

The New Criterion

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

Weekly recommendations from the editors of *The New Criterion* on what to read, see, and hear in the world of culture.



Fairfield Porter, Untitled (View of Pelham hills from artist's studio in Fayerweather Hall, Amherst College), 1969, Oil on gessoed panel, Betty Cunningham Gallery.

“Fairfield Porter: Amherst and Other Places,” at Betty Cunningham Gallery (through May 24):

As an observational painter who believed that modern art should have descended from Vuillard rather than Picasso, Fairfield Porter’s project was to find the inherent vitality within everyday settings. His paintings evoke a sort of studied carelessness—a *sprezzatura* aesthetic, if you will—that eschews classical “finish” or bombastic facility in favor of a more open-ended and even vulnerable sensibility. Now, Betty Cunningham’s small exhibition of oil studies and drawings—eight of which, never before exhibited, were completed while Porter was a visiting artist at Amherst College in 1969–70—is a lesson in Porter at his most unguarded. Among these untitled campus and classroom vignettes are studies for major works such as *Amherst Parking Lot No. 1*. Also included is a larger, earlier, and far more developed

painting, *Jerry* (1955), a lovely portrait in which the artist’s obviously bored fourteen-year-old son sits at the breakfast table in necktie, slacks, and slippers. **—AS**