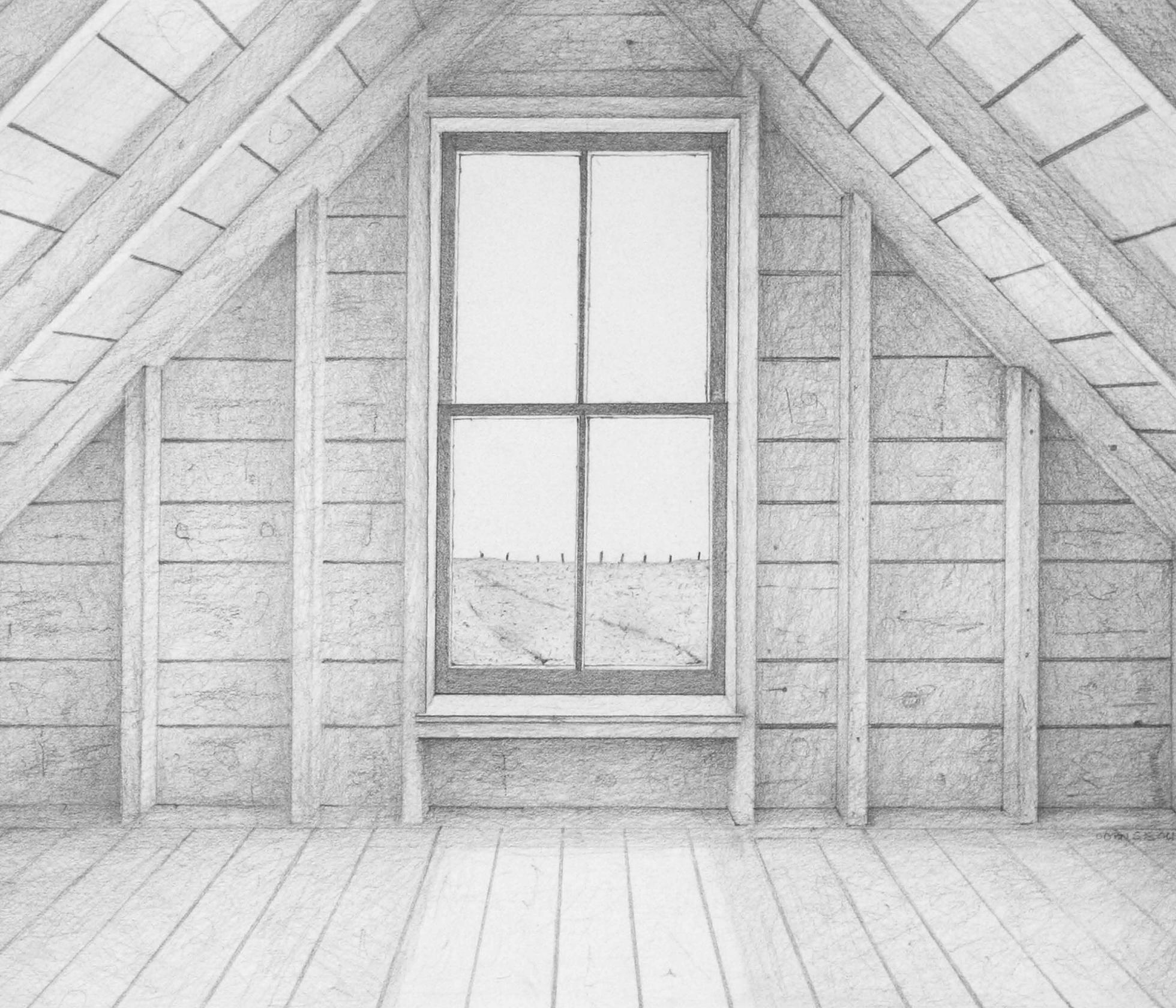




JOHN BALLANTYNE
SILENCE AND LIGHT



J O H N B A L L A N T Y N E
S I L E N C E A N D L I G H T

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198 Davenport Rd, Toronto, Ontario M5R 1J2
416.962.0438 or 800.551.2465
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Her Attic (drawing), graphite on stonehenge paper, 12 × 18 in

IN THE PICTORIAL REALM: BALLANTYNE'S PERSISTENT REALITY

by Donald Brackett

"Music is constant. Listening is intermittent." –John Cage

The same could be said for both looking and seeing and also for depicting our visions in the realm of painted images: looking is constant but actual seeing is only occasional. Paintings such as Ballantyne's are invitations to a ritual of looking that engages our imaginations far above and below the apparently straightforward substance of the images represented. They are what they appear to be: placid architectural spaces, portraits of both interiors and exteriors, still life's with rooms and buildings instead of fruits or flowers, designed and built landscapes at once tightly contained and yet fully open to conjecture.

