

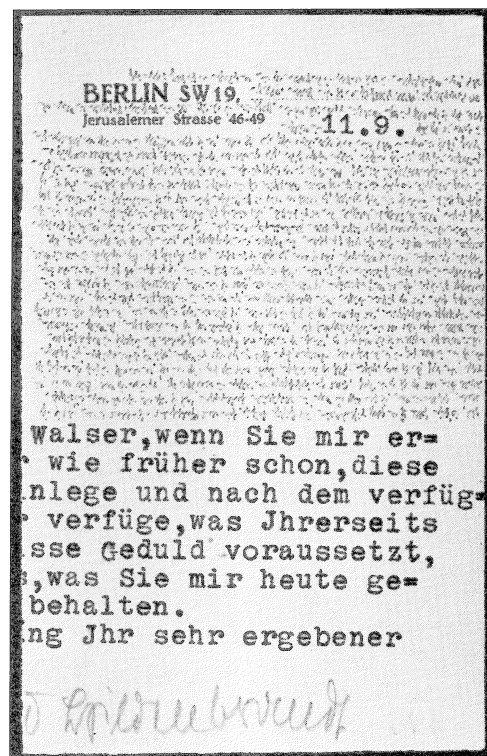
## EXHIBITION

### Fragments of Imaginary Landscapes: Joan Nelson and Robert Walser

February 24 through April 9

Known for her striking landscape paintings on wooden boards, American artist Joan Nelson (born in 1958) has over the last few years developed a series of miniature landscapes. These works on paper, sometimes no bigger than a stamp, have never been shown before. In their dream-like quality, they are images that seem to surge from our collective memory. In their conceptual precision, they are sophisticated analyses of space, in an emotional as well as physical sense.

Taking cues from reproductions of paintings by famous and overlooked artists of the Western world—from Bellini to amateurs' photographs found in flea markets—Nelson has recreated details of their works and infused them simultaneously with irony and sincerity. The projection of acquired knowledge is supplemented by a subtle empathy for these people of past eras, resulting in sometimes playful, sometimes moving and always vexing images of profound beauty. Seen next to Nelson's work, certain aspects of



Untitled text by Robert Walser, written on postcard. (Microscript no. 211)

Robert Walser's writings and writing methods reveal their contemporary relevance. Walser's selection of existing texts as a point of departure for his own, his use of found papers that provide him with the parameters for his own narrative, the constant and explicit reflection of his working method in his texts, the concept of a failed writer and the fragmentation of the narrative are all hallmarks of many artists' works today. Joan Nelson, who has been familiar with Walser's work only for the past few years, has worked on similar issues, viewing them through the prism of post-modernism.

The exhibition is being held at the Swiss Institute, 35 West 67th Street, New York, NY 10023.

Opening reception:  
Thursday, February 24, 6 to 8 pm  
Artist's talk with Joan Nelson:  
Friday, February 25, at 6 pm

Gallery admission is free.  
A catalogue with an introduction by curator Carin Kuoni and texts by Robert Walser is available.



Joan Nelson, *Untitled (from snapshot (1920's))*, 1993. Actual size.

## SYMPOSIUM

### Robert Walser and the Visual Arts

Organized in consultation with Tamara S. Evans (City University of New York)

Saturday, March 12

- Papers: 11:00 am: *Werner Morlang* (Robert Walser Archives, Zurich)  
"Small Is Beautiful: The aesthetic implications of Walser's 'pencil method.'" A discussion of Walser's creative process.
- 11:30 am: *Tamara S. Evans* (City University of New York)  
"Robert Walser: Writing Painting." An investigation of why and how, in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction, Walser, who believed that writing is painting, writes about painting.
- 12:00 pm: Discussion
- 2:00 pm: *Mark Harman* (translator and critic, Lancaster, PA)  
"How Green Is Robert Walser? A Translator's Perspective." Is Walser's short story "Green" an indicator of early Expressionistic methods in the author's style?
- 2:30 pm: *Hans-Ulrich Obrist* (Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris/ARC)  
"The Migratory Museum in Gais/Switzerland: Walser's Significance for Contemporary Artists." Short-term installations by international artists such as Thomas Ruff, Roman Signer and Hugo Suter in the Krone Hotel in Gais where Walser was a frequent guest.

3:00 pm: Discussion

- Roundtable 4:00 pm  
Discussion: Artists and writers, among them painter Joan Nelson, video artist Dara Birnbaum, photographer Daniel Faust, sculptor John Miller, and poet Eileen Myles on Walser's relevance for their own work.

