



**GAIL SPAIEN** STILL LIFE WITH WATER

JANUARY 12 – FEBRUARY 26, 2021



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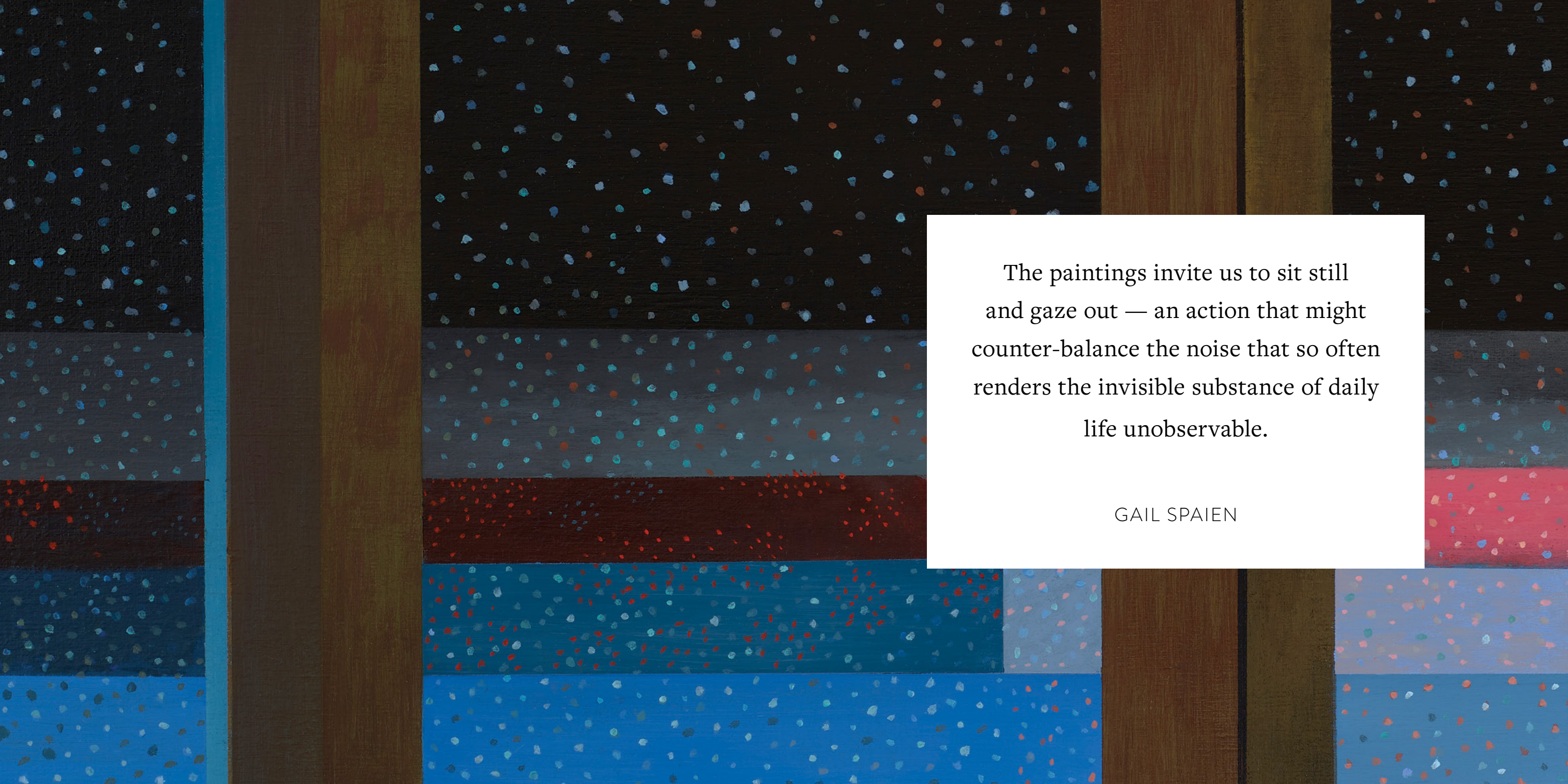
In *Still Life with Water*, artist Gail Spaien presents ten acrylic-on-linen paintings of interior spaces whose windows face exterior seascapes. Inspired by American folk art and early American modernism, Japanese Ukiyo-e prints and the landscape paintings of the Hudson River School, Spaien's portraits capture and idealize qualities of nature and home. Each room is structurally and aesthetically arranged: at first glance harmonious, but at second glance spatially impossible. Rectangular rugs, window panes, thoughtfully placed furniture, and abundant bouquets ground each composition in proportional order. The artist repeats visual motifs from one painting to the next, imbuing successive spaces with familiar feeling. Through different windows, looking at the same expansive sea, we observe day turning into night, and winter following summer.

