

PAUL THEK

INTERIOR / LANDSCAPE

The Watermill Center

July 31 - November 14, 2021

The Watermill Center is pleased to present PAUL THEK: INTERIOR / LANDSCAPE, an exhibition of never before seen works by the artist George Paul Thek (1933-1988).

PAUL THEK: INTERIOR / LANDSCAPE is The Watermill Center's first public exhibition after temporary closure during the COVID-19 pandemic. This exhibition reflects the deeply personal explorations and influences of an often misunderstood artist whose work challenged conventional practices of making, and confronts the body and alienation, the sacred in nature, ecological fragility, and the possibility of transcendence.

Occupying two galleries within The Watermill Center's main building, this exhibition features works and archival documents by the artist Paul Thek from the collections of Robert Wilson (Executor of the Estate of Paul Thek) and The Watermill Center, which has since 2006 maintained an adjacent permanent exhibition of the late artist's work.

This exhibition marks the 40th anniversary of the beginning of the AIDS crisis in New York; the syndrome which took Paul Thek's life in 1988.

PAUL THEK: INTERIOR / LANDSCAPE is organized by Owen Laub and Noah Khoshbin.



unicellular algae, by Robert F. Smith, Brookhaven National Laboratory, Upton, N. Y.
Adult Brain by Fernando G. Gonzalez, Jackson Memorial Hospital, Miami
Beauty-Eye, focusing on the cornea, by Alex A. Gravesen, Jackson Memorial Hospital, Memphis
pollen sacs in a plant's system, by Stanley Kisevych, Department of Agriculture, Ocala, Florida
Kidney Disease Kidney by Nicholas M. Graver, University of Florida
Eyes, lens anomaly of leucophthalmus variety, by Lorenia M. Graver, Armed Forces Institute of Pathology
Sperm-Cells, including both specimen and x-ray, by Nicholas M. Graver, University of Rochester
Sperm, flagellates within a cell, by Robert F. Smith, Brookhaven National Laboratory

WESTERN TELEGRAM
W. P. HARRISON
MANAGER OF THE PAPER
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Peter Hujar (1934–1987), Thek Studio Shoot Studio Wall with Clippings 2, 1967. Color slide. © 1987 The Peter Hujar Archive LLC; courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery, New York

PAUL THEK

Paul Thek (1933-1988) was a sculptor, painter, and multimedia artist.

Paul Thek's artistic practice ranged from the hermetic to the spectacular. Working collaboratively, Thek constructed expansive and surreal environmental installations, collectively reimagining museums as sites of transformation, and the life of exhibitions as cycles of birth, maturation, death, and renewal. In solitude, he cast elements of his body, figments of nature, or wax renderings of raw meat, and sealed them within plexiglass vaults which he called "technological reliquaries". He created exuberant abstractions on newspaper and canvas, as well as sensitively rendered landscapes; the sublime within nature.

During his lifetime, Paul Thek was a frequent collaborator to Robert Wilson, a close companion to the photographer Peter Hujar, and to author Susan Sontag who dedicated her seminal volume of essays "Against Interpretation" to him. He created installations for the Moderna Museet, Stockholm, The Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, and Documenta V, Kassel, curated by Harald Szeeman. Thek died of AIDS in 1988.

In 2010-2011, a posthumous retrospective, DIVER, was exhibited at The Whitney Museum, New York, The Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, and The Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. A selection of his work is on permanent display at The Watermill Center.

INTERIOR LANDSCAPES

This exhibition begins in 1963 in Rome. That year, Paul Thek made the sculpture *La Corazza di Michaelangelo* by encasing in painted wax a classical torso he had purchased at a souvenir shop. He also painted *Sicily*, an intense abstraction evoking an open wound, or maybe hellish terrain.

La Corazza immediately preceded Thek's most iconic series: "Technological Reliquaries" in which abstracted flesh, or casts of his own body, were hermetically sealed in glass vitrines. But he did not continue to paint in the manner of *Sicily*, except for the suggestions offered by a few landscape studies made a decade later on the island of Ponza, off the coast of Italy.

Among the many contradictions of his life, Thek was a devout Catholic, and at times described his practice of making not in terms of subjective authorship, but as being a vessel through which the divine might flow, if presented with the right circumstances. Visiting a Capuchin catacomb in Sicily with Peter Hujar, he described a feeling of exhilaration upon realizing that "bodies could be used to decorate a room, like flowers. We accept our thing-ness intellectually but the emotional acceptance of it can be a joy."

