



PARRISH ART MUSEUM

ACROSS THE AVENUES: FAIRFIELD PORTER IN NEW YORK

February 18–June 16, 2024

Comprised of 26 paintings and prints, *Across the Avenues: Fairfield Porter in New York* focuses on the cityscapes Porter created of Manhattan between the mid-1940s to mid-1970s. Drawn from the Museum's vast Porter collection—consisting of over 240 works—*Across the Avenues* will include 23 paintings and three lithographic prints that illuminate the artist's ability to capture New York City's bustling energy, both day and night. Highlighting different moments throughout the day, Porter's use of varied hues of blue, red, and yellow evoke the early, hazy morning skies above the skyscrapers and the dark, moody night atmospheres.

After occasionally visiting New York during his college years, Porter moved to the city in 1928 and lived on 15th Street while continuing his studies at the Art Students League for two years. After spending time in Europe, he returned stateside in 1932 and married poet Anne Channing, and they called New York City their home until 1936. During these four years, Porter maintained a consistent subject matter of cityscapes in his works—specifically street scenes—which are on view in this permanent collection installation. After spending some years in his hometown Winnetka, IL, he returned to New York in 1943 and remained in the city until 1949 before moving to Southampton, NY. Over the course of Porter's career, the city endured as one of his main inspirations, in addition to his landscapes and portraits.

This group of cityscapes illustrates the artist's commitment to representational art and his formal training. Porter had previously studied at Harvard University with Arthur Pope, at Parsons School of Design with Jacques Maroger, and at the Art Students League with Boardman Robinson and Thomas Hart Benton—all during a time when the focus in contemporary art was on abstraction. Despite being criticized by peers and art critics, including famed Clement Greenberg, Porter was unwavering in his devotion to a representational style of his own. This style is on full display with these works, where he explores the city from multiple vantage points—with views from above looking through an apartment windowpane, of the hurried sidewalks during the mid-afternoon rush, and below the noisy avenues on subway platforms.

Across the Avenues: Fairfield Porter in New York is curated by Kaitlin Halloran, Assistant Curator and Publications Coordinator.

Exhibition Support:

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PORTER & LITHOGRAPHY

Printing became a part of Fairfield Porter's practice during the latter part of his career—previously dedicating much of his time to painting—the Museum holds about 20 of the artist's lithographs dating from the 1960s to as late as 1975, the year Porter passed. In total, the artist produced 31 prints, including lithographs, linoleum block prints, and silkscreens. Of those 31, Porter created 14 color lithographs during the last six years of his life. In 1966, Porter produced his first and only silkscreen, and by 1969 was starting to become fully immersed in the process of color lithography at Mourlot Graphics in New York.

After his time at Mourlot Graphics, Porter began printing at Bank Street Atelier (BSA)—a three-story former U.S. Naval hospital located on the Upper West Side of Manhattan—working closely with printers, Jean-Pierre Rémond and Yann Samson. The large layout of the Bank Street building had expansive windows, allowing considerable light to pour into the working space, an advantageous condition for the artist. Aside from the working area with print presses, the three-level building included a separate working section for visiting artists, Porter had his own cubicle to work in while there.

The process of printing for Porter frequently began with either a watercolor study or a previously completed painting. Using these 'guides' allowed Porter to see for himself how close he could get to what he initially set out to do—a significant element to the artist's sense of accomplishment while printing. Joan Ludman, author of *Fairfield Porter: A Catalogue Raisonné of His Prints*, explained that Porter was the kind of artist who wanted to be included in every step of the process while printing. So much so, that the printing crew would wait for the artist to arrive, ensuring he could be involved from start to finish.

Included in this presentation of Porter's New York cityscapes are three lithographs from the early 1970s, all printed at Bank Street Atelier. In April of 1971, Porter began work on the color lithographs *Sixth Avenue I* and *II* (1971). In May, Porter completed a group of five prints, including *Broadway* (1972) as the last round of works created at BSA before moving to Resam Press on 11th Street with Rémond and Samson.

