

E.M. SANIGA



ARTIFACTS



Artist's table

E.M. Saniga
Artifacts

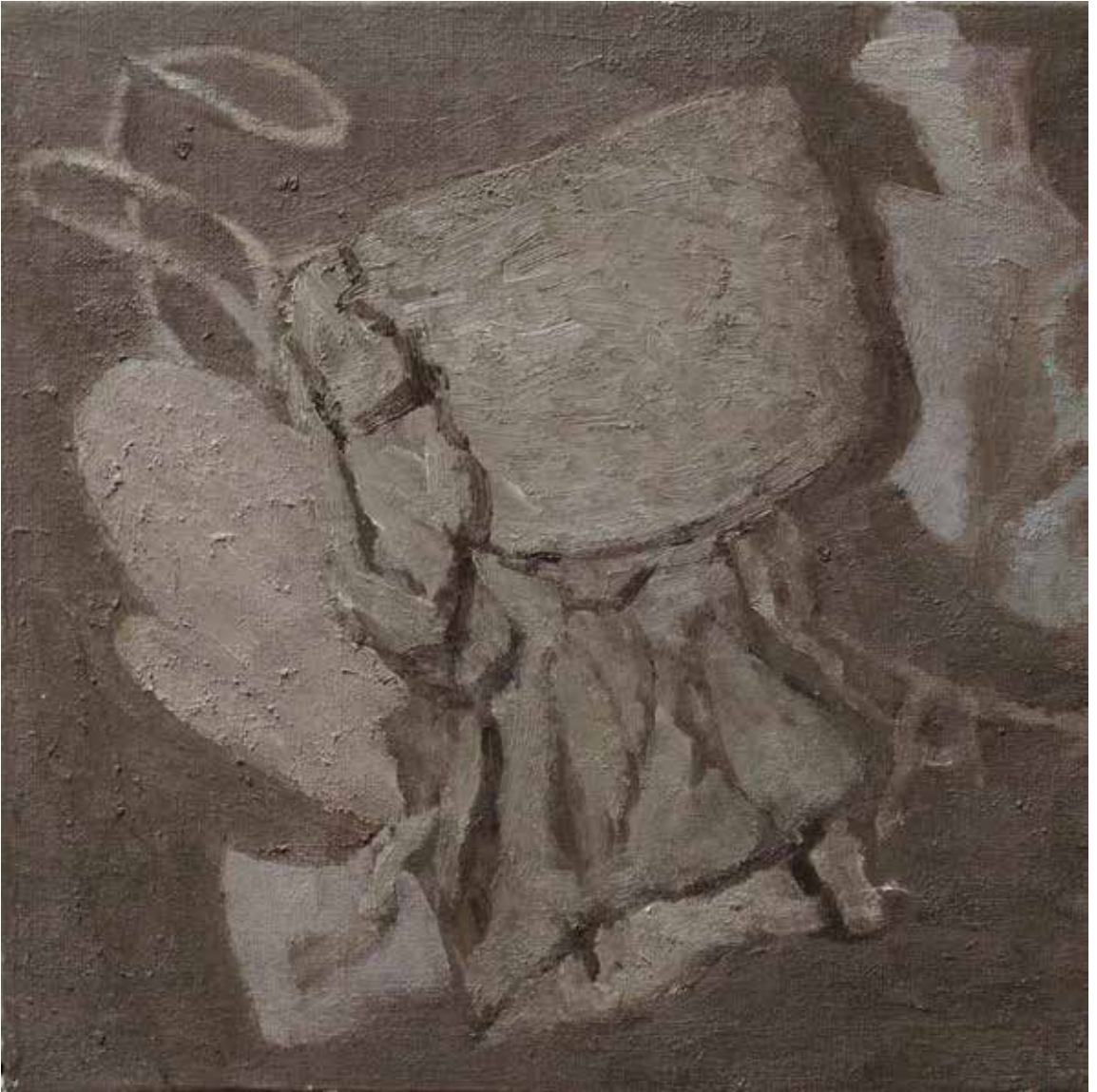
October 15-November 16, 2014

steven harvey fine art projects

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Bonnet and Mitten

2013-2014

oil on linen on panel, 12 x 12 in.

*At Arm's Length:
The Paintings of E.M. Saniga*

Jennifer Samet

The canvas, in E.M. Saniga's new paintings, becomes a stand-in for the palm of one's hand. His paintings evoke the feeling of examining objects at arm's length. The spaces between the elements become signifiers for our fingers, turning and palming the objects. They call to mind a child, holding a worm for inspection, admiring and studying it, and then, unable to restrain the urge, crushing it.

