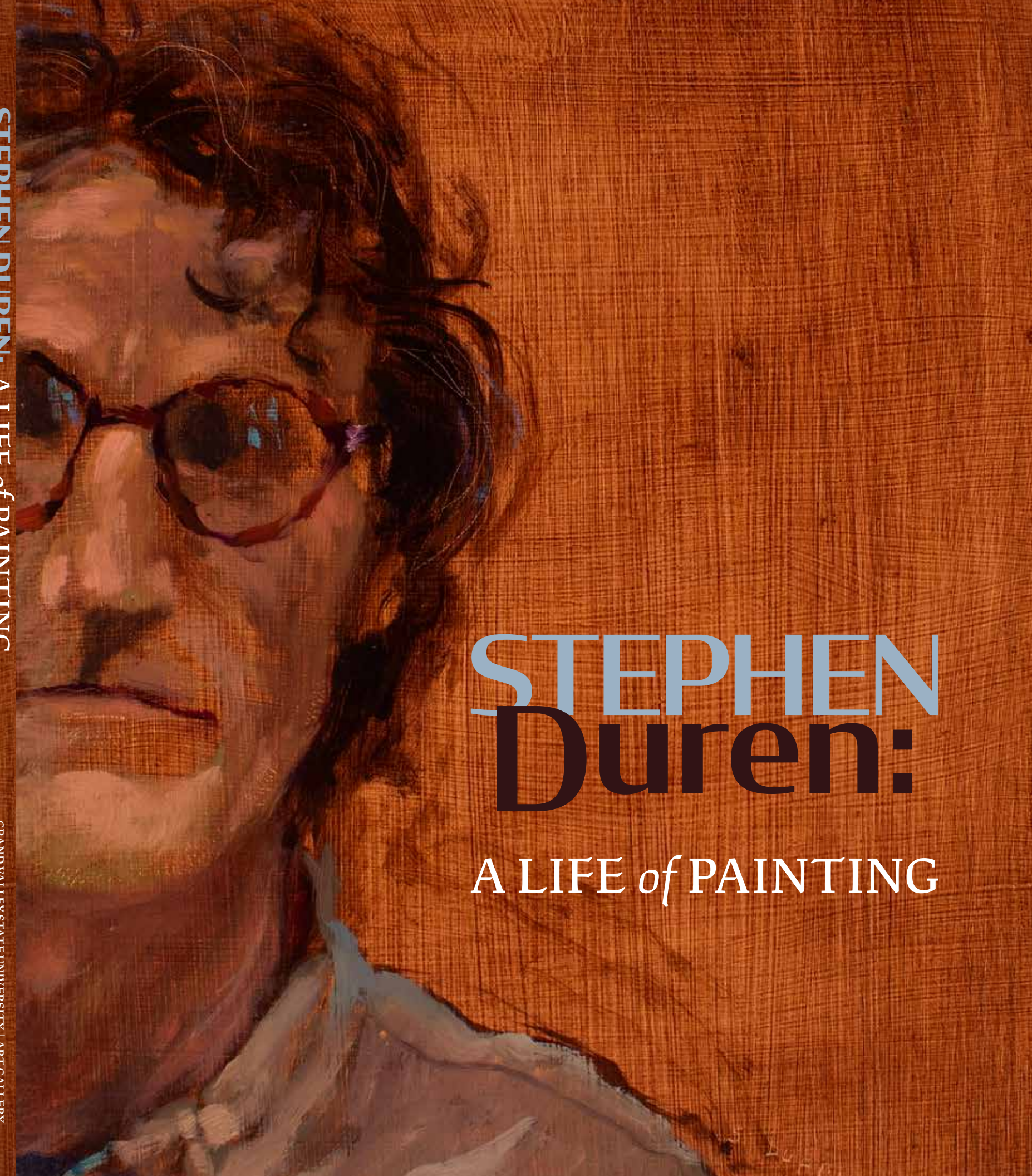


STEPHEN DUREN: A LIFE of PAINTING

GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY | ART GALLERY



STEPHEN Duren:

A LIFE *of* PAINTING



FRONT COVER | *Self* | 1995 | detail | pg. 67
INSIDE FRONT COVER | *Horizon Clouds, Michigan* | 2012 | detail | pg. 55
BACK COVER | *Untitled Landscape (264474)* | 1992 | detail | pg. 15

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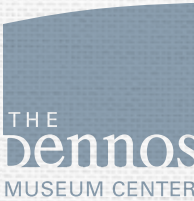
STEPHEN Duren:

A LIFE *of* PAINTING



AUGUST 28 –
NOVEMBER 3, 2023

Thomas J. and Marcia J. Haas Center for Performing Arts
1 Campus Dr. | Allendale, Michigan 49401
616 331 2563 | gallery@gvsu.edu
gvsu.edu/artgallery



SEPTEMBER 17, 2023 –
JANUARY 7, 2024

The Dennos Museum Center
1701 E. Front St. | Traverse City, Michigan 49686
231 995 1055 | dmc@nmc.edu
dennosmuseum.org

Organized by Grand Valley State University Art Gallery

Acknowledgements

We extend our deepest gratitude and appreciation to all those who contributed their time, expertise, and support to make the exhibition “Stephen Duren: A Life of Painting” a resounding success.

First and foremost, we would like to extend our sincere appreciation to the esteemed artist himself, Stephen Duren, for his exceptional talent, vision, and unwavering commitment to his work. Stephen has been painting for over 50 years and his work is included in numerous private and public collections across the country, including ours. We are proud to be the largest public collection of Stephen’s work, with over 150 and counting. Through his masterful brushstrokes and profound artistic expression, Stephen has captivated audiences and enriched our understanding of the human experience through his art.

We would also like to acknowledge the invaluable support of Jim and Marie Preston who have tirelessly championed this exhibition over the past several years. This exhibition and subsequent catalog would not have been possible without their passion, support, and expertise.

A special thanks to our GVSU art historians who have helped to bring Stephen Duren’s remarkable body of work to life within these pages. Their meticulous attention to detail has illuminated the artistic journey of Stephen Duren, providing us with a comprehensive and insightful exploration of his life, artistic development, and broader historical context. Thank you to Dr. Ellen Adams, Dr. Sigrid Danielson, and Dr. Henry Luttikhuizen.

Furthermore, we extend our gratitude to the lenders and collectors who generously loaned their extraordinary artworks for the exhibition. Your willingness to share these cherished pieces has enriched the experience for

our community and ensured the breadth and depth of this retrospective exhibition. Thank you to our partner institution, the Dennos Museum Center at Northwestern Michigan College, for hosting half of this exhibition with their community in Traverse City. This region, and the Leelanau Peninsula in particular, have been an important place for Stephen to commune with the land.

We also acknowledge the invaluable support of the catalog sponsors whose financial contributions and commitment to the arts have played a pivotal role in the realization of this project. Your belief in the transformative power of art and your commitment to fostering artistic endeavors are truly commendable. Thank you to Linda and Scott Lafontsee, the Lafontsee Galleries, Gina and Kevin Paul, Marie and Jim Preston, Barb and Milt Rohwer, Maryann and Jeff Shutz, Sally Viskochil, the Tamarack Gallery, and Brenda and Irvin Wolfson.

Finally, we extend our gratitude to President Philomena V. Mantella and Provost Fatma Mili for their ongoing support of the arts at GVSU. It is only through their support, innovation, and visionary approach that we can continue to integrate and engage with the arts in our everyday lives at GVSU.

In conclusion, we are humbled and honored to have had the privilege of working with such a remarkable group of individuals. Your contributions and support have elevated the exhibition “Stephen Duren: A Life of Painting” to new heights and have enriched the artistic discourse surrounding this exceptional artist.

From all of us at the GVSU Art Gallery, thank you.

— **Nathan Kemler**
Director of Galleries and Collections
Grand Valley State University

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A Life of Painting



Climbing Fences | 1972



Roadside Eucalyptus, California | 2007 | pg. 52



Santa Fe Plein-Air | 2006



Untitled Landscape (620) | 2020 | pg. 26



In the Studio | 2015

Stephen Duren was born in 1948 in Fairfield, a community set amidst the Coastal Ranges of California and located halfway between San Francisco and Sacramento. Growing up he would spend time on his grandfather's ranch in nearby Vacaville, slowly being wooed by the light and landscape of the foothills. His time alone with the land would prove to be both formative and foundational in his approach to art and life. It drove him to paint outdoors, to seek solace from loneliness in nature, and to filter much of his painting through the land and amber light of Northern California.

At age 14, inspired by his uncle's artwork that hung on the walls of his grandfather's home, Duren began to paint and has never stopped. After high school he joined the Navy, serving a four-year tour and eventually becoming a staff artist and broadcast journalist. He returned home in 1972 and completed degrees at the San Francisco Art Institute and Sacramento State University, often eschewing the classroom and instruction for the outdoors. In 1978 he moved to West Michigan and began teaching, an endeavor that lasted six years before the lure of full-time painting drew him back into the field.

