William Clutz: Crossings
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FOREWORD

WILLIAM CLUTZ: CROSSINGS

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A partnership between the Washington County Museum of Fine Arts, Gettysburg College, and Mercersburg Academy, this retrospective exhibition celebrates the life and prolific career of artist William Clutz (b. 1933, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania). The exhibition, which includes works drawn from the collections of all three institutions, traces Clutz’s artistic interests and stylistic development from his youth in Mercersburg, PA through his academic training at the University of Iowa, to his mature years as a professional artist in New York City.

As a child, Clutz often visited the Washington County Museum of Fine Arts with his aunt, who lived across City Park from the museum. He took art classes from Thomas Danaher at the museum, and, as a teenager, Clutz won the First Prize and Gold Medal in the 20th Annual Cumberland Valley Artists exhibition in 1952. Clutz also has fond memories of Gettysburg College, where his paternal grandfather Dr. Frank H. Clutz was a Professor of Engineering, and both the artist’s father and uncle, Dr. Paul Clutz ’28 and John J. Clutz ’24, were graduates. Additionally, Clutz’s maternal uncle Colonel Henry M. Hartman, Jr. ’38 and Hartman’s wife Audrey Keigh Harrison ’40 attended Gettysburg College. Col. Hartman established the Henry M. Hartman Jr. and Audrey Harrison Hartman Scholarship Fund as a memorial in honor of Audrey, the College’s first female chemistry major. Clutz’s interest in art was encouraged by his family, especially his mother, who received a degree in Fine Arts from Barnard College. The family moved from Gettysburg to Mercersburg when Clutz was an infant, and Clutz graduated from Mercersburg Academy in 1951. Now, after a fifty-year career as a painter of abstract figuration in New York, Clutz has made generous gifts of important paintings to the Washington County Museum of Fine Arts, Gettysburg College, and Mercersburg Academy. These institutions stimulated his artistic interest and helped pave the way for his future success. His recent gifts form the core of the exhibition.

The exhibition title Crossings alludes to Clutz’s street scene imagery of New York and reflects the energy and vitality of that city. The title also embodies his role as one of the artists who boldly crossed the lines of artistic orthodoxy. Clutz carefully balances the pure abstraction of mid-century
American painting with the reintroduction of figurative imagery. Because his works are at once abstract and representational, Clutz resists neat categorization into a cohesive art movement. Rather, his vibrant examination of line, color, and light reflects the artist’s sincere commitment to his singular style.

This collaborative endeavor has fulfilled the artist’s wish to create a repository of his work in his hometown region at three institutions that were vital to his development. Throughout the planning for the joint exhibitions, Bill Clutz has been ever responsive to exhibition needs; he provided in-person interviews, a visit to his storage facility, gifts of important archives relating to his paintings, frequent email and telephone correspondence, assistance with shipping arrangements, and artistic advice.

An undertaking such as this exhibition is only accomplished through the shared efforts of many individuals and institutions. The Washington County Museum of Fine Arts and Schmucker Art Gallery are very pleased to have the opportunity to present this important retrospective exhibition of William Clutz’s paintings and drawings. The three-way partnership between the museum, Gettysburg College, and Mercersburg Academy is meaningful, both for our relationships with the artist and for our institutional affinity.

Doug Smith, Mercersburg Academy’s archivist, has been helpful and cooperative in sharing both treasured paintings and archival documents. The museum’s curatorial team of Dr. Nancy Zinn, Consulting Curator, and Kay Palmateer, Collections and Exhibitions Manager, and at Gettysburg College, Carolyn Sautter, Director of Special Collections and College Archives, Molly Reynolds, Schmucker Art Gallery Preparator and Digital Scholarship Assistant, and Leslie Casteel, Academic Administrative Assistant for Schmucker Art Gallery, have provided guidance, insights, and logistical support for the successful development of the exhibition. Additional thanks are due to Andrew Bale for the photography of the works in the Gettysburg College collection, and to Ayumi Yasuda for her beautiful design of the catalog. The support of the Event Planning and Coordinating Committee at Gettysburg College, and the patronage of RBC Wealth Management, The Historical Association of Mercersburg, and the Lions Club of Mercersburg at the Museum of Fine Arts have helped underwrite costs of the exhibition.

This illustrated catalog is the lasting, tangible evidence of this important exhibition, a contribution that will resonate into the future as a tribute to and record of William Clutz’s impact on his native region.

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WILLIAM CLUTZ: CROSSINGS
Encouraged by Thomas Danaher, his teacher at the Washington County Museum of Fine Arts and a Works Progress Administration painter, William Clutz (b. 1933, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania), moved to New York in 1955. In contrast to the rural communities of Iowa and Pennsylvania where he had lived, Clutz examined dense spaces that were diverse with intersections of Old World immigrants and young artists, bohemians and businessmen. New York had just recently established itself as the center of the art world, and Clutz immersed himself in this New York scene that still was dominated by abstraction. By the mid to late 1960s, Abstract Expressionism and new figurative painting largely gave way to Minimalism and Pop Art, movements characterized, in Clutz’s words, by “edge and irony.” Clutz’s work resists designation in any of these dominant moments in art history, but he has been recognized by critics as “one of the most fascinating figurative abstractionists to arise in New York after World War II.”

