forms making an arc that intersects with the curving form of her body below. I read this as an expression of time, as she moves through her sleep and her dreams.
Above this arc of time, we see a landscape of dreams, wish small figures and a little building pulling our eye back to what seems at once like a horizon and a sky—a negative space—and like the rim of a bathtub or some other positive form.
Behold, a pale horse, and his rider was death… and with him rode a witch, a few bats, a train and other nightmares, one wearing a paper bag mask… But this apocalyptic landscape is disrupted and enlivened by a small procession of children wearing paper bag masks. The nightmarish figures occupy a shadowy space on the boundary between a pastoral landscape and a Halloween procession of children. The faces peeking out are playful and naturalistic, exposed to the viewer through impractically large eye cutouts. Several of the masks disguise the children as buildings and forests using sketches of landscapes and buildings. Considered alongside the idealized nudes of Purple Haze and Passage of the Moon and
modestly covered figures of In Sleep, a viewer might consider how the artificial boundaries of clothing and masks shape human encounters with the natural and supernatural worlds.

Anne Rudloff Stanton

Again the space is divided loosely into three realms, each matching a different part of a spectrum between reality and dream. The children, their heads and shoulders covered with their paper-bag masks, fill the lower half of this horizontal drawing with blocky, cut-out shapes, while the dark and rather nightmarish space just behind them includes bare trees, a figure whose paper-bag mask seems more like a trap, a bat, a witch, and a slender figure riding a skeletal horse who seems to be drawn straight out of Pieter Bruegel the Elder’s Triumph of Death. The viewer’s eye is pulled beyond those figures however into a deep, blue/green/purple background, a curving horizon is surmounted by a sun/star whose rays, depicted as faint pale diagonal lines, reach from its distant spot, over the horizon and the nightmarish mid-ground, to the preschoolers in their masks—a promise that morning always comes, perhaps?
W. Arthur Mehrhoff

My understanding is that this highly evocative drawing grew out of an incident that took place in one of Renee Dinnerstein’s art education classes for pre-school children. The children were making masks in response to Maurice Sendak’s classic *Where the Wild Things Are*, but became very unsettled by the loss of their familiar identities. This challenging, mixed-media work places the clearly defined figures of the young children within a recognizable but darkly sinister urban landscape, a feeling I certainly experienced on more than one occasion growing up in old north Saint Louis. While very different graphically from Durer’s *Knight, Death and the Devil*, representational art in the figurative tradition like *Night* seems fully capable of depicting powerful unconscious forces, of showing us where the wild things are…
A Dream Play, 1986
Conté crayon, colored pencil, pastel
Collection of the artist

Rabia Gregory

This crowded composition presents itself as a dream and a theater. It features an artist’s self-portrait, colliding scenery, people dressed for the theater but also (it seems to me?) for the Russian Revolution. I was surprised that Dinnerstein modeled it on a photojournalist’s depiction of Iranian pilgrims visiting a sacred shrine at a Damascus mosque. (which mosque? Has it been bombed lately? What is happening to the busloads of kidnapped Shi’I pilgrims held in Syria right now?) The artist’s portrait is designed after a scene capturing a veiled woman turning to look at the camera during a procession. This is not a copy or even a procession, though the androgynous child playing a small plastic recorder seems to be walking right out of the painting. It is this small piper in blue jeans that I want to think
longest about, likely because I, like many children, first played the recorder as the Cold War was ending.

W. Arthur Mehrhoff

In 8½, Federico Fellini created the indelible cinematic image of himself as ringmaster of the many acts and characters he has encountered throughout his life. Chilean film director Raul Ruiz concluded his brilliant film of Marcel Proust’s *Time Regained* by showing the dying Proust returning to view his boyhood self, playing on the Deauville beach, while a parade of characters from the pages of his epic work promenade across the screen. *A Dream Play* possesses a similar cinematic quality blurring the boundaries of time and memory, with the artist/director/creator in the left side of the painting very much part of the unfolding scene.
Purple Haze, 1991
Conté crayon, colored pencil, pastel, wax crayon,
oil pastel
Collection of the artist

Matthew Ballou

Opalescent violets and purples swirl about the nude in this drawing, a version of a
city at night. The figure floats there, and one wonders if she is physically
suspended there above the metropolitan din or if she’s caught in a dream. Is this
sexual? Is there contraband involved? In any case, the association between the
woman and the city is certain. Her state is somehow mirrored in the pearly streets
below, and our perspective is just high enough that the sounds below are muffled
and indistinct. I find the soft, fluttery edge of the piece particularly compelling.
For an artist so interested in window-like apertures, it seems especially important
that he resists that kind of opening in this piece.
Rabia Gregory

