

CATALOGUE ESSAY 1999 – "In Resonance" by Vesela Stretenovic, Senior Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, The Phillips Collection (Washington, DC)

Whether in the form of painting or drawing, the art of Megan Williamson balances two worlds: the world of visible appearances and the world of invisible reflections. Grounded in a perception of natural forms, figures and objects, her work exceeds the region of sight, aiming toward depiction of the unseen and imaginary.

Trained as a figurative painter and coming out of the tradition of the New York School of painters, Williamson managed to incorporate both languages into her style: faithfulness to observation as well as to inner expression. Although her recent works recall the boldness of Beckmann's woodcuts, the brushstrokes and palette of de Kooning's canvases, and the calligraphy and gestural energy of Kline's and Motherwell's black-and-white paintings, they reveal a sensibility that is uniquely her own; they are restless and gutsy, aspiring to convey a feeling of the material world, but also human presence within it. In this respect, Williamson's work demonstrates that abstraction can indeed surpass formalism's sheer play with painterly marks by investigating what is painted and why. And it is this investigation of meaning through experimentation with pictorial forms that lies at the core of her working method. In the artist's own words, "The paintings begin with a close observation of the relationship of the objects to one another, only to continue searching the unseen relationships of those objects". The search in Williamson's paintings occurs through the drawings that she makes from her paintings in order to understand them and find the new solution for them that cannot be found from direct observation. However, although emerging in the middle of a series of paintings, sharing their themes, Williamson's drawings are to be considered finished pieces in their own right.

Executed in series, the artist's recent paintings and works on paper represent an extensive visual exploration of still lifes (*Still Life: Mapping the Universe*) on the one side and singular objects (*Knife and Sheath; Door Knocker; Pair of Gloves; Electrical Clamps*) on the other. While the still life paintings and drawings, which join odd objects together to discover new relationships among them, are imbued with formal density and inner tension, the single-object drawings are depicted as bold representations of isolated, solitary things. This concentration on a single shape as opposed to a crowded composition derives from the artist's need to differentiate oneness from undifferentiated wholeness, but also from her search for silence in noise and peace in crowds. And it is this need for re-ordering chaos that characterizes the best of Williamson's artwork. In this respect, her still lifes and single-object drawings exist in resonance with each other, similar to a resonance of physical-contemplative, tangible-intangible, and visible-invisible aspects of life.