

A lush green forest scene with sunlight filtering through the trees. The image is a vertical composition dominated by various shades of green, from deep forest greens to bright, almost white highlights where sunlight hits the leaves. The texture is soft and painterly, suggesting a watercolor or oil painting style. The light rays are visible, creating a dappled effect across the foliage. The overall mood is serene and vibrant.

# Loren MacIver's Light



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SELECTED PAINTINGS



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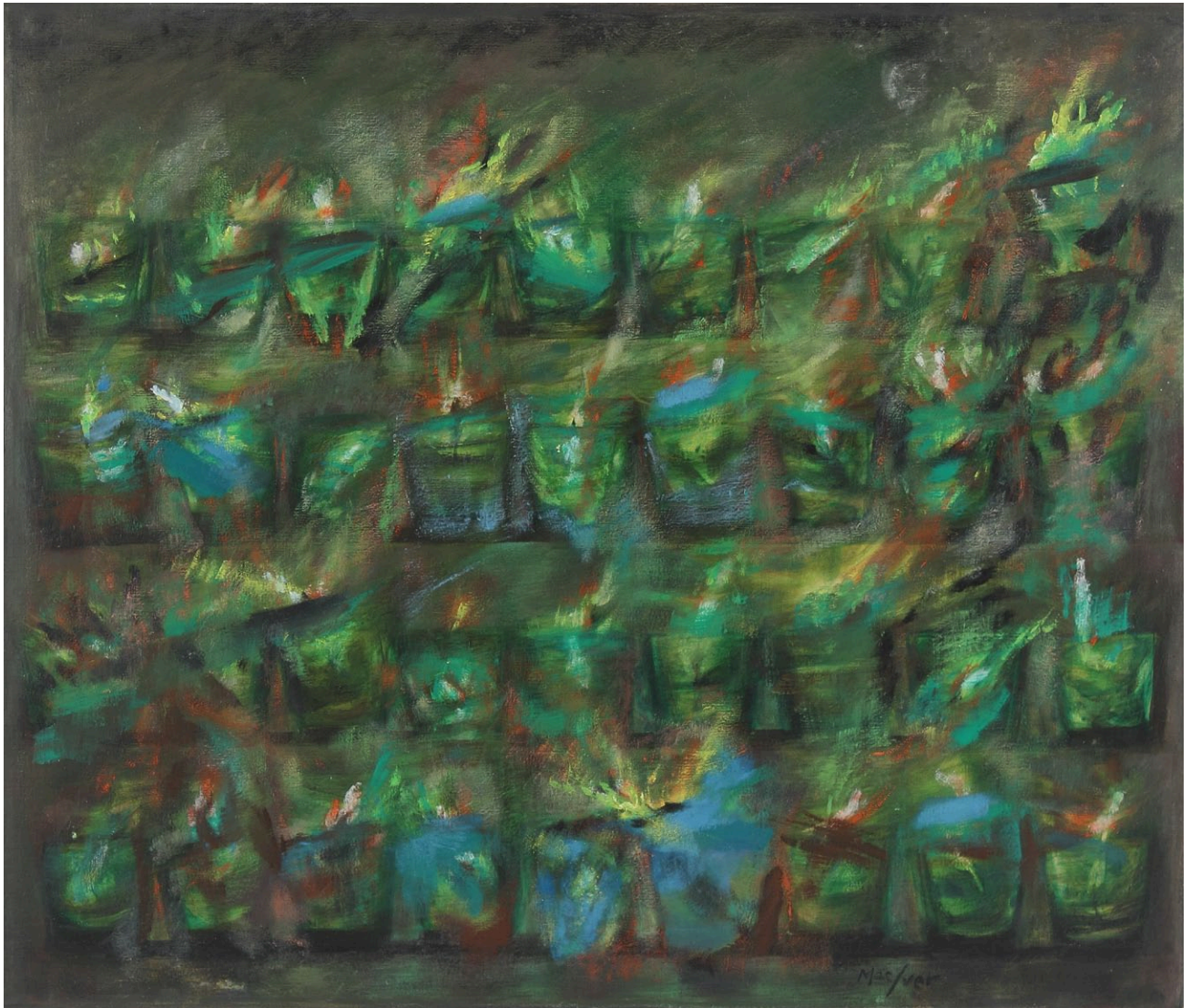
Text by Lisa Mintz Messinger