Other artists with whom Clutz has been compared, such as Alex Katz, Richard Diebenkorn, and Grace Hartigan, also experimented with new modes of figuration and did not abandon the figure in the midst of abstraction. These artists, including Clutz, can be seen as emerging from the New York School of painting, meaning the loose association of artists in New York from the late 1940s through the early 1960s whose work engaged with the material flatness of the pictorial surface, included painterly drips or gestural brushstrokes, and employed vigorously expressive color. Ultimately, Clutz’s “all-over” surfaces reveal a commitment to abstraction; still, the figure remains an organizing principle and a central motif in his works. Crossings, the title of this exhibition, suggests the recurrent motif of walking depicted in so many of Clutz’s paintings. “To me,” explains Clutz, “crossing the street is the quintessential New York City experience.” With pared down, abstracted settings, Clutz focused exclusively on the continuous motility of cars, people and effects of light. Yet, Crossings also implies an insistent repudiation of place, a sense that Clutz did not neatly fall into art-historical categories through his career. Recalling an evening at the Cedar Tavern, the Greenwich Village bar where artists Willem de Kooning, Grace Hartigan, Mark Rothko, and writers John Ashbery as well as O’Hara, among many others congregated, Clutz felt like he didn’t belong to the abstractionist cliques and was considered a “nineteenth-century reactionary.” Instead of falling into the patterns and parties of his contemporaries, Clutz walked his own path. And so, his stylistic and thematic convergences with artists and movements invariably veered from this Cedar Tavern milieu.
Shortly after his arrival in New York, Clutz’s work was selected by prominent curators Dorothy Miller, William S. Lieberman, and curator-cum-poet Frank O’Hara, for inclusion in the Museum of Modern Art’s Recent Painting USA: The Figure in 1962, an exhibition notable for its time at the height of Abstract Expressionism. In his introduction to the exhibition catalogue museum director Alfred Barr, Jr. acknowledged, “These human figures were painted in a period (a glorious period in American art) when the painted surface often functioned in virtual and even dogmatic independence of any represented image. Some of these pictures suggest uncertainty as to whether a painting in the 1960s can or cannot, should or should not, live by paint alone. Others seem more confident. Ambiguous or decisive, more strength to them!” Clutz’s painting from this exhibition *Woman Pulling Down a Window* (1960, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden), exhibited in the company of significant contemporaries Larry Rivers, Elaine De Kooning, and Tom Wesselman, among others, assuredly places the figure at the core of the composition. For many of the artists included in the Recent Painting USA exhibition, especially for Clutz and Rivers, the presence of a recognizable subject matter paradoxically emphasized painterly abstraction. In other words, because Clutz’s figures are created with assertive, painterly gestures, such as the lush green of the window frame and the subtle modulations of color in the woman’s upturned face in *Woman Pulling Down a Window*, the artist establishes a sophisticated and fearless contrast between naturalism and abstraction. Clutz’s *Woman in Window* (1960), completed at the same time, exhibits similarities in color and composition. Clutz devotes equal attention to the presence of the bent-over figure as he does to the billowing curtain, a nuanced study of whites on white.

By not giving way completely to non-objectivity, but studying key art-historical antecedents, particularly those of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century European modernism, Clutz conveys a more complicated approach to American painting in the mid-twentieth century. Additionally, the motif of walking in his work relates to a phenomenological interest in the coalescence of bodies, movement, and vision. No other significant painter in the decades after 1950 took on this theme with such devotion. Finally, Clutz’s work offers an exemplary instance of a study of light. In contrast to the deep blue shadows of New York’s cavernous streets, Clutz’s Los Angeles series from later in his career reveals that city’s golden glow and Clutz’s return to a concerted awareness of Post-Impressionist motifs.

**On Doorways, Stoops, and Parks**

One of Clutz’s earliest works after his arrival in New York, *Woman in Doorway*, is ambitious in its scale and nuanced in its art-historical references. At 65 inches high, the painting depicts a standing woman almost life-size in her stature. She leans on a railing in a bright yellow dress tinged with green; Clutz boldly places her against a similarly warm, orange façade. Clutz subtly adds shadows under her chest and in the folds of her dress, as her intense stare and solid frame proclaims a bodily presence that contrasts with the ambiguous flatness of her surroundings. Clutz’s palette has been compared to that of the Nabis and the Fauves, turn of the twentieth-century periods characterized by their wild, expressive use of non-local color and abstracted figuration. Most noticeably, serves as an exemplary precedent for the clearness and brightness of Clutz’s light and the sanguine contours of the central figure. Specifically, Clutz’s single female figure hums harmoniously in tune with her vibrant backdrop; such bright, flat planes of color call to mind Matisse’s
unification of the figure within the composition and the sensations of fluidity and pulsating dynamism across the surface of his canvases.

Clutz’s evocation of Matisse in his use of expressive, arbitrary color is not the sole indicator of the artist’s deeper engagement with references to French modernism. Because of her statuesque presence, as well as the tilt of the head and the faraway look of Clutz’s Woman in Doorway, the painting recalls Édouard Manet’s striking single-figure compositions, such as Woman with a Parrot (1866) and The Street Singer (1862). Moreover, the deep shadow under her chin echoes Manet’s penchant for the black ribbon and indecipherable expression of his favorite model Victorine Meurent. In Woman in Doorway, the inky black arch of the woman’s hairline and warm tint of her brown hair, too, mirror the decorous coiffure of Manet’s model. Clutz in no way makes any sort of direct copy of Manet; rather, this composition reveals a profound understanding of modernist painting. The flat areas of background color and large scale at first appear to be in keeping with his Abstract Expressionist contemporaries. For instance, the distinct line between the architectural façade and blue sky, punctuated by a vivid, sprightly green stroke compares to the oscillating abstraction of Barnett Newman’s vertical lines, his so-called “zips.” In this assertion of an Abstract Expressionist vocabulary, the black polygon above the figure’s head that elongates and dramatizes her presence finds its equivalent in a horizontally orientated, geometric shadow in the lower right register of the composition. In his conflation of nineteenth- and twentieth-century movements, these areas of darkness also pay homage to the remarkably dark and austere backgrounds of Manet’s large, single-figure paintings.