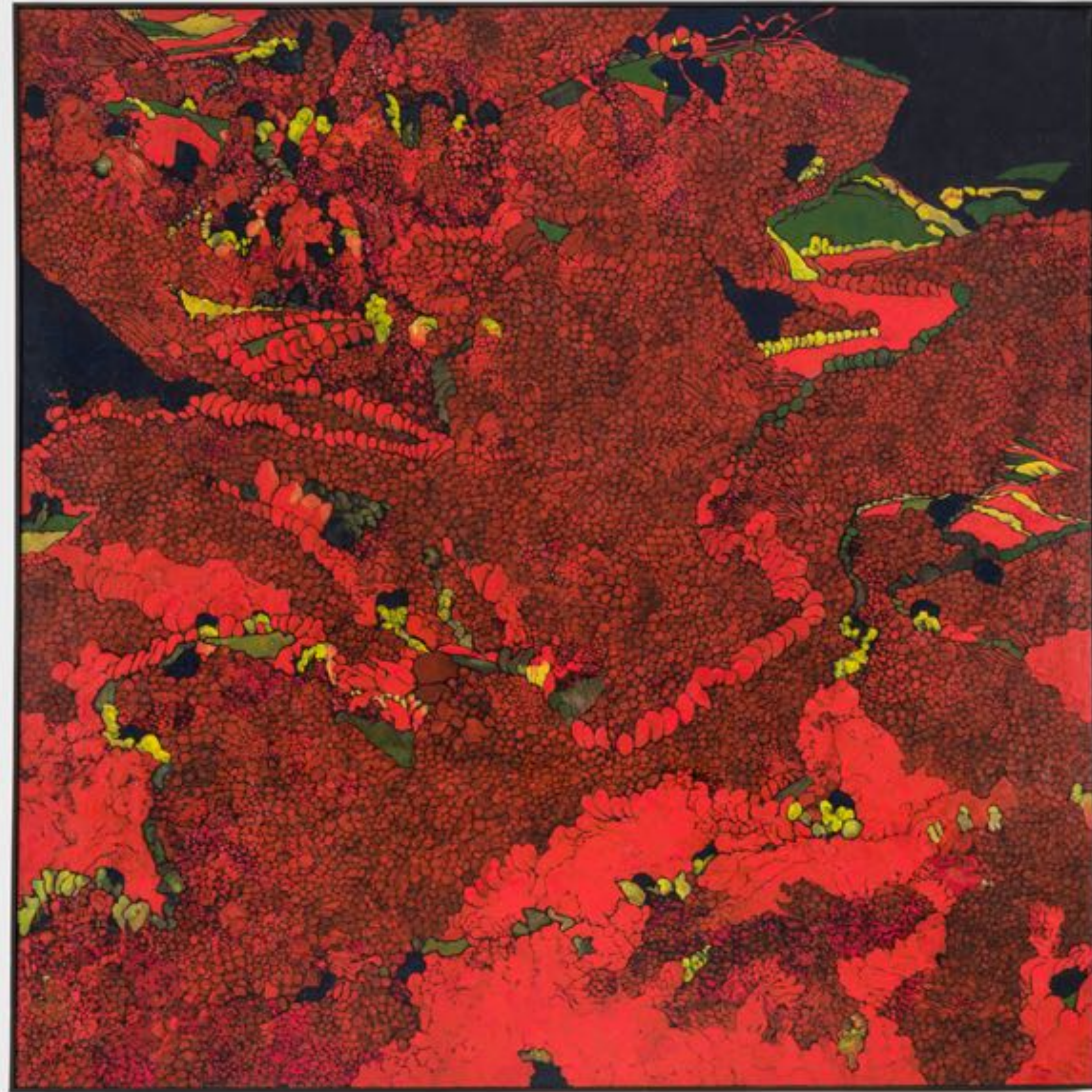
In his notebooks, Thek transcribed the *Confessions* of St. Augustine, among his own confessions, musings, and periodic expressions of hope and despair. On one page he writes:

Get over your self!
Get over your self!
Get over your self!
Get over your self!
Get over your self!



