

An abstract artwork by William Scharf. The composition is dominated by a vibrant blue background. In the upper left, a large black circle overlaps a white circle. A large, rounded blue shape is positioned in the upper center. On the right side, a vertical yellow line descends from the top, intersecting a horizontal yellow line. Below this, a dark purple shape is visible. In the lower left, a thick yellow curved line is present. At the bottom center, a black circle is partially enclosed by a yellow ring. The overall style is minimalist and geometric, with a focus on bold colors and simple forms.

WILLIAM SCHARF Imagining the Actual

WILLIAM SCHARF Imagining the Actual

October 13 through November 12, 2016

Essay by Christopher Rothko

FOREWORD

It is an honor to present this superb group of works by William Scharf, spanning six decades of unbridled devotion and dedication to a unique artistic vision. Anyone acquainted with Bill knows how myopic and focused this man is, and has always been, on painting, drawing, doodling, observing, and always planning his next artwork. Bill's passion as an artist is simply unparalleled; producing art is clearly his life's purpose, and he has been fulfilling that purpose to delightful—and insightful—effect for the last half-century and more.

My first exposure to Scharf's work was two years ago on a visit to his small studio, in which we found the collection of works now on display. My initial impression was overwhelming excitement. I was immediately struck by the emotional intensity of the work, its bold color and surety of line. Bill's work defies simple categorization; it is neither Abstract Expressionism nor Color Field, nor any other "-ism." His work speaks to an independence, a personal vision, and a commitment to non-conformity that is communicated through his own iconography, his own symbology. And yet, his work hits a universal chord. This is the greatness of Bill Scharf—he connects directly with the soul of the viewer.

Scharf has never been one for self-promotion and never sought fame. Yet he deserves recognition far beyond what has been accorded to him thus far. Bill has always been a giver and a generous teacher, with a massive following of truly dedicated art students who never let him rest. *William Scharf: Imagining the Actual* is a small tribute to a master artist and a most-deserving, dedicated painter.

This exhibition was inspired by my good friend Earl Davis, who, sensing we were kindred spirits, introduced me to Bill and Sally Scharf. He was right, and my sincere thanks go to Earl for creating this wonderful opportunity. We also want to thank Christopher Rothko for his brilliant essay, and for helping guide and curate this show from day one, helping in every facet from selecting works to hanging to hand-holding. Our appreciation goes to Kate Rothko for lending her support and enthusiasm to this venture. This endeavor would have been much harder without the help of Hanna Seiman, the backbone of Bill Scharf's studio practice. She has chronicled every single one of Bill's works in organized detail and knows Bill's oeuvre thoroughly. We also thank Sally Scharf for all her patience and guidance throughout this project, and for her infinite charm, beauty, and crucial knowledge of details about Bill's life and work. Finally, our deep appreciation to Meredith Ward for carrying the torch for Bill Scharf's work over the past several years, and for her collegial encouragement.

Hollis Taggart



A retrospective exhibition is often as notable for its variety as for its consistency. How often are we taken aback by unexpected images from the artist we thought we knew? And through mental gymnastics, in some cases necessarily more contorted than others, we will ourselves to see the common threads, the logical evolution, the inevitable progression (substitute your own overworked prose here) that bind the various periods together. Indeed those links between the works of a single artist are there of necessity, but our own need for narrative and structure often mold them into something more concrete than the painted evidence would support.

No such need with the oeuvre of William Scharf. After only brief exposure, one would never mistake a Scharf for the work of anyone else. Every Scharf painting, and virtually every drawing and painting on paper, states the name of its author, immediately and unequivocally. Part of our task, as we consider the works in this retrospective, is to understand how this can be so when a career spans more than seventy years, and yields a generous bounty of work with no shortage of variation. Yet, it is so clearly all of a piece.

There are many reasons for the somewhat flattened curve of Scharf's trajectory. The first of these stems from his remarkable, natural gifts. To look at his earliest drawings and paintings (fig. 1) is to be struck by their manifest assurance and maturity, technique and voice already in synchrony. This is an artist who sprung fully formed from the womb, who always had something to say and the means with which to say it. It is hardly an accident that his student work captured his future wife's eye and swept her away long before she met the remarkable man who made them. I will discuss Scharf's physical aptitude later in this essay, but to no lesser degree, his unique perspective on the world, the questing mind, the emotional connectivity, were there from the first.

A second source of Scharf's consistency comes from a particularly dynamic polarity of elements in his character. To know the man, and to know his work, is to witness a fascinating admixture of youthful vigor married to a wisdom that is typically the product of decades. And yet these ingredients were always there. To see him at eighty-nine is to witness a twinkle in his eye that is undimmed with age. And to meet him at thirty-nine already gave one the sense of being in the presence of an oracle. So too with the artwork. The energy and potency of the paintings, from the most monumental canvases to the often diminutive panels, were demonstrably present in the earliest work (see *Top Sphinx*, 1956, pl. 2) and remain so today, if anything conveyed now with even greater immediacy (see *The Sun Shines On The Opening Volume*, 2011–12, pl. 40).



