

Bill Scott



Bill Scott

September 8 through October 8, 2011 Essay by John Zarobell

HOLLIS TAGGART GALLERIES

958 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10021



FOREWORD

With each exhibition Hollis Taggart Galleries presents of Bill Scott's art comes great anticipation as to the visual delights that will be revealed in his newest work. Bill is one of the most "Proustian" of artists, imbuing each canvas with echoes of remembered experiences, moments and ruminations. Into each he weaves threads of color, compositions and subject matter chosen from his rich repository of artistic inspiration, experiences culled from the earliest moments when art "found" him and he "found" art.

Never has this been more evident than in the paintings in our current exhibition, where special childhood and adolescent recollections coalesce into compositions that, for the first time, pay homage to Scott's beloved historical figurative paintings.

In such new work as *Two or Three Nudes in a Landscape* one sees Scott exploring Pierre-Auguste Renoir's iconic *The Bathers* (in the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art) through the lens of his own personal history. In executing this work he taps into his earliest childhood experiences as a ten-year-old boy spending all of his free time exploring the vastness of this grand museum. Bill sought to literally and metaphorically "figure this painting out." He reflects on his fascination with *The Bathers*: it "is a painting I've been looking at my entire life. I could never satisfactorily figure it out; the space in Renoir's painting never quite delivered the pleasure it seemed to promise. I guess in tackling it I'm trying to resolve these things within it that have always both bothered me yet drawn me to it."

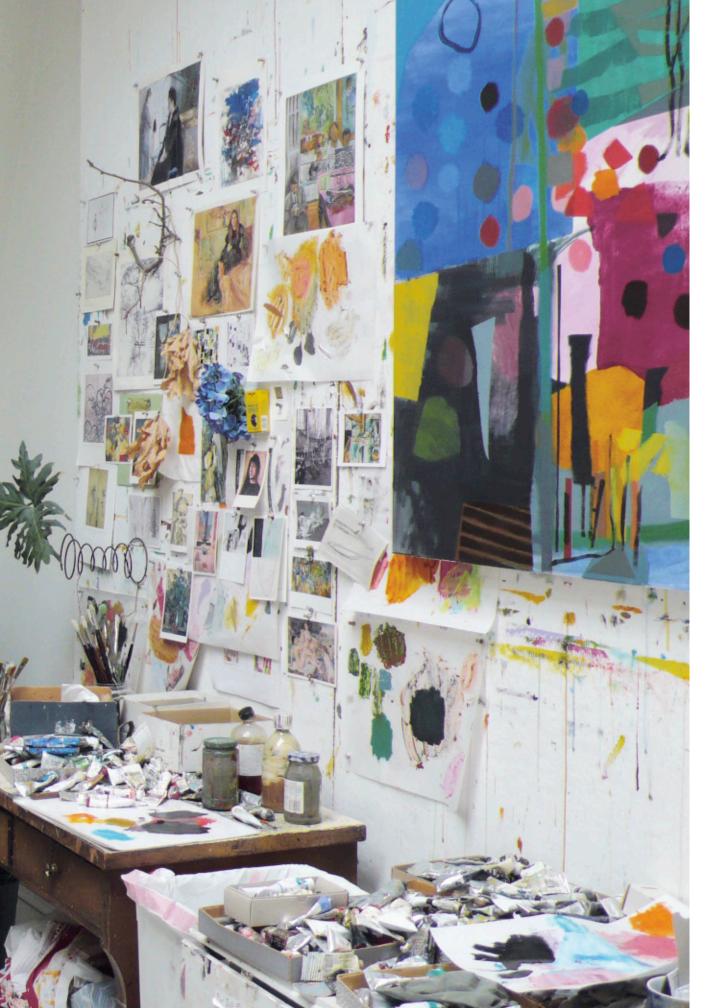
In a similar manner, Scott pays homage to Berthe Morisot through his painting entitled *The Cherry Tree*. As a teenager in the 1970s, he began a long friendship with Morisot's grandsons and since that time has been well acquainted with the group of three 1891 canvases by the same title that Morisot created and considered to be the masterpieces of her own late work. Bill responded to this series through his subsequent *Cherry Tree* painting, which, as he describes, visually "relates more specially to the three Morisots not so much in color but by dimension and compositional structure."

As the young boy who loved art, the adolescent who determined that it would be his life path, and the now mature and respected artist who teaches at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Bill Scott continues to evoke through his painting a passion undiminished.