Sixty years have passed since Duren first took up a paintbrush. During this time, his work has experienced a push and pull between realism and abstraction, resulting in an evolving stylistic approach. Some of his works are direct renderings of nature from his experience painting *plein-air* (outdoors), while others are reductions of natural and artificial spaces into forms, lines, and colors.

Stephen Duren: A Life of Painting explores this evolution, his extensive career, and his deep connection to the landscape in California, Michigan, and abroad. Organized by the Grand Valley State University Art Gallery and hosted concurrently

with the Dennon Museum Center, the exhibition draws from several public and private collections. Between both venues, the exhibition consists of over 90 works of art, including landscapes, abstractions, self-portraits, still lifes, allegories, sketches, prints, and *plein-air* pieces.

— **Joel Zwart**

Curator of Exhibitions and Collections
Grand Valley State University

Artist Statement



Destroyer Duty | 1968



Eucalyptus Grove, California | 2006 | pg. 49



Leelanau Peninsula | 2010



Horizon Clouds, Michigan | 2012 | pg. 55

My little granddaughter once asked, “*Why do you have a pencil here?*” I responded, “*Why do you think I have a pencil here?*” She replied, “*Because you want to see what it does to the paper.*” After a pause, I said, “*Exactly.*”

Maddie’s refreshing perspective on the purpose of a pencil pretty much describes how I work. I make a mark and watch to see what it does to the paper (or canvas), similar to the approach of the abstract expressionists of the 1940s and 1950s. I rarely know a painting’s end until I get there.

My work does not evoke strong insights into the human condition or display uncommon originality. Rather, it falls into a category that the iconic critic Robert Hughes described as “...distinct from propaganda, complaint or ‘cutting edge’ ephemera.”

I am a late bloomer. After a stint in the Navy, I enrolled at the San Francisco Art Institute and did not begin to mature

as a painter until my early 40s. Except for a brief cathartic exploration into figurative allegories in the 1980s, my main painting interests have ranged from total abstraction to stylized realism inspired by the landscape.

I occasionally leave my studio to paint outdoors directly from nature (*plein-air*) and indulge in the romance of impressionistic realism. The challenge here, of course, is the avoidance of clichés. How does a painter of nature sidestep visual platitudes? Does it even matter? Are we less enriched viewing an image of rolling pastoral fields for the millionth time?

The paradox is obvious; a cliché points to an essential truth that we want to revisit again and again and then jades us to that truth through its repetition. Still, I am willing to risk creating a potentially mundane painting in order to enjoy an intimate conversation with nature and immerse myself in the sensuous and mystical ambiance of the outdoors.

Michigan’s Leelanau Peninsula offers me that transcendent conversation. Its rolling hills are similar to the terrain of my youth in northern California, where roads curved and undulated through wonderfully patterned orchards, vineyards, and cow pastures bathed in amber light. As a child, those elements of the countryside served as a kind of surrogate parent for me, which might explain why they remain integral to much of my work.

At the time of this writing, I have not picked up a brush since losing sight in one eye in 2022. My depth perception and peripheral vision are permanently gone, and I am experiencing hand tremors. These constraints have me reflecting on the possibility that my best work may be behind me, and at 75, this retrospective exhibition could be my swan song. I attempt to encourage myself with the Orson Welles maxim; *the greatest roadblock to creativity is the lack of restrictions.*

But then I wonder what Auguste Renoir would have thought about this adage. For the last 30 years of his life, he suffered from crippling arthritis, forced to paint sitting down while others placed a brush in his gnarled hands. I suspect he would have preferred to work without these constraints and would have been just as creative. Well, me too.

For now, my joy of painting has been replaced with the pleasure of gardening, grandparenting, and the daily challenge of working on a memoir—basically, a picture book that will include numerous works not seen in this retrospective. Maybe as I reflect upon 60 years of painting, my physical restrictions will spark a fresh approach and renewed curiosity about what a pencil can do to paper. Or brush to canvas.

S Duren

Early Work



City Nocturn

Oil on Cardboard | 5" x 7" | 1963
Collection of the Artist
On view: Dennon Museum Center



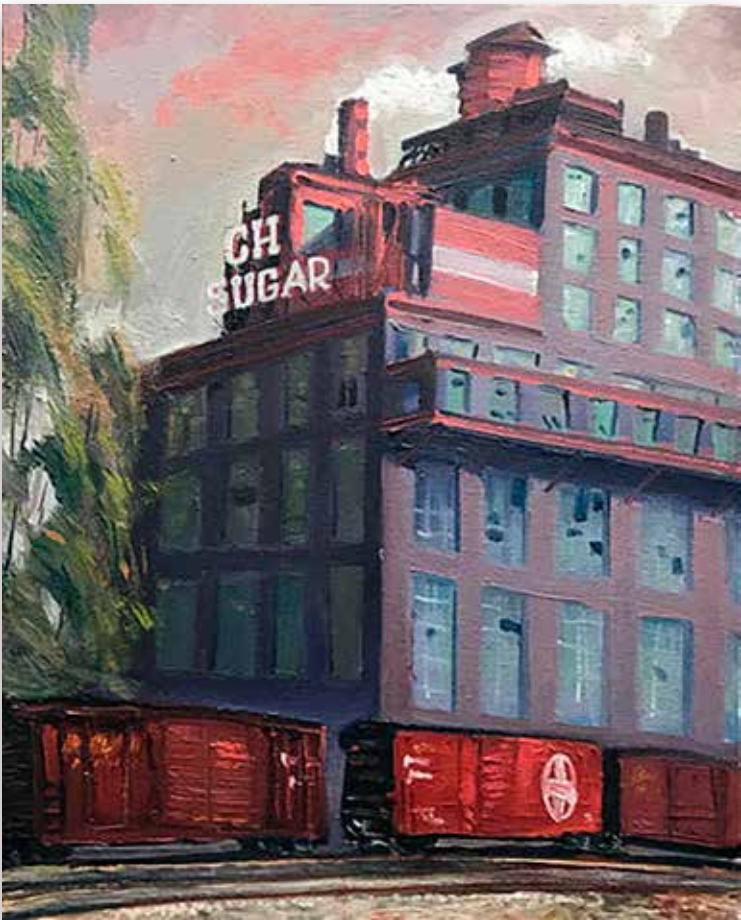
Cement Factory

Oil on Board | 24" x 18" | 1966
Collection of Pam Shouse
On view: GVSU Art Gallery



Shipmates

Oil Pastel | 12" x 10" | 1970
Collection of the Artist
On view: GVSU Art Gallery



C & H Sugar Refinery

Oil on Canvas | 20" x 16" | 1973
Collection of Don Fabiano
On view: Dennon Museum Center



Landscapes

AMBIGUITIES

Henry Luttikhuizen, Ph.D.

Like everything else in this world, human beings take up space. Yet we are also apt at converting spaces into places. To make places, we typically put things within a particular area, one with boundaries or frames of our choosing. As David Summers and others have noted, the word “place” is deeply intertwined with notions of planarity, flattened surfaces with edges. Although we rarely think about it, our streets, public squares, and houses all make use of planes. In many ways, it is difficult to envision spatial arrangement without places and planes. Not only are places shaped by social conventions and personal convictions, but they also give shape to our lives. Of course, all of this is closely connected to the art of painting, which is performed on a two-dimensional surface, a plane.

In the history of Western art, artists have traditionally addressed the planarity of paintings in one of three ways. Like Italian Renaissance painters, they conceal it in hopes

of rendering three-dimensional imagery; like Abstract Expressionist artists, they call attention to flatness, or they do something in between. Stephen Duren works in this third manner. His art is reminiscent of art associated with the Bay Area Figurative School, a movement of the Sixties. Richard Diebenkorn, Elmer Bischoff, and David Park, offering a counterpart to Jackson Pollock and especially Clyfford Still, vacillated between showing visual representations and marking the presentation of flat surfaces. Duren’s paintings offer a similar ambiguity. Although objects can readily be recognized within his works, planarity is never denied. The rich play of colors not only delights the senses, but it also provides a balance between the figurative and abstraction.

Yet there are other notable ambiguities in his paintings. Many of his works are landscapes. Nature, however, never appears on its own. Rather than aim for some ecological purity, Duren depicts human intervention. Buildings, roads, and cultivated fields are rendered from a variety of viewpoints. Duren’s fascination with placement is reinforced by his preoccupation with window ledges and doorways. As

P-52-83 (Steelcase Hanger) | FACING PAGE

Oil on Canvas | 108" x 96" | 1983
Collection of Steelcase Inc.
On view: GVSU Art Gallery

thresholds, liminal spaces between inside and out, doors and windows offer access to different places while simultaneously producing boundaries between opposing localities. This phenomenon extends to human subjectivity. In the act of viewing, we look at things found in the external world, yet we cannot help but recognize that we are encountering Duren’s



Untitled Landscape (513)

Oil on Canvas | 60" x 96" | 2013
Private Collection
(Not on view)

interpretation of a place. Ultimately, the paintings encourage us to reimagine our sense of being in the world.