FIG 1
William Scharf (b. 1927)
Untitled, c. 1940s.
Graphite on paper,
7 x 9½ inches (sight size).
Collection of the artist

Similarly, the deeply contemplative presence of the artist's all-considering eye can be sensed everywhere in his oeuvre, from early to late. For all their energy, these are long-pondered paintings, Scharf opening philosophical channels that draw as much from the ancients as from the contemporary thinkers. This duality between the active and the deliberate creates not tension so much as a sense of universality, of work that encompasses many potentials and approaches. Scharf is a painter who lives in the moment, but his paintings are the product of many moments mused upon and forged into a cogent, but decidedly not-homogenized, whole.

These contrasting elements find their parallels in two consistent, underpinning features throughout his work: wit and deep seriousness. The wit can be puckish, but I think of it more in terms of "a fancy," with its etymological links to fantasy. We are in the realm of the imagined, with its infinite possibilities of combination and recombination, a world where the sensible and the not quite so sensible rub shoulders frequently, giving off the spark of irony in their interplay. And yet this irony is not in the service of mere tomfoolery, but underscores the complicated and at times painful dichotomies that score human existence. The deeply saturated colors—light or dark—the overwhelming sense of incipient drama from the stage Scharf has set, the insistence of the vision he puts forth, let us know that his fantasy is about the all too real.

A final link between the Scharfs of all ages is the timeless symbols that speak, and speak again, through the scope of his work. These components appear in his work across decades, essentially

unchanged, carrying the communicative weight of centuries past along with a glimpse into the pre-verbal eons which they reference. Ladders, eggs, fish, crowns of thorns, arches, tablets, candles (see *The Arches Ladder*, 1992, pl. 21 and *By Jeweled Prayer*, 1997, pl. 23) all populate the work, and although they may have some specifically Christian resonances, Scharf uses them as a portal to a more elemental religious purpose: religion that attempts to explain life's great mysteries, religion that examines root causes, religion that speaks with the existential.

All of these features of the work, that have helped define it from its earliest moments, combine to create the stamp of a truly unique and distinctive vision. And this is what makes a Scharf painting unmistakably a Scharf. His paintings tell us candidly—every one of them—“you have never looked at it this way before.” But Scharf looks at it that way every time—only the “it” changes with each painting. And thus the unity of perspective and of aesthetic sensibility we find in Scharf's work, seasoned as it is by a dizzying repertoire of subject, object and emotional content.

Too few people know Scharf's work, despite first-class exhibitions at the Phillips Collection, the High Museum, the Neuberger Gallery at Purchase and elsewhere that have received abundant praise from the likes of Hilton Kramer, Brian O'Dougherty, Michael Kimmelman, etc. And because his work has not become familiar, critics, curators, gallerists and art-lovers all strive to conceptualize the work in terms of artists they know better. A fruitless task with most art, it is a particularly unlikely aid with work as individual as Scharf's. Ironically that individuality is perhaps why so many turn to such explanations, seeking a point of entry.

A function of his age and also his boldly colorful “all-over” style of painting, Scharf has often been bundled with the Abstract Expressionists. He knew most of them, was friendly with several and was particularly close to my father, Mark Rothko (indeed, he and his wife were perhaps my parents' closest friends in the 1950s and 60s). And yet, it can hardly be said he paints like any of them. His work is abstracted, not abstract, and his color has an immediacy and intensity not found in any of their work.

Perhaps the closest compatriot would be Clyfford Still, whose jagged emotionality, expressed on the canvas through elemental and eruptive forces, can find its parallel in Scharf's work (fig. 2). They share a connection to the primal, to the unconscious brought visibly to the surface. But Scharf's work is far more finished than Still's, far more composed. It does not cultivate the expressionistic sensibility of painting that happened partly by chance; the product of unrestrained gesture in the moment. Instead Scharf brings a highly refined craft to express the most raw of materials. His is a more thorough thinking through of instincts that seldom reach the level of thought.

Despite having come of age when Abstract Expressionism was ascendant, Scharf is much more of a surrealist at heart. This is certainly true in terms of his pictorial language, his use of poetic titles and in the symbolic means he uses to communicate with his viewer. Like many of his surrealist colleagues, he would have us engage with the real by means of the not quite real, or the precursors of the real. Giorgio de Chirico is perhaps the most directly kindred spirit. Here we find a similar architectural engagement, manifestly so in de Chirico's building-populated paintings, where with Scharf we find an architectural sensibility in the way he organizes his compositions. As we can see in many of the works in the exhibition, Scharf employs a notable array of pictorial building blocks that he arranges with a clear sense of



structural purpose to bring balance and define the space of his work (see *The White Elephant Lies Down*, 2007, pl. 34). The two artists are similarly frank in their use of symbolism, where haunting, recurring images direct the viewer to deeper meaning in the work. Most centrally, de Chirico, like Scharf, creates a stage or scene in much of his work, using it as a dramatic window on the possible like de Chirico's *The Anxiety of Waiting* (fig. 3) and Scharf's *Eclipse Finds the Golden Ladder*, 2008 (pl. 35). If Scharf populates his paintings more actively, there remains a shared sense of expectation, of cogs in place but not yet fully engaged, of symbolic functions suggested but not yet realized.