We thank Bill, of course, for his customary dedication. It is always a pleasure to work with him. We also thank John Zarobell, Assistant Curator of Painting and Sculpture at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, for his thoughtful portrait of the artist and his work. Everyone at Hollis Taggart Galleries contributes to the success of our exhibitions, and we are pleased to recognize the efforts of Sarah Richardson, Stacey Epstein, Kara Spellman, Debra Pesci, Martin Friedrichs, Jason Mills, Reid Ballard, and Letty Holton. We are also grateful to Kirsten Olds, and once again, Russell Hassell and Jay Stewart have used their many talents to create a fine publication.

Hollis Taggart, President Vivian Bullaudy, Director





Bill Scott in his Philadelphia studio, 2011

FORM REVEALS ART'S SECRET: THE RECENT WORK OF BILL SCOTT

There is a famous photograph of Leo and Gertrude Stein's studio in Paris from around 1910 and hanging on the wall are colorful paintings by Picasso and Matisse, seen in rich sepia tones. Even seen in monochrome, these are some forceful works—vivid, dynamic, fairly exploding off the walls. If you took away the color from Bill Scott's paintings, they too would have a powerful presence. This is because of the complexity of mark making and the layering effects he introduces into the work. Most importantly, there is the play of forms conjured by Scott's brush. They are teeming with life: both active and passive, ambitious and complacent, circling and luxuriating. They dance in and through the painting. The final work is not an accumulation of forms. Rather their energy radiates to the edges of the painting's surface, generating a visual experience that extends beyond the canvas's tangible boundaries.

These forms are not shapes. Sometimes a form could be a brushstroke, at others it is the way one color blends into another. Or maybe a line comes along and stops just short. How about the way that some strokes just do not fill out, as if they really didn't have the time? Or a color you can see through, or a mass of lines that seems to have fallen down, or dots where the brush hits the canvas like a drum. Scott's works are like a downtown bar at happy hour, or a spring day in the park. These episodes in paint are far more varied and complex than how form normally appears in painting. The idea of forms goes back at least as far as Plato, whose domain of forms was a metaphysical sphere, and yet everything in the world in which we live is a metaphor for the absolute that exists in the domain of forms. The forms in these paintings are neither figurative nor abstract. As metaphors they send us packing, looking for the things they refer to, trying to find their worldly doubles.

And while we're looking around, we might find that our sense of sight is just a little bit different after spending some time with Scott's paintings. They make us feel differently about looking, which is not the same as seeing. What is the difference? It's not a question of recognition but paying attention. When I look at these works, I see they are bright, exuberant, atmospheric paintings. I know they are beautiful. If I attend to them, if I try to comprehend what the artist has tried to achieve, I find that he is manipulating my visual habits. The pictures are full of forms and lines and colors but it is their contingent character that Scott seems to be most interested in. I find myself wondering which colors are under and which are over and which ones you can see through. If one can see through a color, it is both there and not there. If a line is covered up, sometimes one can still see it. In these pictures, the truth is something that does not stand up and announce itself;







it must be sought out and it never gets fixed. Transparency is an illusion but it is also a fact and Scott's paintings plunge into this troubling inconsistency saying 'well, maybe' and also 'not quite'. The result is that a viewer can never stop seeking. What does one know in the end? Everything changes, but it pleases. The pleasure one takes in looking is not a vision but a feeling.

There is a major new development in this body of works though, which sets it apart from the oils the artist has painted since 2003. He has taken up specific historical works of art as points of reference and the results focus the viewer's attention on historical, and even philosophical, issues. Specifically, he has been emulating Berthe Morisot's cherry harvest paintings (figs. 1 and 2) and Auguste Renoir's *Large Bathers* (fig. 4), all pictures he has studied for many years. Recently, he decided to take these influences on in his own work. The method he employed is to measure the paintings and to build canvases of the same size. Then he recreated the originals in his own terms. Scott has written about the art of Morisot and others, and he has been an avid museum visitor since childhood, but the art of prior masters has never invaded his painting in quite this way.