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1. *Green Votive Lights*, 1980, oil on canvas, 22 x 26 inches

# Loren MacIver's Light

By Lisa Mintz Messinger

Ever since Loren MacIver's first solo show in 1938 (at the East River Gallery in New York) people have been writing about the memorable quality of light that pervades her work. In that exhibition's catalogue, sculptor John B. Flannagan focused on the "beauty...that derives from [the] rendition of light as a structural element."<sup>1</sup> But most often writers have used words like "glowing," "luminous," "radiant," "iridescent," "flickering," and "ethereal" to describe the diversity of her visual imagery and the broad range of emotional responses it elicits. She said that she was more interested in painting what she *felt* about the things she saw than in painting things exactly as they were.<sup>2</sup> Her goal was to "make something permanent out of the transitory," to capture those moments that reveal the past and foretell the future.<sup>3</sup> Using thin washes, subtle color harmonies, and evocative lighting she elevated the commonplace—subjects such as flowers, snowflakes, sidewalk pavement, and votive lights—to a magical realm.

From the beginning, MacIver had the loyal support of art dealers, private collectors, and museum curators and directors, who exhibited and acquired her art from the mid-1930s on. Her individualistic blend of realism, fantasy, and abstraction was difficult to categorize, but appealed to their notion of what modern

art should be. The Museum of Modern Art was among the first institutions to support her efforts, purchasing one of her paintings for its permanent collection in 1938 (the first acquired by any museum) and including her work in several group shows: *New Horizons in American Art* (1936), *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* (1936–37), *Art in Our Time* (1939), *Romantic Painting in America* (1943), and *Fourteen Americans* (1946).

In 1940 the Pierre Matisse Gallery in New York became the artist's exclusive representative, an association that lasted almost fifty years until the gallery closed in 1989. During that time she had nine one-person shows there (1940, 1944, 1949, 1956, 1961, 1966, 1970, 1981, 1987) and several group showings. Although the gallery focused almost exclusively on European modernists (e.g. Matisse, Miró, Balthus, Giacometti, Dubuffet, etc.), she had the distinction of being one of the few Americans exhibited there, and the only female represented. Today, her paintings are in more than thirty museum collections and have been seen in over 100 exhibitions, including six retrospectives.

Born in New York City in 1909, MacIver was almost entirely self-taught as an artist, reportedly attending only Sunday classes at



the famed Art Students League of New York at age ten, and a life drawing class at the National Academy of Design in 1927. Not surprisingly, she also studied the permanent collections and temporary exhibitions at The Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art. Before joining the Pierre Matisse Gallery, she worked for the easel division of the government-sponsored WPA Federal Art Project (1936–40). From 1948 to 1970 she took several extended trips to Europe—in 1948 (four months), 1953–54, 1956, 1960–62 (Paris), 1966–70 (Paris and Provence)—but home-base was always Greenwich Village, a vibrant New York City neighborhood that attracted modern artists, writers, and intellectuals. Respected by her art world peers, including the American painters Karl Knaths, Lyonel Feininger, Edwin Dickinson, Peter Blume, Peggy Bacon, and Louis Bouché, who all endorsed her election to the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters in the 1950s, MacIver’s social circle actually centered around a group of poets. Her close relationship with husband Lloyd Frankenberg (to whom she was married from 1929 until his death in 1975) and life-long friends Marianne Moore, Elizabeth Bishop, and e.e. cummings, led many to describe her art as visual poetry. One critic noted that MacIver’s paintings “had more in common with their verse of the humble and ordinary than it did with the muscular brio of the New York City painting scene [of the 1940s–60s].”<sup>4</sup>

Although she was one of four artists chosen to represent the United States at the 31st Venice Biennale in 1962, by the 1970s, '80s, and '90s, MacIver's work was no longer garnering the attention it once had. Yet, she continued to receive accolades and awards, such as a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1976, and the first Lee Krasner Award from the Pollock-Krasner Foundation in 1989. In 1987, on the presentation of a Francis J. Greenburger Foundation award, Metropolitan Museum of Art curator, William S. Lieberman, gave this tribute:

In our harsh age of anxiety and despair, the lyric art of Loren MacIver shimmers with enchantment. Her observation distills the spiritual from the ordinary, and she expands the familiar into vivid patterns that constantly surprise. Color is pleasure and often joy. Overstatement is alien to MacIver's eloquence and as an artist she fits no convenient category. She shares with us the clarity of her personal vision, and its essentials combine a poet's eye and a painter's craft. She discovers magic in simple truth and we are richer and therefore greatly in her debt.<sup>5</sup>

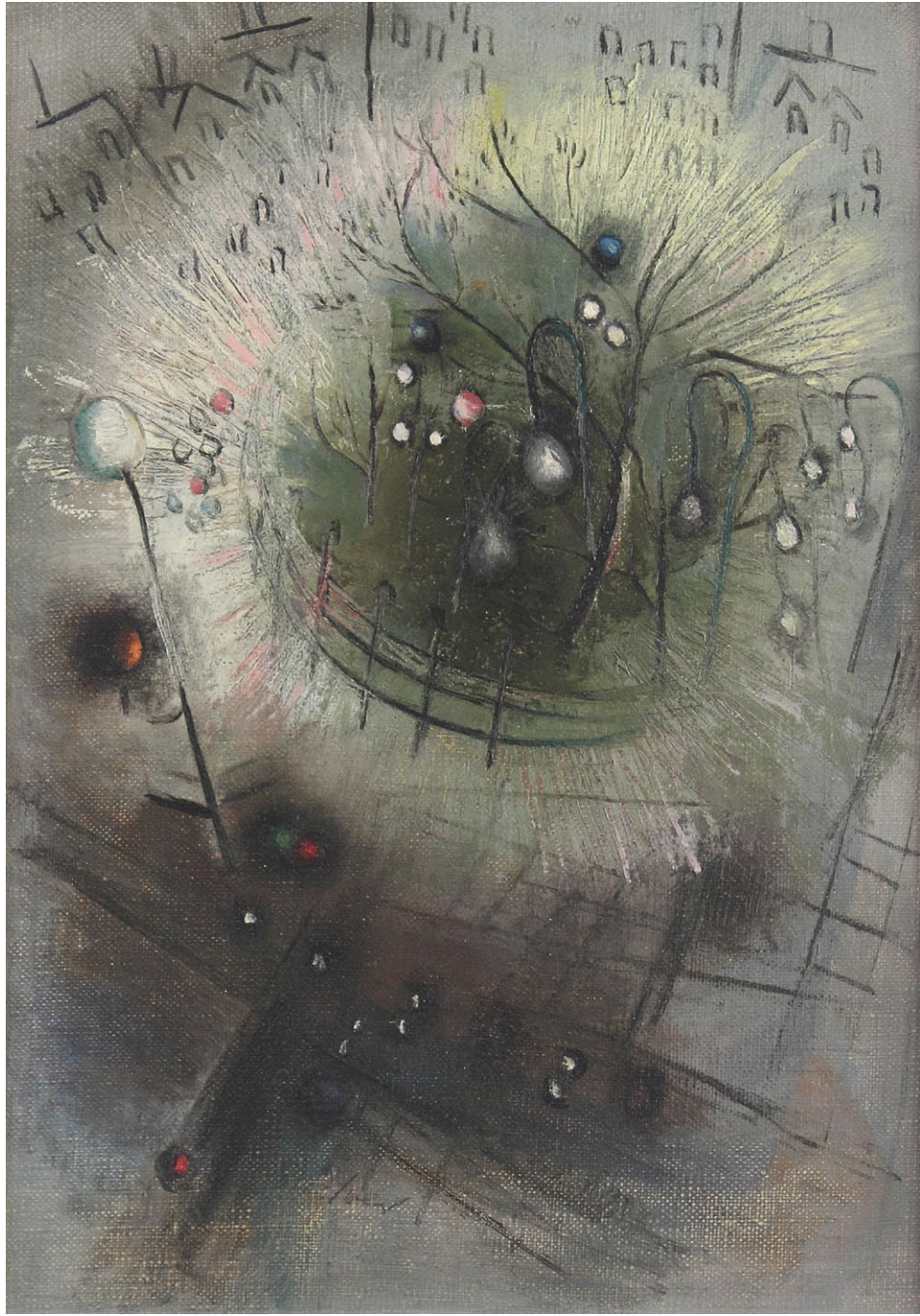
When MacIver died in 1998 at age 90, it marked the end of a long career that had gracefully avoided the trendy “isms” and art movements of her day. As she proclaimed: “I have no theories on art. I don’t know if that’s good or bad. It’s just me.”<sup>6</sup> Remaining true to her own point of view, her work changed relatively little over six decades, keeping a quiet nobility and poetic lyricism at its core. In the artist’s obituary in the *New York Times*, Holland Cotter once again praised the light in her work, writing that she applied “oil paints with the delicacy of watercolors to create a mood of light-bathed Proustian reverie.”<sup>7</sup>

