

# The New Criterion

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

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Weekly recommendations from the editors of *The New Criterion* on what to read, see, and hear in the world of culture.

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*Fairfield Porter, Untitled (View of Pelham hills from artist's studio in Fayerweather Hall, Amherst College), 1969, Oil on gessoed panel, Betty Cunningham Gallery.*

Art



*Fairfield Porter, Untitled (Amherst College building in snow), 1969–70, Oil on panel, Betty Cunningham Gallery.*

**“Fairfield Porter: Amherst and Other Places,” at Betty Cunningham Gallery**

**(through May 24):** As an observational painter who believed that modern art should have descended from Vuillard rather than Picasso, Fairfield Porter’s project was to find the inherent vitality within everyday settings. His paintings evoke a sort of studied carelessness—a *sprezzatura* aesthetic, if you will—that eschews classical “finish” or bombastic facility in favor of a more open-ended and even vulnerable sensibility. Now, Betty Cunningham’s small exhibition of oil studies and drawings—eight of which, never before exhibited, were completed while Porter was a visiting artist at Amherst College in 1969–70—is a lesson in Porter at his most unguarded. Among these untitled campus and classroom vignettes are studies for major works such as *Amherst Parking Lot No. 1*. Also included is a larger, earlier, and far more developed painting, *Jerry* (1955), a lovely portrait in which the artist’s obviously bored fourteen-year-old son sits at the breakfast table in necktie, slacks, and slippers. **—AS**