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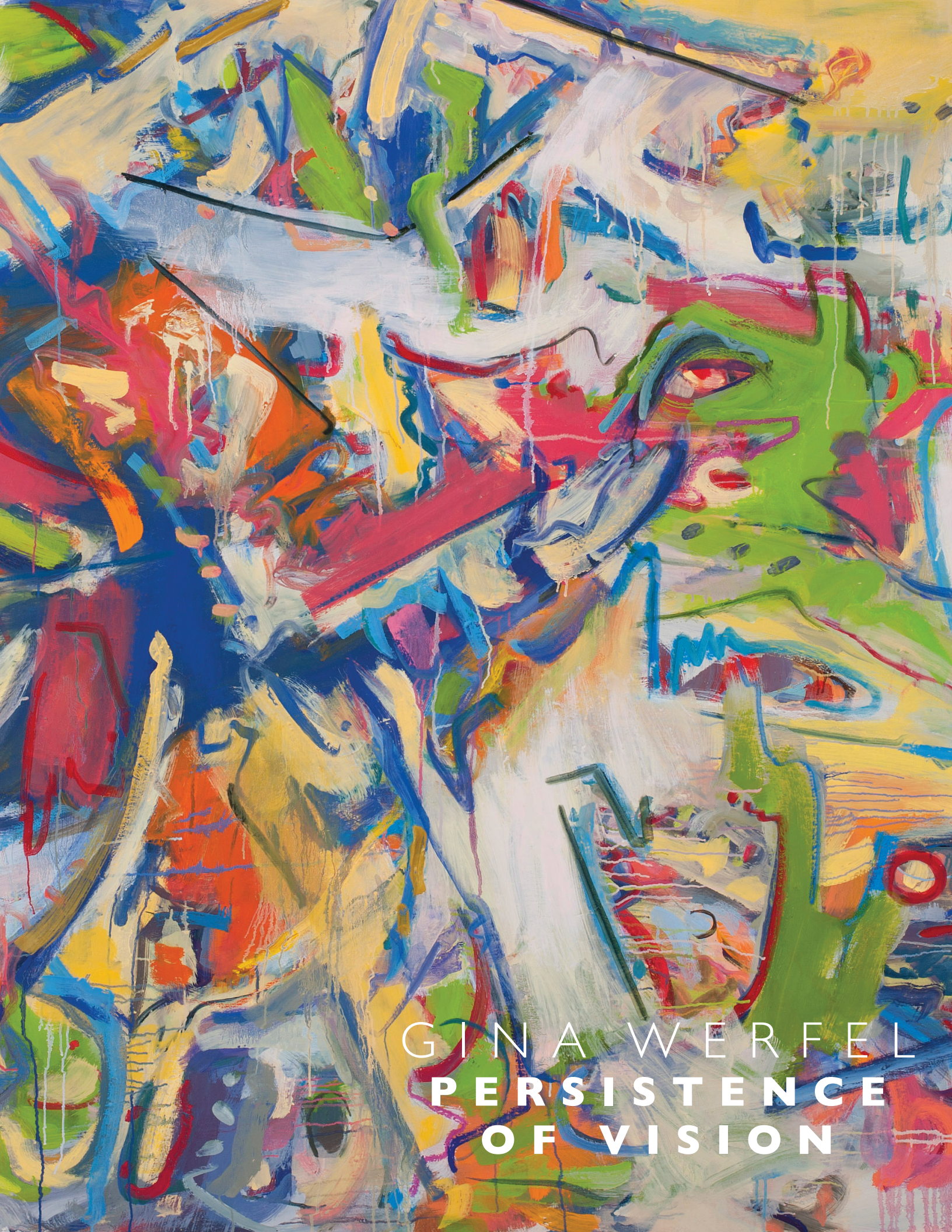
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GINA WERFEL
PERSISTENCE
OF VISION

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University Art Gallery
Department of Art
College of the Arts
California State University, Stanislaus

500 copies printed

Gina Werfel - *Persistence of Vision*

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Department of Art
College of the Arts
California State University, Stanislaus

February 1 - March 1, 2011

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Contents

Director's Foreword	4
Essay: <i>Persistence of Vision</i>	5
Images	9
Artist Statement	28
Curriculum Vitae	30
Acknowledgments	32

Director's Foreword

This exhibition, *Gina Werfel – Persistence of Vision*, represents a brief overview of Gina Werfel's most recent works. Coming from landscapes to abstractions to work consisting of glimpse of studio still lifes, Gina Werfel has studied and understands all that painting has to offer. All of the work leads the viewer on a wonderful journey that pleases the eye and amazes the mind. I am very pleased to be able to exhibit her work for others to enjoy.