La Corazza di Michelangelo (1963, wax and pigment on plaster cast)

LIST OF WORKS



Sicily (1962-63, oil on linen) Private Collection



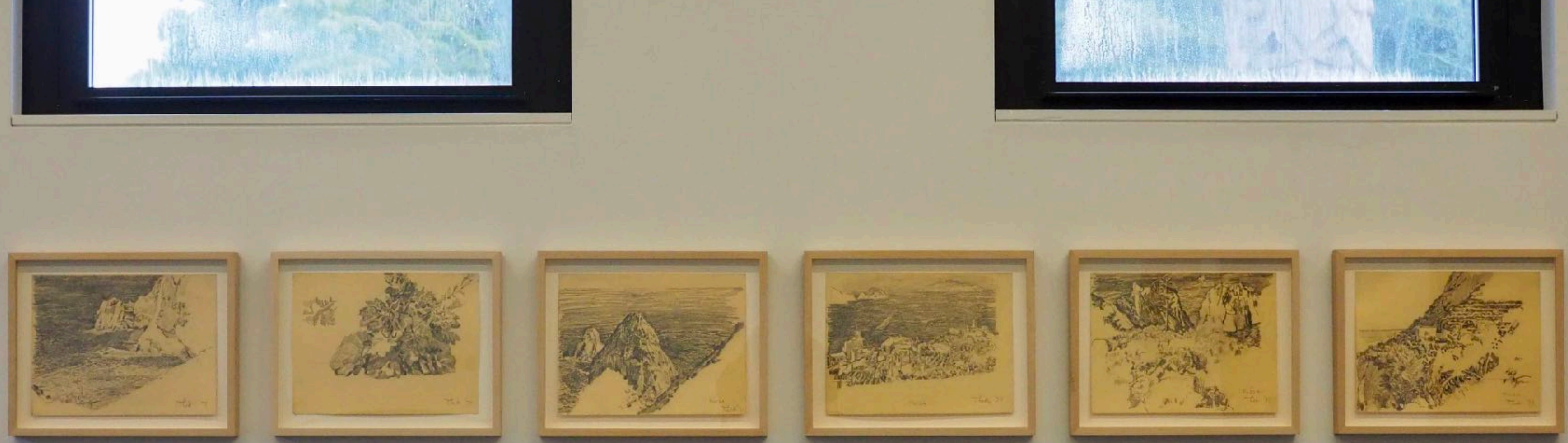
Fjaerlands (1962-63, oil on linen) Collection of Melissa Beck



Untitled (Meat cable, 1969, wax, pigment, metal cable)



The Personal Effects of the Pied Piper (1975, cast bronze)