Clutz’s engagement with the history of art at a time of rapidly changing aesthetic developments in New York—a moment emergent with the ironic Pop gestures, New-Dadaist provocations, and a seemingly pressing need to discard the past—indicates Clutz’s devotion to modernism in the midst of challenges to its theoretical and formal structures. His paintings appear at once experimental and resonant with the past, American and European, figurative and abstract, concerned equally with line and color. Clutz is neither retrogressive nor conservative compared to those of his generation. Ultimately, his work occupies a more complicated space, one that eludes neat categorization and that has placed him outside the conventional narrative of late twentieth-century painting. A more American lineage might include realists like Edward Hopper or a tighter connection with contemporaries Alex Katz or Larry Rivers, but both his subject and style adhere resolutely to a French tradition. Clutz received a thorough and impassioned introduction to art history from his mother who had a B.A. in Art History from Barnard College and a grandfather who taught art appreciation at Gettysburg College. At the University of Iowa, Clutz also enrolled in several excellent art history courses in completing his degree. Moreover, Clutz’s earliest encounter with Cézanne came as a child when Danaher loaned him Erle Loran’s Cézanne’s Composition: Analysis of his Form with Diagrams and Photographs of His Motifs, an intensely influential study of Cézanne’s compositions with explanatory diagrams of shifting perspectives and vectors of compositional force.

In making his affinities for nineteenth-century European art explicit, Clutz distanced himself from an Abstract Expressionist cohort. Nonetheless, Clutz’s early paintings reflected an earnest engagement with his own urban environs, specifically the cultural diversity of his Lower East Side neighborhood in the late 1950s. While living in a small apartment with a shared bathroom in a tenement house near Tompkins Square Park, Clutz painted his old Italian, Polish, and Lithuanian neighbors standing on their stoops, drying clothes on balconies, shopping at the local bakeries, and opening windows. Because his paintings reflect heightened impressions of an urban landscape,
an intricate understanding of painterly structures, and a sophisticated awareness of art-historical precedents, nineteenth-century French-ness, in a way, becomes his method for analyzing a twentieth-century New York-ness.

Clutz’s painting *Figures on a Stoop* (1963) exemplifies his concerted occupation with the subjects of French modernist painting, particularly with the act of seeing or being seen as a key aspect of urbanity. Four men stand on a stoop; each faces a different direction. The men jostle within the thick half-wall, as if they were standing in a box at the theater, looking out and down at a performance. The suggestion that they occupy a sort of balcony, a privileged spot for seeing, recalls this typically French Impressionist motif, seen, for example, in Manet’s *The Balcony* (1868-69) and Gustave Caillebotte’s *A Balcony* (1880). Clutz shares with these predecessors an interest in constructing multi-figure compositions whereby the figures focus intently on a scene beyond the frame. Clutz, however, unlike most artists who work primarily with the figure, did not use models in his studio and could not study these figures from a fixed, interior position. The final paintings are not bound to a rigid sense of optical realism, but were made from many various sketches and studies, often stitched together to capture the experience as a passerby on the street.

In *Figures on a Stoop*, the bodies occupy an ambiguous space, where sight is at once thematized and obscured. The figure in profile in yellow on the left, for example, emerges from the entry and faces the street, but an emphatically thick brown brushstroke across his face masks his vision. Clutz does not cleave to conventional or academic naturalism; this single brown stroke establishes a formal rhythm of line and color to create a different consideration of motion across the canvas. A lavender line marks the shadows of his nose and chin, then reappears above the warm yellow arch in his hair, and ultimately reveals an immediate painterly expression. With his shoddy, patched porkpie hat and bright blue workman’s jacket, the man in the center-right of the painting situates the scene in a particular neighborhood among working class men. The painting makes no overt commentary on politics or social class, but allows for abstract bodies simply to stand in more broadly for urban modernity. In 1962 Stuart Preston, an art critic for *The New York Times*, described, “Faceless, vaguely apprehensive, bowed but not broken, Mr. Clutz’s figures haunt cityscapes rather than dominate them.” These men indeed appear shadowy, seen out of Clutz’s peripheral vision as the artist walks quickly past the stoop. Here, given center stage, they still retain a spectral sensibility.

The Impressionists frequently took balconies and the windows as their subjects, as places to view the bustle of Parisian streets, lined with newly built apartment buildings, and wide boulevards designed by Baron Haussmann. The stoop in New York City, like the Parisian balcony, functions similarly as a liminal space between apartment and street; it is not just a place for comings-and-goings, but for seeing beyond the confines of a cramped tenement apartment. The space in Clutz’s *Figures on a Stoop* appears to be both outside and inside and underscores the conflation of interiority and exteriority felt in crowded city streets. The facade that intersects perpendicularly with the thick half-wall of the stoop clearly establishes a sense of three-dimensionality in the scene and also provides a subtle reference to Caillebotte’s plunging perspectives. Despite this play with spatial recession, Clutz maintains an assertive flatness across the composition. For instance, the vertically orientated rectilinear stripes behind the men provide a background plane as non-objective as Mark Rothko’s multiforms. The figures not only are embedded within an ambiguous space, but the imagined exchanges among them also are presented in terms of a strange disjointedness. Despite the closeness of their bodies, their interactions do not appear straightforward. As the central
man with the hat turns toward the back, the fellow behind him presses forward. This awkward *pas-de-deux*, a confused compression of activity, contrasts with the organized bands of grays, tans, and lavender. Set against the rigid geometry of the scene, Clutz conveys the transience of this encounter among the men. Through a lens of painterly abstraction, the scene conveys the effect of quickly passing by a setting that is decidedly urban and obliquely Parisian.

The fixed absorption of *Woman in Doorway* and the constricted gestures of *Figures on a Stoop* differ from the slightly more lissom movements of the bodies in many of Clutz’s other works. With these strolling figures, the rhythms of Clutz’s city may seem to have quickened, but the walkers still exhibit a similarly steadfast semblance of pensive interiority in these public spaces. In *Summer Park* (1960), one of the first in Clutz’s oeuvre to depict motion, a woman faces the viewer and walks forward from the center of the painting. Although her delicately crossed feet may not seem capable of withstanding the weight of her robust body, clothed with a clingy white skirt and a blue and pink pastel-hued blouse. Her extraordinarily long and thick left arm hangs heavily at her side as she steps toward the viewer. Clutz describes Tompkins Square Park as a stage set, where he could sit and sketch the people walking through the curving paths and along the central promenade that runs from Avenue A to Avenue B. As a central thoroughfare for pedestrians continuing on 9th St., not only was this main walkway frequently trafficked, but its uninterrupted length provided Clutz with an opportunity to examine and distort perspectival space.