- 1 John B. Flannagan in *Loren MacIver*, exhibition catalogue, East River Gallery, NY, 1938
- 2 See MacIver quote, April 6, 1938; reprinted in Robert M. Frash, *Loren MacIver: Five Decades*, Newport Harbor Art Museum, CA, 1983, p. 7
- 3 MacIver quoted in *Fourteen Americans*, exhibition catalogue, Museum of Modern Art, NY, 1946
- 4 Sharon L. Butler, “Tracking Loren MacIver,” *The Brooklyn Rail*, March 7, 2008
- 5 William S. Lieberman, March 1987
- 6 MacIver quoted in Jonathan Santlofer, “Lions in Winter,” *Art News*, v. 92, March 1993, p. 89
- 7 Holland Cotter, “Obituary,” *New York Times*, May 24, 1998



2. *Town Flowers*, 1935, pastel and pencil on paper, 9 x 11 $\frac{3}{4}$  inches





3. *Town Flowers*, 1940, oil on canvas, 13½ x 9¼ inches



4. *Sidewalk Drawing I*, 1939, pastel on black paper, 8 x 8 inches
5. *Sidewalk Drawing II*, 1939, pastel on black paper, 8 x 8 inches



6. *Greenwich Village Night II*, 1939, pastel on black paper, 9 x 11½ inches

7. *Ghost in the Outhouse*, 1937, oil on canvas, 16 x 24 inches







8. *Finit*, 1939, oil on canvas, 21 x 34½ inches



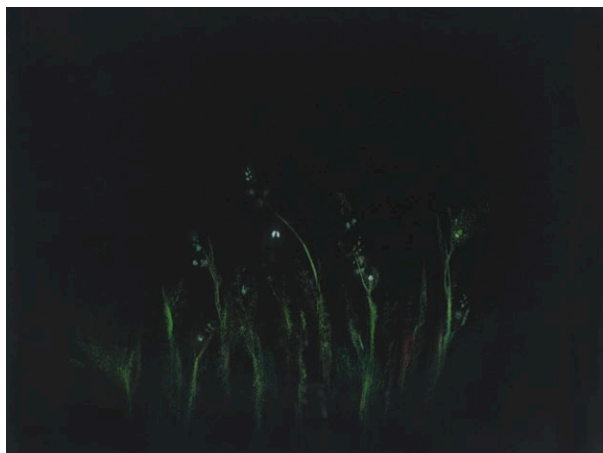


9. *Dune Painting (Night)*, 1937, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches

10. *A Fall of Snow*, 1948, oil on canvas, 42 x 29 inches





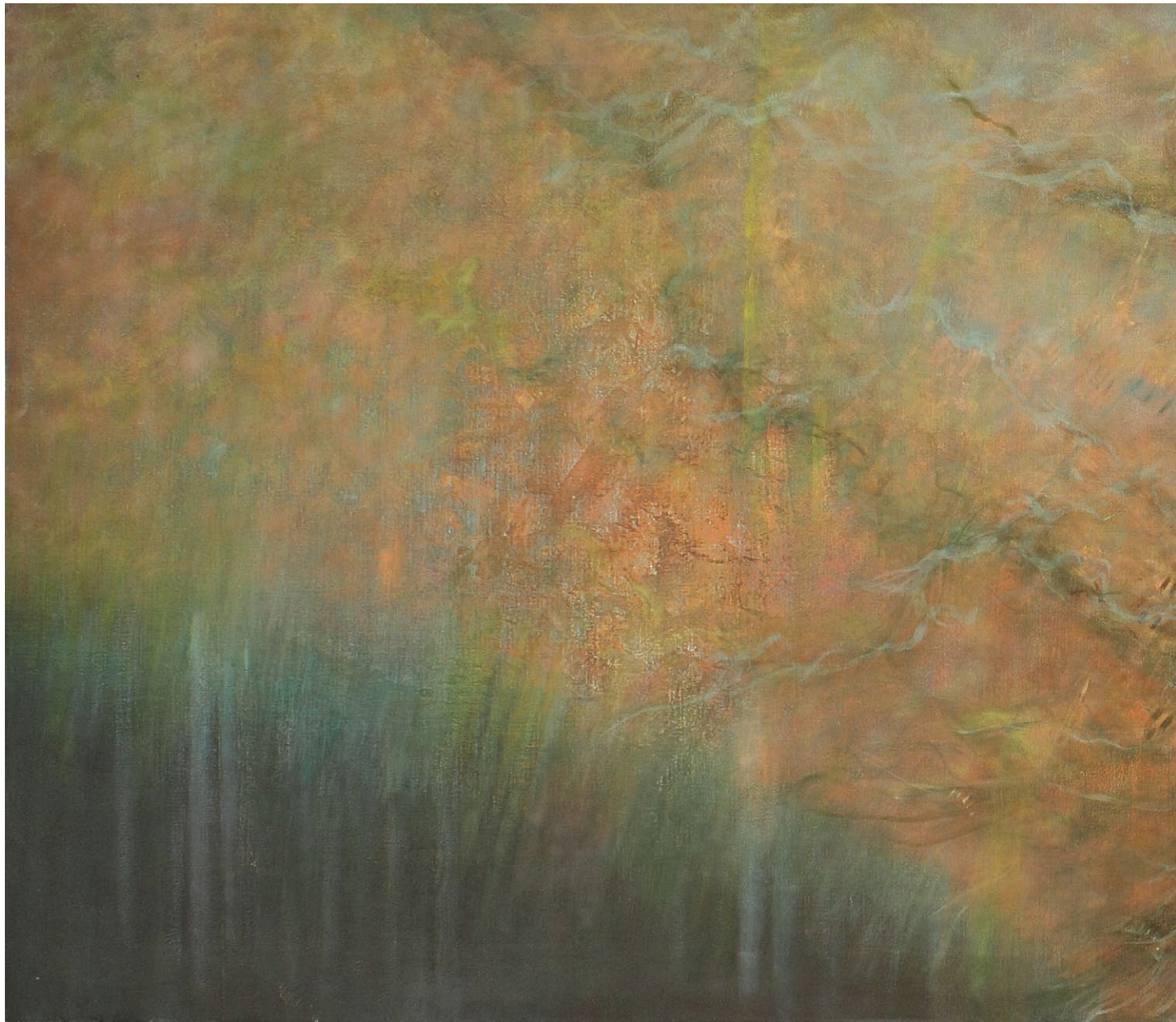


11. *Lilies of the Valley I*, 1955, pastel on black paper, 15 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 19 inches  
12. *Lilies of the Valley II*, 1955, pastel on black paper, 16 x 21 inches

