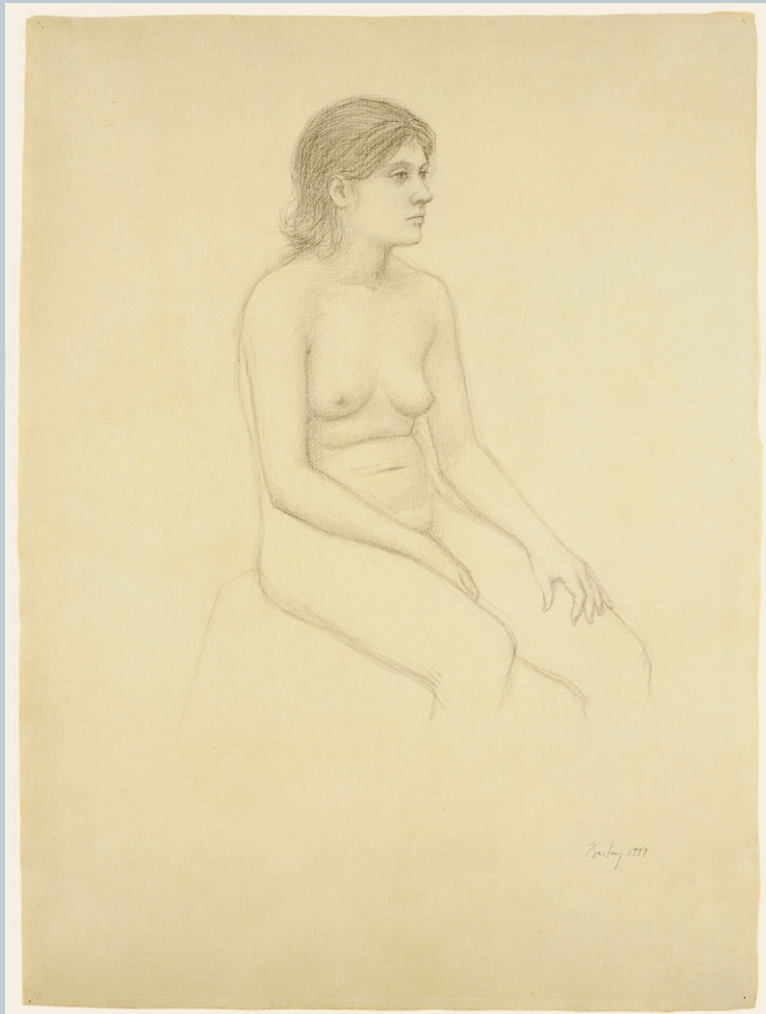


William Bailey: Works on Paper



William Bailey: Works on Paper

ESSAY BY ANDREW FORGE

*This publication accompanies an exhibition
at the Henry Koerner Center for Emeritus Faculty,
Yale University, January 22 to May 22, 2019*

Exhibition open by invitation or appointment; call 203-432-8227

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FOREWORD

I am very pleased to have worked with William Bailey on this exhibition for the Koerner Center. My assumption that he had mounted an exhibition with our former director, Bernard Lytton, who is a good friend of Bill's, turned out to be unfounded – a fact that I should have discovered much earlier. On my invitation, Bill proposed an exhibition of works on paper. The catalogue essay by Andrew Forge, written in 1999 for an exhibition at the Robert Miller Gallery in New York, is focused on Bill's figurative work. Our exhibition includes some still lifes but is mostly figurative art as well, and Bill wishes to honor his former friend and colleague in this way. Andrew Forge was never a fellow of the Koerner Center, which opened a year after his death, but he has had a presence here through his painting hanging in the library, *Study* (1985–86). The largest work in *William Bailey: Works on Paper* occupies that location for the duration of the exhibition, and for that period, Forge will be represented in the Koerner Center by his essay in this catalogue. I am grateful to Bill for sharing his art with Koerner fellows, and thank John Gambell for design, Lesley Baier for editing, and the Betty Cuninghame Gallery for the loan of three paintings and for several images reproduced in the catalogue.