Finally, there is something deeply romantic, if not American, about many of Duren’s paintings. His imagery often elicits longings for rustic farmlands and the countryside. His landscapes seem local and idyllic.

Although they show places which appear nearby, the scenes do not seem to be part of our everyday experience, while evoking perhaps the sentiment that we wish they were. Like strolling in the countryside on a warm summer evening, the intimacy of Duren’s paintings invites us to find wonder and delight in the world. His quiet, but cunningly subtle, works encourage us to appreciate the little things in life as we nostalgically consider what it means to have a place, perhaps one that we might call home.



Intersection III

Oil Pastel on Paper | 12" x 14" | 1981
Private Collection
On view: GVSU Art Gallery



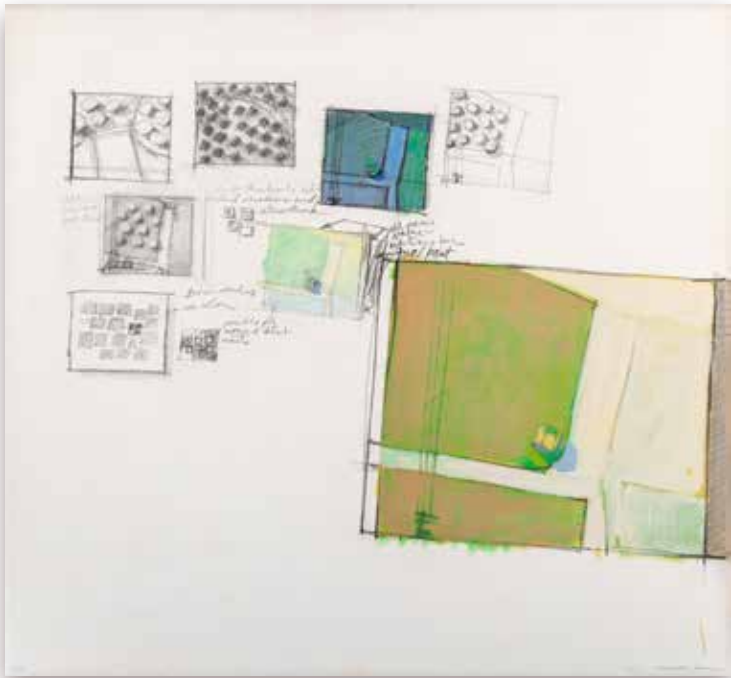
Untitled Landscape (1181)

Oil Pastel on Paper | 15.75" x 12.5" | 1981
Collection of Sarah Wolfson
On view: GVSU Art Gallery



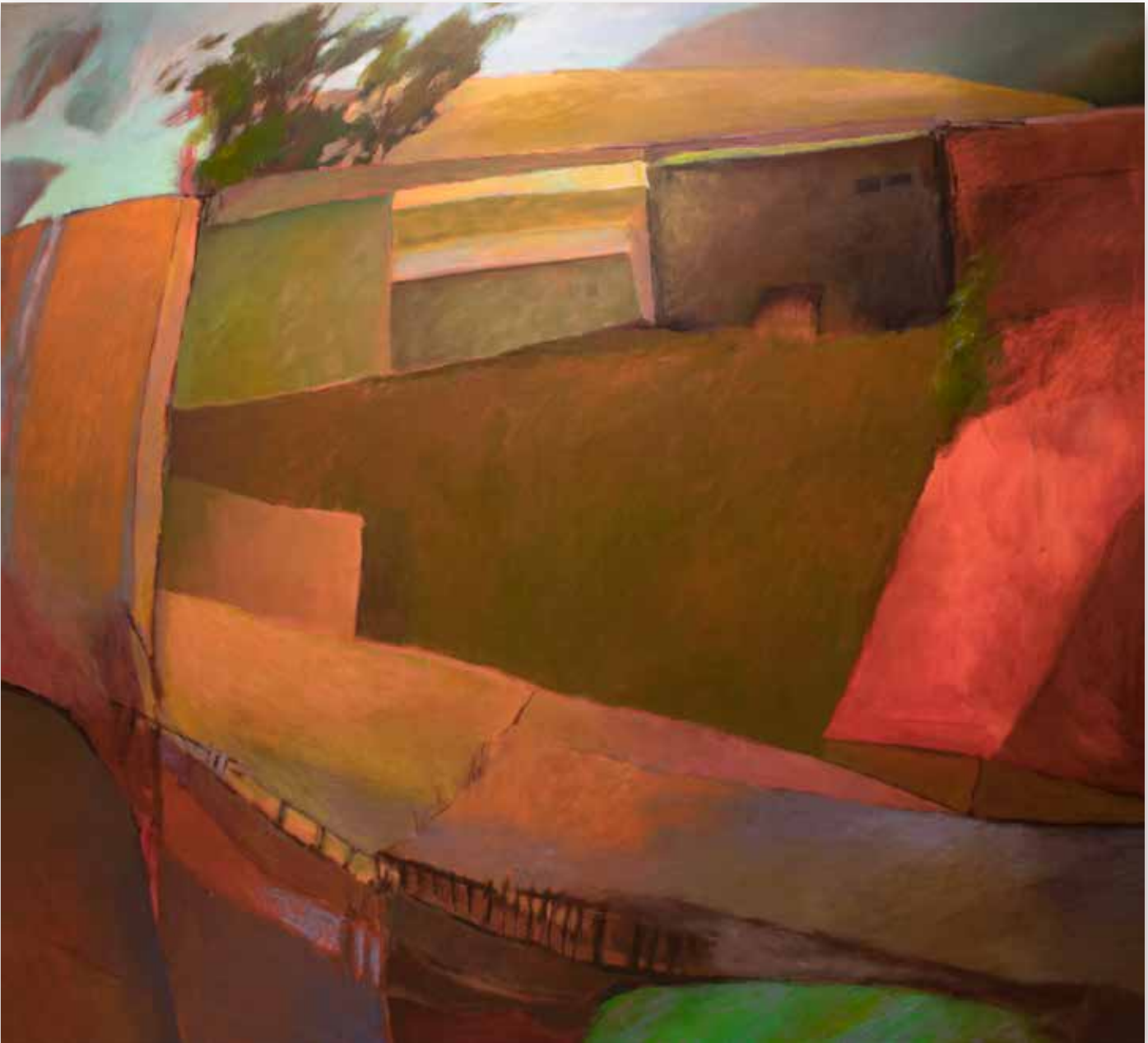
P-38-81

Oil and Charcoal on Canvas | 36" x 36" | 1981
 Collection of GVSU | 2003.247.1
 Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Lonson Barr
 On view: Dennon Museum Center



P-1-82

Oil and Charcoal on Canvas | 37" x 40" | 1982
 Collection of GVSU | 2003.246.1
 Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Lonson Barr
 On view: GVSU Art Gallery



Untitled Landscape (264474)

Oil on Canvas | 71" x 77.25" | 1992
 Collection of Steelcase Inc.
 On view: Dennon Museum Center



Untitled Landscape (G407833)

Oil on Canvas | 74" x 69" | 1998

Collection of Steelcase Inc

On view: GVSU Art Gallery



Untitled Landscape

Oil on Canvas | 76.5" x 71" | 1999

Collection of GVSU | 2000.006.1

On view: Dennon Museum Center



Coleman Valley, Sebastopol, CA

Oil on Canvas | 33" x 100" | 2006

Collection of Roy Gattinella, Santa Rosa, CA

On view: Denny's Museum Center



Red Road

Oil on Paper | 17" x 16" | 2002
 Collection of Bob and Julie Connors
 On view: GVSU Art Gallery



Untitled Landscape (6110)

Oil on Paper | 15" x 14" | 2010
 Collection of Ken and Mary Bauman
 On view: GVSU Art Gallery



Night Sky

Oil on Canvas | 78" x 118" | 2007
 Collection of Cathy Bissell
 On view: Dennon Museum Center



Ghost Tree (2911)

Oil on Canvas | 60" x 72" | 2011
 Collection of Brian Lakey and Jennifer Gross
 On view: Denny Museum Center



Untitled Landscape (5410)

Oil on Paper | 21" x 30" | 2010
 Collection of Milt and Barbara Rohwer
 On view: Denny Museum Center