Many of Saniga's new paintings depict fragments of Quaker pottery, unearthed by his neighbor, an amateur archeologist. The shards are arranged in a kind of flat, abstract pattern, on a textured, mottled gray surface. Saniga's earlier still lifes were more classically modeled and displayed. Here the tables are tilted upright, and depicted solely through the curve of a table edge, or the lines of wood planks.

Saniga's paintings straddle the line between delicate and coarse, sweet and cruel. Although the paintings are modest in scale, subdued in palette, and undeniably beautiful, they have an intensity that belies their genre. Saniga does not shy away from what isn't pretty: he paints animals about to be butchered, and decapitated pigs' and deers' heads. However, this severity extends also to the paintings of bonnets, vintage stockings, and embroidered slippers. The objects are being examined post-mortem; they are no longer in a young woman's hands. They are displaced.

Displacement haunts Saniga's paintings, even the landscapes of houses in his environs of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. They are at once homes and uninhabited, their facades tilted, receding planes, covered in snow, disconnected from the paths that are nevertheless depicted. As Saniga has noted in an interview, "It is very nasty out there even in a suburban meadow each night. Add humans and it can even be nastier."

Bruce Kurland, the still life painter and a private teacher to Saniga, advised Saniga to "Try not to be an artist when you paint; just make the painting." Saniga later found that Matisse said something similar: "Leave the art out while you paint; if you are lucky it will come back in." Saniga's paintings begin like a medical dissection or a surgery, but the mathematical, tactile, and empathic investigation of objects ultimately reveals their hauntedness.

They call to mind Thomas Eakins's *The Gross Clinic* (1875), where surgery is both the external subject of the painting and an internal metaphor for Eakins's aesthetic approach. Eakins is an artist Saniga deeply admires; from lecture notes, Saniga discovered Eakins's approach was mathematical as well as inventive.

Saniga is a scientist and a painter, a Professor of Information Technology at the University of Delaware. The focus of his research is mathematical modeling. Kurland taught Saniga an



Child's Dress and Socks

2012-2014

oil on linen, 18 x 22 in.





ABOVE:

Early Shoes and Quaker Moths

2012-2014
oil on panel, 11 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 15 in.

LEFT:

Book, Cabbage and Early Shoes

2013-2014
oil on panel, 12 x 15 in.