The awkwardness of the figure’s proportions in *Summer Park*, particularly the fleshy oval shape that extends beyond the expected contours of her face, does not indicate a lack of anatomical awareness, but an interest in the plasticity of form and paint. In keeping with his acute understanding of art-historical precedents, Clutz’s careful dysmorphia of the woman’s body specifically refers to Paul Cézanne’s *Bather* (1885), a frontally oriented figure who also is characterized by asymmetrical anatomy, an elongated left arm, and a curious displacement of weight. Additionally, like Cézanne’s bather, Clutz’s walker strolls through an abstracted landscape, made visible as such through a clearly demarcated horizon line and the thick facture that defines the foliage, sky, and ground.

Considering the subject of urban leisure, the multi-figure composition, and the ambitious scale, it would not be too much of a stretch to regard *Summer Park* also as influenced by Georges Seurat’s *Sunday Afternoon on La Grande Jatte* (1884-86). Although Clutz’s painting does not duplicate the density of bodies in *La Grande Jatte*, he plays with the rigidity and peculiar relationships of one figure with the other, that characterize Seurat’s masterpiece. The diminishing sizes of the figures in both artists’ works denote a recession of space in spite of the relative flatness of each painting. Clutz’s painting, of course, declares its abstraction and seeming spontaneity more decisively than Seurat, but the figure in the immediate foreground on the right edge of the painting, a man in dark clothing and a hat who leans slightly toward his dog in the corner of the composition, could be seen as stepping out of the Seurat painting directly into Clutz’s scene. A similarly hatted man occupy the same position in Seurat’s painting, and Clutz’s abstracted animal intimates Seurat’s curious emphasis on pets, including a monkey on a leash and a leaping little lap dog. Clutz’s allusions are never direct appropriations; in other words, Clutz’s dog appears as a playful amalgam of Seurat’s pets with the vigorous black brushwork of Franz Kline.

Clutz’s pictorial relationship with Seurat, Manet and Cézanne is not accidental or arbitrary. In his first jobs in New York City, Clutz consumed a history of art while working part time at the New York Public Library, the Museum of Modern Art’s library, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. He

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*Summer Park*
1960
oil on canvas
71.5 x 60.75 in.
Gettysburg College
Gift of the artist in memory of his parents, Dr. and Mrs. Paul A. Clutz
pored over art books and read each issue of Art News and notably could see Manet’s Woman with a Parrot and Seurat’s final study for Sunday Afternoon on La Grande Jatte at the Metropolitan, as well as Cézanne’s Bather at the Museum of Modern Art, hanging prominently in the galleries. The subtle citations of his French forebears underscores Clutz’s commitment to the concept of pictorial unity and to a longer tradition of analogies between artists of different movements. In invoking Manet, he also refers obliquely to that artist’s interest in the Old Masters. Clutz does not simply look backward, but instead realizes that new painting does not require an abrupt resistance to a modernist trajectory.

Published just two years after Clutz’s arrival in New York, Frank O’Hara’s poem “On Looking at ‘La Grande Jatte,’ the Czar Wept Anew,” provides a means for understanding Clutz’s similarly abstract departure and interpretation of Seurat in his painting Summer Park. Known as a painterly poet, in addition to an art critic and Museum of Modern Art curator, O’Hara, like Clutz, focused on the intersection of the figurative with the abstract while maintaining a keen awareness of city life. Toward the end of the first stanza, O’Hara writes,

*Only a few feet away the grass is green, the rug he sees is grass; and people fetch each other in and out of shadows there, chuckling and symmetrical.*

O’Hara’s poem analogizes the end of summer with Seurat’s social landscape; the rug flattens and reduces a larger landscape into a material object, a rectangle defined by its spatial limits of the interior. In a following stanza, O’Hara describes,

*the steam rising from his Pullman kitchen fogs up all memories of Seurat, the lake, the summer; these are over for the moment.*

Reading Summer Park through O’Hara is like seeing Seurat through this steamy supper. Summer Park does not mimic the eerie formality of Seurat’s crowded island; it is his own contemporary impression. Clutz marks Tompkins Square Park at once with Parisian affinities and a resonant New York School tenor.

The Artist as Flâneur

Clutz borrows much from nineteenth-century French painting, but his savoir-faire as a walker, as a quiet observer in New York City, offers the strongest evocation of a modernist model in his oeuvre. Strolling through the city, French painters fervidly absorbed the goings on in cafes, across bridges and in parks. Like his Parisian predecessors, Clutz is a peripatetic artist. At a time when many New York painters turned their attention away from urban realism, Clutz’s paintings are remarkable for their depiction of the lived experience of walking. He is an embodied pedestrian, and walking was integral to Clutz’s experience in the city. Coming from the relative quiet of rural Pennsylvania, Clutz was perhaps more attuned to the sensations and the spectacle offered by the Manhattan streets. Clutz repeatedly depicts a deeply felt response to the subject of the city and to the everyday life around him. In walking home to his two-room apartment in the Lower East Side after evenings out in Greenwich Village, Clutz recalls that it felt safe and relatively small like a village, that the old Eastern European mothers and grandmothers in his neighborhood kept a careful eye on things. Although they may have been perceptive, these neighbors perhaps never knew that they too were being watched and then painted by this quiet, industrious artist. After Clutz moved to an apartment on the Upper West Side in 1960, his paintings began to reflect the differences in the rhythms of traffic, architecture, and effects of light seen uptown.

Since Clutz’s subjects are the people crossing the street, strolling in the park and
standing on stoops, the artist can be identified as a twentieth-century flâneur, an observer who used what he carefully absorbed as a creative stimulus. Charles Baudelaire notably defined the flâneur in “The Painter of Modern Life,” as one who desires “to see the world, to be at the center of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world.” Clutz, similarly, was simultaneously an insider and outsider, and as with other paintings that refer to the flâneur’s point of view, Clutz seems almost invisible to his fellow walkers. Extensive literature on the flâneur focuses rightly on this observer’s consumption of commodity-like images, his privileged male gaze, and his practice of leisurely strolling. Clutz, contrary to the nineteenth-century flâneur, is best understood as a hard-working artist intent on stripping his streets of commercial culture, yet keenly attentive to the everyday goings-on around him. Clutz’s work is not simply an extension of Parisian flânerie, but it nonetheless engages with this mobile and modernist precedent.

