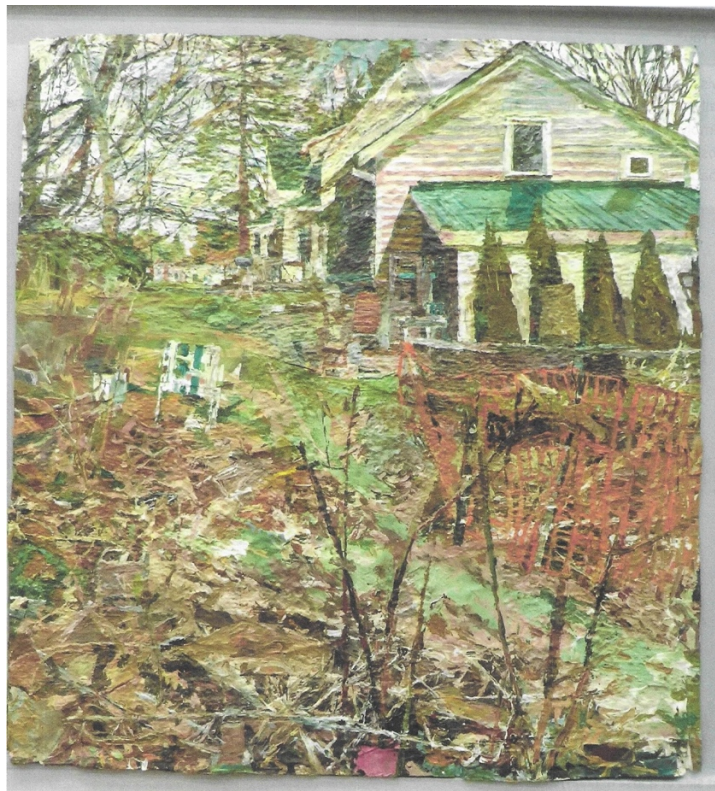


talking PICTURES

July 2022

Stanley Lewis and The Mystery of the Sliced Canvas

BETTY CUNINGHAM GALLERY, MAY 12-JULY 15, 2022



"View of the Garden with Orange Fence II" (2020) 38 ½" x 33"

Lazily, I refer you to two great descriptions of Stanley Lewis' paintings by John Yau and Thaddeus Radell. I could do it myself, but- they have done it so well.

"I think of Stanley Lewis, who paints from observation, as a Sisyphian painter. He attempts to climb a mountain whose summit he never reaches. The struggle is between the overall composition and how many little details can he get into a painting or a drawing without it seeming to implode or becoming clotted." - John Yau*

"Lewis knots and weaves his painted or drawn passages into the formal context of his subject: in part, by literally cutting and pasting, and in part by recklessly juxtaposing areas of dissimilar spatial orientations. The assembly results in a densely tactile, rich phrasing while maintaining a certain buoyancy of light and atmosphere."- Thaddeus Radell**



"West Side of House II" (2021) 27" x 38 1/2"

At seven years old and very forlorn, I was dumped on the Catholic relatives for some endless months. I was surprised to learn how mean Christians can be circa 1960, and in light of recent events, you know I still am. Anyway, on weekends, they drove around in West Virginia, for charity, visiting the homebound and for fun, visiting farms for sale and pretending they were in the market. I didn't like this at all.

On arrival, I would be sent out to play-with nothing and nobody to play with. Lewis' paintings bring back those interminable afternoons vividly-at the bottom of the hill looking up at the house, summer either just over or not yet begun. There are the drab remains of a vegetable garden, broken-down raspberry canes, and the decrepit lawn chair.

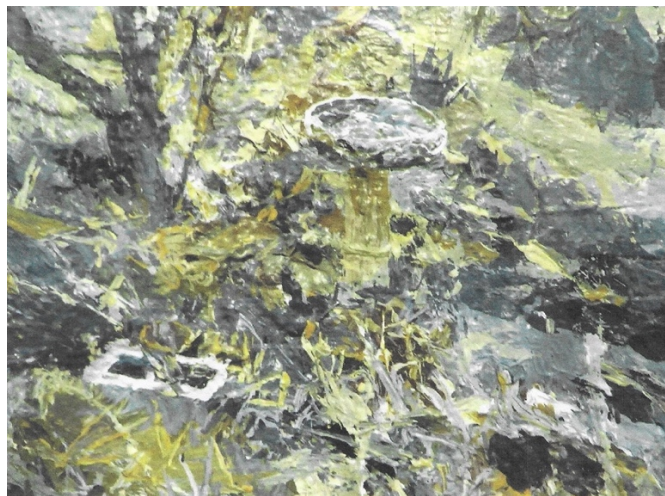
Lewis may be happy in his yard or he may be a lonely exile from the warmth of the house, I'm not sure. Could it be both?



"Looking Up at the House" (2019) 33" x 40"

I'm also reminded of stories about blind people who are cured of their blindness and all of a sudden find themselves unable to walk through the world. All of the lights, darks, shapes and colors are pressing directly onto their eyeballs.

"To the sighted, with a lifetime of practice, rules about occlusion (if A occludes B, object A is closer) and foreshortening (objects farther away appear smaller) are continually used to combine incoming light into a rich, three-dimensional world. The absence of these rules can frustrate the newly sighted, whose visual world can be both blurry and two-dimensional-paintings and people are often described as "flat, with dark patches"; a far-away house is "nearby, but requiring the taking of a lot of steps"; streetlights seen through glass are "luminous stains stuck to the window"; sunbeams through tree branches collapse into a single "tree with all the lights in it." -Stephen Kosslyn***



"Looking Up at the House" (detail) (2019) 33" x 40"

What Lewis seems to be doing is recreating the experience of learning to see. The sighted do that from birth, before they have any words to describe the process, and perhaps we all have some dim memory of it.

Everything must be constantly assessed, the ground must be made to lie down, objects must be separated from one another in space, relative sizes and distances calculated. Sometimes we err and the step down is further, or nearer than we anticipated or the world fools us with an illusion and we experience a little shock.

Lewis' works provide a number of these "little shocks." When I "saw" the birdbath, I then "saw" the concrete block, then a sharp right to the dark shape at the bottom right with a little yellow hanging off it-a sunflower?

-and then the house jumped back and became further away. Then I noticed the car in the driveway, almost as if I had asked the question, "Is Dad back from the store?"; it became the sole focus of the painting at that moment.



"Looking Up at House" (2018) 30" x 33"

Usually the visual world is rigidly controlled by our brains to the point that we only see what we expect to see. Some painters try to reverse the process and see the world anew and Lewis is one of these. Necessary to this exploration, for the painter, and for the viewer, is to explore the same subject repeatedly. It's why Cezanne painted apples and Mont Sainte-Victoire, Monet, haystacks and the Rouen cathedral. Giacometti painted his brother Diego and Lewis paints his backyard.

I'm puzzled though. Why did Lewis take a razor blade to Looking Up...?

-CNQ

*Stanley Lewis in a Wayward World, John Yau, Hyperallergic, May 22,2022

**Auden and Faulkner in the Work of Stanley Lewis, Thaddeus Radell, Painting Perceptions, August 13, 2014

Auden and Faulkner in the Work of Stanley Lewis

***What People Cured of Blindness See, by Patrick House, New Yorker, August 28, 2014