As such they also aspire to be accurate diagrams of something impossible to behold, something which the poet Goethe once offered as an ideal definition of what architecture is and what it does: frozen music. In Ballantyne's work we witness a certain kind of mathematical precision which is not strictly realistic per se but in fact actually arrives at quite a different destination: a metaphysical dwelling place for the frozen music of form and content. Another primary and recurring focus of his work is the frequent element of illuminated objects which remind us of the original meaning of the word *photo-graphis*: *drawing with light*.

Fiat Lux! some of these images seem to whisper, let there be light, and the purity of "Tower Stairs" is a good place to begin contemplating the precious qualities not only of painting *with* light but also paintings of light itself as a subject, and of its palpable yet often invisible personality in our lives. The artist has observed that he sees painting as a tentative step towards realizing "the self", and to express that process he uses "simple exteriors or interiors of buildings accentuated with light, light as a metaphor, a means of illuminating the subject and, at the same time, symbolizing enlightenment". But just as enlightenment

is not actually as complicated as it first appears to be, these lux meditations are definitely not quite as simple as they first appear to be. He investigates what lies beneath the surface of things and arrives at what the philosophically inclined might call *things-in-themselves*. This artist is building a staircase to heaven without ever leaving the earth.

While Ballantyne's kind of themes and these accurate depictions of the recognizable world around us are often called photorealism or pictorial realism, I find it more accurate and rewarding to perceive them as magic realism. Either way, the artist's persistent commitment to capturing the essence of appearances and the mysteries below the surface is laudable in an age still avidly absorbed by both the abstract and the conceptual. As for their visual references or aesthetic geneology, while some viewers may tend to identify a resonance with the Canadian realists Colville or Pratt, or the Americans Wyeth or Hopper, I tend to veer toward their affinity with other more magic realists such as Fransoli, Guglielmi or Helder. They are similarly crisp and tidy, presented in bold outlines, with forms defined by soft but stark lights and gentle but profound shadows.

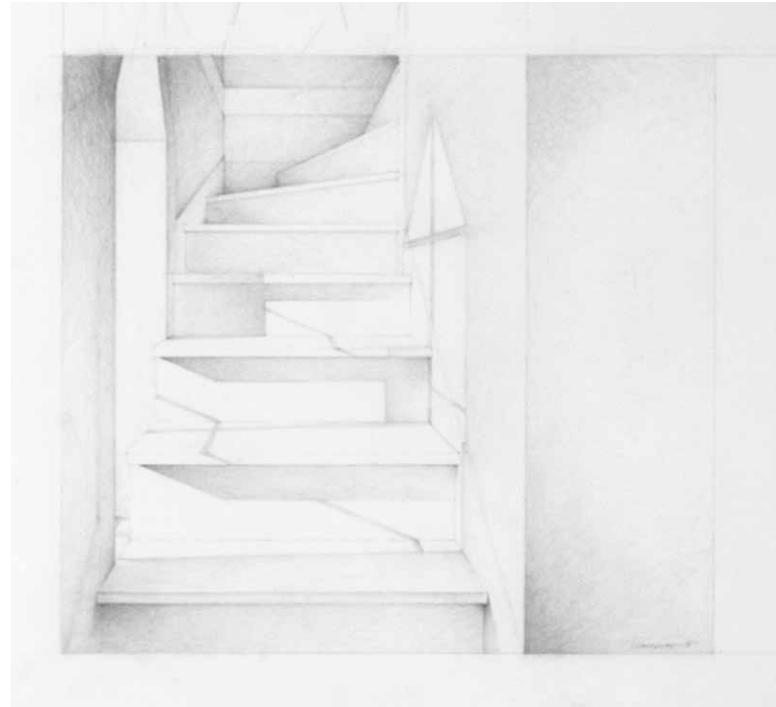
Both "BullsEye" and "Her Attic" for instance, register slightly vertiginous takes on the upper levels of wooden structures, one with a straight ahead and centred field of vision which includes a lovely miniature landscape outside its window, the other a skewed angle looking upward at a wood framed window transom which may or may not be in the same building. In fact, one of the pleasures of this body of work is that all the members of the serial progression could indeed be views, renderings and paintings of buildings within a radius of a few hundred feet of each other. Or, equally charming, they could be miles or even light years apart

