

ELLEN WIENER - COMMENTARY

From the film; *Curating the Art of the Northeast* , 2013

David Ross is the Chairman of the School of Visual Arts MFA Program, He has held Directorships at; The Whitney Museum of Art, The Boston Institute of Contemporary Art, The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

On *Burning Stump* “ ... a Chinese ethos yet it remains completely American in a scroll vocabulary...beautifully made, ... a *hard* picture, it is very slow... You really have to look at it carefully, and enter slowly, ...it wants a certain kind of intimacy- wants you to get right into it- quite wonderful”

From the essay *The Still Small Hours* by James Mustich, Jr.

James Mustich, Jr. was co-founder, and, for twenty years, publisher of the book catalogue, *A Common Reader*. He is now Editor-in-Chief, Barnes and Noble Review.

“Like the prayer books they reference, muse upon, and celebrate, her paintings submit the confidences of personal experience to a ceremonial protocol that derives from the common day – the rule of light that ordered a monk’s attention from Matins through Lauds and back again, illuminating inwardness by opening within it broad perspectives of vision and reverie. Through the absorptive tissue of symbol, metaphor, imagery and natural forms she has created in her work, the artist invites us into still, small chapels of contemplation. There the Hours unfold solitude, and reflection gives a past and future to all the light the day delivers. These works are landscapes of the timeless day- the “one day, that first day”- that is ever and always the incarnation of attention.

The layers of visual information she creates – including meticulous botanical vignettes and night skies as well as references to instruments of inquiry and language systems which range from telescopes to Morse code- allow the sacred and the ordinary, the common and the rare, the unseen and the closely observed to exist in the same frame. With their compressed strata of memory, scrutiny, contemporary thought, and forgotten knowledge...she has concentrated her compact works with such careful calibration that they open over time, revealing themselves quietly to an audience of one, in fact, the paintings are best seen exhibited not on a wall but propped on a table, so one can sit and peer into the network of allusions they connect, as one might concentrate on- and enter into- a book. Indeed one must fight the compulsion to pick them up for closer reading.”

**Ann Landi, Contributing Editor
ARTnews 2008**

“Wiener’s paintings are small, approximating the size of a page and seldom more than 15 inches in their longest dimension. Her works are filled with lushly allusive imagery, and although the

many references are based on copious research, it's not necessary to find meanings in these dense pictorial cosmologies. Paintings like these can be enjoyed for the same reason we are drawn to illuminated manuscripts and Persian miniatures—for their richness of color, jewel-like precision, and assured draftsmanship.

In miniature drawings and journals, the romance of the book, in particular its portability and accessibility, continues to inform Wiener's practice of recording thoughts, observations, and details of the sights she encounters on her travels, such as a pilgrimage she made to Santiago de Compostela. Their complexity and informality call to mind the notebooks kept by earlier artists, such as—and most famously—Leonardo da Vinci. When completely extended, these books are like miniature screens or panoramas and offer a quite literal unfolding of the artist's thought processes.

These are not works that can be quickly grasped and then forgotten. The viewer is invited to marvel at the byways of imagination and the sense of wonder that accrues after prolonged looking."

Pat Rogers, Long Island Pulse, December 2008

"The Book of Hours marks time by the seasons, months, days of the week and hours of the day. Through the chapters, it helps readers notice time and connect with spirituality through ordinary tasks. Ms Wiener takes this a step further- the artwork is printed into palm sized books. Thick pages open so that the artwork can be 'read' and time passed comfortably during a solitary personal communing....other times the books are stretched to reveal their 12-15 foot span. Through her art, Ms Wiener celebrates reading and reflection."

Joyce Beckenstein
Art That's Fit to Print Suffolk Times Sept 18 2008

"Inspired by illuminated manuscripts, her art embraces the wonders of the universe as filtered through the sensibility of a mortal artist. Her unique pieces are compelling allegories about time and process....current works are conceived as books, accordion scrolls that unfold from handmade bindings to a length of 10 feet: small and intimate to hold, expansive and cosmic in their revelations." Ochre Scriptorium" embraces the history of writing and communication. Old typewriter cages, letters, clocks, calendar references lapidary, astral notations and cell phones unfurl through a dense montage of etching, lithography, transfers, embossments, hand drawing and more – all of it landing on a single surface. The original books take months to complete. She has also created them as signed, hand-bound editions of 30, some multiples done on her own press, others digitally transferred and hand colored.

Marion Wolberg Weiss, Dan's Papers, 7/16/2004

"Ms. Wiener's works are small, detailed and have a quality that can be described as delicate and often exquisite. ...the aged aspect of the gallery coincides with the art which derives from a very old source, The Book of Hours, ...Ms. Wiener's integration of the spiritual and the material works well; her nature motifs are particularly arresting when related to religious elements. Consider for example her dainty flowers and wispy winds. Yet contrast in her subject matter also exists: geometric configurations via ladders and lines. There's a sharp edged quality too, in the angular shapes of her "Ship, Shore, Length and Lighthouse" and in her work, "Scissors". These forms counterbalance the circles of her nature images, like pansies and moons. Yet often the artist combines these circles with manmade angular shapes: in "Scissors" the cutting object is about to cut up flowers. We can't help but wonder if some of Ms. Wiener's art is also autobiographical. This would account for the effective way that the style and content have been adapted to present time."

Gwendolen Grocock, 7 Years Filled with Hours, The Suffolk Times, 9/03/03

"An Album of Hours is mixed media- oils, watercolor, prints and etchings on wood and paper- making rich and mysterious layers of images inspired by the spiritual, literary and scientific worlds. The time frame sweeps from Druidic herbalism, to the worship of the Virgin Mary in the Middle Ages, to Victorian luminaries and their views of the natural world, to the edge of today, where mathematical fractals spin infinite shapes and, some say, show the fingerprints of God."

Helen Harrison, The New York Times, 8/11/91

"Internalized gardens are...the subject of Ellen Wiener's small intensely meditational paintings. Petals, leaves and other plantlike motifs drift in ambiguous spaces that seem at once expansive and hermetic- a dream world in which a butterfly's wing can fly disembodied and an eye, looking outward, also focuses within.

Using collage-like compositions, Ms Wiener plays off organic shapes against geometric ones. This deliberate fragmentation creates a mélange of incomplete impressions, obviating the emergence of a complete coherent picture. Far from being a drawback, that effect heightens the imagery's fascination for the viewer."

Victoria Donohoe, Philadelphia Inquirer, 12/5/91

" An aspect of abstract painting's adventurousness today is handsomely represented at Swarthmore College in a solo show by Ellen Wiener. Muffled, semi-precise organic forms are

played off with effortless elegance against fragmented geometric shapes in these small mixed media paintings. Put forth in a softspoken way, these pictures are a perfect antidote to the kind of inflated rhetoric that is a constant danger in today's art. Here are paintings in which organic and angular forms move through membranes of light and form weathered and worn surfaces and line. One can only admire the skill with which paint stains the panel surface apparently without the intervention of the human hand.

The unforgettably rich and luminous glow that comes from somewhere within these pictures could stand for the effect of Wiener's exhibition as a whole."

Walter Thompson, *Art in America*, 4/ 89

"Some paintings more than others challenge one's descriptive and critical language. In Ellen Wiener's case, a deceptively modest show of just ten small abstract paintings ran a surprising gamut of formal and technical virtuosity that left the viewer out of breath. These are works whose delicate surfaces require time and keen visual attention in order to be seen and enjoyed....there is a sense of intimacy and privacy in this group of paintings which comes from more than their small size...Perhaps the artist, who put so much of her sensibility on display, had to hold back a little something for herself."