Gary L. Haller, Director



WILLIAM BAILEY

by Andrew Forge

More than once in interviews, WB has spoken about key events in his formation as a painter, of his studies with Joseph Albers in the early fifties, of contact with some of the Abstract Expressionists, of his travels in Europe and the Far East—and of the stylistic impasse that for several years blocked his horizon. “I simply couldn’t deal with it [painting]. Everything seemed to disappear with the next mark I made.”¹ Then, on his way home from the East, he found himself in Athens and in the museum of the Acropolis he discovered “a room full of feet that had broken off sculptures.” These fragments affected him as nothing had before. “It was all I wanted to look at—those feet, because they were so pure, so mysterious” he told John Gruen and, describing the same moment to Mark Strand he said, “They were elegant and beautifully carved and seemed to have weight and meaning and tension and density. They were feet and at the same time they were extraordinary sculptural experiences.”² With this discovery fresh in his mind, he had stopped in Paris and renewed his acquaintance with Ingres, the *Grand Odalisque* and the *Valpinçon Bather*. Back in his studio in the States he started to paint a figure in an interior. Something had opened. It was “a figure in a measurable space and it seemed terribly important to me—that painting really opened the door.”

We can feel even now the “terrible” importance of WB’s figures, descendants of that first presence that had broken the lock on his talent and shown him the kind of painter he was to be. Since then his reputation has been largely associated with his still lifes. But the figures have always been there, appearing in ones and twos, brooding over the more accessible still lifes, difficult, yet clearly

playing a major role in the internal drama of his art. This is the first time he has shown nothing but figures, an occasion.

You could say that the history of still life painting has taken it, over the years, from a painting of objects as emblems (of riches, nourishment, transience etc.) to a painting of representation and reflection on representation. But WB's still lifes don't fit into this sequence in any obvious way.³ As to the figures, if we ask ourselves who they are and what are they doing, the only answer seems to be that they are posing. That means that they are models. But *models* painted out of one's head? The fact is that you can't get far with his painting unless you come to terms with them as inventions, as achievements of the imagination. He projects an imagined world: over there on their tables and shelves, like distant hill towns, the rows of vessels. Here in this corner a naked woman stands or reads a book. It is a world projected with the insistence of a recurring dream and painted with an almost secretive reserve that makes each picture into some sort of riddle: "A sleeping world or one that thrives / on changeless being – who can say?"⁴

What the still life subjects and the models have in common, of course, is that both belong purely to the province of painting. They don't exist beyond its borders. A table set for lunch is already half-way out of the studio and the model with one shoe on and making a phone call has already left.

With the figures the stakes are higher than with the still lifes. For one thing Eros has broken cover and is running in plain view. For another, the figures touch that live wire, biological recognition: we don't (can't) respond to the proportions of a pot with the same directness as we do to the proportions of a figure, nor is the frontality of a table the same as the frontality of a face. WB has his way

of making his figures, with their large extremities and long legs and lines that are neither sumptuous nor angular. They belong to a tribe as unmistakable as the tribe of Bonnard or the tribe of Paul Delvaux.

“Almost all of Bailey’s figures” Mark Strand has commented, “bear certain resemblances to the work of others.”⁵ Strand finds a “neo-classical mixture of remoteness and sensuality” that summons up David and Ingres. About the 1986 painting called *Portrait of L*, he says that the figure looks as if she had stepped out of a Balthus. Other paintings suggest Corot. All this is so, but what needs to be added is something about the particular quality of these resemblances. I can’t see academism or homage or attack, still less ironic appropriation. WB’s dealings with the past seem to take place at a far deeper level than any of that, somewhere in the innermost reaches of his imagination. It is as though he knows that the admired art of the past places a charge on his present, as though he recognizes the legacy as a task. Discussing a book that deals with kindred ideas, Adam Phillips has written that one way of describing legacy-as-task “would be to say that the dead are very demanding; and that we keep in touch with them, keep them alive, by imagining they still want something from us...”⁶ This sounds exactly right. An act of imagination that takes responsibility for the unfinished business of the past is inseparable from a present awareness of mortality. This is where an indelible line is drawn between academism and a living responsibility to tradition.