In his use of symbolic material, Scharf is reminiscent of Odilon Redon, another artist just slightly out of sync with this time. Here too is a painter, much admired by Scharf, whose work speaks through symbolic means but which also contains a mystical sensibility, not merely an espousal of the unconscious. The images of a Redon painting, much like a Scharf, have the feel of things remembered, essential things from long before our lifetimes yet very much a part of them (fig 4). They are not just universal, they are distinctly personal as well.

Max Ernst is the other major surrealist who comes most readily to mind in relation to Scharf, although primarily for color. Scharf does not typically share Ernst's love of grotesqueries, and as shall be discussed, the nightmarish, otherworldly quality is not part of Scharf's aesthetic (although our dark innards are very much in play). This difference in aesthetic is ultimately reflected in the two artists' use

FIG 2
Clifford Still, 1948-C, 1948.
Collection of the Hirshhorn
Museum and Sculpture
Garden, Washington, D.C.
© 2016 City & County of
Denver, Courtesy Clyfford
Still Museum / Artists Rights
Society (ARS), New York.
Photography by Cathy
Carver

FIG 3
Giorgio de Chirico, *The
Anxiety of Waiting*, 1914.
Collection of Fondazione
Magnani Rocca, Corte di
Mamiano, Italy. © 2016
Artists Rights Society (ARS),
New York / SIAE, Rome



FIG 4
Odilon Redon, *The Window (Allegory)*, c. 1907. Collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York

of color as well. For if the surface reveals a similarity in the intensity and vividness of color, where those colors come from remains quite different. With Ernst we are viewing in technicolor, the palette used to reinforce the shock of the image. He intends to disturb, inflating and distending what he unearths. Scharf's palette, however, is what we would see if (or is it when?) we dream in color. It is strangely familiar, what we notice fleetingly out of the corner of an eye; something that belongs to us even if we do not fully recognize it. And Scharf leaves little doubt that color radiates through his own dreams—sleeping and waking.

Thus, despite their unique imagery, we should not assume that the world of Scharf's paintings lies outside of our experience. It is more that his paintings show us what those experiences would actually be like if we admitted their full intensity. Nothing in the work is hyped or enhanced. Scharf does not paint augmented reality; there is nothing supernatural, nothing that even qualifies as fiction. Instead, Scharf's painting presents our reality in its essences. It is our job to recognize it.

Such talk would appear out of place in the context of painting that so openly speaks in metaphors and symbols both in paint and ink. The world of "like" and "as" is by definition one step removed (at

minimum) from experience. But Scharf's symbols are not suggestions of something else they might resemble. They are archetypes that stir ready, basal associations in our conscious minds, while resonating forcefully with our unconscious ones. Scharf's symbols speak the mind's language of the real—a reality that engages us far more actively than the mere physical world. That reality necessarily includes its precursors and its sequelae, readily admitting that the now is made up of many befores and infinite pending afters.

But perhaps I have made William Scharf's work appear too comfortable, too familiar: easy on the palate and readily digestible. If so, I have done both artist and viewer a great disservice. Even if there are elements we will recognize, even as we appreciate the frequent beauty of Scharf's realization, there is no avoiding the insistently disruptive quality of this work. My ready list of adjectives runs to: searing, convulsive, fecund, combustible, eruptive. These are words full of (often violent) unpredictable motion and deep potentialities. Unstable states prone to transfiguring change. Scharf works all contain the potential for that change. It is part of the work, indeed the current state found on canvas or panel is essentially incomplete, only a way station in a process that is necessary and inevitable. And the beauty of Scharf's work is that it so evocatively communicates the many things it has not yet but may become.

These inherently physical qualities would seem to run counter to my previous discussion of the work's residency in the emotional and ideational realm. And yet, for all their kinetic, even tectonic qualities, these adjectives speak more to profound internal forces. Convulsing and erupting happen from within, and similarly, the white heat emanating from many of the canvases is strictly the product of internal combustion. And make no mistake, that heat, the convulsing, the erupting, stem from deep and potent sexual impulses that are raw material for the self-generating energy of the paintings. Abounding with both masculine and feminine sensuality, and filled with symbols of both (see *The Hero's Step*, 1962, pl. 4, amongst many), the works simmer in their own pheromonal broth, pushing to combine and recombine before our eyes. When walking through his exhibition at the Phillips Collection, I once commented to Bill that we had best not turn out the lights in the gallery or we would return to find many more little paintings in the morning. I was joking but only just, such was (and is) the sexual energy issuing from the canvases.