There's also a captivating narrative at play in his work, not one that tends towards the programmatic, but rather a story of inanimate shapes encountered by sentient beings and activated by our presence amongst them. Especially strong is the sensation of sitting, although in keeping with their purity they are seats without sitters. Except that we are the sitters, now briefly standing before each image that invites recline and reflection. So, "Visitors" "Silent Pews" "Seats 22 and 23" and most mysteriously, "The Office", all offer repose in a dramatic yet meditative manner that provokes a placid state of calm absorption, safety and sanctuary.

Perhaps also the unique sitting practiced in contemplation is being alluded to, which prompts me to bestow a new name on his pictorial sensibility: transcendental mediation, where the painter's practiced eye and hand mediates between us and the painted image.

Indeed, one could identify sanctuary itself as the true subject and theme of his work. Like Charles Sheeler's own deft images of the built, industrial or urban landscape, they utilize a shared severe but reassuring gridwork that was often associated with a group of artists known as the Precisionists. Yes, they are precise, there is no room for chaos or accident here, unless it is the viewer who brings those ingredients into play through our participation in his ritual of looking.

Yet despite their precision in execution and style, they also share a secret sense of the sacred, not because they often employ church architecture, but because they utterly fuse form and content and remind us of what great painters all try to achieve: that a painting is not a picture of an experience, it is itself an experience. Thus there seem to be a wide variety of sitting: secular seats such as those in a stadium, sacred seats such as those in a place of worship. Indeed, churches also recur with some regularity in his work: "Creek Church" and "Prairie Church" both ironically suggest rigorous modernist edges merged with the subtle nostalgia of a rural sensibility. Somehow this paradox works perfectly.



Tower Stairs (drawing), graphite on stonehenge paper, 16 x 17 in

"The White House" is another precise diagram of dwelling without a fixed definition to limit our experience, one where the mediator is there but not there, just as the strangely white windows are both open and closed at the same time. Through his rendering of the built environment so accurately he actually allows it to become utterly surreal, and each of his rituals of looking and seeing reveal much more than can be merely imagined about the builders and dwellers. They're about us.

The artist Edward Hopper once opined that he could imagine growing old painting only the way light hits a white wall. In the case of Ballantyne, he might be suggesting that by doing so we may actually be growing younger. Indeed, dogs, birds and children might see land, sky and buildings exactly this way. Maybe we should try to join them.