New York City Locations:

Sixth Avenue I:

There are two versions of Porter's *Sixth Avenue* prints, *Sixth Avenue I* and *II* (1971). Porter created two almost identical lithographs with the skies revealing only a slight difference in shade, one with pink tones and the other with hues of yellow. In this instance, Porter was so intrigued by both versions of the prints, that he could not decide which one to publish. Rather than making the decision to eliminate one, he printed the two lithographs with both being editioned 33 out of 60.

Sixth Avenue II:

Noticeably included in these prints is the historic Waverly Theater, which opened in 1938 and maintained its presence for almost 70 years. Throughout its run in Greenwich Village, the Theater became known for its sole showings of European films. Porter, having spent considerable time in the Village would have likely been very familiar with the Theater's place on the avenue.

Broadway

Broadway (1972) gives a recognizable glimpse into New York's dynamic energy during the day with people walking along the sidewalks. The Empire State Building and the 1970s mint green city buses are elements that play into Porter's skill of transporting the viewer into his scenes. The grates, parking signs, and fire escape ledges encapsulate the detail the artist incorporates within not only his paintings but prints as well.

Across the Avenues: Fairfield Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill



All works by Fairfield Porter (American, 1907–1975)

1. *Cityscape*, ca. 1942

Oil on canvas

32 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 25 $\frac{1}{8}$

Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, N.Y., Gift of the Estate of Fairfield Porter, 1982.9.10



2. *Turn*, ca. 1942

Oil on Masonite

24 x 30

Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, N.Y., Gift of the Estate of Fairfield Porter, 1980.10.7



3. *City Street* (unfinished), ca. 1943

Oil on Masonite

29 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 24

Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, N.Y., Gift of the Estate of Fairfield Porter, 1980.10.9



4. *Second Avenue and 52nd Street*, ca. 1943

Oil on Masonite

30 x 24

Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, N.Y., Gift of the Estate of Fairfield Porter, 1980.10.8



5. *Street Scene*, ca. 1943
Oil on Masonite
23 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 32 $\frac{7}{8}$
Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, N.Y., Gift of the Estate
of Fairfield Porter, 1980.10.11



6. *Subway*, ca. 1944
Oil on Masonite
18 x 14
Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, N.Y., Gift of the Estate
of Fairfield Porter, 1980.10.13



7. *Cityscape with Yellow Taxi*, 1945
Oil on canvas
32 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 24 $\frac{1}{4}$
Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, N.Y., Gift of the Estate
of Fairfield Porter, 1982.9.2



8. *Cityscape*, ca. 1945
Oil on canvas
25 x 30
Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, N.Y., Gift of Robert
Fizdale, in Memory of Arthur Gold, 1991.5



9. *Hennessey's Bar*, ca. 1945
Oil on canvas
36 x 45
Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, N.Y., Gift of the Estate
of Fairfield Porter, 1980.10.18



10. *Parked Cars*, ca. 1945
Oil on burlap
30 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 25 $\frac{1}{8}$
Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, N.Y., Gift of the Estate
of Fairfield Porter, 1980.10.14



11. *Untitled (First Avenue)*, ca. 1945
Oil on canvas
32 x 26 $\frac{1}{4}$
Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, N.Y., Gift of the Estate
of Fairfield Porter, 1980.10.16



12. *Wines and Liquors #1*, ca. 1945
Oil on canvas
36 x 30 $\frac{1}{8}$
Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, N.Y., Gift of the Estate
of Fairfield Porter, 1980.10.17



13. *Wines and Liquors #2*, ca. 1945

Oil on canvas

36 x 45

Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, N.Y., Gift of the Estate of Fairfield Porter, 1980.10.187



14. *First Avenue*, 1947

Oil on Masonite

21 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 27 $\frac{7}{8}$

Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, N.Y., Gift of the Estate of Fairfield Porter, 1980.10.10



15. *City Window*, ca. 1947

Oil on Masonite

34 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 20 $\frac{1}{8}$

Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, N.Y., Gift of the Estate of Fairfield Porter, 1980.10.130



16. *Sunset*, ca. 1948

Oil on canvas

16 x 12

Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, N.Y., Gift of the Estate of Fairfield Porter, 1980.10.26