Many colleagues have been instrumental in presenting this exhibition. I would like to thank Gina Werfel and Adler & Co. Gallery for the privilege of exhibiting this amazing work, De Witt Cheng for his wonderful essay, College of the Arts, California State University, Stanislaus for the wonderful catalog design and Claremont Print and Copy for their expertise in printing this catalog.

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Dean De Cocker, Director
University Art Gallery
California State University, Stanislaus

GINA WERFEL: Persistence of Vision

"I want gesture —any kind of gesture, all kinds of gesture— gentle or brutal, joyous or tragic; the gestures of space, soaring, sinking, streaming, whirling; the gestures of light flowing or spurting through color. I see everything as possessing or possessed by gesture."

— Elaine de Kooning

In today's pluralist, anything-goes art world, artists no longer voice the moral absolutes that they held sacred during modernism's struggling years in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: at the beginning of that period, abstractionist Wassily Kandinsky enjoined enlightened artists to "serve the development and refinement of the human soul" and "drag the heavy cartload of struggling humanity, getting stuck amid the stones, ever onward and upward"; near the end of it, Philip Guston returned to figuration from Abstract Expressionism and was condemned by colleagues for his esthetic betrayal.

Fortunately, such battles are long over, and artists who work both representationally and abstractly, like the famously eclectic Gerhard Richter are seen, correctly, as, in Whitman's words, "large [sensibilities] ...contain[ing] multitudes." Gina Werfel, a New Yorker who has taught at UC Davis for a decade, is best known for her landscape paintings, *plein-air* depictions of rural Maine, the Southwest, Yosemite, and, in recent years, Davis, a bedroom community near Sacramento built on former farmlands, that derive from a host of influences, from Mannerism (Pontormo and Rosso Fiorentino are especial favorites) through modernism (Cézanne, Matisse, Diebenkorn, deKooning, et al.). These accomplished, eclectic paintings have been praised for their carefully observed and freely rendered evocations of place, but their abstract qualities were noted, too. Peter Frank (*Gone West*, John Natsoulas Gallery) pointed out Werfel's interest "less in



Davis Pond - Fall, 2005, oil on linen, 30" x 40", private collection

rendering landscapes of east and west than ... in the abstract, intuited sensations of these spaces." Victoria Dalkey wrote ("*Nature Untamed*," *The Sacramento Bee*) that Werfel's California landscapes "examine the clash between nature and man-made structures ... as agricultural land is developed," subsuming even tract homes, condos and McMansions into her lyrical vision, and that her abstractions

suggested “water, foliage and floral motifs.” Mark Van Proyen described an incipient dissolution of form in Werfel’s “evanescent atmospheres [that] seem almost interchangeable with elaborated topographies, almost as if the land were evaporating into the sky.” Robert Berling (Art in America) saw the work as “travers[ing] the divide between representation and abstraction,” combining “a strong sense of place and its picturesque pleasures” with the purely pictorial pleasures of “an insouciant lightness of touch and a restrained, precisely pitched palette.” Kenneth Baker (The San Francisco Chronicle) enthused that *Knights*, an abstraction incorporating a childhood drawing by Werfel’s now-grown son, “leaves the eye glad to be awake in its time.”

In the spring of 2008, after three decades of painting onsite outdoors, Werfel decided to concentrate on the abstract elements and let her imagery emerge from the painting process. Clearly this shift was evolutionary, her transition from Renaissance windows on reality to depictions of artistic subjectivity aided by her habit of rotating the canvases sideways and upside-down to exploit the form-creating accidents of fluid paint. She selects subject matter that seems promising: “I may start with one of my son’s early drawings, but add forms from a plastic toy on my studio table, a Renaissance painting reproduction on my studio wall, or a segment of the landscape out my studio window or a remembered landscape element...There is not much nostalgia in my choice of these props, but rather a recognition of interesting forms within which reside some emotional residue and meaning... These props are no more than starting points, and after a certain point, I rotate the painting to dissolve the literal image and focus on what the painting dictates as next steps.” Her long study of and absorption in nature enables her to create, from sometimes unlikely sources, imagined parallel painterly worlds. “Improvisation is at the root of my practice—responses to the way a particular color or mark leads to another... Untethering myself from the demands of representation has allowed me to abandon the restrictions of a horizon line and naturalistic colors, and to explore without restraint some of the same issues that I had explored in landscape— dynamic, edgy movement, spatial complexity and atmospheric color and light... Speed, movement, gesture, allusions to the body and to landscape are all embedded in these paintings.”