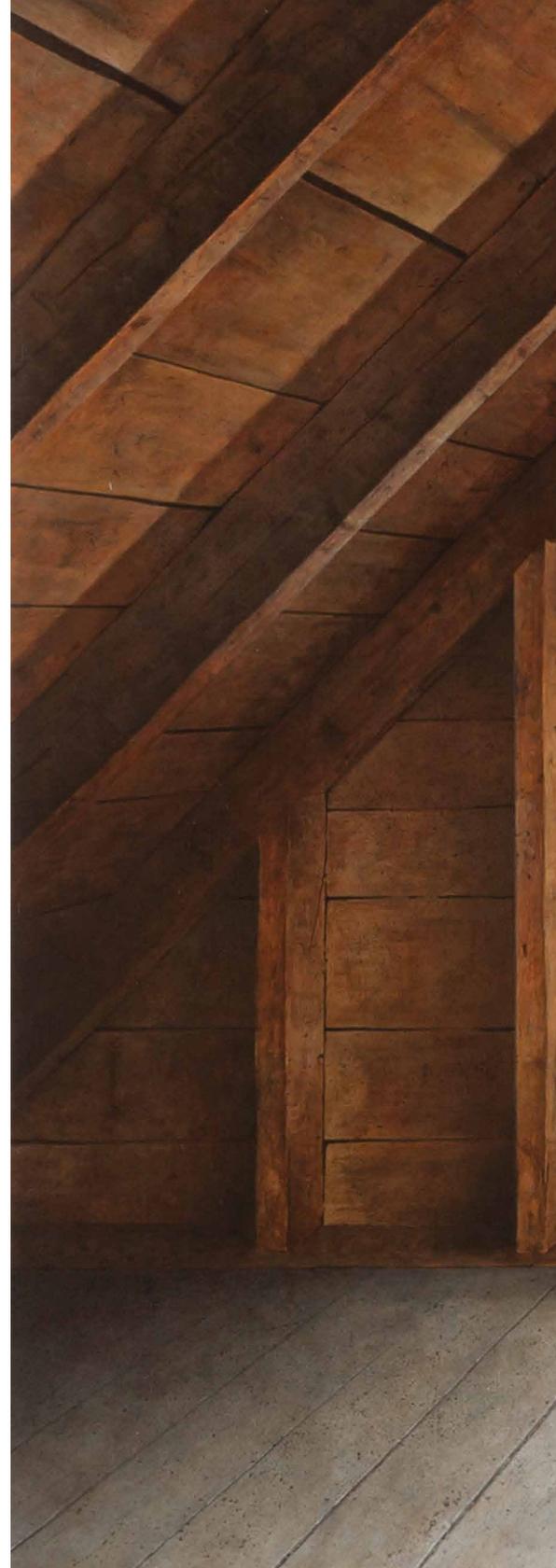


Creek Church, acrylic on panel, 23 × 35 in



Silent Pews, acrylic on panel, 21 × 57 in

Her Attic, acrylic on panel, 30 × 45 in









Previous spread
Prairie Church, acrylic on panel, 20 × 47 in

Opposite page
Tower Stairs, acrylic on panel, 33 × 36 in

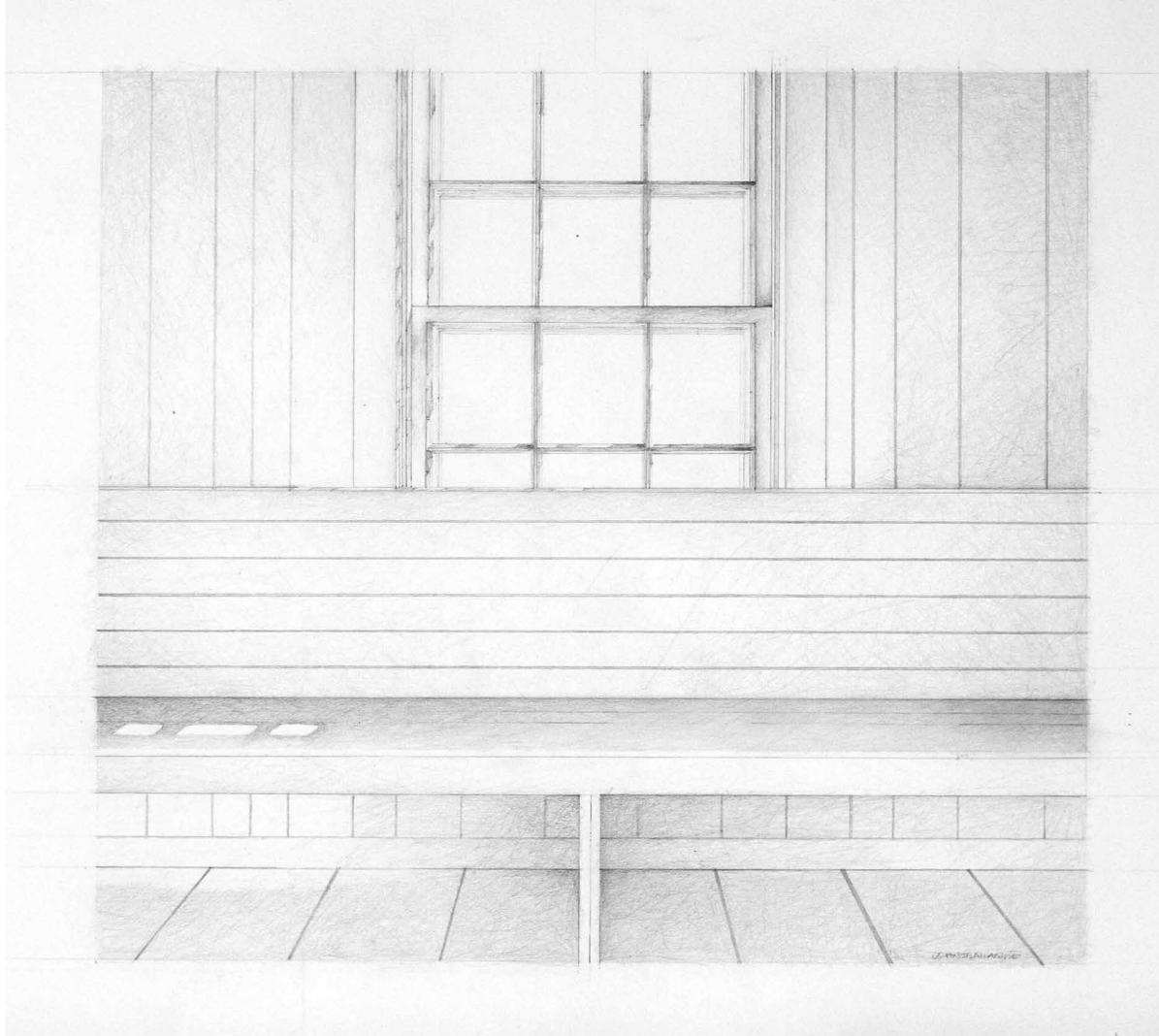




The White House, acrylic on panel, 23 × 45 in



Bull's Eye, acrylic on panel, 30 × 45 in



The Office (drawing), graphite on stonehenge paper, 17 × 19 in



Seats 22 and 23, acrylic on panel, 20 × 39 in

BIOGRAPHY – JOHN BALLANTYNE

Solo Exhibitions

- 2016 Odon Wagner Contemporary, Toronto, ON
- 2011 Odon Wagner Contemporary, Toronto, ON
- 2009 Musée des beaux-arts de Sherbrooke, Sherbrooke, QC
- 2005 Galerie de Bellefeuille, Montreal, QC
- 1998 Arts Sutton Gallery, Sutton, QC
- 1997 God and Me, Bishop's University Artists' Center, Lennoxville, QC
- 1990 West-End Gallery, Montréal, QC
- 1988 West-End Gallery, Montréal, QC
- 1986 West-End Gallery, Montréal, QC