Spaien's proclivity for geometric forms and precision enhances the idealized meaning of her work. She approaches intricate subjects with a reductive eye, delineating lace curtains, decorated vases, embroidered textiles, woven baskets, wood grain, and book spines. Her depictions of flora — both planted and wild — epitomize vitality and appear to transcend the passing of time: not a single petal is brown, not one twig droops.

The visual effect is a textural symphony of color and balance that calms and transports the viewer. Spaien's attention to repetition and pattern mirrors her portrayals of everyday objects, reminding us of the poetic beauty in routine. Spaien noted: "Pondering the meaning and presence of peace in the everyday, I curate an idealized situation, sustaining pleasure indefinitely. By controlling my view, I suggest my desire for, and also the impossibility of, such idealized conditions."

None of Spaien's interiors includes human figures. However, we know warm bodies are nearby, perhaps in adjacent rooms. Clues of human activity include a teacup and saucer placed on a coffee table next to an open laptop. The computer is aglow with a screensaver landscape of Spaien's invention (*Still Life with Water #6*). In another work, a pair of half-full drinking glasses accompanies two open chairs on a porch. As if occupied, the chairs face wide windows through which a passenger ferry chugs gently by (*Still Life with Water #8*). A sleeping dog lies curled in a sliver of afternoon sunlight (*Cottage Bonsai #4*). Despite the absence of visible figures, Spaien's paintings are welcoming. Each one is an invitation to slow down and contemplate. Eye-level perspectives encourage viewers to assume the first-person role in her paintings. We step into her rooms and become participants. As we view one of Spaien's open windows, we feel it was our hand that pushed it open.

— NANCY MARGOLIS GALLERY, 2020



The paintings invite us to sit still  
and gaze out — an action that might  
counter-balance the noise that so often  
renders the invisible substance of daily  
life unobservable.

GAIL SPAIJEN



## INTERIOR LANDSCAPE

BY JULIE POITRAS SANTOS, 2020

In early September 2020, more than six months into the pandemic, I sat by myself in a small second floor room with Gail Spaien’s paintings. Usually a studio visit entails a conversation with an artist in the presence of their work. But these are different times, and we were social distancing, so I sat instead alone with the paintings. The room had low ceilings and creaking wooden floors that registered my movement; I could hear voices in other parts of the house. I could hear an occasional car passing, the slam of a door. A patterned carpet warmed by stockings feet; a book of Ukiyo-e prints sat on a stack near a wet palette. The painter’s seat showed wear. Outside an open window, a breeze blew and bent the branches of an apple tree laden with red fruit as the tail end of summer played out its fleeting warmth. I felt myself slow down as I entered the paintings, each one itself another room with a window: each one suspended in time, a careful rhythm.

Each painting is an object of contemplation — it takes time to see — presenting the viewer with the silence of an empty room and a window to gaze out of. Many of the paintings are also objects of cultivation, and named “bonsai” reference the Japanese artform of growing small trees within a shallow tray.

The paintings concentrate our attention on the small as a path toward internal reflection and intimacy. Like bonsai, Spaien’s paintings reflect daily attentions and disciplined care. The windows onto water and patterned geometries, too, invite the viewer to consider the natural world in conversation with the human. As I sat in a real room, on a real rail-backed chair, looking at a painted one, I was struck by a more expanded sense of time. Paintings as these take concentrated time to make; the presence of the artist’s hand cultivating an interior landscape is palpable.

In *Still Live with Water #3*, a bonsai tree grows silently bathed in moonlight raking shadows across the living room floor. Strikingly different, in this painting, the ocean and night sky sparkle as a series of dark bands dotted by white paint; a million distant stars reflected in the ocean. A porch door opens gently on to night. Embellished by pattern, the upholstered living room chairs and gridded carpet glow in moonlight. In Gail Spaien’s paintings there is room for the individual; mirroring my own symmetry, presenting empty chairs, they invite me in. They share a relationship with the complexities of mind. These crafted spaces assert the value of the contemplative, the meaningful labor of making by hand, and slow time. Looking outward, the windows within rooms ask us to consider what is most important in life and to honor that. Wide awake in the middle of the night, we recognize the resonant mysteries of living on a spinning planet among so many other spinning planets and stars.