17. *East 11th Street*, ca. 1960

Oil on canvas

29 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 23 $\frac{7}{8}$

Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, N.Y., Gift of the Estate of Fairfield Porter, 1980.10.86



18. *Untitled (East 11th Street)*, ca. 1961

Oil on canvas

20 x 12 $\frac{1}{2}$

Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, N.Y., Gift of the Estate of Fairfield Porter, 1980.10.80



19. *East 56th Street*, ca. 1964

Oil on canvas

40 x 40

Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, N.Y., Gift of the Estate of Fairfield Porter, 1980.10.76



20. *Fifth Avenue: Yellow Car*, 1967

Oil on canvas

28 x 22

Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, N.Y., Gift of the Estate of Fairfield Porter, 1980.10.180



21. *Sixth Avenue I*, 1971

Lithograph

Image: $21 \frac{1}{4} \times 28 \frac{1}{4}$; Sheet: $23 \frac{3}{4} \times 30 \frac{3}{4}$

Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, N.Y., Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Daniel J. Mason, 1980.28.5



22. *Sixth Avenue II*, 1971

Lithograph

Image: $22 \frac{1}{16} \times 29 \frac{1}{16}$; Sheet: $23 \frac{13}{16} \times 30 \frac{5}{8}$

Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, N.Y., Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Daniel J. Mason, 1980.28.6



23. *Broadway*, 1972

Lithograph

Image: $29 \frac{3}{4} \times 21 \frac{3}{4}$

Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, N.Y., Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Daniel J. Mason, 1980.28.7



24. *City Street*, ca. 1970

Oil on Masonite

$17 \frac{3}{8} \times 19 \frac{1}{4}$

Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, N.Y., Gift of the Estate of Fairfield Porter, 1980.10.92



25. *Cityscape*, ca. 1970s

Oil on canvas

36 x 45

Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, N.Y., Gift of the Estate
of Fairfield Porter, 1980.10.67



26. *Near City Hall*, ca. 1970's

Oil on canvas

31 ¼ x 38

Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, N.Y., Gift of the Estate
of Fairfield Porter, 1980.10.143



External References:

Basic and General Information on Fairfield Porter via Wikipedia:

Fairfield Porter (June 10, 1907 – September 18, 1975) was an American painter and art critic. He was the fourth of five children of James Porter, an architect, and Ruth Furness Porter, a poet from a literary family. He was the brother of photographer Eliot Porter and the brother-in-law of federal Reclamation Commissioner Michael W. Straus.

While a student at Harvard, Porter majored in fine arts; he continued his studies at the Art Students' League when he moved to New York City in 1928. His studies at the Art Students' League predisposed him to produce socially relevant art and, although the subjects would change, he continued to produce realist work for the rest of his career. He would be criticized and revered for continuing his representational style in the midst of the Abstract Expressionist movement.

His subjects were primarily landscapes, domestic interiors and portraits of family, friends and fellow artists, many of them affiliated with the New York School of writers, including John Ashbery, Frank O'Hara, and James Schuyler. Many of his paintings were set in or around the family summer house on Great Spruce Head Island, Maine and the family home at 49 South Main Street, Southampton, New York.

Fairfield Porter was one of the most important American realist painters from 1949 until his death in 1975. Not coincidentally, these were the years when Porter lived in Southampton, New York, and in 1979 his estate recognized the bond between the artist and the Museum by donating some 250 works to the Parrish collection.

Porter was both a gifted painter and an accomplished writer who produced some of the most lucid art criticism and commentary of the time, notably his reviews for the magazine *Art News*. He insisted that he painted what he saw rather than what he might assume to be there. Porter painted what he was familiar with—his family and friends and the places he lived and visited, including Southampton, New York and a family-owned island off the coast of Maine where he had summered since childhood.

Writing about the intimate interior paintings of the French artists Vuillard and Bonnard, Porter found that in their work that recorded the ordinary "...the extraordinary is everywhere." An artist who steadfastly maintained a figurative vision, he knew and admired many Abstract Expressionist artists on the East End, especially Willem de Kooning. Porter once wrote: "The realist thinks he knows ahead of time what reality is, and the abstract artist what art is, but it is in its formality that realist art excels, and the best abstract art communicates an overwhelming sense of reality."