However clearly he sets things out, however tight or sharp his definitions, I am always left with a feeling of remoteness, of something beyond what I can see. Nothing is set up to invite me in. There are no welcoming diagonals and in the still lifes the table-tops are rigorously straightened as if to wish away the observing eye. And consider the absence of communicative gesture and the

impassive evenness of the figures. Or how they look at you. Often the eyes are a single dark tone without internal drawing, reminding of those late Poussins where the figures have eyes like statues; and of even more distant eyes, the eyes of those funerary⁷ portraits from the Fayum that, like WB's seem to be focussed on some far-distant horizon even as they look straight at you.

But this feeling of remoteness, of confrontation at a distance, can't be attached to particulars. It derives in the end from the unbroken wholeness of the pictures, their dense and distant tone. This is their strangest and most wonderful attribute. It is what lives in one's memory long after particulars have faded. It is hopeless to try to isolate a single aspect. Whatever you focus on elides with some other feature. You can't tell where "what" becomes "how" or how becomes what. You can't catch these pictures aslant. There are no breaks in the fabric, no half-moves to give entrance to his thought this side of the canvas. It is all out there, facing you. The surface, thought of as the way he brushes paint, is indistinguishable from the surface thought of as representation. Wood, metal, skin, earthenware, hair, all have the same matte texture, un-highlighted, intangible, there but not there. Is this brushing or brushed? How or what? The question is even more bewilderingly unanswerable if one puts it to the light in his pictures. Light there doesn't play or break or flicker or glow but seems rather to press. It presses onto the whole canvas from the front, molding every form with the same steady weight. Its quality isn't located only in the way forms are modeled. It is a matter of value, meaning every color-change in the whole picture, every threshold that takes us from warm grey to cool grey, from brick red to leaf brown to mushroom-pale skin or back to grey, now greenish, now tending to gold. This finally is the foundation of his painting, a total all-including color structure that makes light, a unique light, and where everything has to work

and minute misjudgments of weight or saturation can wreck the lot. This is the basic fabric, woven with bated breath, achieved in intense concentration and stubborn will and longing. It is the upshot of an objective task *and* an inner picturing. One can only guess at the tension and turmoil spent on silent calm, or at the hours this timelessness cost. The final mystery of these paintings is that we feel intimations of that energy even in their stillness, and of intense life in their reserve.

1. Interview with John Gruen. *ARTnews*, November, 1979.
2. Interview with Mark Strand. *William Bailey* (exhibition catalogue). Rome: Galleria d'Art il Gabbiano, 1993.
3. Just how he does relate to the history of still life has been brilliantly discussed by John Hollander in *William Bailey*. New York: Rizzoli International, 1991.
4. Eugenio Montale from *Sarcophagi*, trans. Jonathan Galassi.
5. Mark Strand. *William Bailey*. New York: Rizzoli International, 1991.
6. Adam Phillips reviewing *Open-Minded* by Jonathan Lear. *London Review of Books*, 12 November, 1998.
7. [Due to a printer's error, "funerary" was changed to "funny" when this essay was first published in 1999; that error was repeated when the essay was republished in *Observation: Notation. Selected Writings of Andrew Forge, 1955–2002*, ed. David Cast (New York: Criterion Books, 2018). *Ed.*]

This essay was originally published in the exhibition catalogue William Bailey: Studio Fictions (New York: Robert Miller Gallery, 1999). It is reprinted by permission of the Robert Miller Gallery and the Estate of Andrew Forge.

ARTIST STATEMENT

This exhibition is made up entirely of works on paper. They were done in a variety of media during the years dating back to 1964. The earliest are two pencil drawings framed together that were studies for a painting called “N” inspired by Ingres’ *Grand Odalisque*. The two dark still lifes were done as possible book covers for my friend Mark Strand’s book *Dark Harbor*. The pencil drawings of figures were mostly from direct observation of models. The still lifes are all from memory and imagination. I am not a realist. These works are not about stories or ideas or things. I am simply trying to create a believable place to pursue presence and the possibility of transcendence.