Previous writers on Clutz have thought the anonymity of the figures “to be a reflection of their loneliness and isolation in a soulless urban environment.” While this suppression of a particular kind of individualism has focused on feelings of alienation, I claim that these figures represent the condition of embodied walking in the city. The paintings insist on mobility, as Clutz recognizes the variations of gait, stature and tempo of each body. Ultimately, through this agile sense of sympathetic movement, Clutz’s subjects stand in for the peripatetic artist himself. The paintings assume Clutz’s own bodily perspective as a pedestrian, so that the viewer strolls alongside the walkers that cross streets, with heads lowered, or eyes fixed ahead, in pairs or alone. Even when companions, families or couples are pictured, the figures still convey a solitary introspection that thematizes the simultaneously corporeal and visual experiences of the viewer as a walker in the scene. By editing the sensory stimulations from the city streets, Clutz focuses on the depiction of a moving, thinking and seeing body in perceptive motion. In other words, the figures represent the artist’s phenomenological vision within the streets—both what and how one sees.

The paintings suggest seemingly random or happenstance encounters with strangers on the street. Figures do not gather to meet, but pass each other by in intersections, on sidewalks, and through parks. Given the emphasis on abstraction in many of Clutz’s street scenes, particularly those from early in his career, it is difficult to ascribe a particular psychic narrative to his subjects. In other words, the paintings do not illustrate either a dark mood of alienation or even a more positive conviction that the figures are bound together as concordant inhabitants of a shared city. The subject is Clutz himself and how he sees, thinks, and moves. He is the walker, whose phenomenological coalescence of vision and physical locomotion reflects his relationship to the other passersby. In *Figures and Awning* (1969) Clutz’s painting does not illustrate a particular place or the unique identities of the figures, but rather demonstrates a physical convergence of bodies, including his own, through a gestural and seemingly spontaneous handling of paint. The awning delineates at once an architectural detail and a modernist regard for the framing edge. The central figure appears as a counterpoint to the woman in *Summer Park*, as she walks into, not out of, the picture plane. In a sense, she approximates the viewer’s position, of facing into and trying to enter into the scene. But, the olive drips that sprinkle from her coat, and the impish purple stroke on her foot reminds the viewer of Clutz’s push and pull between abstraction and figuration; his painterly shorthand reveals two kinds of dynamism—streaming sidewalks and viscous paint.

When Clutz began to photograph subjects on the street as a complement to sketching, shadows emerged as additional abstractions and echoes of movement in his paintings. In the 1980s
and 1990s, Clutz infused several paintings with increased representational detail of the figures’ faces and gestures. *Two Women (Friends)* (1990), for instance, Clutz captures a bit of wind that slightly blows the woman’s skirt on the right, as she draws her left hand across the opening of the coat, seemingly keeping it closed. The woman on the left grasps her purse strap with both hands; the gesture is also one of enclosure, as she secures her handbag while hurrying down the street. The horizon line follows the women’s path along a diagonal from the upper left to the lower right of the composition. He balances the light that hits their left shoulders with the shadows that fall to the women’s right. These watery silhouettes do not promote the illusion of three-dimensionality in the scene, but appear as autonomous forms, abstract and independent of their referent. Such shadows encourage the viewer to see a deeper, more tangible connectedness to light and to painted form. The traces of the figures and their gait create a parallel puddle, a different engagement with the horizontal ground plane of the works. He elicits a renewed tension between the abstract, insistently flat surface of the canvas and the three-dimensional space of the streets.

**From Blue Shadows to the Golden West**

Through his decades in New York City, Clutz reacted to its temperaments of light; he caught the deep raking rays of the afternoon as well as the cool shadows cast by the tall buildings in an early morning. “One of the things I am about,” he explains, “is not to make the city look more beautiful, but to change an attitude about it.”26 The way Clutz sees the city, through its charcoal shadows, fast-paced tempo, and layers of history embedded into its gritty concrete surfaces, realizes that the overwhelming accumulation of quotidian specifics (signage, displays in shop windows, particular faces or portraits) have been omitted, but are not missed. The broader strokes and abstract planes of architecture and streets nonetheless convey the aura of the city. The comparison of the New York works to those made in Los Angeles casts the particularities of each city in sharp relief. Clutz’s pastels of Los Angeles, made in four series between 1984 and 1995, glow with a sunny warmth rarely found in the shadowed streets of cavernous New York. In *Sunset Curve*, the boulevard whorls energetically along an s-curve into the background. The light hits the yellow-tinged road and strikes the candy-colored façades of the buildings. A pink-topped tower rises in the background, and a similarly warm pink stucco building peers through the lush green palms. Unlike the New York paintings and drawings, the viewpoint of the artist is not as a pedestrian but as a driver in the car. Cruising on the road, one notices that no one walks in Los Angeles. The palms and the cars stand in for the rhythms and steps of his New York walkers.