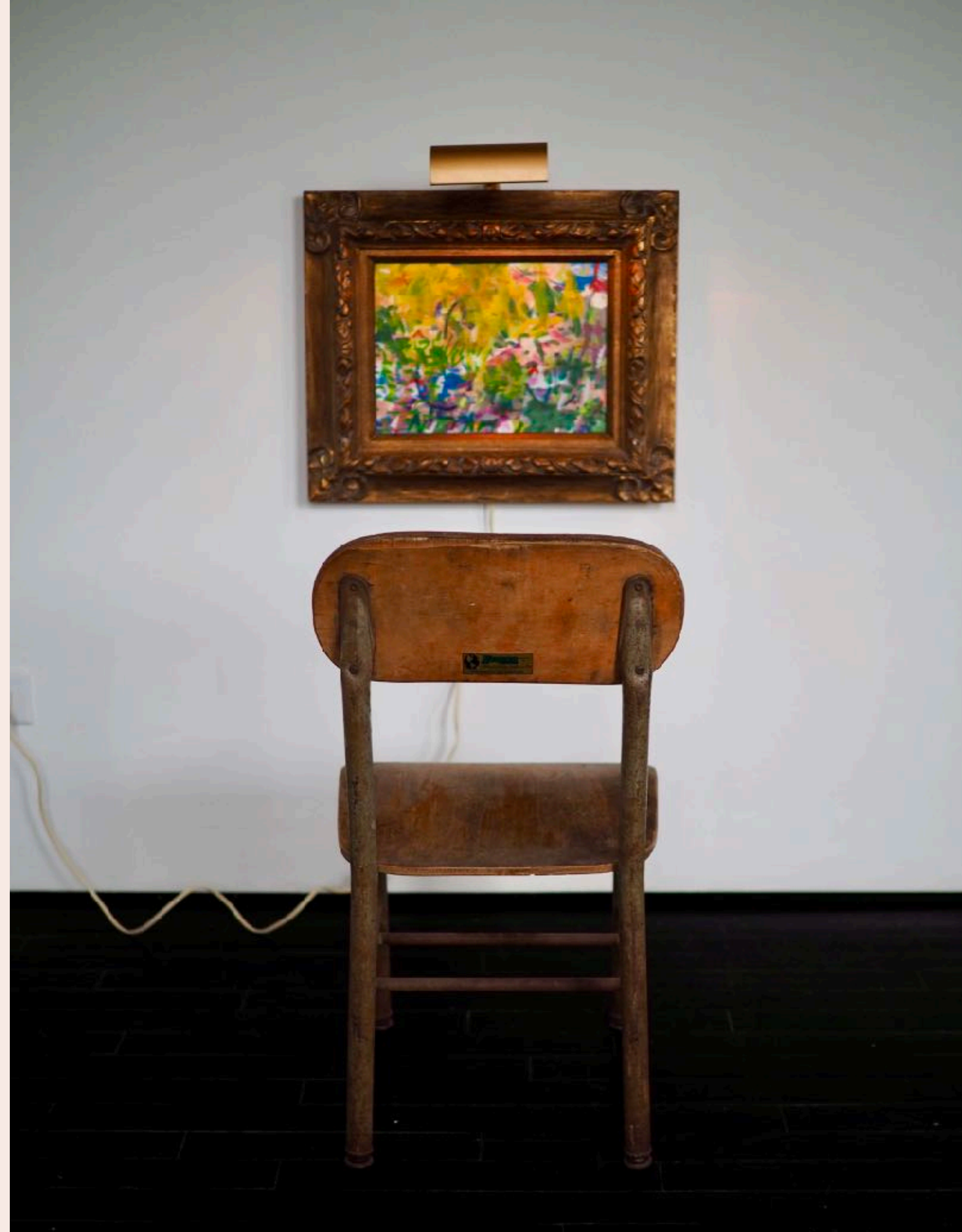
Untitled (Ponza drawings, 1976, graphite on paper)



Ferocious (1971, mixed media)



Planks of a Roman Vessel (1979-1980), Where it's at (1979-80, acrylic on canvas with artist's frame and picture light)



Untitled (Abstract Yellow Landscape 1979-80, acrylic on canvas with artist's frame and picture light)



Where it's at (1979-80, acrylic on canvas with artist's frame and picture light)



In Search of the Perfect Stimulant (1979-80, acrylic on canvas with picture light)



Twelve (1979-80, acrylic on canvas with picture light) Collection of Eleanor Heyman Propp



Untitled (75 from the series Technological Reliquaries, 1964, resin cast within glass vitrine)