Again, we are veering in this discussion of Scharf's work to the decidedly physical realm. Yet we should note the ways in which the paintings make that connection. First, Scharf's imagery speaks to our instincts—sexual and otherwise—easily skirting cognition to address our most elemental functions. Second, all the motion I have outlined above reflects an appeal to our sense of touch, the most primitive of the senses, the one we first have access to as an infant and the one we ultimately fall back upon when trying to determine the verity of the things we scrutinize. Thus through these physical gambits, Scharf is finding a direct route to our internal lives, that proto-conscious area of self that feeds all "higher" function. These paintings remind us how those inner selves conduct, shape and undermine our conscious lives far more than we know. By addressing the pre-conscious, Scharf is directing the conversation before it evens starts. This, incidentally, is a classic surrealist mechanism. Scharf however, in part because of his greater level of abstraction, in part because of the sheer vibrancy of his tones, veers us more emphatically than other surrealists to these depths. There are many levels on which to appreciate a Scharf painting, but they are all informed by this most elemental one.

To this point, we have primarily considered Scharf's eye, but one cannot look at his work without being moved, and indeed, filled with wonder, by the work of his hand. The artfulness of his line, the fluidity of gesture, the painterliness of the many ways in which he applies pigment. To view a Scharf painting is to know instantaneously that one is in the presence of a master, and of artwork shaped by singular kinetic intelligence.

One must start with the sheer candlepower of his color. There is a pronounced physicality to the way Scharf's color meets our eye; an absoluteness and solidity that cannot be shaken off. His color means what it says, resolute and unwavering. Some of this impact is the result of Scharf's embrace of acrylics, beginning in the 1970s. As so often, this transformation was the product of a happy accident, a change he made when teaching art in San Francisco. He was traveling between coasts, painting all the while, and soon found that his oils took too long to dry, typically still wet when it was time for him to return to New York. The change to acrylic was strictly pragmatic and intended as temporary. But once painting in acrylic, Scharf never turned back, finding in these paints not just a medium that conformed to his needs but one wholly in line with his aesthetic.

Much as we all find oil paint luscious and evocative, when we view images painted in oil, we are always viewing through a lens, a sleight haze. Oil provides what is, in truth, a somewhat romanticized perspective; lustrous but softened. Acrylic, by contrast, is decidedly direct. There is no hedging. Acrylic speaks in *actual* color. And as suggested previously, where a Scharf painting of the 1960s may glow, the work from later decades sears, unqualified in its address to the viewer. One need only look at the candle-like flames in his works (see *Green Bridge*, 1986, pl. 20) to feel how intensely their whiteness burns. Indeed Scharf's mastery of white is particularly striking, unchallenged by any artist I can think of since Whistler. And like Whistler, much of the impact of Scharf's use of white is created by the manner in which he handles the colors around it. His colors may be vibrant and vivid, but he does not lack for subtlety in the way he juxtaposes them and places them in the context of his composition.

For all of its bold incandescence, for all its sultry seductiveness, however, the role of color, to my mind, is ultimately secondary in Scharf's work. It may highlight the shapes, it may assist in realizing the drama, but that drama comes first and last from the dynamism of line, which abounds in Scharf's work and serves as its defining force. I will go one step further to suggest that every single Scharf composition, from the simplest pencil sketch to the largest and most complex acrylic canvases, is a drawing. Once suggested, this phenomenon is readily evident and manifest in the work, but I came to this understanding by observing Scharf's work in another context. Having spent many, many hours with Bill in a variety of settings over four-plus decades, I realized that I had actually seldom spent time with Bill—I had only spent time with Bill drawing. To have a meal with Bill is to watch him go through a half dozen paper napkins, sketching, doodling, shading, using his hand to essentially think aloud. Bill is always drawing. *Always*. And it took me only a little while to understand that this extends to his studio as well. Even when Scharf is painting, he is drawing.

One can feel the sweep of the hand in every brushstroke, making line even as it deposits pigment. The large, open shapes that occupy many of the canvases, drawn and then colored in, their dominance

enhanced by color but determined by the lines that give them form. And when I speak of the predominance of line, I am not referring to the detailed sketches that Scharf often produces in anticipation of a painted work, or the underdrawing that is frequently a part of his compositional process. These elements of Scharf's method certainly lend to the feeling of a drawn composition, but the dynamism, the unrestricted flow evident throughout, is the product of a hand that moves as if it held a pencil—no matter what the medium—and an eye naturally oriented to the fluidity of line.