The Cherry Tree (fig. 3, pl. 9) is based on the largest of three Morisot paintings of a cherry harvest and besides preserving the dimensions of the original, there are many traces of Morisot's

FIG 1

Berthe Morisot, *The Cherry Tree*, 1891. Oil on canvas, 57⁵/₈ x 35 inches. Private collection

FIG 2

Berthe Morisot, *The Cherry Picker (The Cherry Tree)*, 1891. Oil on canvas, 605% x 31½ inches. Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris / Giraudon / Bridgeman Art Library

FIG 3

Bill Scott, *The Cherry Tree*, 2011. Oil on canvas, 61 x 32 inches. Signed and dated lower left: "Bill Scott 11" composition here, including the orthogonals of the ladder, the arch of foliage, and traces of the figures' dresses. There the visual similarities end, however, and it is clear that Scott did not intend this picture to be a transcription from figurative to abstract painting. It is more an improvisation, like Coltrane playing a Cole Porter tune, forcing the underlying formal relationships of the source into a decisively experimental rendition. The churning of the brushstrokes is recapitulated, resolved into another dimension of pictorial complexity and geometric concatenation. The gestural swirls are fantastically confident yet they do not stand on their own. Rather, their dynamism animates the structure of the work. When looking at *The Cherry Tree*, the Morisot picture is not necessary as a point of reference, but Scott's engagement with it amplifies his and our sensibilities; what he loves about the Morisot is expressed in this painting and expands its reach.

This interaction with historical painting is even more complex in his three pictures that depart from Renoir's Large Bathers, namely Two or Three Nudes in a Landscape (fig. 5, pl. 7), Arcadian Landscape (fig. 6, pl. 8), and City, Country, Sea (pl. 17). Painted in a new technique, the Large Bathers was a breakthrough that allowed Renoir to come to a wholly new understanding of the capacities of his method and how they might be connected to the decorative tradition he so admired from the ancien regime. Scott's reinvention of Renoir's painting is no less significant for him and the three large canvases he has generated attest to both the capacity of the original work to inspire innovations and his ability to transform a traditional figurative painting into something much more radical.

The Renoir provides a point of focus outside of the works and allows a viewer to understand better what point Scott has arrived at in his recent work. Even without awareness of the source, looking at *Two or Three Nudes in a Landscape* makes one imagine the fleshy pinks as nudes, the blue and green as hillside and water. In other words, there is an automatic response, reinforced by the title, which transforms the collection of forms into a worldly scene (whether real or imagined). But the title informs us that we cannot be sure. Is it two or three nudes we're looking for? In other words, the artist lets us play the game of transforming this abstract picture into a scene but he undermines any certainty about this interpretive enterprise. The next in the series, *Arcadian Landscape*, allows an interpretation perhaps closer to the heart of Renoir's project but the increased pictorial complexity here resembles Cubism, or Léger's modern urban landscapes, albeit painted with the colors of Matisse. In such a way, *Arcadian Landscape* lays claim to both the future, as understood in the early twentieth century, and the idealized past (arcadia) that art and poetry have always kept aloft.

City, Country, Sea is perhaps the resolution to the problems introduced by these first two paintings. The last of the three works inspired by Renoir, it is the simplest in formal terms yet



FIG 4

Pierre-Auguste Renoir, The Large Bathers, 1884–87. Oil on canvas, 46¾ x 67¼ inches. Philadelphia Museum of Art: The Mr. and Mrs. Carroll S. Tyson, Jr., Collection, 1963

FIG 5

Bill Scott, *Two or Three Nudes in a Landscape*, 2010.

Oil on canvas, 46 x 67 inches.

Signed and dated lower left:

"Bill Scott 10"



FIG 6

Bill Scott, Arcadian Landscape, 2010–11. Oil on canvas, 46 x 67 inches. Signed and dated lower left: "Bill Scott 10–11"