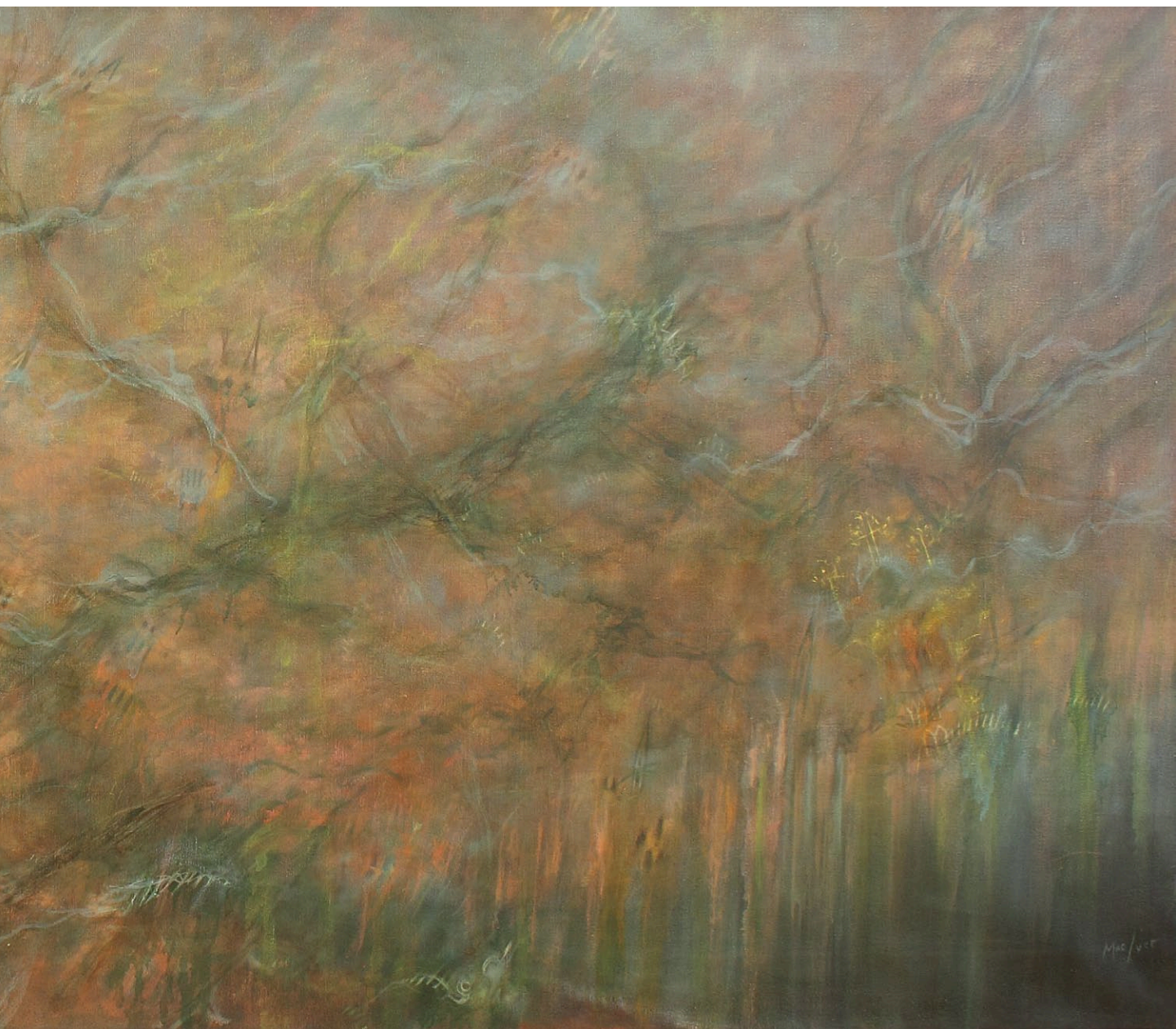


13. *Spring Forms*, c. 1950, oil and pastel on black paper, 26 x 34½ inches









14. *Grand Canal*, 1961, oil on canvas, 32 x 74 inches



15. *Aquarium*, 1956, oil on canvas, 52 x 33 inches





16. *Phaedriadae*, 1958, oil on canvas, 50 x 40 inches







17. *Bretagne*, 1965, oil on canvas, 45 x 71 inches





18. *L'Atelier Paris*, 1963, oil on canvas, 70 x 39 inches



19. *St. Raphael*, 1967, oil on canvas, 68 $\frac{1}{8}$  x 35 $\frac{3}{4}$  inches





20. *Acropolis*, 1956, oil on canvas, 42 x 74 inches



21. *Fleurs de marronniers*, 1953, oil on canvas, 64 x 51¼ inches





22. *Porte Bonheur*, 1980, oil on canvas, 21¾ x 18¼ inches





23. *Bright Spring*, 1980, oil on canvas, 21¼ x 32 inches



Quite simple things can lead to discovery. This is what I would like to do with painting: starting with simple things, to lead the eye by various manipulations of colors, objects and tensions toward a transformation and a reward.