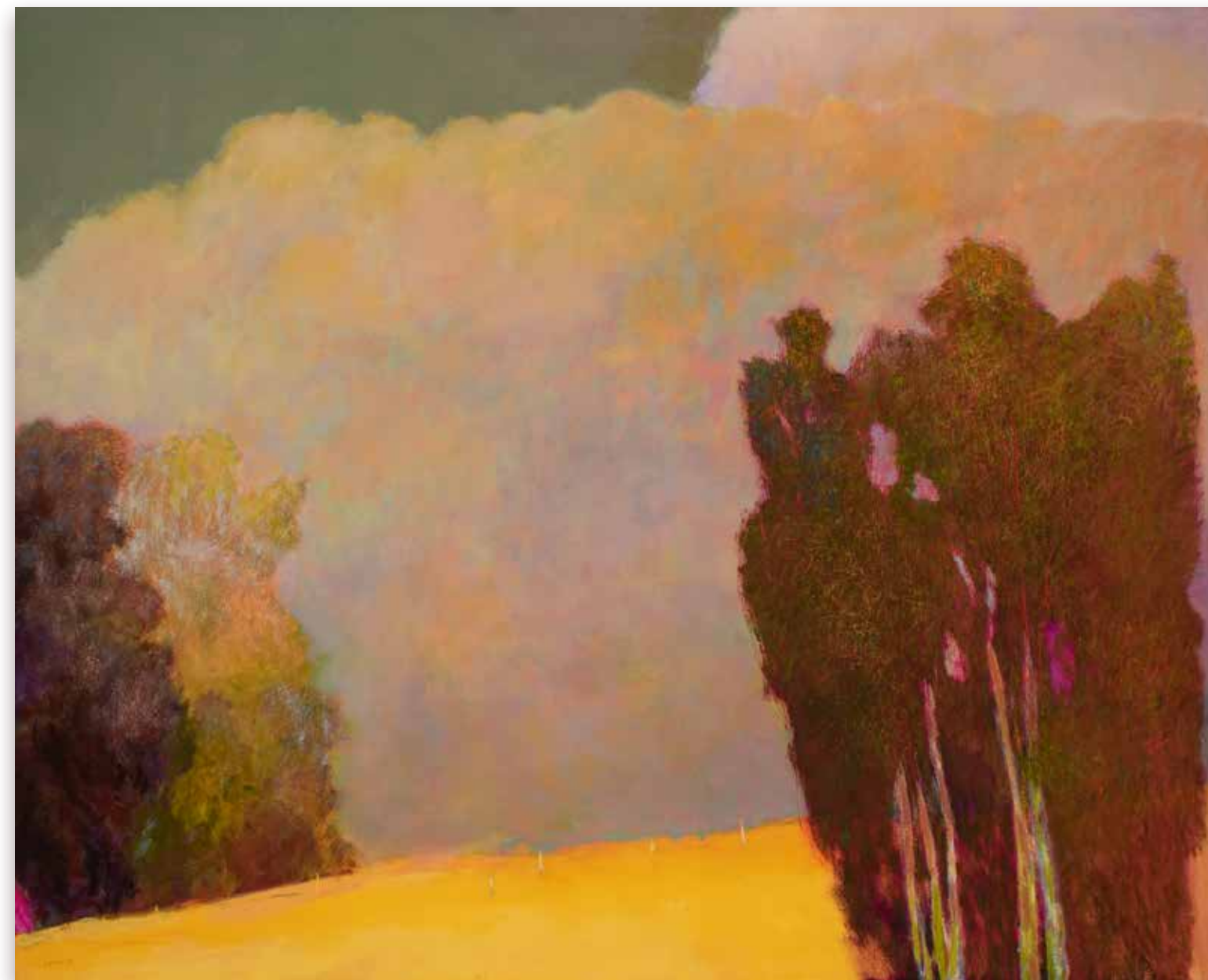
Untitled Landscape (315)

Oil on Paper on Board | 17" x 16" | 2015
 Collection of Andy and Jan Atwood
 On view: Denny Museum Center



Untitled Trees (6415)

Oil on Paper | 30" x 44" | 2015
Collection of Julie Duisterhof and Randy Damstra
On view: Dennon Museum Center

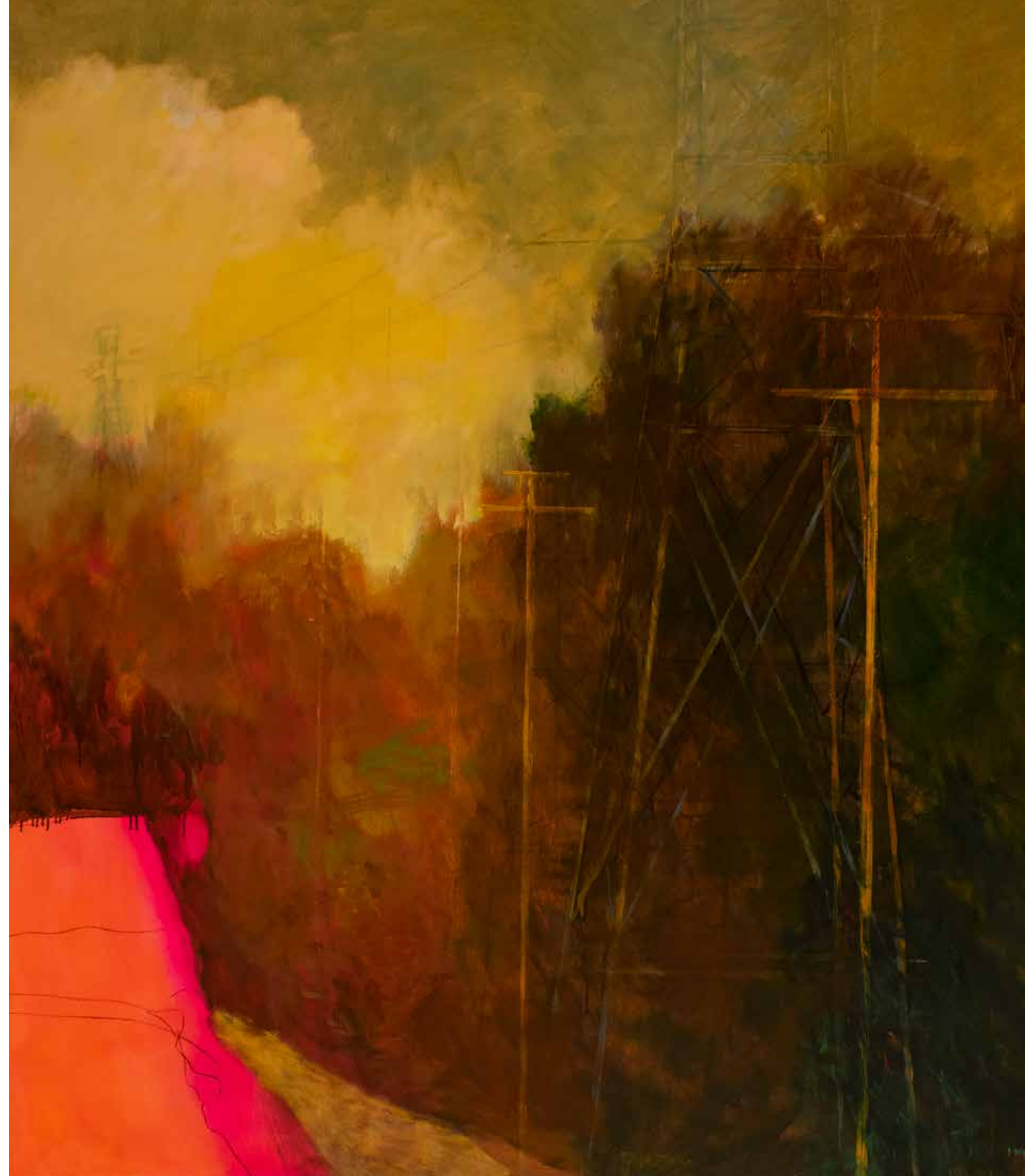


Untitled Landscape (4519)

Oil on Canvas | 52" x 64" | 2019
Collection of Julie Duisterhof and Randy Damstra
On view: Dennon Museum Center



Untitled Landscape (620) | ABOVE
 Oil on Paper | 25" x 30" | 2020
 Collection of Rosanna and John Nelson
 On view: GVSU Art Gallery

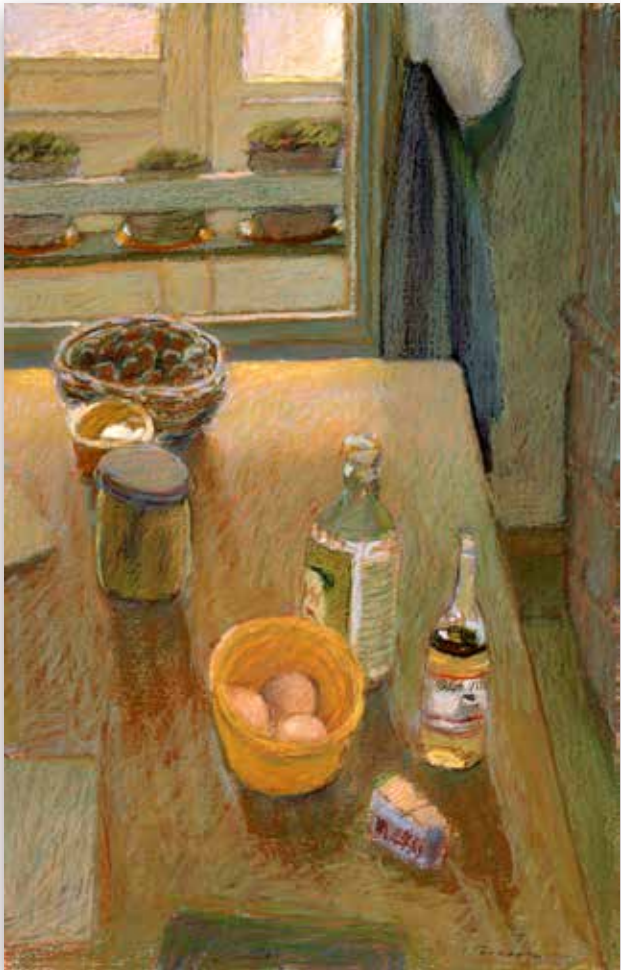


Untitled Landscape (2820) | RIGHT
 Oil on Canvas | 74" x 69" | 2020 | detail
 Collection of John Cannarsa and Tim Straker
 On view: Dennon Museum Center