William Bailey



Two Studies for "N," 1964
Pencil on paper, 10 x 12 1/2 in. (each)



Seated Figure, 1967

Pencil on paper, 11 x 15 in.



Seated Nude, 1975

Pencil on paper, 14 1/2 x 10 3/4 in.



Seated Figure with One Hand Showing, 1984
Pencil on paper, 14 1/2 x 10 3/4 in.

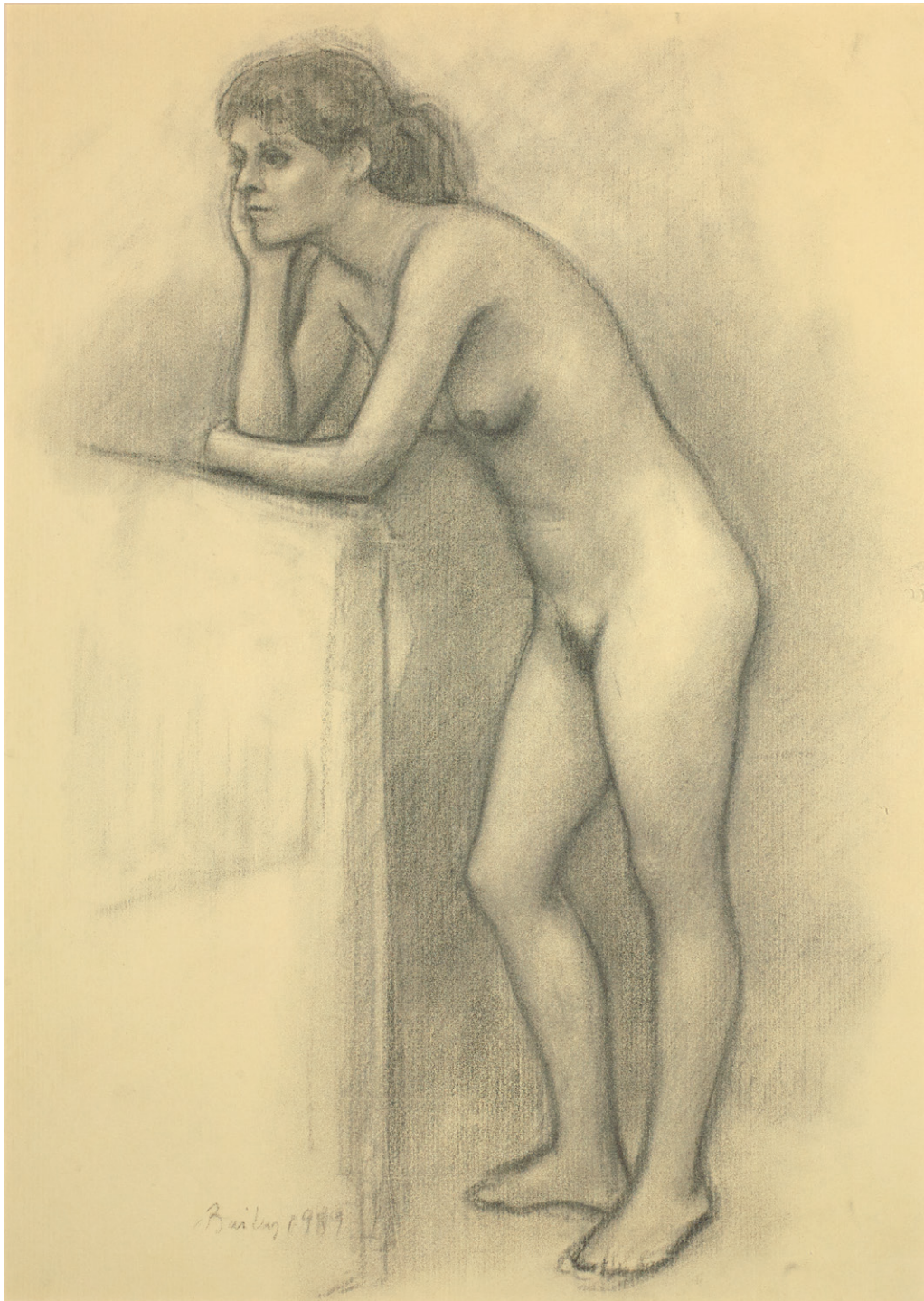


Untitled (Figure Study), 1988
Graphite on paper, 15 x 11 in.



Reclining Figure, 1989