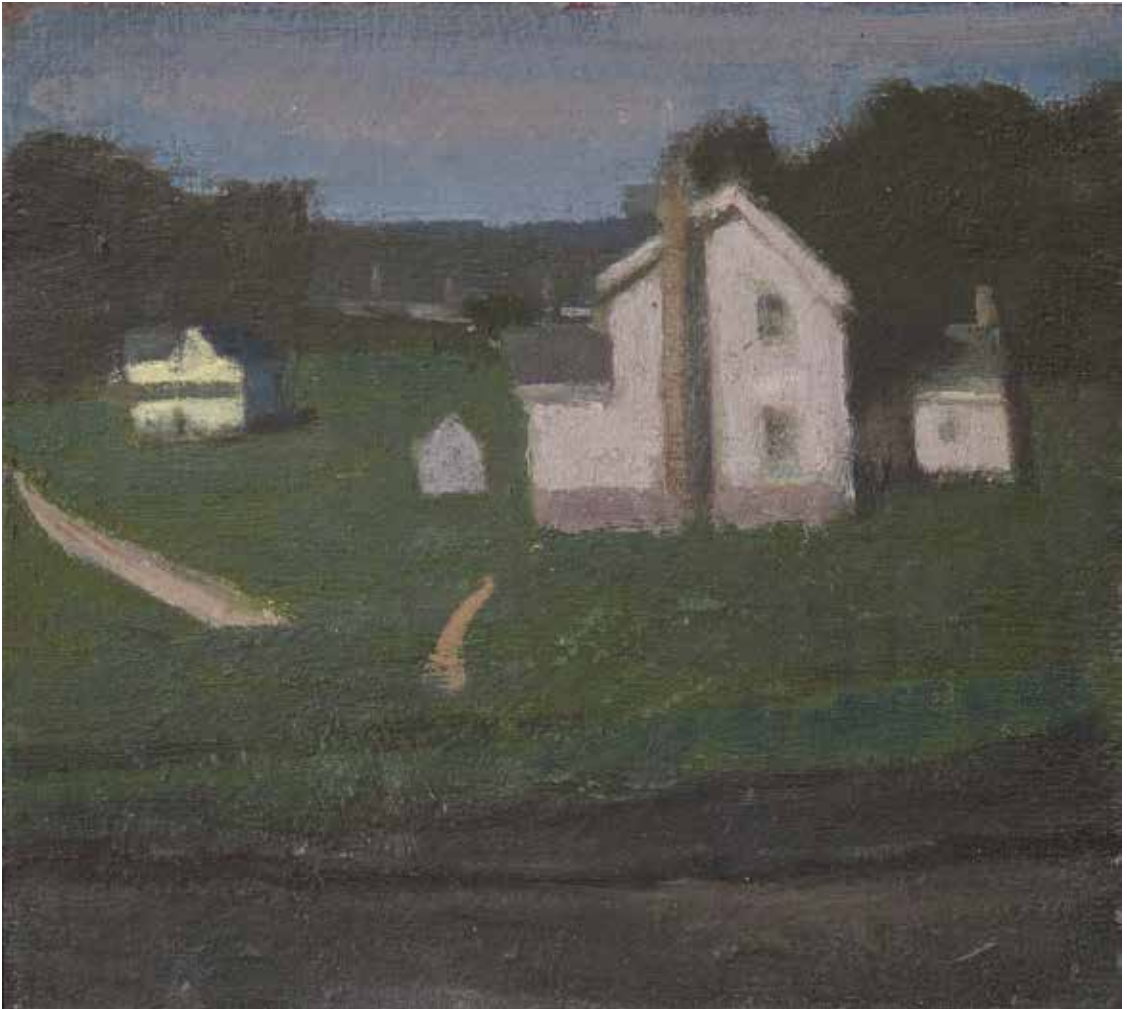
analytic approach to modeling light in painting, which Saniga finds a helpful way to begin, and which he realized was a part of the paintings of Vermeer, Eakins, and others.

The suggestion of an objective, though not detached, investigation pervades Saniga's new paintings. Each object is discrete from the others within the painting. In *Child's Dress and Socks*, the spaces between the elements are poignant suggestions of a hand too large to be the owner's. *Early Shoes and Quaker Moths* shows four slippers along with four insects, either dead or resting on the table. The shoes each lack their matched pair, and the moths seem deliberately set independently on the table.

The woman in *Figure (Christina) in the John Churchman House* has an angular profile and rigid posture that separates her from her surroundings. *Five Women and a Pig* groups figures in an unlikely formation behind a pig set on an antique butchering table. It is like a family photo gone awry, where each person's reaction is incongruent with the event.

A formative experience for Saniga was visiting the concentration camp in Dachau as a young boy; his father was in the occupation army in Germany after World War II. As an adult he visited Auschwitz and Birkenau. He admires the work of Anselm Kiefer and Joseph Beuys. Saniga grew up in a coal mining and steel producing area of Pennsylvania and spent summers working in the steel mills.

There is nothing grotesque or over-dramatized about Saniga's paintings. Saniga has said that he has looked at a steak in the supermarket and at turns been horrified, found it beautiful, and also thought about how it would taste off the grill. His paintings are the same—investigations neither cool nor devotional, where suggestions of death seep in with the inevitability of science. □



Plain Houses Near Wakefield

2006-2014

oil on panel, 8 x 10 in.



ABOVE:

A Wallpaper and Pottery

2013

oil on panel, 13 x 15 in.

Louis-Dreyfus Family Collection

RIGHT:

Wallpapers and Soft Paste

2012-2015

oil on panel, 12 x 15 in.





Lettuce, Pie Tin, and Pitcher

2010-2012

oil on panel, 12½ x 14½ in.

Quaker Archaeology & Other Works by E.M. Saniga

Steven Harvey

You feel the shadow of life passing all the time.

—Francis Bacon

Eight years ago E.M. Saniga sent me slides of his work. I remember the fascination they exerted over me. They looked both old and modern. In these tiny color transparencies Saniga's pictures seemed to evidence an exquisitely restrained facture. I asked him if he would bring me a few paintings to see in person. When I met him I was struck by his appearance along with his work. He is a tall, strongly built, friendly man who resembles a career soldier as much as an artist. As I sat with these paintings over several months, in their beautifully hand-carved frames, made, I was to discover by Carl Laughlin, a master Pennsylvania framer, Saniga's work continued to

intrigue me. When I opened steven harvey fine art projects in 2007, Saniga was the first painter that I sought out. I asked him if I could visit his studio and drove down to Lancaster County where he works.