The emotion that suffuses Werfel’s landscapes emanates from her abstractions as well. Alternating between jazzy calligraphy and serene mists of color, and often combining them, these works synthesize the gestural (Pollock, de Kooning) and colorist (Mark Rothko, Frankenthaler) wings of Abstract Expressionism. *Fast Forward* (2009), based on one of her son’s drawings of knights in combat, may be, due to its arduous creation, a symbol of struggle for Werfel, but its floral



Galen Pardee, drawing, 1993

palette and floating calligraphy recall to viewers instead the semi-abstract arcadias of Kandinsky, Masson and Gorky. *Headdress* and *Saddle*, also deriving from her son's drawings, similarly suggest nature transformed into symbols, while *Collision* (2010) does embody dramatic conflict and tension—de Kooning's monumental abstraction, *Excavation*, sprung to coloristic life. *Deruta* (2010), based on the patterning on a seventeenth-century Italian plate, retains the colors of its originating motif, but the forms have been broken apart into autonomous "agents" aloft in the colored "air." More Asian and meditative in feeling are the more open compositions of *Interlude* (2009), *Encounter* (2008), and *Cloak* (2009). Werfel sees erasure as a form of mark-making, and likes leaving *pentimenti*, partial erasures, as suggestive, mysterious elements midway between source and metaphor, looking both back and forward, revealing their "complexity of references, and multi-layering of marks and forms. I want to retain the ghosts of previous decisions and retain the multiplicity of original sources." These vaporous paintings with their ambiguous actors or hieroglyphs are landscapes of metamorphosis that reveal themselves to the long gaze rather than the quick scan. Baudelaire, in his poem, *Correspondences*, described Nature as a temple of living columns and a forest of symbols. Werfel's works are poetic, even dreamlike, depictions of nature that emerge from the collaboration of the playful imagination and the disciplined eye and hand and attain their own reality.

"Persistence of vision" is the term for the brain's acceptance of a succession of rapidly projected images—24 frames per second is the cinematic standard—as continuous motion. Paradoxically, it might also be applied to the enterprise of painting, which might, in this hectic digital age, seem anachronistic. In the long view, however, painted visions (and revisions) like Gina Werfel's, reconciling real and imaginary, and embedding time and flux, will persist, renewing and transforming a tradition as old as humanity. Joan Mitchell, the Abstract Expressionist painter, characterized painting (along with photography) in a 1986 interview, fittingly, as "the only thing [art form] that is both continuous and still."

— DEWITT CHENG

DeWitt Cheng is an independent critic and curator based in San Francisco. He writes regularly for *Art Ltd.*, *Artillery*, *Sculpture*, *VisualArtSource.com* and *East Bay Express*, and teaches at UC Berkeley Extension in San Francisco.

IMAGES



Fast Forward, 2009, oil on canvas, 72" x 60"



Headdress, 2009, oil on canvas, 60" x 48"



Saddle, 2009, oil on canvas, 60" 48"



Cloak, 2009, oil on canvas, 48" x 48"



Collision, 2010, oil on canvas, 60" x 60"



Lances, 2010, oil on canvas, 60" x 60"



Interlude, 2009, oil on canvas, 48" x 48"



Encounter, 2009, oil on canvas, 48" x 48"



Corciano, 2010, oil on canvas, 60" x 48"



Deruta, 2010, oil on canvas, 60" x 48"



Stretching Out, 2010, oil on canvas, 20" x 16"



Underwater, 2010, oil on paper, 14" x 11"



Drawbridge, 2009-2010, oil on canvas, 48" x 48"



Restraint, 2010, oil on canvas, 60" x 48"



Scattershot, 2010, acrylic on paper, 20" x 16"



Blue Veil, 2010, acrylic on paper, 20" x 16"



Suspended Circle, 2010, acrylic on paper, 14" x 11"



Orange Windows, 2010, acrylic on paper, 20" x 16"

ARTIST STATEMENT

My paintings incorporate dynamic, edgy movement with references to the body and landscape. I create compositions that echo the spatial complexities of landscape to which I had been drawn when I was painting outdoors- tumbling series of hills and/or underwater reflections in water. However, mixing up stuff is the most exciting part of painting for me- a universe that incorporates the seen world as well as fragmentary gestures from memory. Fragments floating in a fluid space intrigue me, in contrast to my earlier efforts to bring a landscape into a unified spatial whole.