Pencil on paper, 19 1/4 x 26 1/2 in.



Standing Figure, 1989

Charcoal on paper, 26 1/2 x 19 1/2 in.



Portrait, 1992
Pencil on paper, 19 1/8 x 13 1/8 in.



Untitled, 1992
Ink on paper, 15 x 11 in.



Untitled, 1999

Pencil on paper, 26 1/4 x 19 1/4 in.



Studio in Rome, 2000

Tempera on paper, 26 7/8 x 21 1/8 in.



Girl with Beads, 2004

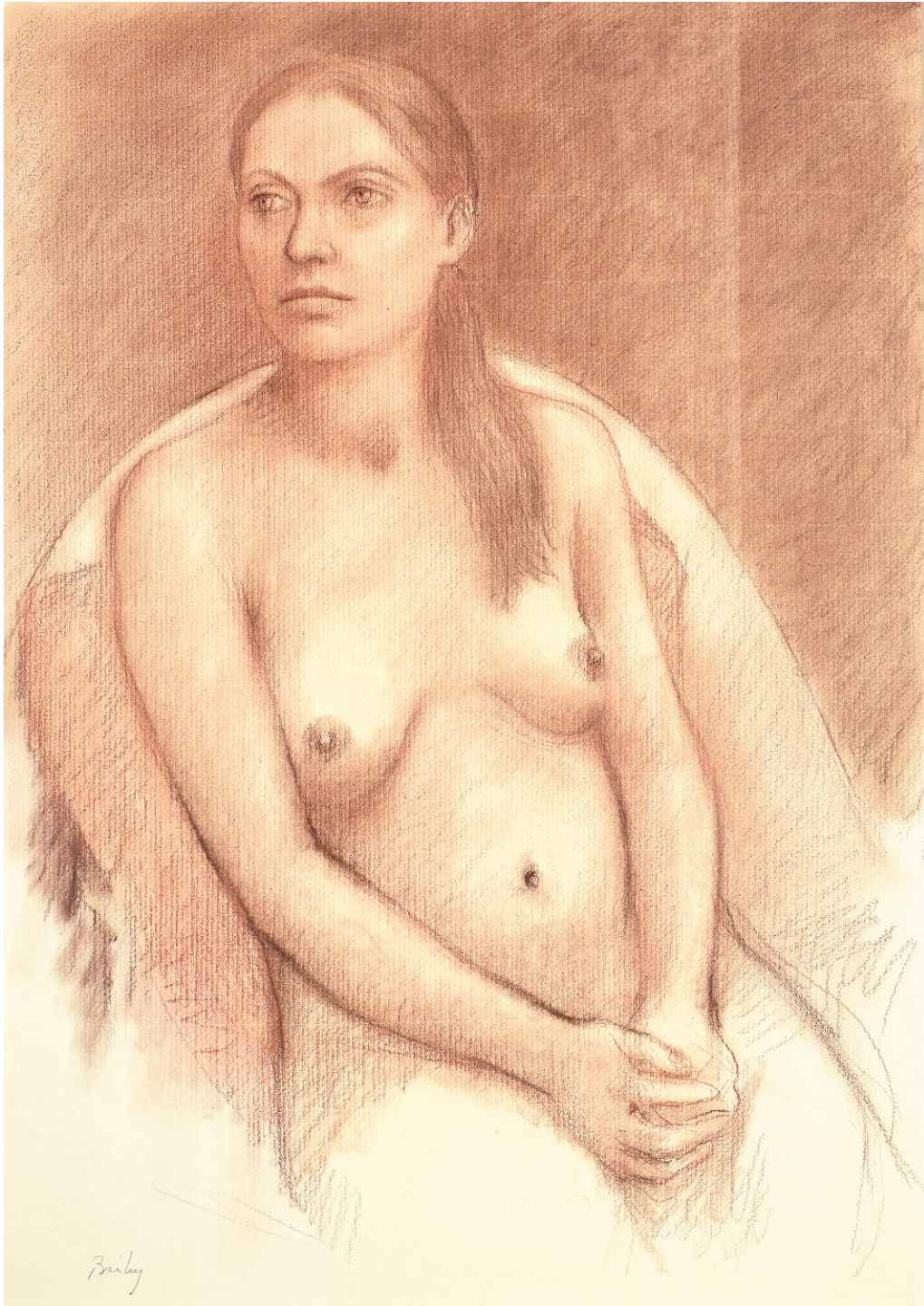
Tempera on paper, 15 3/4 x 12 3/4 in.