*Based in Portland, Maine, Julie Poitras Santos is an artist, writer, and curator. She is currently the Director of Exhibitions at the Institute of Contemporary Art at Maine College of Art.*

**STILL LIFE WITH WATER #1, 2020**

Acrylic on linen

60 x 60 inches



**STILL LIFE WITH WATER #2, 2020**

Acrylic on linen

30 x 34 inches



**STILL LIFE WITH WATER #3, 2020**

Acrylic on linen

34 x 36 inches





**SERENADE #9**, 2017

Acrylic on linen  
38 x 40 inches



**COTTAGE BONSAI #4, 2020**

Acrylic on linen  
60 x 66 inches



**SERENADE #10**, 2017

Acrylic on linen  
44 x 41 inches



**STILL LIFE WITH WATER #5, 2020**

Acrylic on linen

24 x 24 inches



**STILL LIFE WITH WATER #6, 2020**

Acrylic on linen

34 x 36 inches



**STILL LIFE WITH WATER #7, 2020**

Acrylic on linen

36 x 34 inches



**STILL LIFE WITH WATER #8, 2020**

Acrylic on linen

36 x 36 inches



## EDUCATION

San Francisco Art Institute, M.F.A.  
University of Southern Maine, B.F.A.

## ONE & TWO PERSON EXHIBITIONS

2021 *Still Life with Water*, Nancy Margolis Gallery, online  
2020 Museums of Old York, George Marshall Store Gallery, York, ME  
2019 *Bonsai Cottage*, AD Gallery, University of North Carolina, Pembroke, NC  
*Renegade Mirage*, Carol Calo Gallery, Stonehill College, Easton, MA  
2017 *Serenade*, Ogunquit Museum of American Art, Ogunquit, ME  
2016 *Still-Lives and Botanicals*, Coastal Maine Botanical Garden, Boothbay, ME  
2014 *Dozier Bell and Gail Spaien*, Aucocisco Galleries, Portland, ME  
2013 *New Paintings*, Ellen Miller Gallery, Boston, MA  
2012 *The World Over*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Portland, ME  
2010 *Between: Gail Spaien and Ahmed Al soudani*, Aucocisco Galleries, Portland, ME  
*In Winter, Garden*, Archive Project 6, Miller Block, Boston, MA  
2008 *Garden Archive*, Project 4, Museums of Old York, George Marshall Store Gallery, York, ME  
*Garden Archive*, Project 5, William Scott Gallery, Provincetown, MA  
2006 *New Work*, Miller Block Gallery, Boston, MA  
2004 *Damon Lehrer and Gail Spaien*, William Scott Gallery, Boston, MA  
2003 *Charm*, Museums of Old York, George Marshall Store, York, ME  
2002 *Samplers and Mourning Paintings*, Aucocisco Galleries, Portland, ME  
2001 *Domestic Time*, Vanier Gallery, Tucson, AZ  
2000 *Counting*, Colby College Museum of Art, Waterville, ME  
*Art Houston: Introductions*, Jack Meier Gallery, Houston, TX  
1998 *At the Edge of Wind*, Robert Clements Fine Arts, Portland, ME  
1992 *New Work*, Gump's Gallery, SF, CA  
1991 *Introductions '91*, Gump's Gallery, SF, CA  
1989 *Visiting Artist Exhibition*, Center Gallery, University of Maine, Gorham, ME  
1985 *Gail Spaien and Heather Wilcoxon*, Diego Rivera Gallery, San Francisco Art Institute, SF, CA

## SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2020 *Mixing it Up*, Maine Jewish Museum, Portland, ME  
20, Zero Station, Portland, ME  
2019 *Flowering: Inside/Outside*, Nancy Margolis Gallery, New York, NY  
*Perfection*, Able Baker Contemporary, Portland, ME  
*SPF 32*, Ulmer Brewery, Brooklyn, NY  
2017 *American Genre: Contemporary Painting*, Institute of Contemporary Art, ME  
*The 2016 Grant Recipients*, Provincetown Art Assoc. and Museum, Provincetown, MA  
*Impact*, Art Museum, University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH  
*Take Flight*, Museums of Old York, George Marshall Store Gallery, York, ME  
2016 *Bounty*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Portland, ME  
2015 *20 Year Anniversary Show*, Museums of Old York, George Marshall Store Gallery, York, ME  
2014 *New Acquisitions*, University of New England, Portland, ME  
2011 *Momentum*, Museum of Old York, George Marshall Store Gallery, York, ME  
2010 *Collected Nature*, Miller Block, Boston, MA  
2009 *Economies of Scale*, Miller Block, Boston, MA  
*Winter Salon*, Denise Bibro Fine Art, New York, NY  
2008 *Out There: Mediated Landscape*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Portland, ME  
*New Natural History*, Portland Museum of Art, Portland, ME  
2007 *Biennial*, Portland Museum of Art, Portland, ME  
*Nature/Nurture*, Miller Block, Boston, MA  
2006 *Peaceable Kingdom*, Museums of Old York, George Marshall Store Gallery, York, ME  
2005 *Inside/Outside*, Miller Block Gallery, Boston, MA  
*Pretty Sweet: The Sentimental Image in Contemporary Art*, DeCordova Museum, Lincoln, MA  
*Transcribing Time: Grace DeGennaro, Gail Spaien, Alice Spencer*, Maine Center for Contemporary Art, Rockport, ME  
*Momentum: PCF Advancement Grant Finalists*, George Marshall Store Gallery, York, ME  
*Gallery Artists*, William Scott Gallery, Provincetown, MA  
2002 Elements Gallery, Rockland, ME  
York Public Library, York, ME  
2001 *Domestic Culture*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Portland, ME