Still Life



Paint Tubes
Oil Pastel on Paper | 28" x 26" | 1988
Collection of Bob Hefferan
On view: Dennos Museum Center



Old Monk
Oil Pastel on Paper | 18" x 11" | 1994
Collection of Al and Gail Bowerman
On view: Dennos Museum Center



Cup with Blue Saucer
Oil on Paper | 14" x 13" | 1994
Collection of Elliott Wolfson and Dr. Barret Myers Wolfson
On view: Dennos Museum Center



Flower Shadow | ABOVE
 Oil on Board | 18" x 12" | 2004
 Collection of the Artist
 On view: Dennos Museum Center

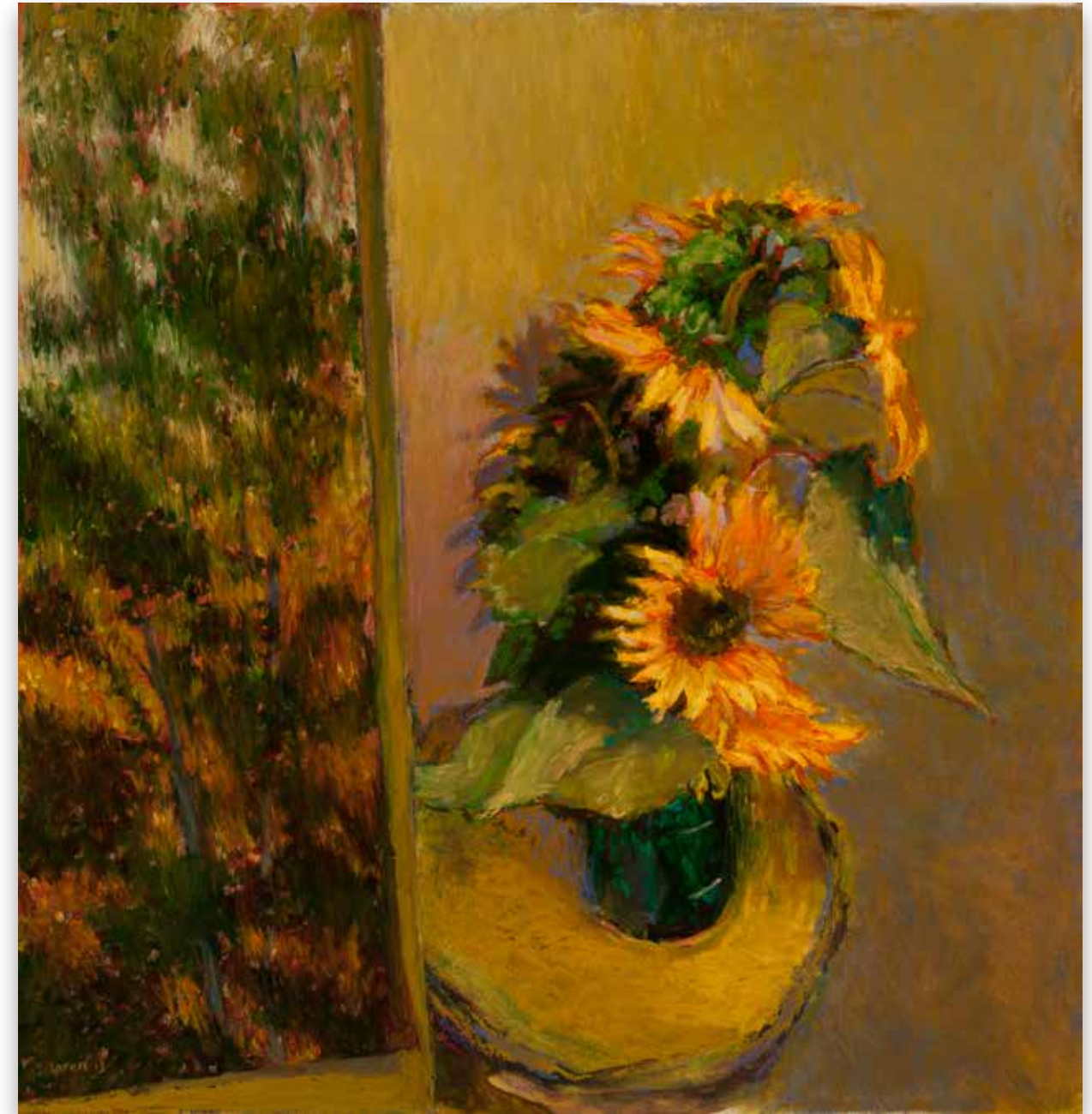
Geraniums (1404) | FACING PAGE
 Oil on Board | 27" x 26" | 2004
 Collection of Jim and Marie Preston
 On view: Dennos Museum Center





Lilacs (2912)

Oil on Paper | 27" x 23" | 2012
 Collection of Julie Duisterhof and Randy Damstra
 On view: Dennon Museum Center



Sunflowers (6613)

Oil on Board | 27" x 26" | 2013
 Collection of the Artist
 On view: Dennon Museum Center



View of the Lake | 2013 | detail | pg. 56

Plein-Air Painting

CALIFORNIA TO MICHIGAN

Stephen Duren

For the first 33 years of his life, artist Russell Chatham lived and painted in the same northern California climate and terrain where I was raised. Then he moved to Montana, where he lived and worked for 40 years. So, when the Dennon Museums’ former director, Eugene Jenneman, introduced me to Chatham, I asked the artist if transitioning to the light and topography of the Midwest was difficult for him. His response was an emphatic “Yes!”

When I moved from California to Michigan at 30, my way of dealing with the transition artistically was to include elements of California in my Michigan paintings. This might be truer of my studio abstractions than of my outdoor realism. But I can see hints of California’s bittersweet light in the latter. In essence, I brought a piece of California with me.

In my 50s, I began making plein-air painting pilgrimages back to my home state. But the Leelanau Peninsula remains my go-to region for painting out of doors, partly because it is similar to the terrain of my youth. Like the coastal foothills north of San Francisco, the Leelanau Peninsula offers a quiet aesthetic atmosphere where roads curve and undulate through wonderful patterns of orchards, vineyards, and farm fields.

Chatham eventually returned to one of my favorite areas in California, Tomales Bay. He spent his last years there painting the motifs he grew up with. I have no such plans. When I want to experience the pathos of my childhood stomping grounds, I wander through Grand Valley State University’s campus halls, where 15 of my small California paintings—Chatham would have called them sketches—are hanging as part of the school’s permanent collection.

Coastal California | 2006



Newton Farm Leelanau Peninsula | 2010





Allendale Wisteria | TOP
 Oil on Board | 10.5" x 15.125" | N.D.
 Collection of Brenda and Irvin Wolfson
 On view: GVSU Art Gallery



Pfleghaar Painting Outside of Duren's Allendale Studio | BOTTOM
 Oil on Canvas | 10" x 12" | 1985
 Private Collection
 On view: GVSU Art Gallery



West Side, Grand Rapids | TOP
 Oil on Board | 7" x 12" | 1990
 Collection of the Artist
 On view: GVSU Art Gallery



100th Street Nocturn | BOTTOM
 Oil on Board | 12" x 18" | 1995
 Collection of the Artist
 On view: GVSU Art Gallery