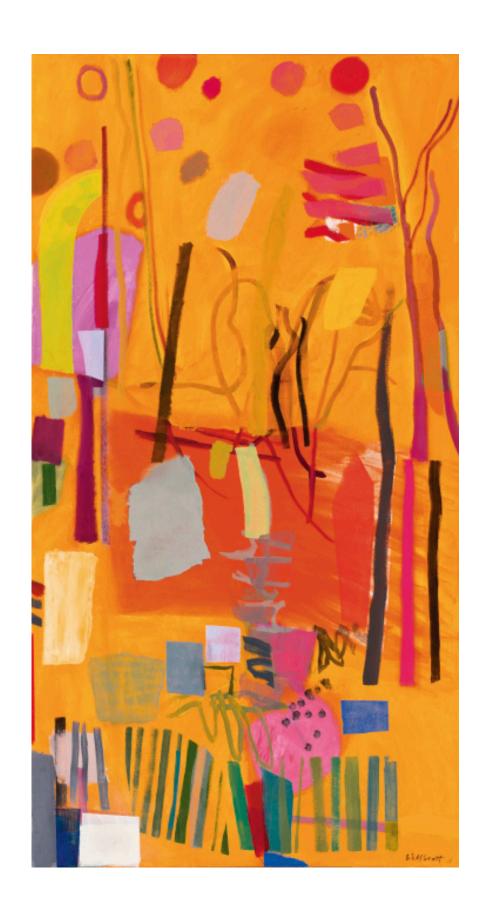


this simplicity makes the forms more emphatic. The three terms of the title are all symbols and carry heavy freight in the history of art. Yet here Scott has found a synthesis of form and figure. A truncated, schematic nude emerges in the upper left, while a leaf from the plant that Scott keeps beside his easel in his urban studio presents itself in the lower center of the canvas. Just above the white scratches that resemble writing in the water, mostly erased (lower right), is a rectangle that suggests a window on the sea. Right in the center of the painting one finds a pair of ancient symbolic forms (circle and phallus) kept just apart. These symbols remind us, as if it needed repeating, that it is all about sex. And I mean all of it: arcadia, the bathers, the country, the city, painting, etc. It is not that the solution is vulgar, and indeed Scott never would intend this, but that what the artist unmasks in this work is an incredible creative force, a coupling of history and the present, abstract and figurative painting, the real world and the domain of images.

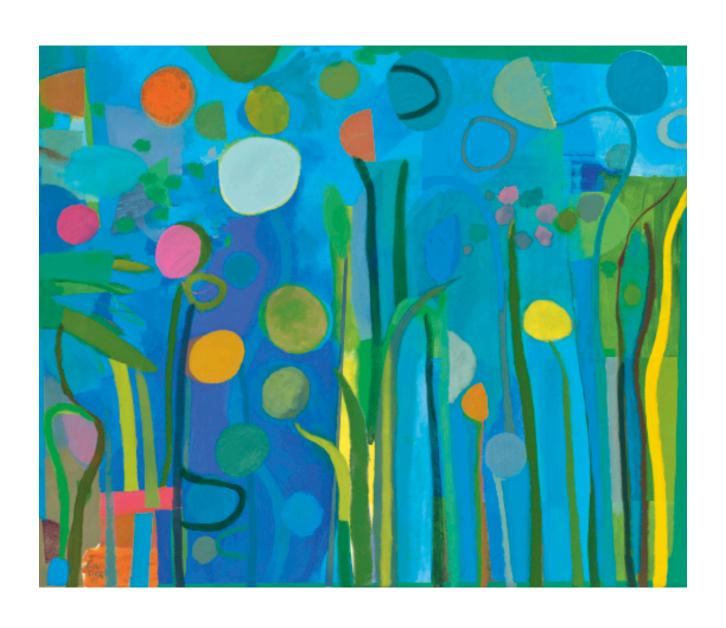
In Scott's recent paintings, culminating with *City, Country, Sea*, painterly invention is doubled, rendering something procreative. Genesis passes for pleasure. This hidden meaning, only sensed, is the subject of the painting that does not proclaim truth but only reveals whatever is there. Since the Greeks, that has been the basis of aesthetics, the path to beauty.

John Zarobell, Assistant Curator of Collections, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