His studio is a small 18th-century Quaker stone building where the dim north light enters through a shuttered skylight. Everywhere are pictures almost disappearing into dust and shadows. Piles of handmade Laughlin frames lay stacked in the corner. The miraculous images take time to reach one, through the dimness. An almost grisaille image of a wood with a tiny blood trail indicates the passing presence of a wounded animal. The severe gaze of a female sitter bores into the viewer. Still lifes of old household things, vegetables and flowers on tables appear upended, flattened into a kind of cubist realism. In his pictures, dogs and horses, people and things are treated with equanimity. Made in this half-light, Saniga's images really emerge when brought into a brightly lit gallery.

Saniga's paintings present a complete pictorial universe, made meticulously, without fussiness. Saniga's landscapes, still lifes and figures possess a mysterious alternative reality that seems "out of time." It is as though we had been brought into contact with an American painter such as Homer in this modern day. They are also erudite reflections on painting culture and on the closely valued tonalities of painters such as Gwen John and Giorgio Morandi. They show how oil painting is an ideal medium to represent the delicate, differentiated tactility of surfaces in the world—of lettuce and aluminum and ceramic. In his new work the elements are fragmentary, pieces of wallpaper and clothing from the past. Shards. In a sense his archaeology of the rural past in Quaker Pennsylvania is an apt metaphor for his entire project. Saniga is arguing the validity of Degas's language, of Corot's, to continue to reach us in present time. He has stated that, "Representational painting



Wallpaper, Shards, Scissors and Pennies

2011-2014

oil on panel, 12 x 15 in.





ABOVE:

Golden Beets

2011-2012

oil on panel, 15 x 20 ½ in.

LEFT:

Beets and Butternuts

2008

oil on panel, 12 x 15 in.

Collection Mrs. G. Ashforth

is so old fashioned anyway, but we still do it in spite of the resistance to it in today's world of art."

We live in a diverse and fractured art world. In this context, Saniga's paintings appear anachronous. In fact they are related to works of contemporary literature, by writers such as Marilynne Robinson and Phillip Roth that accept the language and modalities of 19th and early 20th century literature as the foundation for contemporary story-telling. Recently, a friend described Saniga's work as "slow" and "quiet." Miles apart from the machine/digital era in art, Saniga's painting are perfect pitched worlds that draw us into their intense rural narrative with a physical facture that rewards close examination. □



Pears, Cups, and Plate

2008-2012

oil on panel, 9½ x 11½ in.