Sebastopol Orchard, California | TOP

Oil on Board | 12" x 18" | 1999

Collection of the Artist

On view: Dennos Museum Center



*Telephone Line, French and Kirt Roads,
View North* | BOTTOM

Oil on Board | 12" x 18" | 2000

Collection of Jim and Marie Preston

On view: Dennos Museum Center



Two Paintings and a Wood Pile | TOP

Oil on Board | 12" x 18" | 2000

Collection of the Artist

On view: GVSU Art Gallery

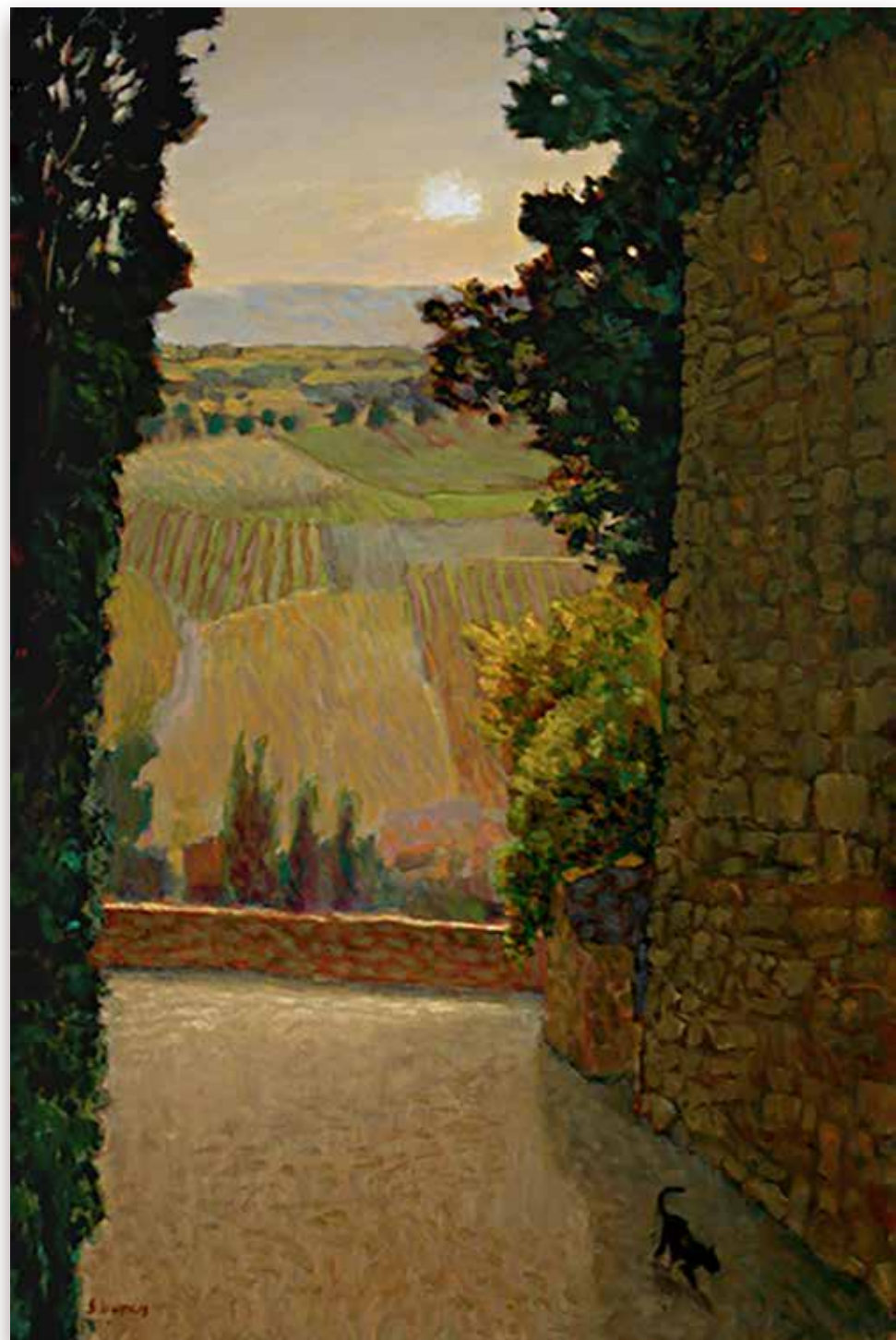


Olive Grove, Italy | BOTTOM

Oil on Board | 12" x 18" | 2001

Collection of Joan DuBois

On view: GVSU Art Gallery



Lubber's Cat, France

Oil on Board | 18" x 12" | 2001
Collection of Don and Nancy Lubbers
On view: GVSU Art Gallery



Egalières, France

Oil on Board | 18" x 12" | 2001
Collection of the Artist
On view: GVSU Art Gallery



Novotny Road – View South | TOP

Oil on Board | 12" x 18" | 2001
 Collection of Jim and Marie Preston
 On view: Dennon Museum Center



Harbor Ridge Fall | TOP

Oil on Board | 12" x 18" | 2002
 Collection of Bob and Julie Connors
 On view: Dennon Museum Center



Marie's Pyramid Point | BOTTOM

Oil on Board | 12" x 18" | 2002
 Collection of Jim and Marie Preston
 On view: Dennon Museum Center



Harbor Ridge Winter | BOTTOM

Oil on Board | 12" x 18" | 2002
 Collection of Bob and Julie Connors
 On view: Dennon Museum Center



*Silver Birch, Highway 22
– Tall Timber Lane*

Oil on Board | 12" x 18" | 2002
Collection of Jim and Marie Preston
On view: Dennos Museum Center



Brockley, London | TOP
 Oil on Board | 12" x 18" | 2005
 Collection of the Artist
 On view: GVSU Art Gallery



Above Watsonville, California | BOTTOM
 Oil on Board | 12" x 18" | 2006
 Collection of Cathy Bissell
 On view: GVSU Art Gallery



West of Tomales, California | TOP
 Oil on Board | 12" x 18" | 2006
 Collection of Jim and Marie Preston
 On view: GVSU Art Gallery

Orchard in Fog, California | BOTTOM
 Oil on Board | 12" x 18" | 2006
 Collection of the Artist
 On view: GVSU Art Gallery



Coleman Valley, California | TOP

Oil on Board | 12" x 18" | 2006

Collection of the Artist

On view: Dennon Museum Center



Barn Roof, California | BOTTOM

Oil on Board | 12" x 18" | 2006

Collection of the Artist

On view: Dennon Museum Center



Jim's California Hills | TOP

Oil on Board | 12" x 18" | 2006

Collection of Jim and Marie Preston

On view: GVSU Art Gallery



Eucalyptus Grove, California | BOTTOM

Oil on Board | 12" x 18" | 2006

Collection of the Artist

On view: Dennon Museum Center

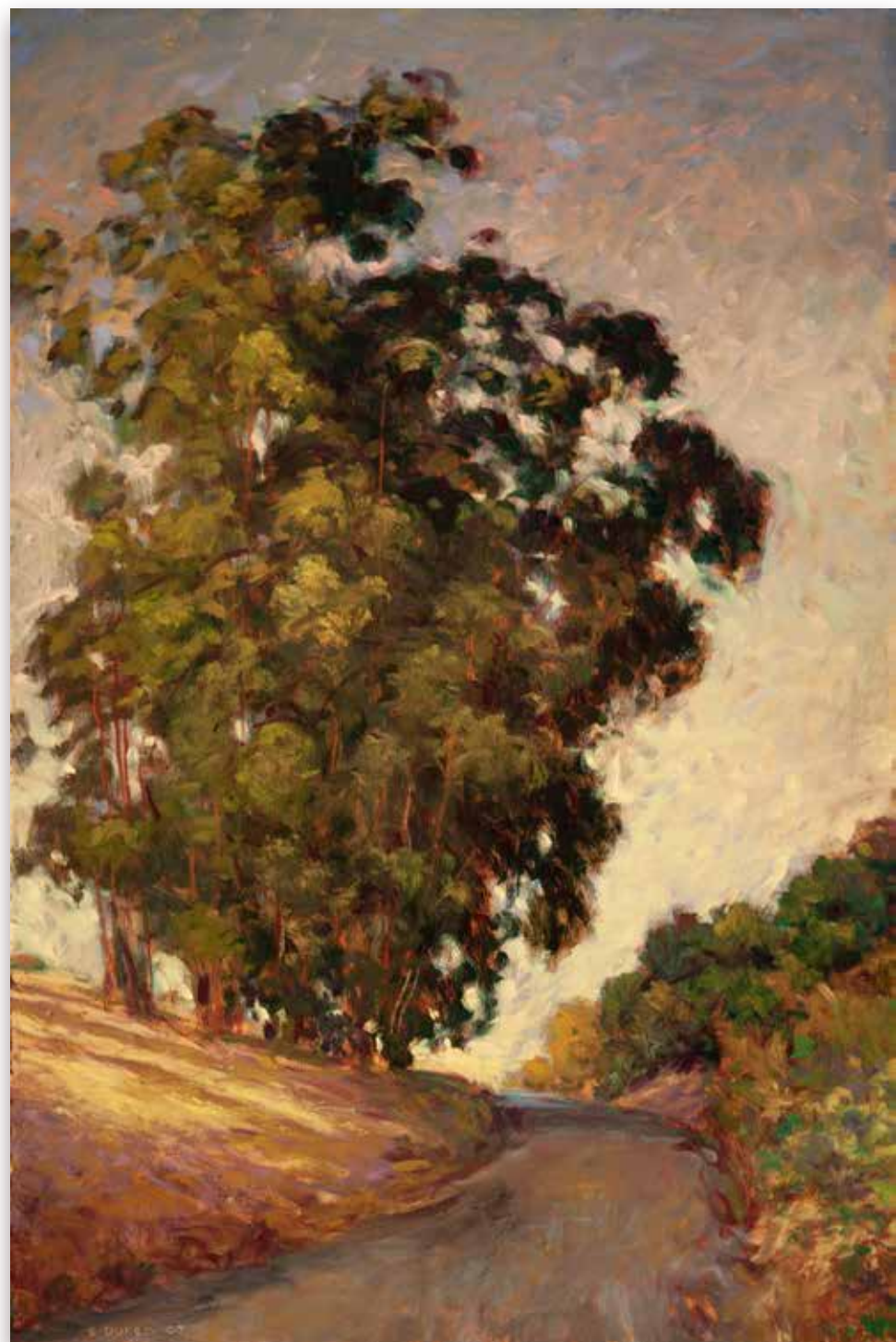


*Cows and Eucalyptus,
California*

Oil on Board | 12" x 18" | 2006

Collection of Lisa M. Rose

On view: Dennos Museum Center



Roadside Eucalyptus, California

Oil on Board | 18" x 12" | 2007
Collection of Kevin and Gina Paul
On view: Dennos Museum Center