Reception: 5:30 pm

Sunday, March 13

- Film: 10:00 am: *"I Still Stand Before Life's Portals"* ("Ich stehe noch immer vor der Türe des Lebens") In German, no subtitles.  
This two-hour documentary by German author Peter Hamm traces Robert Walser's life through the eyes of writers such as Peter Bichsel, Martin Walser, and Urs Widmer. It includes moving accounts by Walser's two nurses at the mental hospital in Herisau, Switzerland, where he spent the last twenty-three years of his life.
- Papers: 2:00 pm: *Susan Bernofsky* (translator, Princeton)  
"Unrelenting Tact: Elements of Style in Walser's Novel 'The Robber' and Other Late Prose." Walser's stylistic techniques of relativizing, questioning and flat-out contradiction by which he liberates his prose from the realm of the merely mimetic.
- 2:30 pm: *Katarzyna Antonowicz* (doctoral candidate, University of Geneva)  
"When a Nose Comes Across a Glass of Champagne" — Odd Love Stories from the Microscripts of Robert Walser." Contrast and collage, and the relevance of these painterly methods in Walser's texts.

3:00 pm: *George C. Avery* (Swarthmore College)

"Already Written: Representation, Retellings and Resistance in Robert Walser's Short Prose." A discussion of Walser's self-marginalization and his appropriation of other authors.

3:30 pm: Discussion

- Reading: 4:30 pm: *Christopher Middleton* (University of Texas, Austin)  
reads from Walser's short story "A Painter's Life" (1916). This important story, a tale of the triumph and struggles of a young landscape painter, has been translated for the first time into English for this conference.

The symposium is being held at the Swiss Institute, 35 West 67th Street, New York, NY 10023.

Admission is free. For further information and reservations, call the Swiss Institute at (212) 496-1759.

## FILMS

Tuesday, March 22

8:00 pm: *The Comb from the Museums of Sleep* by the Brothers Quay

A 17-minute short (no dialogue) by the "masters of the Eastern European mode of eclectic surrealism" (Stephen Holden, *The N.Y. Times*). A journey into the progressive states of a dreamer's subconscious enacted with live-action puppet animation by the American filmmakers. "...Weird and striking." (Vincent Canby, *The N.Y. Times*)

8:30 pm: *The Assistant* by Thomas Koerfer (122 min., with English subtitles)

The chronicle of Josef Marti's life as butler to a small-town patrician is a melancholic and oddly funny story reminiscent of Walser's own life as servant to the bourgeoisie of Germany and Switzerland. The film attempts to "relate the monuments of Walser's speech to visual monuments." The result is a movie of haunting beauty, delicately painting the image of a vague and folkloristic socialism.



Film still from *The Assistant* by Thomas Koerfer

Wednesday, March 23

8:00 pm: *The Forest* by Friedrich Kappeler (80 min., with English subtitles)

A filmic stroll through the woods, Kappeler's work evokes the forest's meaning to different people connected to it by destiny or desire, such as carpenters and soldiers, coal miners and hunters. A juxtaposition of Biedermeier style and contemporary concepts of nature accompanied by Walser's text "The Forest" and Franz Schubert's music.



Joan Nelson, *Untitled (Bellini) 1993*. Actual size.

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Swiss Institute, New York  
February 24 through April 9, 1994

Opening Reception:  
Thursday, February 24, 6 to 8 pm

Artist's Talk with Joan Nelson:  
Friday, February 25, at 6 pm

Gallery Hours:  
Tuesday through Sunday, 2-7 pm

9:30 pm: *Robert Walser* by Hans Helmut Klaus Schoenherr (90 min., no dialogue)

A study of Walser as a cultural icon. The film has neither narrative nor text, consisting of eight tableaux or music-like phrases, each made up of crescendo, climax and coda. Schoenherr has described this film as a "cinematographic adventure" where the filmmaker is actually under the spell of his subject. A film that negates narrative tradition, building on fragments of sound, image and color.

Thursday, March 24

8:00 pm: *Basta* by Anne Cuneo (14 min., English)

In a local restaurant, an average Swiss takes great pains not to think. Based on a short story by Walser, the film is made by one of Switzerland's best-known writers, Anne Cuneo, who has made the experience of being on the outside one of the main features of her work.

8:30 pm: *The Guardian and His Poet* by Percy Adlon (100 min., English)

Robert Walser spent his life from 1929 on at two mental hospitals. During those years, the Swiss writer and editor Carl Seelig was his legal and spiritual guardian. The relationship between the two men was framed by extensive discussions on their long walks through the countryside. Filmed on location in Switzerland, this work recreates these discussions against the backdrop of the year's changing seasons.

The film festival is presented at Anthology Film Archives, 32 Second Avenue, New York, NY 10003.

Admission is \$7. For ticket reservations, call the Anthology Film Archives at (212) 505-5181. For film information, call the Swiss Institute at (212) 496-1759.

These events are made possible by the generous support of the Robert Walser Archives/Carl Seelig Foundation, Zurich; Pro Helvetia, the Arts Council of Switzerland; the Swiss Center Foundation; the Robert Miller Gallery, New York; Swissair; and the City University of New York.

Design: Bethany Johns Design, NY

ROBERT WALSER FESTIVAL

Swiss Author and Playwright (1878-1956)

Swiss Institute  
35 West 67th Street  
New York, New York 10023  
(212) 496-1759