The colorful lines of traffic and city lights outshine the moon and stars. Resting on the air, a youthful nude divides a cityscape from the skyline—or is she standing up straight, posing like a dancer unbound by gravity as the unmussed state of her hair implies? Her floating figure bifurcates the sky and land, reminding me of the many national cosmologies in which heaven and earth are divided by the body of a divine being. Dinnerstein describes the cityscape as modeled on the view from a private home. I’m choosing to ignore his creation story (and the allusion to Jimi Hendrix). I prefer the ancient sky-map of the Queen of Heaven. I’d like to imagine this is a new goddess for the city-dwellers, her skin and back supporting an asphalt and concrete firmament brightened by electric lights, her gaze distracting us from the stars and moon.

Brick Johnstone

Erotic, sensual, inviting, mystical purple haze. Dinnerstein shows a simple but beautiful female form. Laying still, unprovocative yet amazingly provocative. Femininity is accentuated in the woman’s beautiful face, perfectly shaped breasts, slim hips, and delicious legs. Her gaze, so inviting, accentuates all other features. The vision is fulfilled with the soft purple haze, given the painting a comforting, sensual presence.
W. Arthur Mehrhoff

I used to work as a museum educator at the Gateway Arch in St. Louis, and one of the highlights of my job involved talking to visitors at the top of the Arch. If they could summon the courage to look 630 feet down, they would see that architect Eero Saarinen had sited the high point of the city deep in the matrix of nature. That heady experience came flooding back to me as I viewed *Purple Haze*. What is the relationship here between the hard-edged city and the voluptuous, floating nude? Interestingly, also in 1991 cultural historian Richard Tarnas published his controversial book *The Passion of the Western Mind*. In it, Tarnas argued that our contemporary world of postmodern thought is caught "between the inner craving for a life of meaning and the relentless attrition of existence in a cosmos that our rational, scientific world view has assured us is empty, dead, devoid of all purpose.” Like the view Saarinen fashioned from the top of the Arch, the dreamlike *Purple Haze* also suggests a deep-seated desire to reanimate our quotidian existence.

Anne Rudloff Stanton

In *Purple Haze*, a nude female figure is stretched across the middle zone of the drawing above a deep cityscape rendered in pale purple and blue tones echoed in
the sky at the top of the image. The cityscape directly behind her body is darkened, almost black, with the lights of windows and signs punctuating the gloom. The cityscape is in shadow here, but almost seems to swirl around her form like a nest, or bedding.
Passage of the Moon, 1998
Oil and gold leaf on wood panel
Henry Justin, New York

Matthew Ballou

In this syncretistic artwork Dinnerstein combines a Western figurative tradition with an impression of a Japanese screen, here portrayed in gold leaf. The austerity of the gold is met with the alabaster stillness of the woman, yet her arching back and crossed limbs form a tense tableau. Her pose defies gravity, and set against the airless stylization of the golden screen, it brings to mind some sort of grand mythology.
Rabia Gregory

A reclining nude poses her hairless arms and legs to bracket in an otherworldly landscape simulating a Japanese screen. Her gravity-defying nipples direct the viewer’s gaze to the small crescent of moon in transit. The moon is nearly hidden in a burnished sky that blends into the waves of a harbor. Her skin is pale and bloodless, closer to the color of the moonlight than the sliver of moon blending into the golden sky. Dinnerstein describes viewing such a screen in a museum context and, in a sense, painting this panel is a kind of souvenir, both a commemoration of that viewing and a process of remembering. But he painted a panel, rather than learning screen-making or the history of screens, undertaking to learn the art of burnishing gold. Vertical lines allude to the folds of a tall standing screen in this neo-oriental replica. Even if he did not intend it this way, Passage of the Moon speaks to me of cultural collisions and connoisseurship. I wonder if he knew that many different narratives such screens recorded, from domestic spaces to heavenly landscapes, folk tales and legends to recent historical events, or that some screens portrayed the arrival of European traders and missionaries in the Nanban art of Edo Japan?
Brick Johnstone

Like *Purple Haze*, this painting evokes sensuality, but a different type. Rather than a simple sensuality evoked by *Purple Haze*, *Passage of the Moon* takes a similar female form but shows it in a more provocative, sexual manner. Now the curves of the body are more intense, more inviting. The shapes of the body are accentuated by the shapes of the bedding and wall hangings around her. Her face, although partly hidden, seems to be in the beginning, thoughtful stages of ecstasy. In addition, whereas *Purple Haze* invoked a subdued sense of sexuality, the bold golds and whites of *Passage of the Moon* exude sexuality as a basic yearning upon viewing the painting. Waiting. Inviting. Delightful.