An ashcan suggests the phoenix; its relics begin a new life, like a tree in spring. Votive lights, flickering and vanishing, become symbols of constancy. In the catalyzing air of evening a city and its traffic merge; it is as if all the events of wheels and people, cobbling it, had left upon the avenue of their passing a stain of circumstance.

My wish is to make something permanent out of the transitory, by means at once dramatic and colloquial. Certain moments have the gift of revealing the past and foretelling the future. It is these moments that I hope to catch.

Loren MacIver  
from *Fourteen Americans*,  
Museum of Modern Art, NY, 1946

## SELECTED BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

- 1909 February 2, born New York City, daughter of Charles Augustus Paul Newman, doctor, and Julia (MacIver) Newman, librarian. Mother, of Scottish-Irish descent, retained maiden name, which Loren adopted.
- 1919 Studies at Arts Students League, New York, Saturday Classes, for one year.
- 1929 Marries poet and critic Lloyd Frankenberg. Couple moves to Greenwich Village. Their second home on MacDougal Street is subject of *Strunsky House*, 1935.
- 1931 First of ten consecutive summers spent on Cape Cod.
- 1935 First museum purchase, *Shack*, 1934, by Alfred Barr for Museum of Modern Art (accessioned 1938).
- 1936 Receives Federal Arts Project assignment.
- 1938 First one-person exhibition at Marian Willard's East River Gallery.
- 1938 Spends first winter in Key West, Florida.
- 1940 Pierre Matisse Gallery's first exhibition of MacIver's work. Matisse remains her dealer until 1990.
- 1941 Designs backdrops and lighting for Museum of Modern Art Coffee Concerts at invitation of Louise Crane. MacIver previously designed lighting for Virgil Thompson's *Four Saints in Three Acts*.
- 1945 First one-person museum exhibition at Baltimore Museum of Art.
- 1946 Dorothy C. Miller includes MacIver's work in Museum of Modern Art exhibition *Fourteen Americans*.
- 1948 MacIver and Frankenberg travel to France, Italy, England, Ireland and Scotland.
- 1953 Whitney Museum of American Art organizes traveling retrospective covering 20 years of work.
- 1957 Receives first prize Corcoran Biennial.
- 1959 American Academy of Arts and Letters elects MacIver member.

- 1960 Receives Ford Foundation Grant.
- 1962 Museum of Modern Art selects MacIver to exhibit 25 paintings in American Pavilion at the XXXI Biennale, Venice.
- 1965 The Phillips Collection organizes its second one-person exhibition of MacIver's work.
- 1975 Montclair Museum of Art organizes retrospective exhibition.  
MacIver's husband Frankenberg dies.
- 1983 Newport Harbor Art Museum (Orange County Museum of Art) organizes retrospective exhibition.
- 1992 Metropolitan Museum of Art acquires nine paintings by MacIver.
- 1998 MacIver dies peacefully at her home, 61 Perry Street, New York.

## SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 1938 East River Gallery, New York, New York.
- 1940 Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York, New York.
- 1941 The Arts Club of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois.  
Duke University Museum of Art, Durham, North Carolina.  
San Francisco Museum of Art, San Francisco, California.
- 1944 Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York, New York.
- 1945 Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, Maryland.
- 1949 Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York, New York.
- 1950 Vassar College Art Gallery, Poughkeepsie, New York.
- 1951 The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C. Traveled to  
Wellesley College Museum, Massachusetts.
- 1953 Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York. Traveled to:  
Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, Dallas, Texas; Des Moines Art Center, Des  
Moines, Iowa; San Francisco Museum of Art, San Francisco, California;  
Arts Club of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois.
- 1956 Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York, New York.
- 1958 Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
- 1959 Fairweather-Hardin Gallery, Chicago, Illinois.
- 1961 Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York, New York.
- 1965 The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C. Traveled to: University of  
Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Indiana.
- 1966 Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York, New York.
- 1970 Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York, New York.
- 1975 Montclair Art Museum, Montclair, New Jersey.
- 1981 Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York, New York.
- 1993 Terry Dintenfass Gallery, New York, New York.
- 1995 Terry Dintenfass Gallery, New York, New York.
- 1998 Tibor DeNagy Gallery, New York, New York.