PLATES











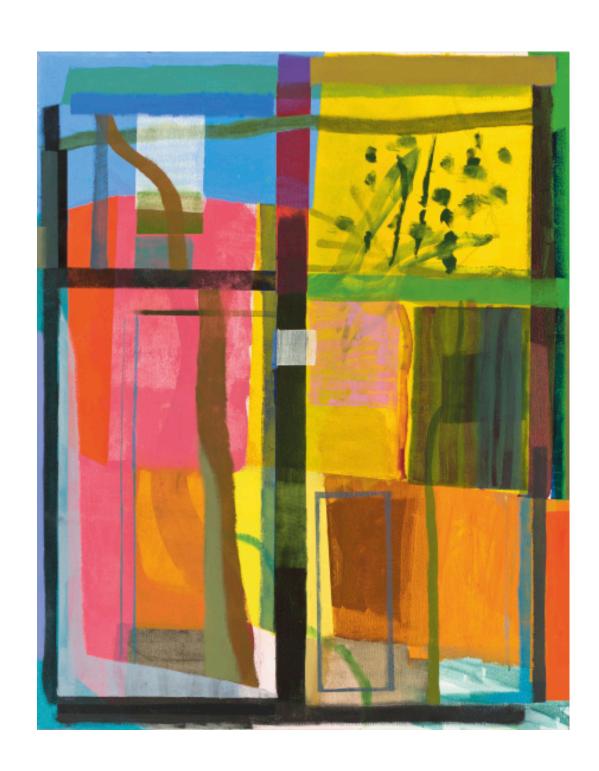


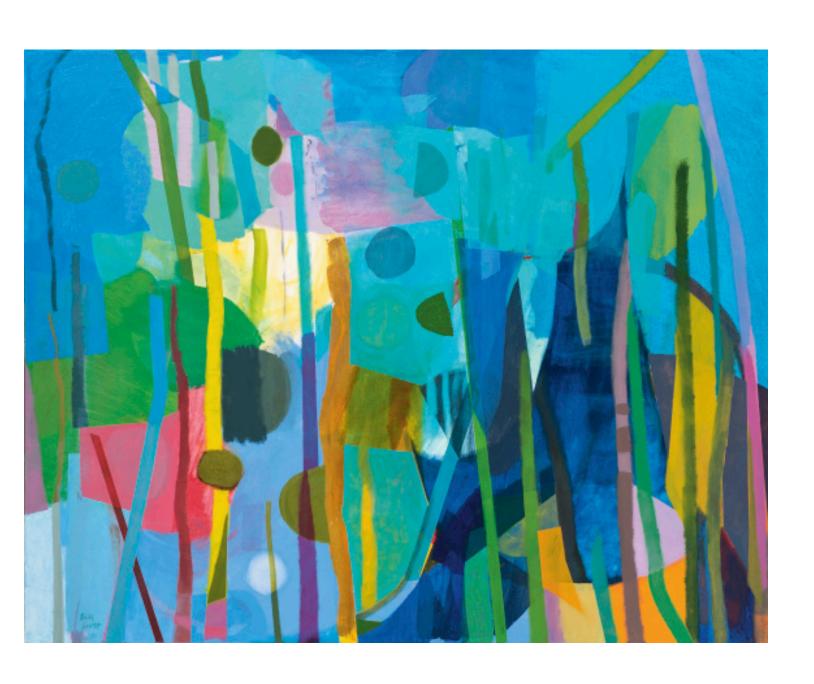












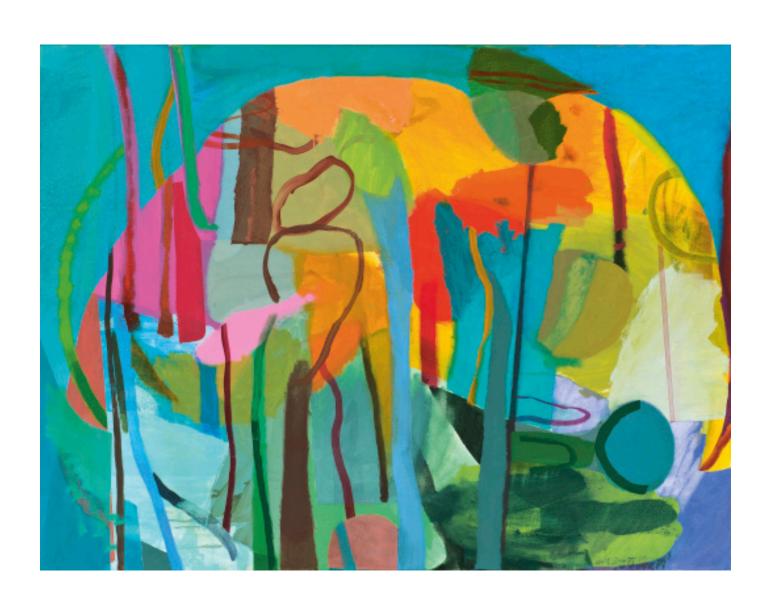














BILL SCOTT (B. 1956)

EDUCATION

1974–79 Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia

AWARDS

- 2008 Benjamin Altman Award, National Academy Museum, New York, N.Y.
- 2006 Distinguished Alumni Award, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia
- 2004 Adolph & Clara Obrig Prize, National Academy Museum, New York, N.Y. Independence Foundation Fellowship in the Arts, Philadelphia
- 1989 Philadelphia Museum of Art Award, Cheltenham Art Center, Pa.