California Hills (3807) | TOP

Oil on Board | 12" x 18" | 2007
Collection of Richard E. Paschke and Kate Cragwall
On view: Dennos Museum Center



California Coast | BOTTOM

Oil on Board | 12" x 18" | 2007
Collection of Kevin and Gina Paul
On view: GVSU Art Gallery



Fireflies and Hay Bales (1107) | TOP

Oil on Paper | 17" x 37" | 2007
Collection of Gary and Adele Forbrig
On view: GVSU Art Gallery



Orchard, Michigan (2612) | TOP

Oil on Board | 12" x 17" | 2012
Collection of Jim and Marie Preston
On view: Dennon Museum Center



California Barn (2907) | BOTTOM

Oil on Board | 6" x 18" | 2007
Private Collection
On view: GVSU Art Gallery



Horizon Clouds, Michigan | BOTTOM

Oil on Board | 12" x 18" | 2012
Collection of the Artist
On view: Dennon Museum Center



View of the Lake | TOP
Oil on Board | 18" x 24" | 2013
Collection of Kevin and Gina Paul
On view: Dennon Museum Center



East Dufek Road, Michigan (3613) | BOTTOM
Oil on Board | 12" x 18" | 2013
Collection of the Artist
On view: GVSU Art Gallery



Frozen Lake Leelenau (314) | TOP
Oil on Board | 8.5" x 18" | 2014
Collection of the Artist
On view: Dennon Museum Center



Grape Vines (6715) | BOTTOM
Oil on Board | 12" x 24" | 2015
Collection of Jim and Marie Preston
On view: Dennon Museum Center



Plein-Air to the Studio



Route 1 Eucalyptus, California

Oil on Board | 18" x 12" | 2006
Collection of the Artist
On view: GVSU Art Gallery

Eucalyptus, California (317)

Oil on Board | 24" x 18" | 2017
Collection of Richard E. Paschke and Kate Cragwall
On view: GVSU Art Gallery

Eucalyptus, California (3909) | FACING PAGE

Oil on Canvas | 100" x 65" | 2009, reworked 2013 | detail
Collection of the Artist
On view: GVSU Art Gallery



Sebastopol Cows

Oil on Board | 12" x 18" | 2006
 Collection of Brenda and Irvin Wolfson
 On view: Denny Museum Center



Sebastopol Hills (2411)

Oil on Canvas | 60" x 72" | 2011
 Collection of GVSU | 2022.45.1
 Gift of Mark and Elizabeth Murray
 On view: Denny Museum Center



Self Portraiture

LOOKING IN-LOOKING OUT

Sigrid Danielson, Ph.D.

Stephen Duren’s landscape paintings offer viewers an opportunity to shape connections with settings common to the rural spaces of California and Michigan. His depictions of the environment, often grounded in observation, manifest the visual characteristics of specific locations and provide a counterpoint to his more abstract images. In these works, the artist’s use of intersecting planes of color and texture invite us to resolve the visual elements into landscapes that evoke familiar spaces. As Duren’s landscapes bridge the places and spaces of California with those of Michigan, his self-portraits encourage one to reflect on themes of connection.

Today, it is possible to possess hundreds of selfies on a cell phone and routinely

share them through social media outlets. Given these contexts for image collection and distribution, it can be tempting to take the self-portrait for granted. But these images are never created isolation and they continue to play a role in shaping connections between people. Their history in European art is a long one; artists have generated self-portraits for well over 1000 years. In the earliest examples,

these images stressed an artist’s role as maker depicting the subject at work along with their tools. These images typically employed generalized depictions rather than replicating individualized physical features. Several of the self-portraits in this retrospective build on elements from these longstanding motifs. Duren’s focused depictions of himself at work in the studio transform the presentation of self into a commentary on the labor of art making. In contrast, the remaining self-portraits, with their careful attention



In the Studio | 2020

Self in Allendale Studio | FACING PAGE

Oil on Canvas | 36" x 32" | 1985 | detail
Collection of Kim Smith and Patricia Jones
On view: GVSU Art Gallery

to the depiction of physiognomy and mood, reference the more recent history of the genre. These depictions of the self, frequently employing a gestural style, trace specific impressions that he has chosen to share with the viewer marking a changing physiognomy, significant life events, and his evolving trajectory as a painter.

Taken as a group, these self-portraits invite us to reflect on Duren’s relationship with his creative practice. They capture different facets of an artist’s life by depicting him at work, as he considers and drafts his own features, as well as portraying a moment standing before a window that frames an expansive landscape. One may pose direct questions that suggest a biography created through visual means. Queries such as “What aspects of his personality may be revealed in this image?” readily come to mind. The viewer can also offer broader questions to generate new connections with the works. “When looking at this drawing, have I become the mirror?” “How do the visual elements of the painting connect me with the artist’s ideas, the medium, the subject, and its contexts?” Duren’s *Self with Diebenkorn* (right) completed in 2016, provides just such an invitation to nuanced and multiple meanings. Here, the artist, his back to the viewer, depicts himself pondering a large landscape

by the painter Richard Diebenkorn. The viewer’s position is outside the image, and we observe Duren in the process of gauging *something* about the massive canvas. That *something* remains hidden, leaving it open for us to connect the work with many possibilities including the practices of image making, the genre of landscape, and a painter’s sense of place within the broader artistic community.

Duren’s self-portraits and his landscapes engage with the tensions posed by the intersections of specificity and the general. His work prompts the viewer to inquire and explore as we seek connection.



Self with Diebenkorn

Oil on Paper | 18" x 24" | 2016
Private Collection
(Not on view)



Self

Graphite on Paper | 5.5" x 4" | 1972
Collection of the Artist
On view: GVSU Art Gallery



Self in Chair

Charcoal on Paper | 25" x 19" | 1973

Collection of Havalah Myers

On view: Dennon Museum Center



Self

Oil on Canvas | 10" x 8" | 1995

Collection of the Artist

On view: Dennon Museum Center



Self (2716)

Graphite on Paper | 5" x 3.5" | 2007

Collection of the Artist

On view: GVSU Art Gallery



Self (3316)

Oil on Paper | 18" x 24" | 2016

Collection of Joan DuBois

On view: Dennon Museum Center



Allegory

UNSETTLED SLEEP

Ellen E. Adams, Ph.D.

Two figures, presumably asleep, share a much-too-small bed that hovers delicately above a landscape. Earth-tones—greens, browns, ochre, and yellow—provide the only indication that this is in fact a landscape, since it is devoid of plants or trees. A multi-hued sky occupies a full two-thirds of the composition but since the colors and the artist's touch are light, the sky appears to float above the earth. Anchored solidly along the central vertical axis, a cloud reflects the yellow and green colors that hover above the horizon line and glows with an orange-yellow radiance.

Stephen Duren returned repeatedly to the suspended bed motif in works such as *Levitating Bed* and a similar canvas in the GVSU collection titled *Floating Bed*. In each, Duren grapples with one of the most traditional genres of painting—figures in a landscape – and creates plausible yet irrational compositions. *Levitating Bed* arises out of a quiet layering-on of oil pastel. The ethereal strangeness of the



Floating Bed | FACING PAGE

Oil on Canvas | 78" x 72" | 1988

Collection of GVSU | 1999.783.1

Gift of Dr. Lonson and Mrs. Mary Barr

On exhibit at the GVSU

Cook-DeVos Center for Health Sciences building

Levitating Bed | ABOVE

Oil Pastel on Paper | 12.5" x 11.5" | 1988

Private Collection

On view: GVSU Art Gallery

myriad combinations of hues in both works transports the viewer beyond the everyday and helps us to reckon with the images created by Duren. We believe yet disbelieve our own eyes. For example, the shadow cast by the floating bed is shallow, connoting a midday timeframe. The colors of the sky, however, coupled with the barest suggestion of light at the horizon line produce the impression of the onset of dusk. *Floating Bed* duplicates this approach, albeit with pinks, purples, and blue-green tones. An atmosphere of fading light in each suggests the moment when we move from a state of wakefulness to sleep, the brief liminal passage during which we are prone to hallucinations: visions of shapes and light, the somatic experience of weightlessness, flying, or falling. It seems cliché to attribute a floating bed to a dream state, but Duren primes our expectations through color and light.