This preeminence of line is part of what makes Scharf's many small paintings so compelling. The strength of motion contained on a panel often no more than 9 x 4 inches is uncanny, setting forth a dynamic interaction between the sumptuously painted elements. The resulting vitality threatens to rupture the bounds of these diminutive works, the power of a twelve-foot canvas somehow shoehorned into a delectable locket of a painting arranged as *tyriptych* (see *The Heaven Hole, Whale Gold, Bow Gold Wing Black*, 2005, 2004–5, 2006, pl. 32).

Scharf's technique is formidable, a rare combination of precision and gesture. The drawings reveal the unerring hand that produces perfect ovals and intricate shapes without the point ever leaving the paper (pls. 14, 16–18). In the paintings we find an uncannily even application of paint, only to be disrupted by beautifully orchestrated drips and splatters far too rhythmically integrated to have been born of chance. And yet most of the time, we hardly notice. Scharf is like the pianist whose playing is fabulously liberating; liberating not because we marvel at their technique but because their technique is so advanced that all questions of production or craft are put aside, and we are left to revel in the music itself. With Scharf's artwork, the how of the work is so superbly executed that we can simply wrestle with the what and the why.

We are blessed ultimately with work that reveals the beauties of eye and hand. William Scharf's artwork is the remarkable offspring of a marriage between unbounded physical gifts and the questing mind of a poet/philosopher. His mystical language takes us to questions of origins, to a place where words break down to more amorphous thought, and those thoughts to instincts. And Scharf's paintings show us how active those instincts still are—how vivid, how beautiful and yes, how threatening. These raw elements compete to nearly break his paintings apart, and it is only through cogency of his concept and its effective expression in paint that they are contained within the composition in dynamic interplay. Scharf's evocative titles hint at the internal ferment of his paintings, and serve to both reflect and loosely organize the dramatic action.

The artwork in this exhibition, the artwork from throughout Scharf's career, takes us deep into a seemingly preconscious sphere, a place of what came before and what might be again. I say seemingly, however, because Scharf's paintings are the embodiment of his uncanny ability to make that vivid world of the imaginary concrete. Each work effectively documents how relevant the inhabitants of his imagination are to each of us; how real, how familiar, how necessary. He places his keen intellect in the service of rare vision and that vivid imagination—shaping invention that stems from inner perception, not outward longing. Ultimately this is what makes his artwork so compelling, so commanding. Scharf does not imagine the imaginary. He imagines what is.





CATALOGUE

1

Of the Square and by the Night, 1956

Oil on canvas, 36 x 48 inches

Signed and dated verso



2

Top Sphinx, 1956

Oil on canvas, 43 x 59 inches

Signed lower left: "Wm. Scharf"

Titled and dated on verso



3

To A Dead Poet, 1956
Oil on canvas, 38 x 52 inches
Signed and dated verso



4

The Hero's Step, 1962
Oil on canvas, 9 x 12 inches
Signed lower right
Titled and dated on stretcher verso
Dated and signed on verso



5

Watched White, 1965
Gouache on paper, 11 x 13⁷/₈ inches
Inscribed, titled, and dated verso