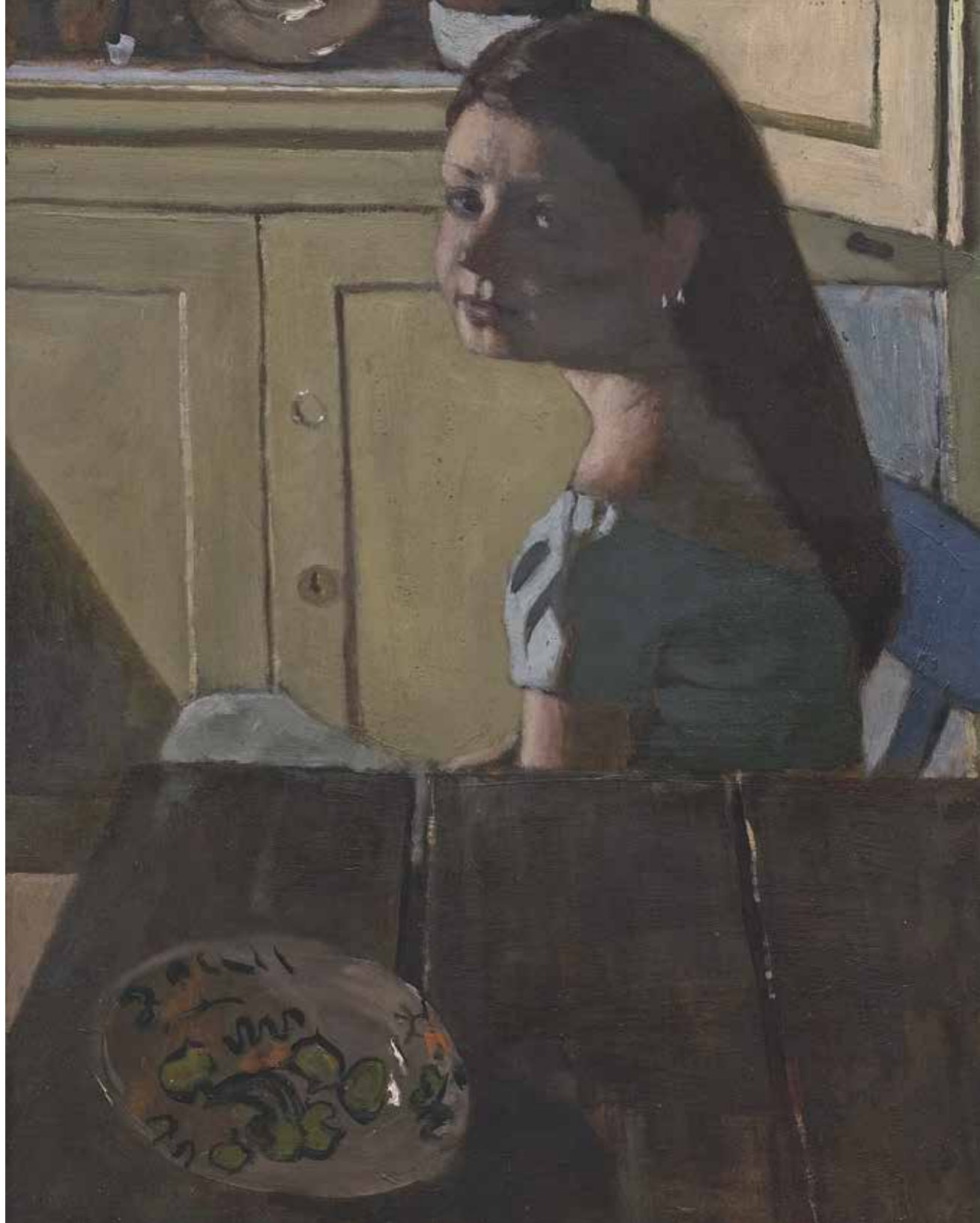
Soft Paste, Spoons, Wallpaper and Trap Jars
2011-2014
oil on panel, 17½ x 20¾ in.

Girl with a Decorated Bowl

2005-2007

oil on board, 17½ x 14 in.

Private collection



Two Does

1986

oil on panel, 17 x 22½ in.

Louis-Dreyfus Family Collection









ABOVE:

Apples and Leaves

2008-2010

oil on panel, 16 x 20 in.

Louis-Dreyfus Family Collection

LEFT:

Apples and Quince

2005-2008

oil on panel, 9 7/8 x 10 7/8 in.

Louis-Dreyfus Family Collection





Apples and Canned Food
2013
oil on board, 12 x 15 in.
Louis-Dreyfus Family Collection



ABOVE:

Groundhogs in a Meadow

2004

oil on panel, 12¾ x 13 in.

RIGHT:

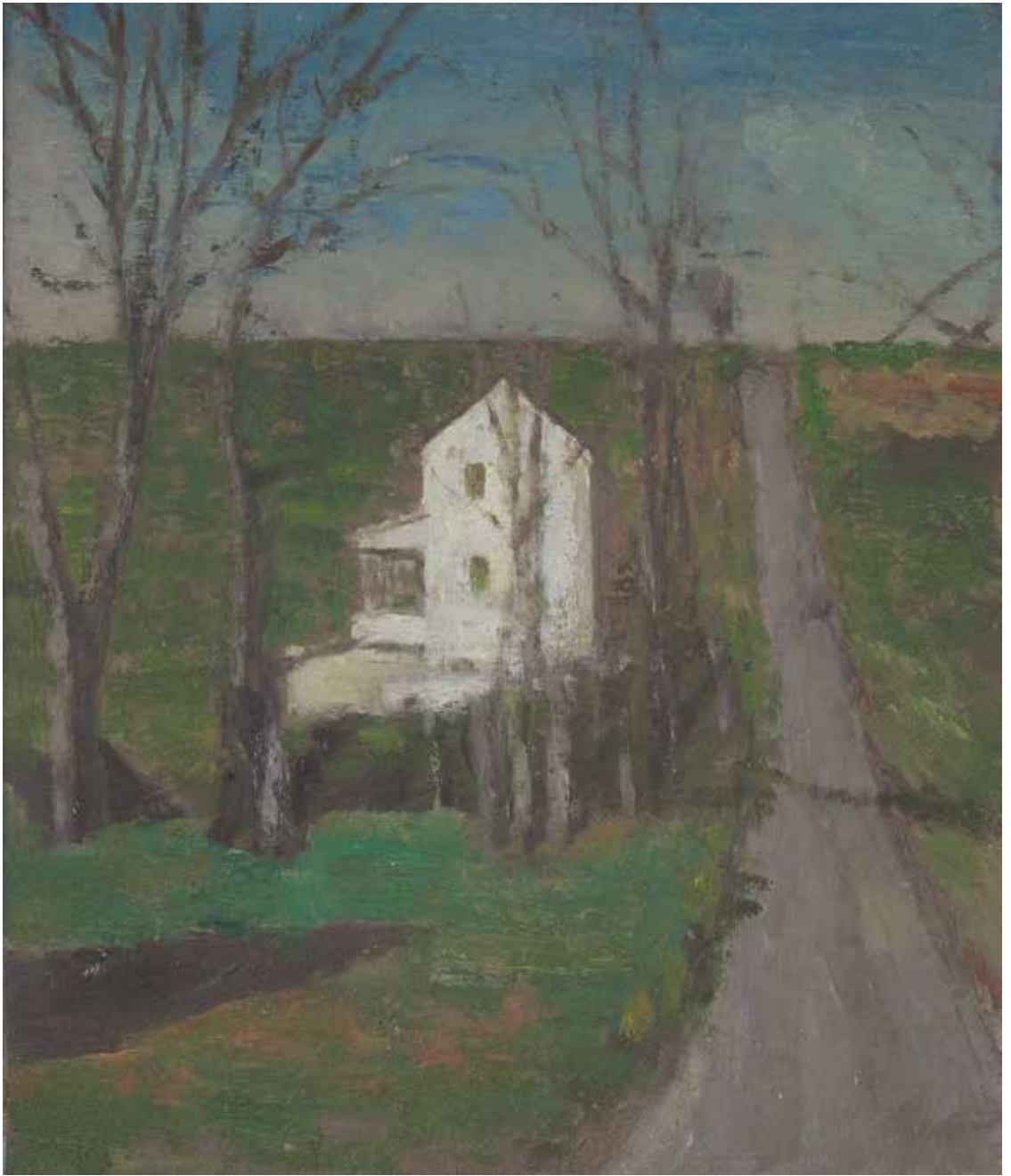
Woman and a Bull in a Pennsylvania Landscape

2005-2008

oil on panel, 11½ x 14¾ in.

Collection Katherine B. and Robert M. Devlin







ABOVE:

Outbuildings on Reynolds Run

2014

oil on panel, 11 x 13 in.

LEFT:

House on Peach Bottom Road

2012-2014

oil on panel, 12 x 12 in.

House and Coal Mine
2005
oil on board, 12 x 16 in.
Louis-Dreyfus Family Collection







ABOVE:

Figure (Christina) in the John Churchman House

2011-2014

oil on linen, 24 x 21 in.

RIGHT:

Five Women and a Pig

2005-2010

oil on panel, 9½ x 11½ in.







ABOVE:

Pottery, Leeks, Meat

2001-2005
oil on panel, 18 x 24 in.
Louis-Dreyfus Family Collection

LEFT:

Pigs' Heads

2011-2014
oil on panel, 11 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 15 in.





ABOVE:

After Velazquez

2000
oil on masonite, 7¼ x 8½ in.
Collection of Vincent Casey

LEFT:

House and Wood

2012
oil on linen, 11¼ x 14½ in.
Louis-Dreyfus Family Collection





ABOVE:

The House on the Kishoquillas Creek

2005

oil on panel, 12 x 12 in.

Collection of Vincent Casey

LEFT:

The Artist's Hand and a Young Crow

2008

oil on panel, 9 ½ x 11 in.

Collection Katherine B. and Robert M. Devlin



A Woman and Bull

2006

oil on panel, 13 x 15 in.



*This catalog was produced
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E.M. Saniga: Artifacts

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FRONT COVER:

Wallpapers and Soft Paste (detail)

2012-2015
oil on panel, 12 x 15 in.

BACK COVER:

Kirsten

2000
oil on canvas mounted on board, 24 x 19 in.