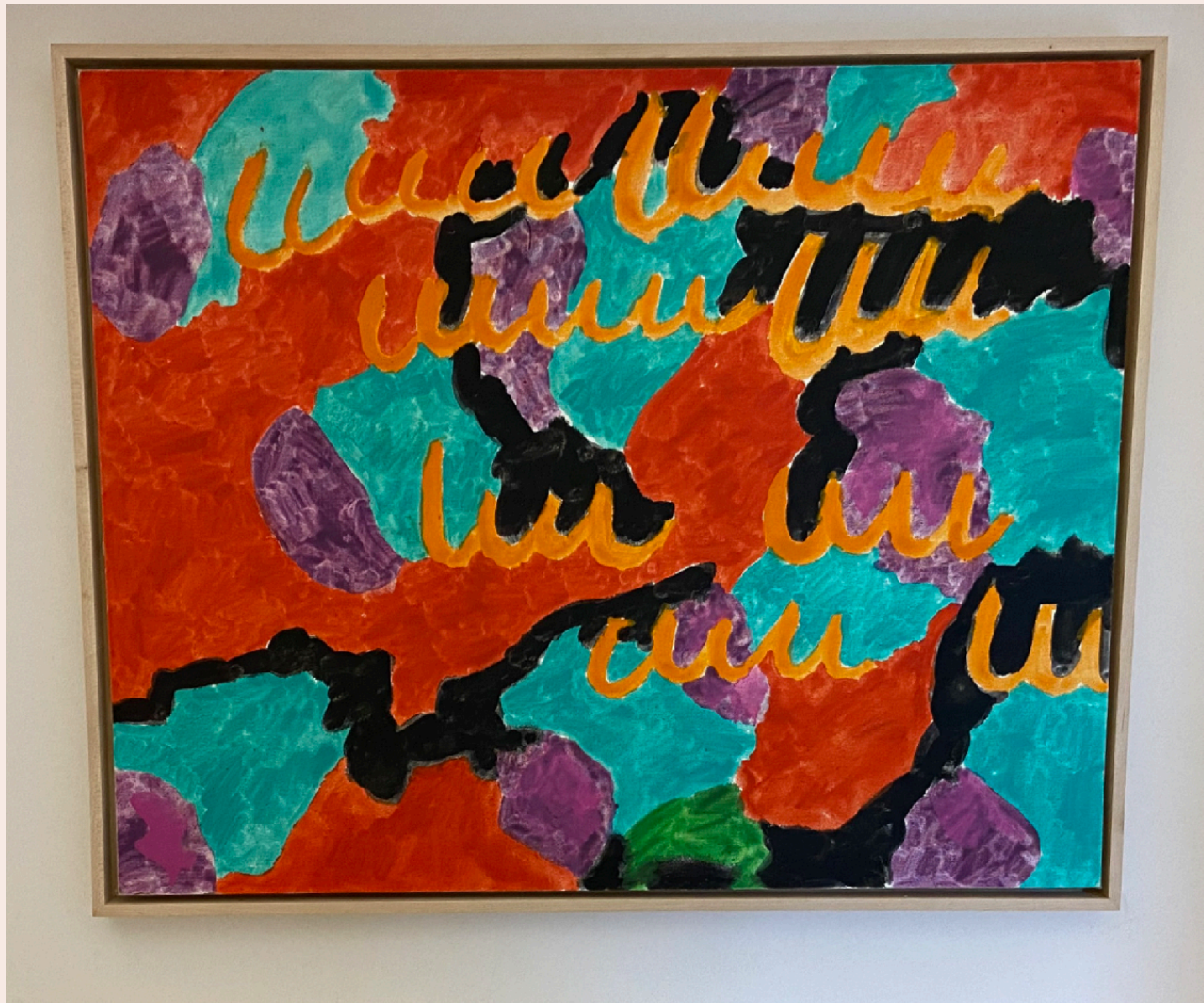
Untitled (Three yellow x's, 1984, acrylic on canvas)



Untitled (Stars, 1974, enamel on newspaper)



Untitled (fragment, date unknown, ink on vellum)



Untitled (Orange squiggles, 1984, acrylic on canvas)



Untitled (Dust, 1988, acrylic on canvas)



Untitled (Dinosaurs, acrylic on canvas, c. 1970s)



Untitled (Oval Landscape, 1970, watercolor on paper)



Untitled (Self portrait, tomato, hippo, 1970, graphite on paper)