Waiting, Umberto, 2006
Tempera on paper, 17 7/8 x 12 1/8 in.



Seated Figure with Legs Bent, n.d.
Pencil on paper, 26 3/8 x 19 1/8 in.



Sepia Figure, n.d.

Conte on paper, 26 x 18 1/2 in.



Dark Harbor IV, 1992
Casein on paper, 14 x 18 1/4 in.



Dark Harbor V, 1992

Casein on paper, 14 x 18 1/4 in.



Poggio Manente, 1994

Tempera on paper, 18 x 21 in.



Still Life with Natalie's Cup, 1996
Pencil on paper, 39 1/2 x 42 3/8 in.



Borello, 2001

Tempera on paper, 13 1/8 x 18 1/2 in.



Pianello, 2001

Tempera on paper, 18 x 22 in.

WILLIAM BAILEY

- 1930 Born in Council Bluffs, Iowa
1948–51 School of Fine Arts, University of Kansas
1951–53 United States Army, in Japan and Korea
1955 B.F.A., School of Art, Yale University
1957 M.F.A., School of Art, Yale University

The artist lives and works in Connecticut and Italy.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2016 *William Bailey*, Betty Cuninghams Gallery, New York, N.Y., Apr. 30–June 11
2014 *William Bailey*, Betty Cuninghams Gallery, New York, N.Y., Feb. 13–Mar. 22
William Bailey Paintings and Drawings, Giampietro Gallery, New Haven, Conn.,
May 30–July 12
2013 *William Bailey: Paintings and Works on Paper*, Alpha Gallery, Boston, Mass.,
Nov. 2–Dec. 4
2012 *William Bailey*, Betty Cuninghams Gallery, New York, N.Y., Mar. 29–May 12
2010–11 *William Bailey Works on Paper*, Gallery at the Whitney, Whitney Humanities
Center, Yale University, Nov. 8–Jan. 28
2010 *William Bailey*, Betty Cuninghams Gallery, New York, N.Y., Feb. 18–Mar. 27
2009 *William Bailey: Paintings*, Dunn and Brown Contemporary, Dallas, Tex.,
Mar. 6–Apr. 18
2008 *William Bailey: Still Life/Figure*, Susan Maasch Fine Art, Portland, Maine,
June 6–July 15
2007 *William Bailey, Paintings*, Betty Cuninghams Gallery, New York, N.Y.,
Oct., 18–Nov. 24
William Bailey, Alpha Gallery, Boston, Mass., Oct. 1–Nov. 7