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2010 Albemarle Gallery, London (also in 2006)
- 2009 Hollis Taggart Galleries, New York, N.Y. (also in 2004, 2007)
- 2008 List Gallery at Swarthmore College,
 Swarthmore, Pa.
 The Print Center, Philadelphia
 Fountain Restaurant, Four Seasons Hotel,
 Philadelphia
- 2002 Mangel Gallery, Philadelphia (also in 1999, 1998, 1996, 1994, 1992, 1990)
- 2000 Zone One Contemporary, Asheville, N.C.
- 1999 Mulligan-Shanoski Gallery, San Francisco (to benefit Bread & Roses)
- 1998 Friends Select School, Philadelphia
- 1997 Prince Street Gallery, New York, N.Y. (also in 1995, 1993, 1989)
- 1994 The Lawrenceville School, Lawrenceville, N.J.
 Galerie LouLou Lasard, Berlin, Germany (with
 Marie-Theres Berger)
- 1992 The State Museum, Harrisburg, Pa. (Contemporary Artists Series)
- 1990 Carspecken-Scott Gallery, Wilmington, Del.
- 1989 University of Delaware, Newark
- 1987 Peale House Galleries of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia
- 1984 Gross-McCleaf Gallery, Philadelphia (with Brad Thorstensen)

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2011 Asheville Art Museum, N.C., "Color Study."
Woodmere Art Museum, Philadelphia,
"Flirting with Abstraction: Modernist and
Contemporary Abstraction by Philadelphia
Artists; The Promised Gift of Karen Segal
and Woodmere's Collection."
Main Line Art Center, Haverford, Pa.,
"Paint! Emerging Philadelphia Artists
Selected by Bill Scott."

- 2010 Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts,
 Philadelphia, "C. R. Ettinger Studio
 Selections from 2000 to 2010."
 Free Library of Philadelphia, "One Theme/
 Thirty Prints: A Collaborative Portfolio by
 Philadelphia Printmakers."
 The Flinn Gallery in the Greenwich
 Library, Conn., "Celebrating Eighty Years:
 Eight Artists."
 - The Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts, Wilmington, "Spectrum: Contemporary Color Abstraction."
- 2009 Hollis Taggart Galleries, New York, N.Y.,
 "Summer Selections."

 Gross McCleaf Gallery, Philadelphia,
 "Resonance of Place: David Brewster,
 Julian Hatton, Ying Li, Stanley Lewis,
 Ruth Miler, Anne Neely, & Bill Scott."

 Somerville-Manning Gallery, Greenville,
 Del., "Bo Bartlett, Murray Dessner, Alex
 Kanevsky, Bill Scott & Stuart Shils."
- The Painting Center, New York, N.Y.,
 "Color Key."
 Delaware County Community College,
 Media, Pa., "Abstract Invitational."
 National Academy Museum, New York, N.Y.,
 183rd Annual Exhibition of Contemporary
 American Art
- Paul Prouté S.A., Paris, "Dessins et Estampes du XVI au X Siècle."
 Hopkins House Gallery of Contemporary Art, Haddon Township, N.J., "Garden in Winter."
- 2006 Albemarle Gallery, London, "10th Anniversary Show." Fine Arts Museum, Western Carolina

University, Cullowhee, N.C., "Worldviews."

- The University of the Arts, Philadelphia, "C.R. Ettinger Studio: Recent Editions."

 National Academy Museum, New York, N.Y., "179th Annual: An Invitational Exhibition of Contemporary American Art."
- 2003 Hidell-Brooks Gallery, Charlotte, N.C., "Introductions."
- Boyden Gallery, St. Mary's College of Maryland, St. Mary's City, Md., "The Nature of Nature."
 Walker-Kornbluth Art Gallery, Fairlawn, N.J., "A Painterly Vision: Mary Page Evans, Eileen
- Goodman & Bill Scott."

 The Flinn Gallery, Greenwich, Conn.,
 "Bordering on Abstraction."
- 2000 The State Museum of Pennsylvania, Harrisburg, "Jane Piper & Her Circle: Three Generations of Painters in Philadelphia." The Print Center, Philadelphia, "Multiple Visions."
- 1999 Hollins University, Roanoke, Va., "Four Artists: Theophilus Brown, Jeffrey Carr, George Nick & Bill Scott."

- Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, N.C., "Kinds of Drawing." Washington Art Association, Washington Depot, Conn., "Land, Sea & Sky." The United States Embassy, Muscat, Oman, "Art in Embassies Program."
- 98 M B Modern, New York, N.Y., "The Flower Show." Susquehanna Art Museum, Harrisburg, Pa., "A Diverse Gathering: Highlights of Local Collections." The State Museum of Pennsylvania, Harrisburg, "The Fine Art of Giving: Gifts of Art to the State Museum 1987–1997."
- James A. Michener Art Museum,
 Doylestown, Pa., "Surface, Symbol,
 Psyche: Contemporary Abstract Painting."
 The Art Museum, Florida International
 University, Miami, "American Art Today:
 The Garden."
 The United States Embassy, Nairobi, Kenya,
 "Art in Embassies Program."
- 1996 Bernard Toale Gallery, Boston, "Small Scale Landscapes." Smith College, Northampton, Mass., "Invitational Drawing Exhibition."
- "Invitational Drawing Exhibition."

 1995 Walker-Kornbluth Gallery, Fairlawn,
 N.J., "Color."
- 1994 Philadelphia Art Alliance, Pa., "Jimmy C. Lueders Memorial Exhibition: Works from the Lueders Collection."
- 1992 Philadelphia Museum of Art, "Pertaining to Philadelphia: Contemporary Acquisitions from the Julius Bloch Memorial Fund."
- 1986 Samuel S. Fleisher Art Memorial, Philadelphia, "Challenge Exhibition III."

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 Bill Scott: Looking Through: Recent Oils

 and Prints. New York: Hollis Taggart

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- ———. *The Art of Watercolor.* New York: Watson-Guptill, 1999, 82–83, back cover.
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- May, Stephen. "Reviews: New York. Bill Scott." ArtNews (June 2007), p. 135.
- Mullarkey, Maureen. "Arts and Letters: Gallery-Going." New York Sun, 10 June 2004, 18.
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- Naves, Mario. American Art Today: The Garden, Miami: The Art Museum at Florida International University, 1997.
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- ——. "Bill Scott's Sunny Spectacles: An abstract painter wrestles with nature's luxuriance." New York Observer, 26 March 2007, p. C13.
- -----. *Bill Scott: Recent Works.* (London: Albemarle Gallery 2010).
- Newhall, Edith. "Galleries." *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* September 14, 2008, p. H9. 33
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- Sartarelli, Stephen. Languages of Reflection: The Art Showcase XI. New York: The Bond Market Association, 1998.
- Schantz, Michael W. Celebrating Philadelphia's
 Artistic Legacy: Selections from the
 Woodmere Art Museum Permanent
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 Art in America 80 (November 1992):

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SELECTED COLLECTIONS

Arkansas Arts Center, Little Rock Asheville Art Museum, North Carolina Beverly Hills Hotel, California British Museum, London Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania Butler Institute of American Art, Youngstown, Ohio Community College of Philadelphia Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington Dickinson College, Carlisle, Pennsylvania, (Mr. and Mrs. Meyer P. Potamkin Collection) Federal Reserve Bank, Philadelphia Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Museum of Art, Utica, New York Philadelphia Museum of Art The State Museum of Pennsylvania, Harrisburg Western Carolina University, Belk Art Gallery,

SELECTED WRITINGS BY THE ARTIST

Cullowhee, North Carolina

Woodmere Art Museum, Philadelphia

- "Arthur B. Carles." Art in America 73 (January 1985): 102–203.
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- "Desde La Pintura." *Mujeres Impresionistas.* Bilbao: Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao, 2001, 40–51.
- "Inspirations, Pleasure, and Painting." Jane Piper: Poetic Distillations. New York: Hollis Taggart Galleries, 2005, 19—22.
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- "Joan Mitchell: In the Eye of the Tiger." *Art in America* 83 (March 1995): 70–77.
- "Mary Nomecos at Rosenfeld." *Art in America* 94 (November 2006): 213–14.
- Nell Blaine. Image and Abstraction: Paintings & Drawings, 1944–1959. New York: Tibor de Nagy Gallery, 2007.
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- "Randall Exon at the James A. Michener Art Museum, Doylestown, Pa." Art in America 92 (January 2004): 109–10.
- Rose Naftulin: Paintings and Watercolors, 1955–2005. Philadelphia: Woodmere Art Museum, 2005, 11–16.
- "Sarah McEneaney at More Gallery, Philadelphia."

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