A word about the presence of time in these paintings: some take over a year to complete, but others come more easily. I struggle between emptying the paintings out and packing them so intensely that there is little air left. I use pentimenti or vestiges of erased decisions almost like markers of time. Space is created through the vestiges of gestures left embedded in the process of painting itself.

Titles sometimes come from the original source material from which I first started the painting. Other times, the painting itself suggests a title. For example, "Fast Forward" used to have a title in reference to my son's childhood knight drawings with which I began the painting. Once I realized that the painting had lost all references to those drawings, I thought "Fast Forward" would be a more accurate expression of the speed of the painting marks and its tumbling, tumultuous stance.

— Gina Werfel 2011



Gina Werfel, studio, 2010

GINA WERFEL

EXHIBITIONS

- 2011 California State University Gallery, Stanislaus
2010 Adler& Co Gallery, San Francisco, CA
2009 Prince Street Gallery, New York City
Adler& Co Gallery, San Francisco, CA
Mondavi Winery, Vineyard Gallery, Napa, CA
2007 Prince Street Gallery, New York City
2006 Monty Stabler Galleries, Birmingham, AL
2005 B.Sakata Garo Gallery, Sacramento CA
2004 Mondavi Winery, Vineyard Gallery, Napa, CA
2003 Prince Street Gallery, New York City
2001 Prince Street Gallery, New York City
Monty Stabler Galleries, Birmingham, AL
1998 Prince Street Gallery, New York City
1995 Monty Stabler Galleries, Birmingham, AL
1994 Prince Street Gallery, New York, NY
Second Street Gallery, Charlottesville, VA
Dupont Gallery, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, VA
1993 Monty Stabler Galleries, Birmingham, AL

1992 Maier Museum of Art, Lynchburg, VA
Prince Street Gallery, New York, NY
Congress Square Gallery, Portland, ME
1989 Prince Street Gallery, New York, NY
Colby College Museum of Art, Waterville, ME
Gallery 127, Portland, ME
1986 Prince Street Gallery, New York, NY
Jersey City Museum, Jersey City, NJ
1985 Prince Street Gallery, New York, NY
1983 College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA
Colby College Museum of Art, Waterville, ME
1982 Prince Street Gallery, New York, NY
University of Maine, Farmington, ME
1981 Colby College Museum of Art, Waterville, ME
1980 Prince Street Gallery, New York, NY

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2009 "Fourth of July Show", Jancar Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
"Artists in Residence", Yosemite Museum, Yosemite, CA
"The Nature of Landscape", San Francisco Studio School Gallery, San Francisco, CA
2008 "Surface and Substance" San Francisco Studio School Gallery, San Francisco, CA
"Cool and Austere". Jancar Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
"Plein Air Abstraction", curated by Peter Frank, Riverside Art Museum, Riverside, CA
2007 "Landscape, Observation and Abstraction", Wiegand Gallery, College of Notre Dame de Nur, Belmont, CA
(catalogue by Mark Van Proyen)
2006 "From Postwar to Postmodernism" curated by Jerome Neuner, Noah Fischer, Garth Graeper, and Gareth James
(catalogue), Columbia University
"Sacramento Valley Landscape Show", John Natsoulas Gallery, Davis, CA,
2005 New York Studio School, "The Continuous Mark: 40 Years of the New York Studio School", curated by Jennifer Samet
John Natsoulas Gallery, Davis, CA, "Sacramento Valley Landscape Show"
2004 Gallery C, Hermosa Beach, CA, "See California Now", curated by Peter Frank with illustrated brochure
John Natsoulas Gallery, "Sacramento Valley Landscape Show"
2003 John Natsoulas Gallery, Davis, CA, "Gone West", curated with catalogue by Peter Frank
Woodland City Hall, "Pieces of the Puzzle", curated by Melissa Chandon
2002 Birmingham Art Museum, Birmingham, AL, "Art Afficionado"