- 2006–7 *William Bailey, Works on Paper*, Philbrook Museum of Art, Tulsa, Okla.; Alexandre Hogue Gallery, University of Tulsa, Tulsa, Okla., Nov. 1–Dec. 3; Wichita Art Museum, Wichita, Kans.
- 2006 *William Bailey, Paintings*, Dunn and Brown Contemporary, Dallas, Tex., Oct. 13–Nov. 11
- 2005 *William Bailey*, Betty Cuninghame Gallery, New York, N.Y., Apr. 8–May 7
William Bailey Drawings and Prints, Clark House Gallery, Bangor, Maine, Mar. 29–May 27
- 2003 *William Bailey: New Paintings*, Robert Miller Gallery, New York, N.Y., Feb. 6–Mar. 15
William Bailey: Drawings and Prints, California Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco, Calif.
- 2000 *William Bailey Drawings and Paintings*, Galerie Claude Bernard, Paris, France, May 17–July 1
- 1999 *William Bailey: Studio Fictions*, Robert Miller Gallery, New York, N.Y., Mar. 16–Apr. 24
- 1998 *William Bailey: Still Lifes*, Crown Point Gallery, San Francisco, Calif., Mar. 15–Apr. 18 [Prints]
 Alpha Gallery, Boston, Mass. [Works on paper]
- 1997 Galleria d'Arte il Gabbiano, Rome, Italy
- 1995 University Art Museum, State University of New York at Binghamton, Binghamton, N.Y.
 André Emmerich Gallery, New York, N.Y.
- 1994 Galleria Appiani Arte Trentadue, Milan, Italy
William Bailey: Selected Works, 1964–1994, André Emmerich Gallery, New York, N.Y., Mar. 2–Apr. 9
 Betsy Senior Gallery, New York, N.Y. [Prints]
- 1993 Columbus College, Columbus, Ga.
 Galleria d'Arte il Gabbiano, Rome, Italy

- 1992 *William Bailey: New Work*, André Emmerich Gallery, New York, N.Y.,
Mar. 26–Apr. 25
- 1991 Robert Schoelkopf Gallery, New York, N.Y.
Donald Morris Gallery, Birmingham, Mich.
- 1989 *Fairfield Artist of the Year*, Fairfield University, Fairfield, Conn.
- 1988 *William Bailey Recent Paintings and Drawings*, John Berggruen Gallery,
San Francisco, Calif., Nov. 22–Dec. 31
Rhode Island School of Design Museum of Art, Providence, R.I.
- 1987 FIAC, Grand Palais, Paris, France (Galleria d'Arte il Gabbiano, Rome)
Wright State University Art Galleries, Dayton, Ohio
- 1986 *William Bailey: Recent Paintings*, Robert Schoelkopf Gallery, New York, N.Y.,
Nov. 1–Dec. 3
- 1985 Galleria d'Arte il Gabbiano, Rome, Italy [Drawings and prints]
- 1984 American Academy in Rome, Italy
Utah Museum of Fine Arts, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah
[Drawings]
- 1983 Meadows School of the Arts, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Tex.
- 1982 *William Bailey: Recent Paintings*, Robert Schoelkopf Gallery, New York, N.Y.,
Apr. 3–May 4
- 1980 Galleria d'Arte il Gabbiano, Rome, Italy
- 1979 *William Bailey: Recent Paintings*, Robert Schoelkopf Gallery, New York, N.Y.,
Jan. 6–Feb. 10
Fendrick Gallery, Washington, D.C.
- 1978 *William Bailey: Peintures*, Galerie Claude Bernard, Paris, France
- 1976 Dart Gallery, Chicago, Ill. [Drawings]
- 1975 Polk Museum, Lakeland, Fla. (exhibition traveled to Ft. Lauderdale Museum of
Art, Ft. Lauderdale)