- 2002 Alexandre Gallery, New York, New York.  
2006 Alexandre Gallery, New York, New York.  
2008 Alexandre Gallery, New York, New York.  
2012 Alexandre Gallery, New York, New York.  
2014 Alexandre Gallery, New York, New York.

## SELECTED PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

- Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, Massachusetts.  
Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois.  
Art Museum, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey.  
Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, Maryland.  
Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris, France.  
Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York.  
Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.  
Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, Michigan.  
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.  
Indiana University Art Museum, Bloomington, Indiana.  
Krannert Art Museum, Champaign, Illinois.  
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, California.  
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York.  
Montclair Art Museum, Montclair, New Jersey.  
Museum of Art, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.  
Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Illinois.  
Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York.  
Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica, New York.  
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.  
Neuberger Museum, Purchase, New York.  
Newark Museum, Newark, New Jersey.

Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.  
Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.  
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, California.  
Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Nebraska.  
Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, Massachusetts.  
University of Oklahoma, Oklahoma.  
Vassar College Art Gallery, Poughkeepsie, New York.  
Wadsworth Athenem, Hartford, Connecticut.  
Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota.  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York.  
Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, Massachusetts,  
Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut.

## AWARDS

1957 Corcoran Biennial, First Prize.  
1959 National Institute of Arts and Letters, Member.  
1960 Ford Foundation Grant.  
1962 Frank G. Logan Medal, Art Institute of Chicago,  
65th Annual Exhibition.  
1963 Urbana Purchase Prize, Krannert Art Museum, University of Illinois.  
1972 Mark Rothko Foundation.  
1976 Guggenheim Fellow Member, National Institute Arts and Letters.  
1985 Francis Greenbuger Award.  
1989 Lee Krasner Award, Krasner-Pollock Foundation.



## CHECKLIST TO EXHIBITION

*Town Flowers*, 1935, pastel and pencil on paper, 9 x 11¾ inches

*Dune Painting (Night)*, 1937, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches

*Ghost in the Outhouse*, 1937, oil on canvas, 16 x 24 inches

*Greenwich Village, Night II*, 1939, chalk on black paper, 9 x 11½ inches

*Sidewalk Drawing I*, 1939, pastel on black paper, 8 x 8 inches

*Sidewalk Drawing II*, 1939, pastel on black paper, 8 x 8 inches

*Town Flowers*, 1940, oil on canvas, 13 ½ x 9¼ inches

*A Fall of Snow*, 1948, oil on canvas, 42 x 29 inches

*Lilies of the Valley I*, 1955, pastel on black paper, 15¾ x 19 inches

*Lilies of the Valley II*, 1955, pastel on black paper, 16 x 21 inches

*Aquarium*, 1956, oil on canvas, 52 x 33 inches

*Acropolis*, 1956, oil on canvas, 42 x 74 inches

*Rue Mouffetard (La Mouffe)*, 1956, collage on board, 59 x 16 inches

*Phaedriadae*, 1958, oil on canvas, 40 x 50 inches

*Grand Canal*, 1961, oil on canvas, 32 x 74 inches

*Fleurs de marronniers*, 1963, oil on canvas, 64 x 51¼ inches

*L'Atelier Paris*, 1963, oil on canvas, 70 x 39 inches

*Bretagne*, 1965, oil on canvas, 45 x 71 inches

*St. Raphael*, 1967, oil on canvas, 68 x 35¾ inches

*Green Votive Lights*, 1980, oil on canvas, 22 x 26 inches (Private Collection, New York)

*Porte Bonheur*, 1980, oil on canvas, 21¾ x 18 inches

This catalogue is published on the occasion of the exhibition

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Front cover: *Fleurs de marronniers*, 1963,  
oil on canvas, 64 x 5 1/4 inches (detail)

Back cover: *Acropolis*, 1956,  
oil on canvas, 42 x 74 inches (detail)

*Loren MacIver's Light* © Lisa Mintz Messinger

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