Elements Gallery, Rockland, ME  
 John Beuche Gallery, Northeast Harbor, ME  
*Abstraction: 22 Visions*, Maine Art Gallery, Wiscasset, ME  
 1999 *Accord III*, Museums of Old York, George Marshall Store Gallery York, ME  
 1998 *Biennial*, Portland Museum of Art, Portland, ME  
 O'Farrell Gallery, Brunswick, ME  
 1997 *Faculty Exhibition*, Colby College Museum of Art, Waterville, ME  
*Picking up the Pieces*, Museums of Old York, George Marshall Store Gallery, York, ME  
*3 Painters, 2 Sculptors*, Between the Muse, Rockland, ME  
*Summer Salon*, Robert Clements Gallery, Portland, ME  
 1996 *Skowhegan at 50: A Maine Legacy*, Baxter Gallery at Portland School of Art, Portland, ME  
*December International*, June Fitzpatrick Gallery, Portland, ME  
*Miniatures*, Between the Muse, Rockland, ME  
 1995 *Contemporary Collage*, Frick Gallery, Belfast, ME  
*Annual*, Center for Maine Contemporary Art, Rockport, ME  
 1994 *Visual Artists Showcase*, Boston Center for the Arts, Boston, MA  
 1993 *Solstice Tree Project*, Portland Museum of Art, Portland, ME  
*The Unique Print*, Center for Maine Contemporary Art, Rockport, ME  
 1992 O'Farrell Gallery, Brunswick, ME  
*Small Views*, Large Spaces, Turtle Gallery, Deer Isle, ME  
 Claudia Chaplin Gallery, Stinson Beach, CA  
 1991 *Seascapes*, Center for Maine Contemporary Art, Rockport, ME  
 1990 *Crocker-Kingsley Annual*, Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, CA  
*Individual Artist Grant Finalist Exhibit*, Marin Arts Council, Mill Valley, CA  
 1989 *Bay Arts 89*, San Mateo Arts Council, San Mateo, CA  
 Natsoulas Novelozo Gallery, Davis, CA  
 1988 *Exhibition 88*, Sun Gallery, Hayward, CA  
*Overview*, Walter Athol McBean Gallery, SF, CA  
 1987 *Exchange*, San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art, San Jose, CA  
*Masters 87: SF Art Institute Graduate Exhibition*, Fort Mason, SF, CA  
 1986 Marin Arts Council Invitational  
*Woman Arts*, Sausalito Bay Model, Sausalito, CA  
 1985 Headlands Center for the Arts, Group Exhibition, Sausalito, CA

## RESIDENCIES, GRANTS, AWARDS

2020 Varda Artist Residency, Residency Fellowship, Sausalito, CA  
 2016 Lillian Orlowsky and William Freed Foundation, Grant Award  
 Maine Arts Commission, Project Grant Award  
 2010 New Hampshire Charitable Foundation, Artist Advancement Grant  
 Maine Arts Commission, Visibility Grant Award  
 2006 Maine Arts Commission, GIG Grant Award  
 2004 Maine Arts Commission, GIG Grant Award  
 1996 Djerassi Foundation Resident Artists Program, Fellowship, Woodside, CA  
 1990 Crocker Art Museum, Merit Award, Sacramento, CA  
 1988 Millay Colony for the Arts, Fellowship, Austerlitz, NY  
 1986 Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Scholarship, SFAI  
 1985 Headlands Center for the Arts, Seminar-in-residence, Sausalito, CA  
 1978 Whitelands College, University of London, London, England

## SELECTED PUBLIC & PRIVATE COLLECTIONS

David H. Koch Center for Cancer Care at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, NY  
 Fidelity Investments, MA  
 Portland Museum of Art, ME  
 University of Southern Maine, ME  
 University of New England, ME  
 Intuit Corporation, CA