The solitary bed with its slumbering inhabitants drifts a few feet above the ground. The bed appears to be suspended from the cloud, and while no visible strings attach the two forms, they give the impression of being visually and psychologically balanced and in harmony. The figures seem

unaware of their circumstances. Despite there being ample space within the landscape, both lay atop a single bed, one faced away from us and the other draped over its side. Unaffected by gravity, the draped sleeper's legs float in space. A sense of solitude pervades the scene, bittersweet rather than disconcerting. Take away the bed and the floating sleepers in either composition, however, and we would be left with almost pure abstraction.

Like American artist Albert Pinkham Ryder's moody and eccentric landscapes, Stephen Duren's stylized forms and atmospheric color appear to be roused from memory. The artist elicits a sensation of the uncanny with the combination of the earthly and the fleeting. *Levitating Bed* is mysterious, imaginative, and at the same time familiar.



Self Portrait with Heart

Oil on Paper | 29" x 29" | 1986

Collection of the Artist

On view: GVSU Art Gallery



Passage | ABOVE

Oil Pastel on Paper | 17" x 16" | 1987

Collection of the Artist

On view: GVSU Art Gallery

Figure with Bird | RIGHT

Oil on Canvas | 78" x 72" | 1988 | detail

Collection of Joan DuBois

On view: GVSU Art Gallery





Tornado | ABOVE

Oil Pastel on Paper | 24" x 38" | 1996

Collection of the Artist

On view: GVSU Art Gallery



Bay Window | RIGHT

Oil on Canvas | 64" x 52" | 1998 | detail

Collection of Shelley E. Padnos and Carol L. Sarosik

On view: GVSU Art Gallery

Printmaking



Untitled Landscape

Etching | 6" x 9" | 2001

Collection of GVSU | 2005.400.51

On view: Dennos Museum Center



Houdek Road – View South

Oil on Panel | 18" x 12" | 2002

Private Collection

On view: Dennos Museum Center



*Untitled Road with Trees
(Process Proof)*

Etching | 9" x 6" | 2001

Collection of GVSU | 2005.400.25

On view: Dennos Museum Center

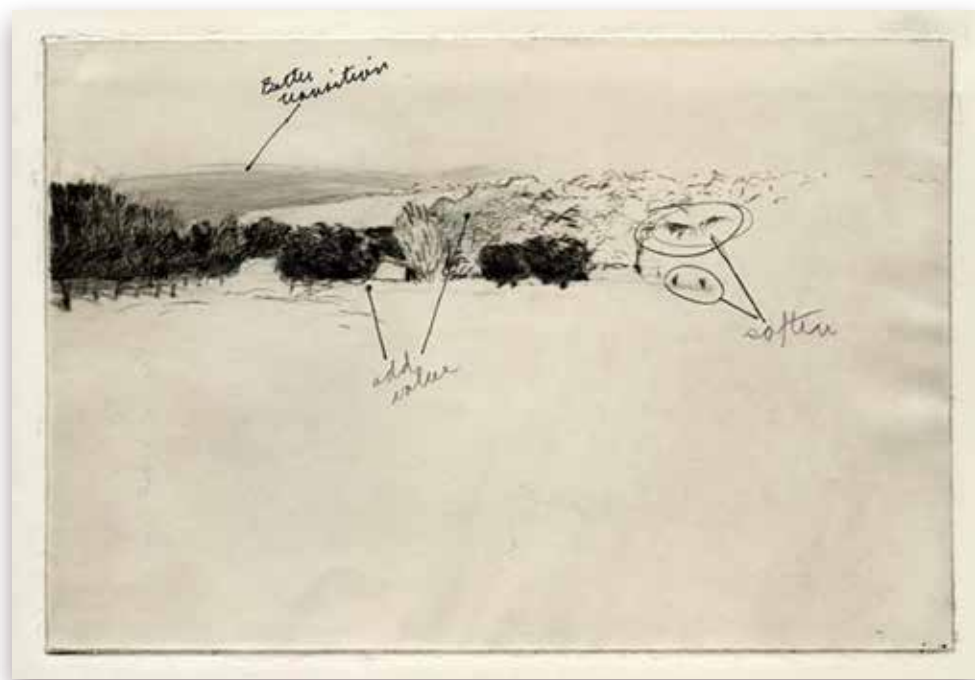


Untitled Road with Trees

Etching | 9" x 6" | 2001

Collection of GVSU | 2005.400.49

On view: Dennos Museum Center



Tree Row (Process Proof) | TOP
 Etching | 6.75" x 9.75" | 2001
 Collection of GVSU | 2005.400.12
 On view: GVSU Art Gallery



Tree Row | BOTTOM
 Etching | 6" x 9" | 2001
 Collection of GVSU | 2005.400.58
 On view: GVSU Art Gallery



Bridge | TOP
 Lithograph | 7" x 9" | 2001
 Collection of GVSU | 2005.400.64
 Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Lonson Barr
 On view: GVSU Art Gallery



Landscape Study | BOTTOM
 Pastel on Paper | 4.5" x 7" | 2001
 Collection of GVSU | 2007.024.1
 Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Lonson Barr
 On view: GVSU Art Gallery

Sketches



Approaching Storm

Graphite on Paper | 2" x 4" | 2008
Collection of the Artist
On view: GVSU Art Gallery



Don and Sharon

Graphite on Paper | 8" x 9" | 1982
Collection of the Artist
On view: GVSU Art Gallery



Self in Bathroom

Graphite on Paper | 9" x 7" | 1985
Collection of the Artist
On view: Dennon Museum Center



Bathroom Door

Graphite on Paper | 10" x 7" | 1985
Collection of the Artist
On view: GVSU Art Gallery



Tree (with notes)

Graphite on Paper | 7.5" x 6" | 1995
Collection of the Artist
On view: Dennon Museum Center



Waiting for Elliott – Kalamazoo Sycamore

Graphite on Paper | 6.5" x 3.5" | 2008
Collection of Elliott Wolfson and
Dr. Barret Myers Wolfson
On view: Dennon Museum Center



Tree and Clouds

Graphite on Paper | 4.75" x 3.25" | 2008
Collection of the Artist
On view: GVSU Art Gallery



Road with Trees

Graphite on Paper | 4.5" x 6" | 2010
Collection of the Artist
On view: Dennon Museum Center

ABOUT GVSU ART GALLERY

Grand Valley State University has long believed that learners of all ages and backgrounds should have access to art. We are leading in innovative ways to provide access to art for our students, our community, and our state.

To that end, the university has built the second largest art collection in Michigan, displaying it in over 130 buildings on all campuses and regional centers. Artwork is thoughtfully incorporated into every university building, creating a virtually borderless museum that spans all of our beautiful campuses. The GVSU Art Gallery empowers our community to engage with visual narratives that align with university values through diverse exhibitions, learning events, resources, and unparalleled access to art.

We believe that visual art-viewing experiences have the power to spark conversations, action, and reflection on core themes of social justice, human rights, and empathy that align with the university's philosophy of liberal education. Art has the power to move people; to bridge gaps in understanding; to spark our collective imagination toward building a better, more equitable world; and to enrich learning experiences beyond the capacity of traditional classroom structures.

We seek to actively collaborate with community partners in the production of learning materials, experiences, and events, as well as the placement of art in public buildings. We support the interdisciplinary educational goals of the University and for the benefit of the community-at-large.

We believe that art matters because our shared humanity and lived stories matter. Art at GVSU is our collective pulse; our united spirit.

gvsu.edu/artgallery

ABOUT GVSU

Grand Valley State University educates students to shape their lives, their professions and their societies. The university contributes to the enrichment of society through excellent teaching, active scholarship and public service. At Grand Valley State University, we value effective teaching, liberal education, scholarship, university and community, and service.

Established in 1960, Grand Valley State University is a comprehensive university serving students from all 83 Michigan counties and dozens of other states and foreign countries. The university attracts more than 24,000 students with its high-quality programs and state-of-the-art facilities. Grand Valley provides a fully accredited liberal undergraduate and graduate education. Grand Valley's main campus is located in Allendale, almost midway between downtown Grand Rapids and Lake Michigan. This contemporary campus offers all the amenities expected from a residential college. The Pew Grand Rapids Campus is located in the heart of Michigan's second-largest city, putting students closer to employment, internship, and community outreach programs.

Students at Grand Valley benefit from access to outstanding cultural, athletic, fine arts and recreational activities in both Allendale and Grand Rapids. The university also has a campus in Holland and centers in Battle Creek, Muskegon, Traverse City, and Detroit.



Thomas J. and Marcia J. Haas Center for Performing Arts lobby



Untitled

Oil on Canvas | 144" x 108" | 1990

Collection of GVSU | 2007.004.1

Anonymous Gift, In Honor of Stephen Duren

On view: GVSU Thomas J. and Marcia J. Haas Center for Performing Arts building