- 1974 Robert Schoelkopf Gallery, New York, N.Y.
- 1973 Galleria il Fante di Spade, Rome, Italy
Galleria la Parisina, Turin, Italy
Galleria dei Lanzi, Milan, Italy
- 1972 Tyler School of Art, Temple University, Philadelphia, Pa. [Drawings]
Queens College, City University of New York, Flushing, N.Y. [Drawings]
- 1971 Robert Schoelkopf Gallery, New York, N.Y. [Paintings and drawings]
- 1969 Nason College, Springvale, Maine [Maine drawings]
- 1968 Robert Schoelkopf Gallery, New York, N.Y. [Paintings and drawings]
- 1967 Kansas City Art Institute, Kansas City, Mo. [Paintings and drawings]
- 1963 Indiana University Art Museum, Bloomington, Ind. [Paintings and drawings]
- 1961 Kanegis Gallery, Boston, Mass. [Paintings and drawings]
- 1958 Kanegis Gallery, Boston, Mass. [Paintings and drawings]
- 1957 Kanegis Gallery, Boston, Mass. [Paintings and drawings]
- 1956 Robert Hull Fleming Museum, University of Vermont, Burlington, Vt.
[Paintings and drawings]

AWARDS

- 2012 Honorary Doctor of Fine Arts, Lyme Academy College of Fine Arts, Old Lyme, Conn.
Honorary Doctor of Fine Arts, Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, Md.
- 2007 Benjamin Altman Award in Painting, National Academy of Design
- 2004 Honorary Doctor of Fine Arts, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, Pa.
- 1993 Honorary Doctor of Fine Arts, Adelphi University, Garden City, N.Y.
- 1992 Elected Accademico di Merito, Accademia di Belle Arti Pietro Vannucci, Perugia

- 1991 Elected Accademico, Accademia Nazionale di San Luca, Rome
- 1987 Honorary Doctor of Humanities, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah
- 1986 Elected Member of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters
- 1985 Yale Arts Medal for Distinguished Contribution in Painting
- 1982 Elected to the National Academy of Design
- 1976–77 Visiting Artist, American Academy in Rome
- 1975 Ingram-Merrill Foundation Grant for Painting
- 1965 Guggenheim Fellowship in Painting
- 1958 Boston Arts Festival, First Prize in Painting
- 1955 Alice Kimball English Traveling Fellowship

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Arkansas Arts Center, Little Rock, Ark.
 Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Ill.
 William Benton Museum of Art, University of Connecticut, Storrs, Conn.
 Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Mich.
 de Young Museum, San Francisco, Calif.
 Des Moines Art Center, Des Moines, Iowa
 Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, Mich.
 Eskenazi Museum of Art, Indiana University, Bloomington, Ind.
 Evansville Museum of Arts, History & Science, Evansville, Ind.
 Fralin Museum of Art, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Va.
 Florence Griswold Museum, Old Lyme, Conn.
 High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Ga.
 Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Hyde Collection, Glens Falls, N.Y.
Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis, Ind.
Kalamazoo Institute of Arts, Kalamazoo, Mich.
Legion of Honor Museum, San Francisco, Calif.
Mead Art Museum, Amherst College, Amherst, Mass.
Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee, Wis.
Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis, Minn.
Montclair Art Museum, Montclair, N.J.
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Mass.
Museum of Modern Art, New York, N.Y.
Nasher Museum of Art, Duke University, Durham, N.C.
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase College, State University of New York,
Purchase, N.Y.
New Jersey State Museum, Trenton, N.J.
Ogunquit Museum of American Art, Ogunquit, Maine
Orlando Museum of Art, Orlando, Fla.
Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, Pa.
Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pa.
Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.
Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, Mass.
Saint Louis Art Museum, St. Louis, Mo.
Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, Mass.
Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.
Speed Art Museum, Louisville, Ky.
State University of New York at Cortland, Cortland, N.Y.
Suermondt-Ludwig-Museum, Aachen, Germany
Swope Art Museum, Terre Haute, Ind.

University Museum of Contemporary Art, University of Massachusetts,
Amherst, Mass.

University of Iowa Stanley Museum of Art, Iowa City, Iowa

University of Kentucky, Lexington, Ky.

University of Louisville, Louisville, Ky.

University of New Mexico Art Museum, Albuquerque, N.Mex.

University of Tulsa, Tulsa, Okla.

Weatherspoon Art Museum, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, N.C.

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, N.Y.

Wichita Art Museum, Wichita, Kans.

Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, Mass.

Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Conn.

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