- 1999 Washington Art Association, Washington, CT (3-person)
- 1997 Les Yeux du Monde, Charlottesville, VA
- 1996 Karl Drerup Fine Arts Gallery, Personal Views: Four Painters and Landscape, Plymouth State College, Plymouth, NH
- 1995 New York Studio School, Thirty Years of Drawing,
- 1994 Site 250, Fairbanks, AK
Pennsylvania School of Design, Lancaster, PA, curated by Ruth Bernard
- 1991 Art Institute of Boston, Contemporary Landscape, curated by Martin Mugar
- 1989 Gaumann-Cicchino Gallery, Fort Lauderdale, FL, Landscape Revisited, traveling to Philadelphia, Washington and New York City, 1989-91
Area Gallery, Portland, ME, Visions of the Southwest
- 1987 Gallery 127, Portland, ME, inaugural group show
Maine Coast Artists, Rockport, ME, Artists Who Teach in Maine, curated by Sarah Fawcett
- 1986 Chautauqua Institute, Chautauqua, NY, faculty invitational
College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA, Landscape
- 1985 New York Studio School, New York City, juried alumni show
University of Maine, Farmington, ME, Painters Who Look at the Environment, curated by Tom Higgins
- 1983 Maine Coast Artists, Rockport, ME, juried show
Barridoff Galleries, Portland ME, Contemporary Gallery Artists
- 1982 Joan Whitney Payson Gallery, Portland, ME, Drawings from Nature, curated by Judith Sobol, Director.
- 1981 Maine Coast Artists, Rockport, ME, juried show.
- 1980 Bette Stoler Gallery, New York, NY, New Drawings.
- 1984 Barridoff Galleries, Portland, ME, Contemporary Gallery Artists
- 1978 Hudson River Museum, Yonkers, NY, juried by Irving Sandler.

RECENT REVIEWS AND REPRODUCTIONS OF WORK

- Baker, Kenneth, "Don't Miss" color reproduction, San Francisco Chronicle, April 25, 2010
- Baker, Kenneth, "Werfel at Adler", San Francisco Chronicle, February 19, 2009
- Baker, Kenneth, "Cheap Thrill" San Francisco Chronicle, January 18, 2009
- Berlind, Robert, "Gina Werfel at Prince Street" Art in America, Nov 2007
- Goodrich, John, www.exhibitionspreview.com, 2007
- Cohen, David, The Continuous Mark: 40 Years of the New York Studio School, New York Sun, February 17, 2005
- Dalkey, Victoria, "Nature Untamed" Sacramento Bee, March 20, 2005
"Valleyscapes" Sacramento Bee, July 24, 2005
- Katz, Vincent, "Gina Werfel" Art in America, May 2004
- U. S. Art in Embassies Program, Anniversary Catalog, Reproduction, 2004
- Sievert, Robert "Gina Werfel" Artezine Fall 2003
- Munich, Suzanne, "Gone West" Davis Enterprise, February 2003
- Sievert, Robert "Gina Werfel" Artezine, Spring 2002
- Nelson, James R. Nelson, Birmingham News, October 9, 2001
- Driscoll, John & Skolnick, Arnold, The Artist and the American Landscape, First Glance Books, 1998
- Skolnick, Arnold, and Little, David, Paintings of Maine, New York, 1991

GRANTS AND AWARDS

- 2005 - 2007 International School of Art, Montecastello, Italy, Senior Artist in Residence
Yosemite National Park, Artist in Residence
- 2000 Connecticut Arts Commission Grant in Painting
Artist in Residence, Auvillar, France,
- Spring 1993 Yosemite National Park, Artist in Residence
- Spring 1991 Rancho Linda Vista, Oracle, AZ (residency)
- Summer 1986 Djerassi Foundation, Woodside, CA (residency)
- Spring 1984 Rockefeller Foundation, Bellagio, Italy (fellowship)

EDUCATION

- MFA Columbia University, New York, NY
New York Studio School, New York, NY
- BA Hamilton College (Kirkland College), Clinton, NY

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California State University, Stanislaus

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Ms. Susana Gajic-Bruyea, Vice President for University Advancement

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