

THE 
GRIFFIS ART CENTER

INTERNATIONAL ARTIST-in-RESIDENCE PROGRAM – MAISON des ARTISTES
NEW LONDON, CONNECTICUT USA

FRED FRANZEN

2000 January Artist-in-Residence
Ontario, Canada



"Down River, 2000"

Date Acquired: 6/20/2000, Date Created: 2000
Framed Dimensions: Unframed, Picture Dimensions: 25.75" x 31.5"
Medium: Oil on Wood Panel

"Down River 2000" has been technically created by incorporating traditional oil paints and a special oil based filler – finely ground titanium dioxide and silicates combined with linseed oil and varnishes. Manipulated and burnished during the drying process, surfaces can attain a subtle sheen and stone like texture that is good to the touch with the back of your hand.

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Fred Franzen paints the natural landscape in a manner that makes me think about abstract painting “pure” painting, and the sometimes contemplative, sometimes tense standoff between observation of the world and creation of pictorial space that painting engages under the hands of Bonnard, Morandi, Avery and Katz, among others. There are too many such artists throughout the 20th century for the rest of us to be at all comfortable with our working categories and chronologies of modernist and post modernist painting “development.” But maybe that’s the point. The margins are the preserve of the *petits-maîtres* and the seedbed of historical revision.

Liked the artist named above, Franzen paints pictures that are hard to ascribe to a movement or a social condition. His shapes are drastically flattened and both interlock and nest within each other. His palette is tonal, tending toward light grays, but the dark form of a tree, for instance, will make a much stronger statement of value contrast in a Franzen painting than in one by a virtuoso of lo-fi tonality such as Luc Tuymans. Franzen’s forms (rocks, trees, sky, a wedge of sea) increases in size to suggest foreground, and the painting, as it often is in the landscapes of Beckmann.

Franzen is in his 60s and has lived for years in Canada, but he is a native of Germany and spent his childhood there during the war. The historical legacy of his background can be intuited through the abject paleness of his palette coupled with the expressionist vigor of his flattened natural forms. Landscape



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painting provides Franzen, like Keifer, with a stage for conflicting impulses. He remembers landscapes with bomb craters from his childhood, but he also experiences landscape as a regenerative, form-giving field. His gently pasty palette and intermittent use of discarded wood panels as a support surface for his

Paintings, betray an ambivalence toward buying into the Romantic idealization of landscape. But part of him can't help it. He is, after all, a painter, and enterprise that was fully consecrated by Romanticism.

Franzen's abstracting impulse drives his work to a lovingly labored simplicity that reminds me of Serge Poliakoff, who may have made some of the most abstract paintings of the Midcentury School of Paris. Poliakoff's jaggedly interlocking planes were richly expressionist in color and sensually languorous in their material buildup by palette knife and brushed drizzle. There's a similar complex shifting in the textures in Franzen's work, like shifts of feeling or air currents. The effect is comic, elegiac and lyrical.

Steven Westfall, Art in America, May 1999