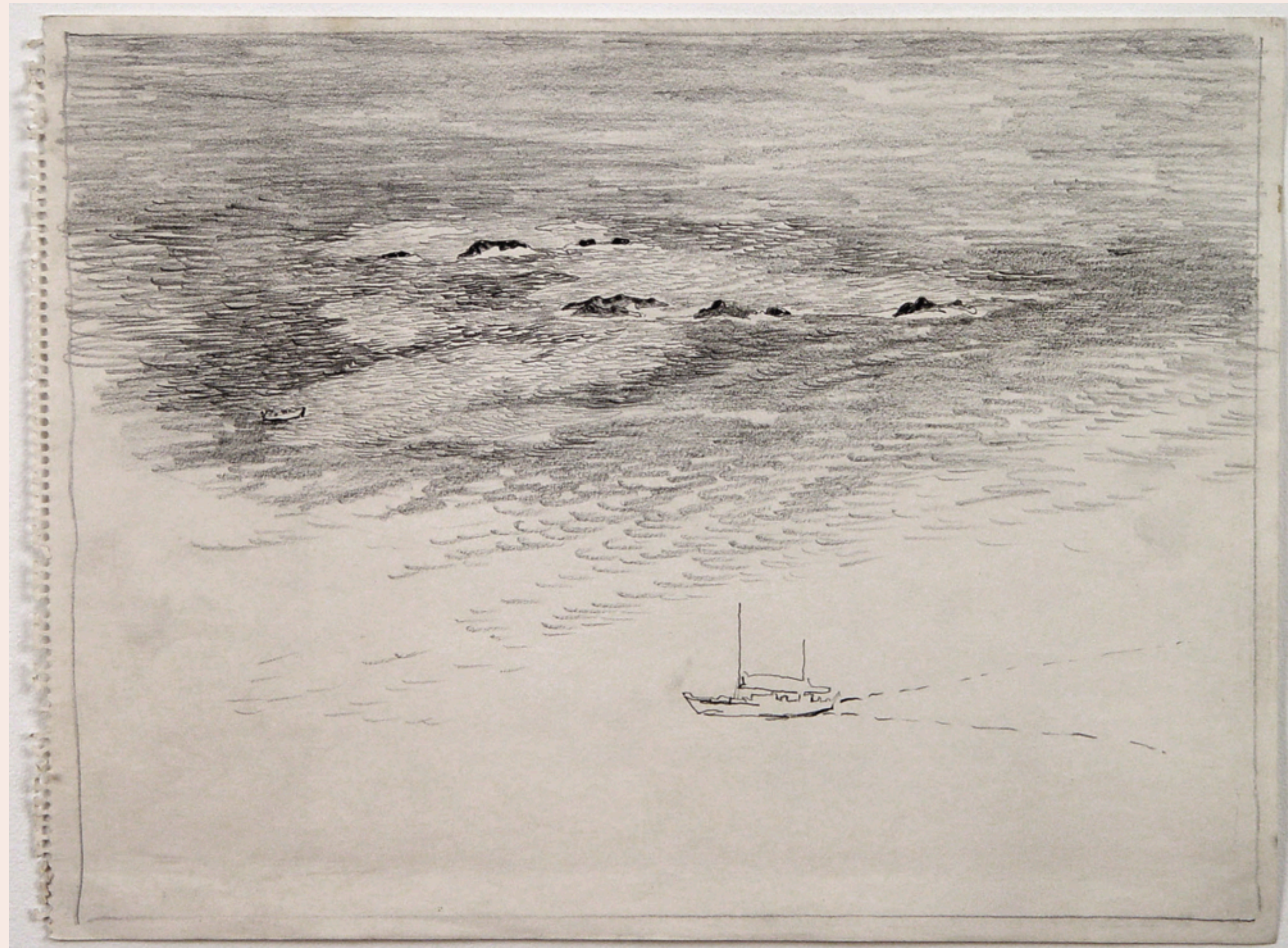
Untitled (Self portrait and shoe, 1970, graphite on paper)



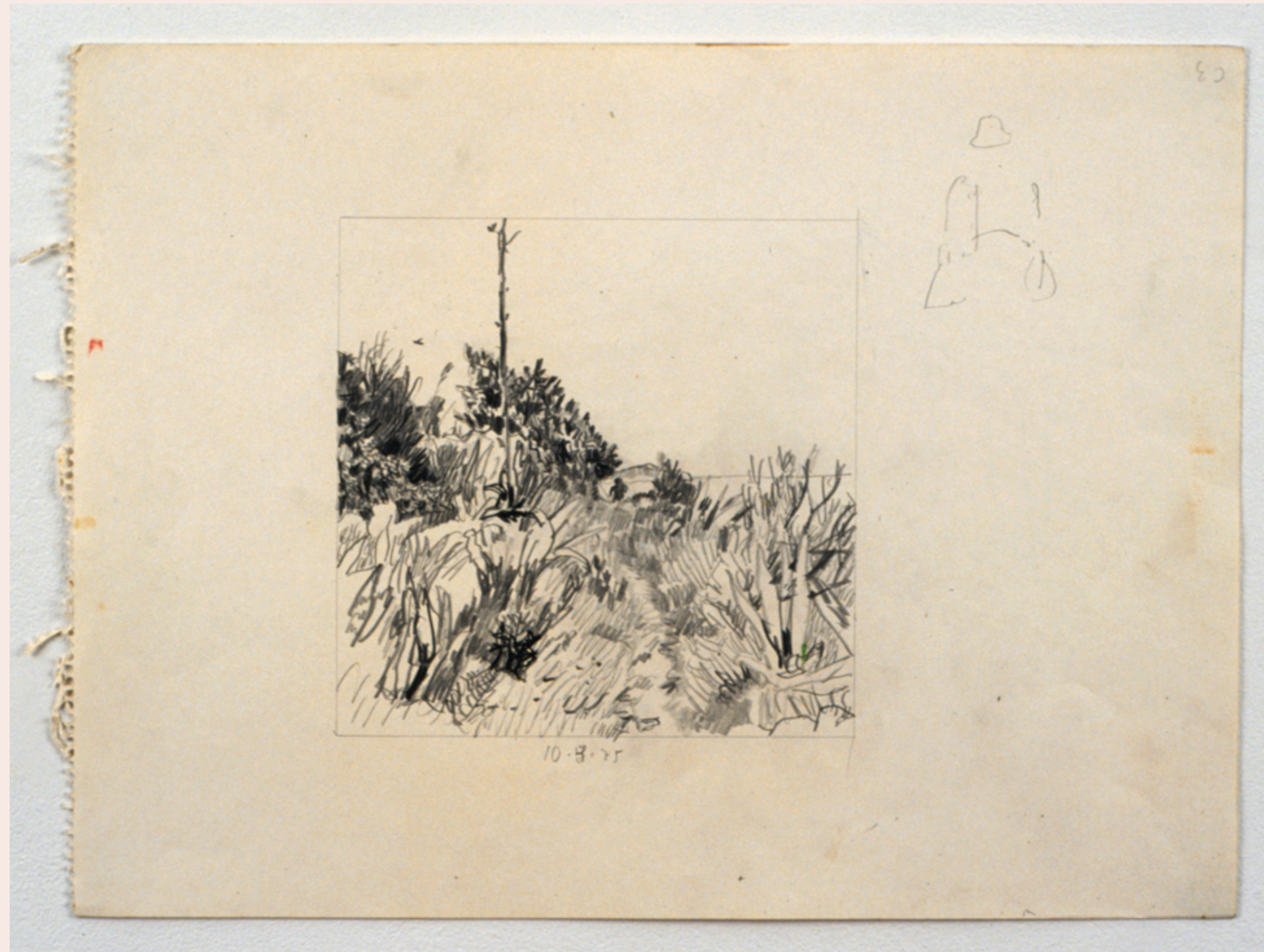
Untitled (Still life, 1970, graphite on paper)