## PUBLICATIONS

Radar Poetry, editions 26 + 27, radarpoetry.com

*American Genre: Contemporary Painting*, catalog for the exhibition, curated by Michelle Grabner, ICA, Portland, ME, 2018

Maine Arts Journal: The UMVA Quarterly, *The Wave of Creativity*, Dietlind Vander Schaaf, Features and Essays, Summer 2018, online

MaineToday.com, *With Two Weeks Until it Closes, American Genre Beckons Fans of Contemporary Painting*, Bob Keyes, August 28, 2017

Portland Press Herald, *September 18, 2016, At the Institute of Contemporary Art, an exploration of 'Bounty' in all its forms*, Dan Kany

New American Painting, *Northeast issue 116*, Juror: Michelle Grabner

Two Coats of Paint, *Snap: A Visit to Maine College of Art*, November 2014

Maine Home and Design Magazine, *Annual Art Issue*, 2014

Boston Globe, *Gail Spaien, New Paintings*, Cate McQuaid, March 20, 2013

Boston Globe, *Critics Pick*, March 13, 2013

Portland Phoenix, *Serious Thoughts in a Frivolous Season*, Nicholas Schroeder, November 7, 2012

Down East Magazine, *Feature: Maine Art In Season*, Edgar Allen Beem, May 2011

Art New England, *Reviews, Gail Spaien and Ahmed Alsoudani at Aucocisco Galleries*, Carl Little, Nov/Dec 2010

Portland Phoenix, *In Grave Detail: Light and Heavy Connections "Between" Two Artists*, Nicholas Schroeder, November 19–25, 2010

Maine Sunday Telegram, *After Making it Big, MECA Grad Returns to Artistic Roots*, Bob Keyes, October 31, 2010

Fosters Daily Democrat, *Local Artist Wins Grant for her Unique Work*, J. Claffery, October 4, 2010

Portsmouth Press Herald, *Artist Wins \$25,000 Grant to Build Studio*, Jeanne Mccartin, October 2, 2010

Boston Globe, *Winter's Weight and What Lies Below*, Cate McQuaid, February 17, 2010

Maine Home and Design, *Canvas*, Suzette McAvoy, May 2009

Portland Phoenix, *Seeking Relevance*, Ken Greenleaf, December 3, 2008

Yankee Magazine.com/blogs, *Out There*, Edgar Allen Beam, November 2008

Mixed Media/Maine Today.com, *Natural Instincts*, Jamie Thompson, October 5, 2008

Accent Magazine, *Modern Art Meets Natural History*, Jamie Thompson, March/April 2008

American Artist, *Quick Sketches*, April 2007

Art New England, *Sentimental Journey: Time and Memory in Pink and Gray*, Susan Boulanger, June/July 2005

The Wire, *Profile*, Rebecca Cox, May 2004

Art New England, *Review, Maine Charm: Paintings by Gail Spaien, Mary Behrens*, October–November 2003

Portsmouth Herald, *Profile: Charm, Waterworks*, Jeanne McCartin, July 1, 2003

Maine Sunday Telegram, *Doisneau offers a lot to like with one lingering question*, Philip Isaacson, February 17, 2002

Maine Times, Vol. 33 No. 40, *Those Who Can Teach*, Edgar Allen Beem, February 15, 2001

New American Painting, *Volume 20*, February 1999

Channel 13 TV, One of 5 featured artists, Nov. 15, 1998, Portland Museum of Art Biennial Exhibition, WGME-TV video production

Maine Times, *Metaphysics Made Manifest, A Surprising Turn in Portland's Ambitious Biennial*, Edgar Allen Beem, November 19, 1998

Sun Journal, *The Art Biennial*, Pat Davidison Reef, November 20, 1998

Maine Sunday Telegram, *At Maine College of Art, Faculty Boldly Shows its Stuff*, Philip Isaacson, January 25, 1998

Maine Sunday Telegram, *Frick Exhibit's an Elegant Mix of Collages, Assemblages*, Philip Isaacson, August 13, 1995

Maine Sunday Telegram, *Maine Coast's 15th Annual Juried Show Strongest in Years*, Philip Isaacson, June 13, 1993

The Sacramento Bee, *Works of Content*, Victoria Dalkey, April 22, 1990

San Jose Mercury News, *San Francisco Art Institute/San Jose University Exchange: Part two*, Dorothy Burkhart September 4, 1987

The Pacific Sun, *The Arts Review*, Jack Van der Meulen, May 3–9, 1985



The repetitious activity of painting patterns mirrors the experience of domestic time — a continuous and repetitive cycle.

GAIL SPAIEN



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