- 1985 Yaneff Gallery, Toronto, ON
- 1984 Yaneff Gallery, Toronto, ON
- 1983 West-End Gallery, Montréal, QC
- 1981 West-End Gallery, Montréal, QC
- 1979 West-End Gallery, Montréal, QC
- 1978 Cultural Centre, Cowansville, QC
- 1973 Ibis Gallery, London, England

Group Exhibitions

- 2010-15 Art Toronto, Odon Wagner Contemporary, Toronto, ON
- 2008 Art Miami, Galerie de Bellefeuille, Montréal, QC
- 2003-08 Toronto International Art Fair (TIAF), Galerie de Bellefeuille, Montréal, QC
- 2007 Art Miami, Galerie de Bellefeuille, Montréal, QC
- 2006 Art 2006, Montréal, Galerie de Bellefeuille, Montréal, QC
- 2006 Retrospective 25 YRS, Arts Sutton Gallery, Sutton, QC
- 2006 Chicago International Art Fair, Galerie de Bellefeuille, Montréal, QC
- 2001-02 Toronto International Art Fair, Marcia Rafelman Fine Art, Toronto, ON
- 2000 Anniversary Exhibition, Arts Sutton Gallery, Sutton, QC
- 2000 Tour des Arts 1989- 2000, Sutton, QC
- 1999 Creatio, Bishop's University Artists' Center, Lennoxville, QC

