

William Smith  
Artist's Statement

My approach to painting is multifaceted. Drawing on a variety of references and sources, I create richly layered images: paintings that connote a variety of feelings and aspirations. The consistent image in my work is the landscape, and I use it as both a reference point and a point of departure. My paintings are not of or about actual landscapes; the images are created in my studio from a study of specific references and the genre. In a sense, I would relate my current landscape paintings to stage sets or backdrops (though certainly not in terms of scale). This comparison suggests that the landscape image in the painting maintains a sense of composed artificiality that elicits a particular mood -- a quality more important to my work than evoking a particular place.

Most of my recent work involves a somewhat melancholy feeling of recall or nostalgia; a sense of the passing of time and its effects manifested in the painted surfaces of my canvasses -- marred and scratched, as if aged. Always key in my work is its sense of scale -- its intimacy with the viewer. The size of the paintings is small, and is closely related to the size of the body, in particular, the head. The highly detailed, layered surfaces of the paintings are meant to be carefully scrutinized, mulled over, and reflected upon.

In addition, another important aspect of these landscapes is their often uncertain or shifting perspective. With the diptychs, in particular, I create a pairing or mirroring of images, a study of contrasts, sometimes pushing the space of the image into an almost kaleidoscopic compression. Another important consideration in my work is the development of a series of tensions based on the pairing of opposites, expressing a duality of purpose and intention. Reflected within the work in a number of ways are the tensions in both the natural landscape and within the discipline and the act of painting itself.

In the paintings I am currently completing for the Samuel S. Fleisher Art Memorial Challenge Exhibition, I intend to pull together many of the issues which I have been exploring in a series of individual paintings and works on paper over the past year. My goal is to create an installation that has the added dimension of being site-specific. I have planned the installation with the particular spatial configuration of the "tower gallery" in mind. The term "site-specific" is confined to my consideration of this particular gallery space in deciding, to some degree, the scale of my paintings and the image that will be represented on them. It does not refer in a more general way to the Fleisher Art Memorial, its location, or its mission. To qualify this further, an important aspect of my work is the small size of the paintings. The paintings for the Fleisher will have both the intimacy of scale I am accustomed to working with, and, as an added dimension, a noticeable relationship to the space of this particular gallery. They will engage the space, and hence, read on a larger scale or as a unit: one continuous image or work. I intend to achieve this effect by creating a unity of both scale and image. All of the eight paintings will be 10 inches high and will vary only in their widths, with the sizes bearing a relationship, on the one hand, to the room's configuration (with its two different-sized and unevenly placed doors, and its large passageway), and, on the other hand, to the level and size of the viewer's head. I plan to

highlight this connection with the use of three square canvasses (a common and important shape in my work), which will both add to and break the rhythm of the longer, more horizontal works.

Another way to describe this vision is to see the paintings as an interrupted, or punctuated, stripe around the gallery walls, with a particular rhythm that highlights both the space of the gallery as well as each of the separate works. The installation will be further unified by a consistency among the painted images, which will be readable both as individual works and as one work: as a panoramic landscape, with the eye connecting one image to the next as it travels around the space of the room. In connection with this plan, I will build on certain dichotomies and tensions already established in my work -- between the representational and the abstract, between the ordered and the accidental mark, between the absence of a human presence in the image and the sense of implicit human touch in the painted surfaces.