With the similarly Mediterranean light, architecture, and flora, Clutz’s Los Angeles series returns to finding its affinity with French modernism of the early twentieth century, specifically with Cézanne’s South of France. In *Blue Cactus (Los Angeles, Series 2)*, red-tiled roofs and houses, represented as seemingly simplified cubes, line a street that rushes intensely toward the viewer and unmistakably evoke Cézanne. Clutz plays with linear perspective and recognizes the ambiguity of Cézanne’s forms that characterize foreground or background space and the interest in a pictorial surface as a totalizing field, meaning that the perspectival exactness gives way to a different, more complicated understanding of planes within the picture. The blue cactus, outlined in acid green and jutting aggressively from the bottom edge of
Blue Cactus (LA Series 2) 1991
pastel on paper
44.125 x 33.75 in.
Gettysburg College
Gift of the artist

the picture, offers a more assertive play of shape and space. Its odd placement in the drawing, framed by what appear to be the green tops of trees, calls to mind Cezanne’s conviction that the edges of objects pass or overlap each other in order to unify the surface of the painting with the depth of pictorial space. In addition to the strong diagonal of the road, the atmospheric blur of the right area of the drawing returns the picture to its Los Angeles smoggy specificity. In this reference to Cézanne, Clutz underscores his interest in establishing an ambiguity between background and surface tension. The tight pattern of apricot-hued lines abstractly demarcates the golden glow of a California sky and blend seamlessly into this white haze. Cézanne’s articulation of pictorial totality demanded that the viewer understand the multiplicity and ambiguity of shape, the movable sensations that render objects in relation to an embodied viewer. But, just as one settles into feeling the red-roofed affinities between Cézanne’s L’Estaque and Clutz’s Los Angeles, the cactus erupts from the lower edge of the drawing. It cuts into the composition, changes the landscape’s scale and perspective, and situates the viewer somehow high above the rushing street below. Its placement—as punctuation and provocation—is quite reminiscent of the sharp melon cutting into Picasso’s Demoiselles d’Avignon. This oblique reference to Picasso, whose own painterly facture and compositional structure shows Cézanne’s prominent influence, reads as a synthesis of the Cézanne and Picasso’s modernism. With Barr’s diagram of “The Development of Abstract Art,” a chart prepared for a Museum of Modern Art exhibition Cubism and Abstract Art in 1936, in mind, Clutz’s work subverts and moves Barr’s arrows of influence. Blue Cactus offers a critique of Barr’s rigid timeline and reminds one that his art-historical references, his commitment to representation, and his experimentations in abstraction are synchronous.

A Portrait of the Artist

In wandering through Clutz’s perambulations and intersections with the past, this essay takes its final turn to portraits of the artist. Comparing his Self Portrait of 1957 with a pastel of the same subject of 1978 provides a sense of consistency throughout his career that went unnoticed by older critics. In the painting, Clutz sits on the edge of the bed, slightly off center to the right, and stares directly out at the viewer. A framed picture, a reference to an earlier painting Clutz made of harlequin dancers and scenes of the commedia dell’arte, hangs behind him. The saturation of color in his carefully worked surface, particularly in the field of complementary colors of the blanket on the bed, almost a pastoral landscape unto itself, reveals Matisse’s influence. The overall structure resonates most closely with Matisse’s Carmelina (1903), a portrait of a nude female model, whose strong modeling and upright frontal pose, mirrors Clutz’s stance, if not his dress. Matisse’s Carmelina, too, is a self-portrait, as the artist appears as a brightly abbreviated red form in a framed mirror behind the model. The pairing of sitters with figures in frames calls attention to the thematics of the studio as a site of production of art. Both artists depict representations within a representation as a means to also envisage the artist’s body as sitter, maker, and viewer. In Clutz’s self-portrait of 1978, the role of the artist is explicitly also as a walker. He is seen in profil perdu, or “lost profile,” as his face turns into the background of the composition. He is on a city street, surrounded by buildings; the window on the left notably seems to resist a sense of transparency or depth. Clutz’s parallel pastel lines echo the verticality of the skyscrapers that enclose the figure. Bright light hits his neck, casting the face into darker planes of the background. This man, this walker, sees the streets and finds his way among the sidewalks, as he pays attention to sunlight and shadow and finds his way among the people he presents.
In conversations with the artist, Clutz mentions that he found himself somewhat of an outsider in his milieu. At first, Hans Namuth’s striking portrait of Clutz from 1961 might negate the artist’s modest perception of not belonging; the photograph was taken on the occasion of Clutz’s solo exhibition at David Herbert Gallery in 1962. By 1962, Clutz’s work was already in several collections and shown in a number of exhibitions. Namuth’s portrait captures the artist’s quiet conviction and evokes his tangible successes. According to Clutz, the Namuth portrait was intended to convey the artist as a confident young painter. Although Clutz never exhibited such hubris, he consistently felt assured in his own vision and aesthetic direction. Bright light hits the left side of his face; Clutz’s body is balanced within the symmetrically bisected composition by a large, stretched canvas, turned with its face to the wall. This composition is similar in a way to Clutz’s self-portraits, with framed pictures and windows paired with the brooding intensity of the artist’s gaze. The closed window, the painted picture, and the canvas stretcher that all occupy similar positions in their respective compositions aid in understanding the artist’s place. At home in his paintings, Clutz embodies his figures, embeds his sources, and feels the movement of the city.

Shannon Egan, PhD
Director, Schmucker Art Gallery
Gettysburg College

1 Conversation with the artist, May 2015. William Clutz recalls that Thomas Danaher studied under artists Hans Hoffman and Rockwell Kent. Danaher’s lithographs made during his years with the Works Progress Administration are in the Metropolitan Museum of Art Collection.

2 Conversation with the artist, January 10, 2016.


4 According to Clutz, after Richard Diebenkorn had his first exhibition of figurative work in the late 1950s at the Poindexter Gallery, critics, artists, and gallerists compared Clutz to Diebenkorn. Clutz asserts that because Diebenkorn painted quietly reposed models, similarly to Matisse’s seated women, as opposed to Clutz’s grittier street scenes, their differences outweighed their similarities. Email correspondence with the artist, May 2, 2016.

5 Email correspondence with the artist, January 8, 2016.

6 Email correspondence with the artist, May 2, 2016.

7 His work had also been included in Recent Drawings USA at the Museum of Modern Art in 1956. At the Museum of Modern Art, William Lieberman, a curator of prints and drawings, and Alicia Legg, curator of painting and sculpture, were particularly supportive of Clutz’s work. Phone conversation with the artist, May 3, 2014.


Self Portrait
C. 1957
Oil on canvas
41.75 x 27.625 in.
Washington County Museum of Fine Arts
Gift of the artist
See the mention of “French and German art forms, especially the works of August Macke, Max Beckman, Ernst Kirchner, and Nicholas de Staël,” in Helen Thomas, “William Clutz,” Arts Magazine (October 1977).