Untitled (Window in studio, 1970, graphite on paper)



Untitled (Seascape, 1975, graphite on paper)



Untitled (Landscape, 1975, graphite on paper)



Untitled (Landscape, 1975, graphite on paper)



Untitled (Landscape, 1975, graphite on paper)



Selection of drawings by Paul Thek (c. 1950s, graphite and ink on sketchbook paper)

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THE WATERMILL

CENTER

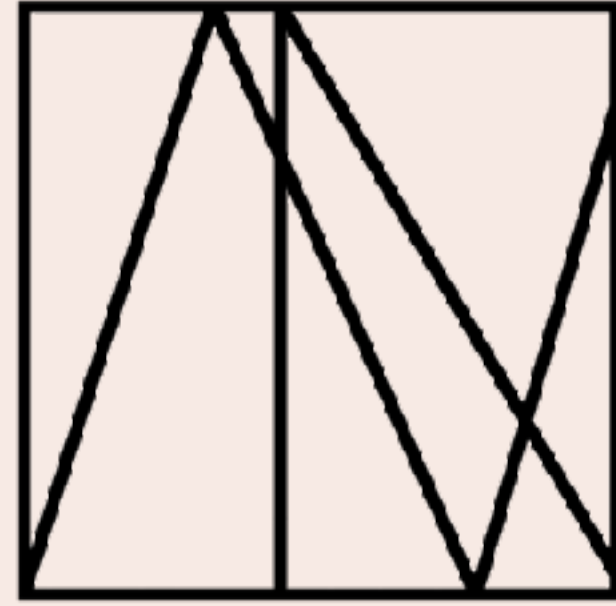
The Watermill Center was established in 1990 as a laboratory for performance. Since 2006, Watermill has operated public programs for artist residencies, education, research, and exhibitions.

In 2016, The Watermill Center initiated the Inga Maren Otto Fellowship, which has been awarded to artists including Carrie Mae Weems, Tania Bruguera, Anne Carson, Barthelemy Toguo, and others.

The Watermill Center is situated on 10 acres of ancestral Shinnecock land, currently owned and operated by the Byrd Hoffman Water Mill Foundation, a registered 501(c)3 in the state of New York.

www.watermillcenter.org





the watermill center

For more information please contact Owen Laub owen.laub@robertwilson.com

For viewing appointments please contact info@watermillcenter.org

Photographs by: Alexander & Bonin Gallery, Laurie Lambrecht & Eli Troen