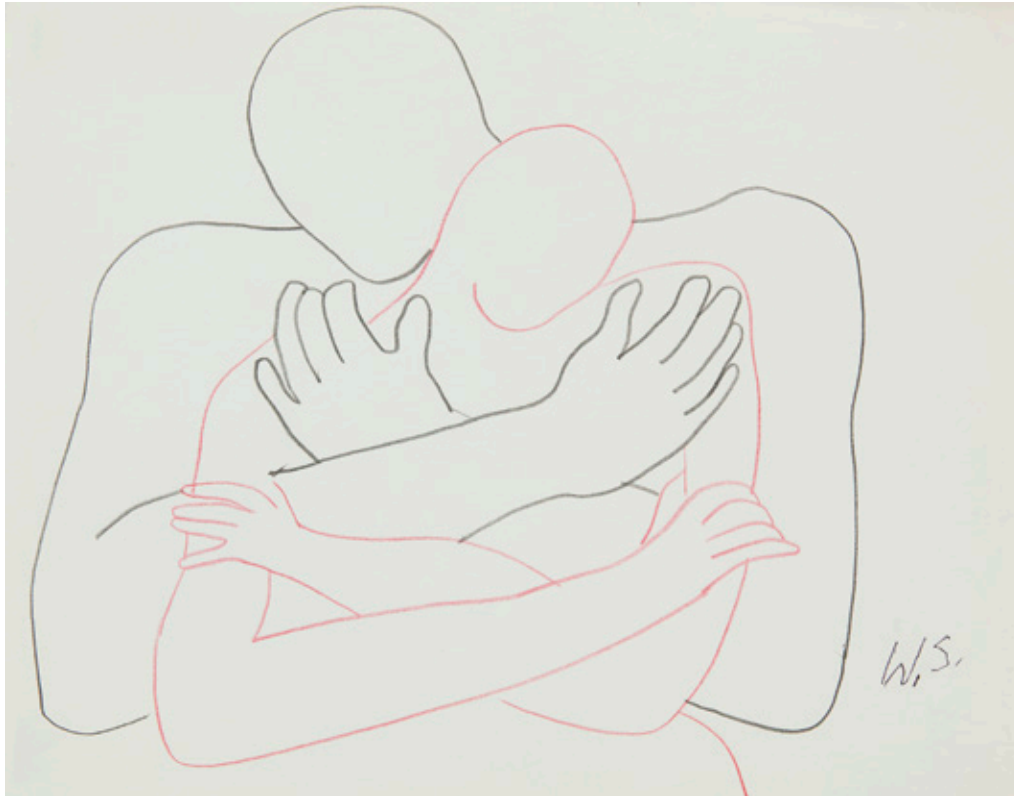
6

Mother Embracing Child, 1965

Color pencil on paper, 8½ x 10⅞ inches

Initialed lower right: "W.S."

Dated and inscribed on verso



7

Care, 1966

Ink wash and graphite on paper, 10 3/4 x 14 inches
Dated, inscribed, and titled on verso



8

The Hen Lady, 1969

Gouache on paper, 17½ x 12 5⁄8 inches

Dated, inscribed, titled, and signed verso





10

Madonna Sphynx, 1970-71

Acrylic on canvas, 10 x 13 inches

Signed and dated verso: "Wm. Scharf / 1971"

Titled and dated on stretcher verso



11

Untitled, circa 1970s

Acrylic on canvas, 12 x 15 3/8 inches

Inscribed on stretcher verso



12
Untitled, circa 1970s
Acrylic on Masonite, 8½ x 13 inches



13

Arched Annunciation, 1979
Colored marker on paper, 8½ x 7 inches
Initialed lower left: "WS"
Inscribed lower right: "ANNUNCIATION"
Dated, inscribed, signed, and titled on verso



14

Untitled, 1985
Color pencil on paper, 8½ x 11 inches
Signed lower left: "W Scharf"
Inscribed lower right: "7½ x 8⅝"
Numbered, inscribed, signed, and dated verso



15

At the Forgiving, 1980s

Acrylic on canvas, 69 x 139½ inches

Titled and dated on verso





16
Atlas Mariner, 1985
 Colored pencil on paper, 8½ x 11 inches
 Titled and dated lower right: "ATLAS
 MARINER' IN 12:26 AUG 14, 1985"
 Signed, numbered, dated, and inscribed verso



17
Untitled, 1985
 Colored pencil on paper, 8½ x 11 inches
 Signed, dated, numbered, and inscribed verso



18
Untitled, 1985
 Colored pencil on paper, 8½ x 11 inches
 Numbered, dated, and signed verso

19

Of Menaced Madness, 1986

Acrylic on canvas, 67½ x 75½ inches

Dated and signed verso

Collection of Ms. Patricia O'Gorman & Mr. Reese Schonfeld



20

Green Bridge, 1986

Acrylic on canvas, 38 x 32 inches

Titled, signed, and dated verso





The Giver Threatened, 1993
Acrylic on canvas, 68 x 77 inches
Titled, signed, and dated on stretcher verso
Collection of Mr. Christopher Rothko



23

By Jeweled Prayer, 1997

Acrylic on Bainbridge Board, 12 x 15 inches
Inscribed, dated, titled, and signed verso



24

The Magic Fragments, 1997

Acrylic on Bainbridge Board, 12 x 15 inches
Inscribed, titled, dated, and signed verso



25

Through Succeeding Light, 1997

Acrylic on paperboard, 11½ x 14½ inches

Inscribed, signed, titled, and dated verso



On the Ether Swing, On to Adjacency, Gull White (From left to right), 2000-1, 2000, 2001-2 (From left to right)
Acrylic on paper, 9 x 4 inches (each)
Dated, inscribed, and titled verso



27

A Pending Sorrow, Totem and the Ice Shoal, A Wife After Goya,
(From left to right), 2000, 2001, 2002-7 (From left to right)
Acrylic on paper, 9 x 4 inches (each)
Dated, inscribed, and titled verso

28

The Martyr's Ladder and The Harm Angel, 1998-2002
Acrylic on canvas, 69 x 47 inches
Signed verso







29

The Sigh Weapons, 2002-6

Acrylic on canvas, 56 x 32 inches

Signed, titled, and dated on stretcher verso



30

Sun Diamonds, Snow Eagle, At the Myth Mirrors (From

left to right), 2004, 2004, 2005-7 (From left to right)

Acrylic on paper, 9 x 4 inches (each)