Clutz’s paternal grandfather, Dr. Frank Hollinger Clutz, was a professor of Civil Engineering at Gettysburg College, who also painted, collected prints, and taught an art appreciation class at Gettysburg College. His paternal grandmother was a successful antiques dealer in Gettysburg and also instilled an appreciation for aesthetics. His mother had a degree in Fine Arts from Barnard College and went to Paris on 1929 as part of a grand tour to Europe. His mother’s encouragement of art and music was significant for Clutz. Particularly, the study of piano helped Clutz to identify the kinds of feelings that he wanted his art to have. Clutz also checked out books of Old Master drawings from the library and drew from these sources. Phone conversation with the artist, January 2016.

Email correspondence with the artist, May 1, 2016.

On Caillebotte, who interestingly bought Manet’s The Balcony and also painted the similar work Young Man at His Window (1875). See Michael Fried, “Caillebotte’s Impressionism,” Representations 99 (Spring 1999): 1-51.


Clutz’s charcoal drawings, such as Street, reveal a remarkable relation to Seurat’s charcoal and graphite sketches. Elegantly condensed studies of shadow and light, movement and gesture characterize both artists works.

Clutz refers specifically to Kline; conversation with author. I would also argue that the similarity of Summer Park to Edgar Degas’s Place de la Concorde (Viscount Lepi and His Daughters Crossing the Place de la Concorde) (1875). Degas depicts a nearly deserted square, where a father, his two daughters and a dog, all gaze in disparate directions. Like Clutz’s painting, a figure at the far left, here top-hatted and wearing a dark suit, is not seen in his entirety, but is cropped by the painting’s edge. Both in Degas’s and Clutz’s canvases, this figure on the left establishes a vertical rhythm, a sense of movement across the composition. On the theme of walking in this painting by Degas, see Nancy Forgione, “Everyday Life in Motion: The Art of Walking in Late-Nineteenth-Century Paris,” The Art Bulletin 87, no. 4 (December 2005): 670-1.

Growing up, Clutz also spent much time at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, where Cézanne’s most ambitious painting, The Large Bathers (1900-06) left an impression on the young artist. Phone conversation with the artist, May 2016.
Clutz’s paintings that are most redolent of Manet are the ones that also reveal the latter’s strong allusions to Velasquez. On Manet’s sources, see Michael Fried, *Manet’s Modernism or, The Face of Painting in the 1860s* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).


Conversation with the artist, January 8, 2016.


On the subject of phenomenology and walking in nineteenth-century painting, see Forgione, 664.


Before owning his own gallery, David Herbert worked for significant contemporary galleries, including the Betty Parsons Gallery (1951-1953) and the Sidney Janis Gallery (1953-1959). Herbert negotiated the sale of Clutz’s work to important collectors, namely the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden. Among the other artists David Herbert represented were Louise Nevelson, Alice Neel, Ray Johnson, George Segal, Rudy Burkhardt, and William Scharf. David Herbert Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

Email correspondence with the artist, May 2, 2016.
Thomas Danaher, Portrait of William Clutz
1947
gouache on cardboard
28.875 x 23 in.
Washington County Museum of Fine Arts
Gift of William Clutz
Park IV
1958
oil on canvas
17.5 x 20.5 in.
Washington County Museum of Fine Arts
Gift of the artist in memory of Thomas and Ellen Danaher, Mercersburg, PA
Hans Namuth, *Portrait of William Clutz*
1961
photograph
16.125 x 19 in.
Washington County Museum of Fine Arts
Gift of William Clutz
Street Crossing
1962
oil on canvas
39.875x 30.125 in.
Washington County Museum of Fine Arts
Gift of the artist in memory of Thomas and Ellen Danaher, Mercersburg, PA
Car/Figure

C. 1963

Oil on canvas

29 x 26 in.

Washington County Museum of Fine Arts

Gift of the artist in memory of Thomas and Ellen Danaher, Mercersburg, PA
Street
1964
charcoal on paper
24.25 x 30.5 in.
Gettysburg College
Gift of the artist
Drawing
1964
graphite on paper
20 x 25.875 in.
Gettysburg College
Gift of the artist
Landscape, Mt. Parnell
1964
oil on canvas
40.75 x 50.875 in.
Washington County Museum of Fine Arts
Gift of the artist
Street
1966
charcoal on paper
Washington County Museum of Fine Arts
Gift of the artist in memory of Thomas and Ellen Danaher, Mercersburg, PA
Man in Car
1966
charcoal on paper
25.5 x 31.5 in.
Gettysburg College
Gift of the artist
Street (Blue and Orange)
1972
oil on canvas
41.375 x 36.75 in.
Gettysburg College
Gift of the artist
Man in Window
1974
oil on paper
19.75 x 15.5 in.
Gettysburg College
Gift of the artist
Somber Street
1974
oil on canvas
19 x 21.25 in.
Gettysburg College
Gift of the artist
Mother and Child Crossing
1977
oil on canvas
23.875 x 29.875 in.
Washington County Museum of Fine Arts
Gift of the artist in memory of Thomas and Ellen Danaher, Mercersburg, PA
Broadway I
1977
oil on canvas
41.125 x 36.25 in.
Washington County Museum of Fine Arts
Gift of the artist
Station
1978
oil on canvas
60 x 45 in.
Mercersburg Academy
Gift of the artist
Toward St. Johns
1982
pastel on paper
35.5 x 29.25 in.
Gettysburg College
Gift of the artist
Shopping
1982
pastel on paper
22.375 x 30 in.
Washington County Museum of Fine Arts
Gift of the artist in memory of Thomas and Ellen Danaher, Mercersburg, PA
Morning Light, Michigan Avenue
1983
pastel on paper
35 x 30.125 in.
Washington County Museum of Fine Arts
Gift of the artist
*Met Steps*

1983

pastel on paper

40 x 30 in.