W. Arthur Mehrhoff

In his book *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form*, British art historian Sir Kenneth Clark observed that "in the greatest age of painting, the nude inspired the greatest works; and even when it ceased to be a compulsive subject it held its position as ... a demonstration of mastery". For Clark, the nude as a conceptual and artistic category always involved an ideal abstracted from the reality of our everyday lives. Although Sir Kenneth has long fallen out of academic favor, his notion of the nude as a search for an ideal form still seems to apply to *Passage of the Moon*. This fantastic painting integrates an archetype of the Western artistic tradition into
the floating world of a Japanese print. Like some alchemist of art, Simon Dinnerstein continues to seek the philosopher’s stone of an ideal form, some precipitate of The Lasting World.

Anne Rudloff Stanton

Passage of the Moon is a very different kind of work, although similar in scale. Here the nude is firmly anchored on a bed or platform, the twisting forms of sheets contrasting and complementing her smooth but twisted and intersecting limbs. The golden screen-like background, with its Orientalizing landscape, speaks to a clear relationship between this work and the paintings of nineteenth-century Europeans, like Delacroix and Ingres, of odalisques and harems.
Appendix: A list of items depicted in *The Fulbright Triptych* as displayed in the digital interface

1. Roberto Ortiz (age 8)


3. Renée and her father, Sam Sudler

4. Phonogram card, Spalding Unified Phonics

5. Alfredo Quinones (age 6)

6. Jean Miele (age 10)

7. Subway booth photograph, Renée and Simon, 1965

8. Subway booth photograph, Renée and Simon, 1965


10. Barbara Ann O’Toole (age 6)

11. Child’s drawing


13. Ian Lewis (age 6)

14. Child’s drawing

16. Photograph, Roxbury, Vermont 1968


18. Standing Female Figure, Nayarit, Mexico, 100-300 CE. Art Institute of Chicago

19. Persian miniature like Folio from the Silsilat al-dhahab (Chain of gold) in the Haft awrang (Seven thrones) by Jami (d. 1492), Freer Sackler Museum of Asian Art

20. Child’s circles, Spalding Unified Phonics


29. Jan van Eyck, *Eve* (detail), *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb* (also know as the Ghent Altarpiece), Cathedral of Saint Bavo, Ghent Belgium

30. Shaikh Zada, *Khusrau Catches Sight of Shirin Bathing*, Folio from a Khamsa (Quintet) of Nizami, c. 1524-25, ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper, page: 32.1 x 22.2 cm (Metropolitan Museum of Art)

31. Hans Holbein the Younger, *Georg Gisze*, c. 1532. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Germany

32. Quote, Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*

33. Letter, Renée to Simon Dinnerstein


37. Edgar Degas, *Nude Drying Her Feet After the Bath*, c. 1880. Musée d’Orsay


40. Child’s drawing

41. Willowbrook photograph

42. Larry Clark, *Untitled*, from the series, *Teenage Lust*, 1972

43. Photograph, Hebert and Andrea Wenderoth, Germany, 1971


45. Neo-Assyrian relief panel, c. 883-859 BCE, Metropolitan Museum of Art

46. Photograph, late 1960s, *The New York Times*


48. Subway booth photograph, Simone, Renée, and Simon, 1974

49. Jan van Eyck, *Baudoin de Lannoy*, c. 1437. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Germany

50. Subway booth photograph, Simone, Renée, and Simon, 1974

51. Photograph, Renée and Lucky, Roxbury, Vermont. 1968.

52. Soviet exit visa

53. Andrea Wenderoth (age 6), Portrait of the Dinnerstein family

54. Quote, Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*


57. Sumerian figure from the Square Temple of Tel Asmar, modern day Iraq

58. View from the Dinnersteins’ apartment, Germany

59. View from the Dinnersteins’ apartment, Germany

60. Lens

61. Circular mat cutter

62. Stopwatch

63. Sycamore frond

64. Burnisher

65. Scraper

66. Burin

67. Dried out potato

68. Engraving plate

69. Leather pad

70. Steel table plate with artist’s signature and date of painting

71. Pencil stubs