Dated, inscribed, titled, and signed verso



31

By Equal Airst, Crawl Tree, The Unperil (From left to right),

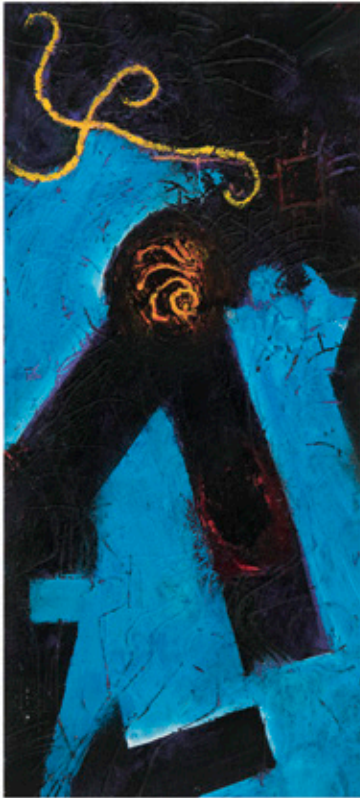
2003-8, 2002-8, 2005 (From left to right)

Acrylic on paper, 9 x 4 inches (each)

Dated, inscribed, titled, and signed verso



The Heaven Hole, Whale Gold, Bow Gold Wing Black (From left to right),
2005, 2004-5, 2006 (From left to right)
Acrylic on paper, 9 x 4 inches (each)
Dated, inscribed, titled, and signed verso



33

Young Shepherd Moves His Sheep Away From The Storm, 2007

Acrylic on paper, 9 x 12 inches

Inscribed, titled, signed, and dated verso



34

The White Elephant Lies Down, 2007

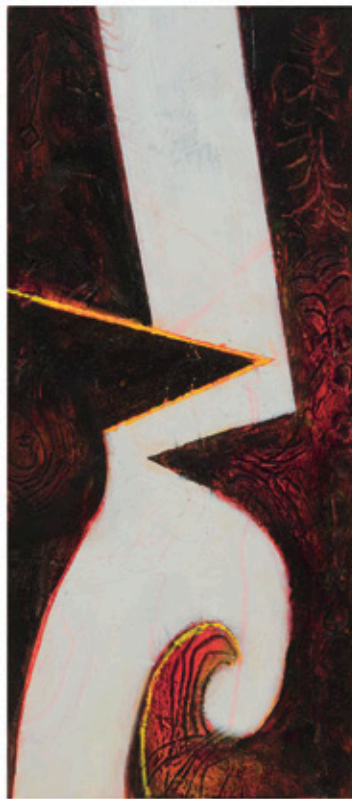
Acrylic on paper, 9 x 12 inches

Inscribed, titled, signed, and dated verso





Vernal Equinox, Shrine Climb, On the Path's Map (From left to right), 2005
Acrylic on paper, 9 x 4 inches (each)
Inscribed, dated, titled, and signed verso



37

Ivory Totems, 2007-2012

Acrylic on paper, 9 x 12 inches

Inscribed, titled, signed, and dated on verso



38

The East Winds Tells The West Winds The Truth, 2008
Acrylic on paper, 9 x 12 inches
Inscribed, titled, signed, and dated verso

39

The Golden Anchor Escapes, 2009-10
Acrylic on canvas, 36 x 34 inches
Titled and signed on stretcher verso





40

The Sun Shines On The Opening Volume, 2011-2012

Acrylic on paper, 9 x 12 inches

Inscribed, titled, signed, and dated verso

41

From Matisse's Balcony, 2011

Acrylic on canvas, 37 x 30 ½ inches

Dated, titled, and signed on stretcher verso





WILLIAM SCHARF

Chronology and Selected Exhibition History



Self Portrait, 1956
Watercolor and gouache
on paper, 9 x 6 inches
Collection of the artist