Washington County Museum of Fine Arts

Gift of the artist
August Spray II
1986
oil on canvas
45.25 x 37.375 in.
Washington County Museum of Fine Arts
Gift of the artist in memory of his parents,
Dr. Paul A. and Catherine H. Clutz
Lunch Hour
1987
oil on canvas
49.75 x 40 in.
Washington County Museum of Fine Arts
Gift of the artist in memory of Thomas and Ellen Danaher, Mercersburg, PA
Tan Suit Crossing
1987
oil on canvas
31 x 21.25 in.
Gettysburg College
Gift of the artist
Touching the Edge (LA Series 2)
1988
pastel on paper
40 x 30 in.
Mercersburg Academy
Clusters Crossing
2005
oil on canvas
50 x 40 in.
Washington County Museum of Fine Arts
Gift of the artist in memory of John F. Sheehy
William Clutz

Born: Gettysburg, PA 1933
Mercersburg, PA 1933-1951
New York City 1955-1996
Rhinebeck, NY 1996-present

Education

Painting: Thomas Danaher (NYC, ASL, WPA) 1944-51
Mercersburg Academy, PA 1947-51
University of Iowa, B.A. 1951-55
Arts Student League, NYC 1957

Solo Exhibitions

Nicholas Davies Gallery, NY Retrospect 1955-1975 1997
Carrie Haddard Gallery, Hudson, NY 1997
Washington County Museum of Fine Arts Hagerstown, MD Retrospective 1991
Tatistcheff Gallery, Los Angeles, CA 1992, 1988
P.B. van Voorst van Beest Gallery, The Hague 1984

Selected Group Exhibitions

Center for the Arts, Vero Beach, FL Collector Series 2004, 2001
Metropolitan Museum of Art, NYC 1990-1989
Montclair Art Museum, NJ Art of the 80s 1989
Kornbluth Gallery, Fair Lawn, NJ 1989
Christian A. Johnson Memorial Art Gallery, Middlebury, VT 1988
Tatistcheff & Co., NY 1987, 1985
Chemical Bank Gallery, NY 1987
Tweed Museum of Art, University of Minnesota, Duluth, MN
American Realism, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, CA 1985
Schoekopf Gallery, NY 1985
Art and the Law, West Publishing Co., MN 1985
Squibb Gallery, Princeton, NJ 1985
Traveling Exhibit, Rahr-West Gallery, St. Paul, MN 1984
The Great East River Bridge, Brooklyn Museum, NY 1983
Robert R. Woodruff Arts Center, Atlanta, GA 1983
Of Time and Place, American Figurative Art from The Corcoran Collection, Traveling Exhibit, Collegiate School, NY 1982
Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC 1981
Hirschl & Adler, NY 1980
The New American Still Life, Westmoreland County Museum, Greensburg, PA 1978
American Drawings 1976, Traveling Exhibit, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC 1977
Brooke Alexander, NY 1973
Columbus Gallery of Fine Arts, OH 1970
Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, FL 1969
Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN 1968
Tweed Gallery, University of Minnesota, Duluth, MN 1968
University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI 1967
Hunter Gallery of Art, Chattanooga, TN 1966
University of Colorado, Boulder, CO 1966
Storm King Art Center, Mountainville, NY 1966
Norfolk Museum of Arts and Sciences, VA 1966
Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, RI 1965
Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, NE 1965
Ontario East Gallery, Chicago, IL 1965
Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, NE 1964
Minnesota Museum, St. Paul, MN 1964
The Figure International, Traveling Exhibit, The American Federation of Arts Recent Painting USA: The Figure, Museum of Modern Art, NY 1962
The Emerging Figure, Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, TX 1961
Recent Drawings USA, Museum of Modern Art, NY 1956
Des Moines Art Center, Iowa Annual (Honorable Mention) 1954
Cumberland Valley Artists, First Prize, Washington County Museum of Fine Arts, MD 1952

Selected Collections: Museums, Universities

Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, MA
Brooklyn College, Brooklyn, NY
Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC
Dayton Art Institute, Dayton, OH
Dutchess County Community College, Poughkeepsie, NY
Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA
Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC
Mercersburg Academy, Mercersburg, PA
Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY
Miles College, Atlanta, GA
Minnesota Museum, St. Paul, MN
Museum of the City of New York, NY
Museum of Modern Art, NY
Museum of the City of New York, NY
The Newark Museum, Newark, NJ
New York University Collection, New York, NY
Phillips Exeter Academy, Exeter, NH
Schmucker Art Gallery, Gettysburg College, Gettysburg, PA
Sheldon Memorial Museum, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, NE
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, NY
Tweed Museum of Art, University of Minnesota, Duluth, MN
University of Massachusetts Art Collection, Amherst, MD
Washington County Museum of Fine Arts, Hagerstown, MD
Yale University Art Museum, New Haven, CT

Southeast Banking Corporation, Miami, FL
Third National Bank and Trust, Dayton, OH
J. Walter Thompson, NY
Wausau Insurance Company, WI

Selected Bibliography


Selected Collections: Corporations

Ashland Oil Company, KY
Amerada Hess, NY
AT&T, NY
Chase Manhattan Bank, NY
Donaldson, Lufkin, Jenrette, NY
First Bank, Minneapolis, MN
McKinsey and Company, NY
Milbank, Tweed, Hadley, McCloy, Washington, DC
Minnesota Mutual Life Insurance, St. Paul, MN
Mobil Corporation
New York Stock Exchange, NY
Shearson / Lehman Brothers, NY
Schroeder Bank, NY
Simpson, Thatcher and Bartlett, NY
Solomon Brothers, NY


*Recent Paintings USA: The Figure*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1962.

“The Emerging Figure,” Contemporary Arts Museum (May-June 1961).


The William Clutz papers are deposited in The Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.
FRONT COVER IMAGE

*Woman in Doorway*
1959
oil on canvas
62.5 x 37.625 in.
Gettysburg College
Gift of the artist in memory of his grandparents, Dr. and Mrs. Frank H. Clutz

BACK COVER IMAGE

*Clusters Crossing*
2005
oil on canvas
50 x 40 in.
Washington County Museum of Fine Arts
Gift of the artist in memory of John F. Sheehy

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