- 1999 Musée des beaux-arts de Sherbrooke, Sherbrooke, QC
- 1998 Marcia Rafelman Fine Arts, Toronto, ON
- 1996 Marcia Rafelman Fine Arts, Toronto, ON
- 1994 Art Vue, Atlanta, GA
- 1994 Des cadavres exquis, Arts Sutton Gallery, Sutton, QC
- 1993 West End Gallery, Montréal, QC
- 1992 West End Gallery, Montréal, QC
- 1992 The Centennial Gallery, Saint John, NB
- 1991 The Canadian Council Art Bank, Québec City, QC
- 1991 McCain Gallery, Group Show, Quebec Artists, Florenceville, NB
- 1991 Gallery 78, Group Show, Quebec Artists, Fredericton, NB
- 1988 Arts Sutton Gallery, Sutton, QC
- 1987 Francesca Anderson Gallery, Boston, MA
- 1987 Arts Sutton Gallery, Sutton, QC
- 1985 Yaneff Gallery, Toronto, ON
- 1985 West End Gallery, Montréal, QC
- 1985 Gallery Lac Brome, Knowlton, QC
- 1976 Arts Sutton Gallery, Sutton, QC
- 1974 6th Festival international de la peinture, Cagnes-Sur-Mer, France. UNESCO Sponsorship. Represented Canada with Guy Montpetit
- 1973 Salon d'été, Grasse, France
- 1971-72 Maison des artistes, Cagnes-sur-mer, France
- 1971 Salon d'automne, Paris, France
- 1969 New School of Art, Toronto, ON

Notable Collections

- A & F Baillargeon, Pointe Claire, QC
- Afasic Association, London, England
- Art Bank, Canada Council, Federal Government of Canada, Ottawa, ON
- Bishop's University, Lennoxville, QC
- Byers Casgrain, Montréal, QC
- Canada Packers, Toronto, ON

Claridge Investments Ltd., Montréal, QC
Counsel Corporation, Toronto, ON
Crownx, Toronto, ON
Genstar, San Francisco, CA
Loto-Québec, Montréal, QC
Prolith Inc., Montréal, QC
Shearman & Sterling, New York, NY

Awards / Memberships

1994 The Royal Canadian Academy of Arts, member
1973 Salon d'Été, Grasse, France Médaille d'or / Gold medal

Education

1968-69 The New School of Art, Toronto, ON
1967-68 Loyola College, Montréal, QC
1963-67 Montréal Institute of Technology, Montréal, QC

CREDITS

Curatorial: Odon Wagner, Rafael Wagner, Caitlin McCullough,
Tenya Mastoras

Layout: Caitlin McCullough, Tenya Mastoras

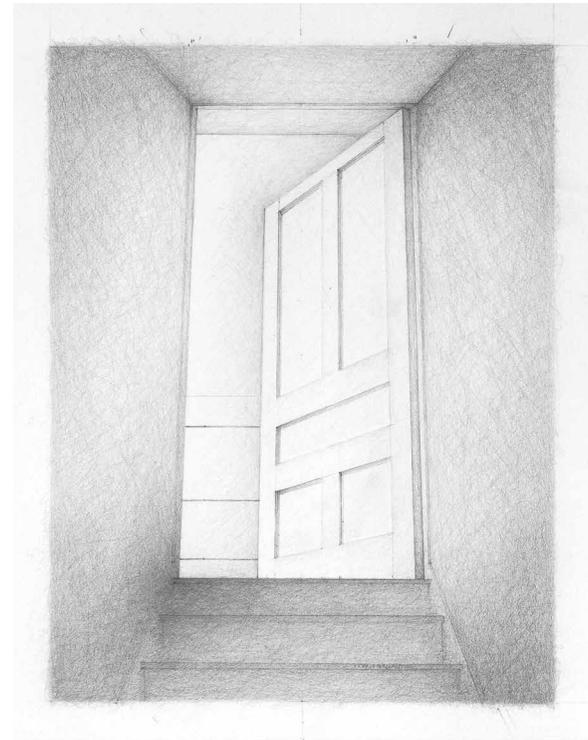
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Above
Top of the Stairs (drawing),
graphite on stonehenge paper, 13 × 10 in.

Front cover
The Office 2014, acrylic on panel, 34 × 38 in.

Back cover
Visitors 2015, acrylic on panel, 19 × 43 in.



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