- 1927** Born in Media, Pennsylvania.
- 1937** Shows his drawings to N. C. Wyeth, who encourages Scharf by supplying him with art materials. The two remain in contact until Wyeth's death.
- 1944-49** Studies at The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts under Franklin Watkins, Daniel Garber and Walter Stuempfig.
- 1945** Enters US Army Air Corps.
- 1946** Returns to The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Exhibits for the first time in group shows at The Philadelphia Art Alliance and The Philadelphia Print Club.
- 1947-48** Group exhibition at Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, PA
- 1947** Studies at The Barnes Foundation under Abraham Chanin. Marries Diana Denny and eldest son, William Denny Scharf, born on December 27th.
- 1948** Receives scholarship that allows him to study at The Académie de la Grand Chaumière, Paris. Also travels to Italy, Belgium and England.
- 1949** Begins classes at the University of Pennsylvania.
- 1950** Reenters Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Begins spending evenings sketching in a Jazz club and becomes friends with Dizzy Gillespie. Solo exhibition at Dubin Gallery, Philadelphia.
- 1952** Scharf and Denny divorce. Settles in New York City in a studio above a New Orleans nightclub on West 52nd Street. Works as a guard at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- 1953** Moves to a studio on West 53rd street next to the Museum of Modern Art. Meets and becomes close with Mark Rothko. Spends time at the Cedar Street Bar.
- 1954-57** Begins to exhibit in New York City in small group shows at the John Meyers Gallery, Poindexter Gallery, Avante Garde Gallery and the Heller Gallery.
- 1956** Marries Sally Kravitch, also known as actress 'Sally Jessup'. Rothko is the best man at the wedding and his wife is the matron of honor.
- 1958** Group exhibitions include the Museum of Modern Art, New York's European Travelling Exhibitions; The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; The Houston Museum of Contemporary Art, Houston.
- 1960** First solo exhibition in New York City at the David Herbert Gallery.
- 1962** Second solo exhibition at David Herbert Gallery. Exhibits for the first time at the American Gallery in New York City.
- 1963** Begins to teach painting and drawing at the San Francisco Art Institute. Solo exhibition at Zabriskie Gallery, Provincetown, MA. Group exhibition at Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA.
- 1964** Helps Rothko with preliminary studies for the De Menil Chapel in Houston, Texas. Moves New York studio to Columbus Avenue. Teaches painting and drawing at The Museum of Modern Art's Art Center. Son, Aaron Anderson Scharf, born February 25th.
- 1965-69** Teaches painting and drawing at the School of Visual Arts, New York City.
- 1967** In Savannah, Georgia, begins using an abandoned cotton warehouse as a studio. Here, begins work on *Continuum*, a series of scroll paintings. Maintains a studio in San Francisco above Harrington's Bar on Front Street.
- 1969** Solo exhibition at San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco, CA.
- 1970** Studies icons in Leningrad, Kalinin, and Moscow. Group exhibition at San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco, CA.
- 1973** Group exhibition at Martha Jackson Gallery, New York, NY.
- 1974** Guest lectures at Stanford University and at the California College of Arts and Crafts, San Francisco. Group exhibition at San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco, CA.
- 1976** Appointed to the board of newly created Rothko Foundation. Solo exhibition at Neuberger Museum, Purchase, NY
- 1978** Acts as guest curator for *Mark Rothko, 1903-1970: A Retrospective*, at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. Solo exhibition at High Museum, Atlanta, GA.
- 1980** Travels to Greece and makes drawings. Group exhibition at Hirschl-Adler Gallery, New York, NY.
- 1982** Completes more drawings in London and St. Ives in Cornwall. Solo exhibition at Mississippi Museum of Art, Jackson, MS. Group exhibition at Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY.
- 1985** Moves New York City Studio to West 68th Street.
- 1988; 1991** Group exhibitions at National Museum of American Art (Smithsonian), Washington, DC.
- 1992** Group exhibition at Anita Shapolsky Gallery, New York, NY.
- 1993** Solo exhibitions at University of Michigan Museum of Art, Ann Arbor, MI; Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ.
- 1994-99** Paints part-time in Vinalhaven, Maine.
- 1995-96** Group exhibition at The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC.
- 1998** Group exhibition at Art Students League, New York, NY.
- 2000-01** Retrospective exhibition at The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.; Group exhibition *League Masters Now*, Arts Student League, New York, NY.
- 2001** Solo exhibition at The Frederick R. Weisman Museum of Art, Malibu, CA.
- 2002** Group exhibition at P.S.1/MoMA, Queens, NY.
- 2003** Group exhibition at National Academy of Design, New York, NY
- 2009-10** Solo exhibitions at Meredith Ward Fine Art, New York, NY
- 2014** Group exhibition at Freeman Art, New York, NY

This catalogue has been published on the occasion of the exhibition "William Scharf: Imagining the Actual," organized by Hollis Taggart Galleries, New York, and presented from October 13 to November 12, 2016.

ISBN: 978-0-9800745-0-5

Cover: *Eclipse Finds the Golden Ladder*, detail, 2008, p. 41

Page 3: *The Martyr's Ladder and The Harm Angel*, detail, 1998-2002, p. 35

Pages 12-13: *At the Forgiving*, detail, 1980s, p. 25

Publication copyright © 2016 Hollis Taggart Galleries
Essay "William Scharf: Imagining the Actual"
© Christopher Rothko

All rights reserved

Hollis Taggart Galleries
521 West 26th Street, 7th Floor, New York, NY 10001
Tel 212 628 4000 Fax 212 570 5786
www.hollistaggart.com

Reproduction of contents prohibited

Catalogue production: Ashley Park
Design: Russell Hassell, New York
Printing: Meridian Printing, Rhode Island
Photography: Josh Nefsky, New York

HOLLIS TAGGART GALLERIES

Chelsea 521 W 26th Street 7th Floor NY, NY 10001 Private Viewing 18 E 64th Street 3F NY, NY 10065 212 628 4000 hollistaggart.com



HOLLIS TAGGART GALLERIES