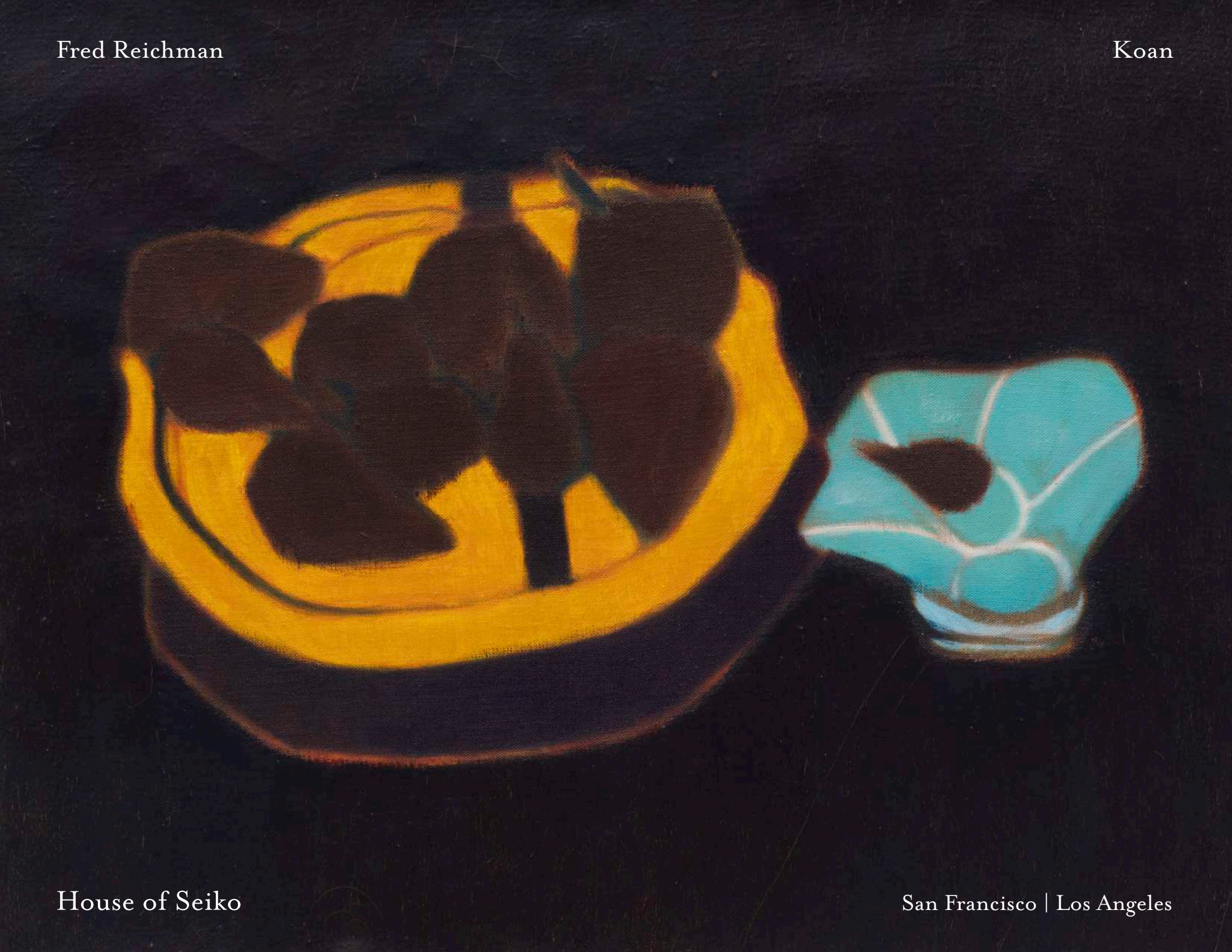
Fred Reichman

Koan



House of Seiko

San Francisco | Los Angeles

Fred Reichman (b. Bellingham, WA, 1925 - d. Yuba City, CA, 2005)

House of Seiko is pleased to present Koan, a twenty-year survey of artwork by the historical Northern California painter Fred Reichman. Influenced by Fred's devotion to Buddhism through his time spent with Shunryu Suzuki Roshi, the namesake of the exhibition, Koan refers to a paradox meditated upon to abandon ultimate dependence on reason and gain sudden intuitive enlightenment; an ethos held closely by Fred and many of his colleagues in the San Francisco Bay Area during the post-war renaissance period.

Reichman worked fluidly between painting and sculpture, guided by a personal engagement with Zen practice that shaped both his methods and his attention to the world. A lifelong reader of haiku, he often understood his paintings as compressed moments in which observation is refined into essential form. Rather than pursuing a grand narrative, his work repeatedly returns to modest subjects: everyday objects, family members, his cat Issa, and brief, unplanned encounters with wildlife.

At times, the subject is defined by what has just passed through the frame: a broken picket on a fence disturbed by a startled deer, or a single bird perched on new grass marking the arrival of spring. In other works, Reichman's presence appears indirectly through depictions of his studio table, where brushes, jars, and an easel are arranged with the same attentiveness given to landscape. These quiet interiors function as sites of memory and perception, folding the external world back into a meditative space shaped by patience, restraint, and care.

Reichman worked in the unusual medium of alkyd, an alcohol-based resin that dries quickly, which allowed him to build paintings through the slow stippling of paint, layer upon layer, at times a dozen or more. In all of his work, a reveal of the painting's foundation is essential, exposing the many layers as both a record of the process and a meditation on time itself. This accumulation of color ultimately resolves into quiet, calm representations of daily life, offering the viewer a profound sense of well-being.

Reichman's style reflects a synthesis of Western European, West Coast, and Eastern influences, drawing on Cézanne, Matisse, Pascin, Piazzoni, Sengai, Chu-ta, and the clarity of haiku poetry, particularly Issa. He described himself as a California painter, writing: "There is a unique energy that exists on the Pacific Coast. It is different from our Eastern Seaboard, different from the art of Europe and Asia—yet it comes out of all these sources to create inspiration and fresh insights. The light and the land, the atmosphere that exists here, has its own particular ambience. I feel a part of this energy."

Fred Reichman was born in 1925 in Bellingham, Washington, and moved with his family to San Francisco in 1934, where he built both his personal and artistic life. He passed away in Yuba City, California, in 2005. After earning his B.A. and M.A. in art at the University of California, Berkeley, he was awarded a UC Berkeley Taussig Fellowship, which allowed him to spend two years in Europe. Returning to the Bay Area, Reichman taught painting and drawing at UC Berkeley, UC Davis, the San Francisco Art Institute, and the UC Extension in San Francisco, becoming a respected mentor to generations of artists.

His work is represented in numerous public collections, including the National Museum of American Art in Washington, D.C., the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Legion of Honor in San Francisco, the Oakland Museum of California, and the Berkeley Art Museum. His paintings have been shown widely in solo exhibitions across San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York, Taos and Santa Fe, Tokyo, Osaka, and Wiesbaden, Germany.

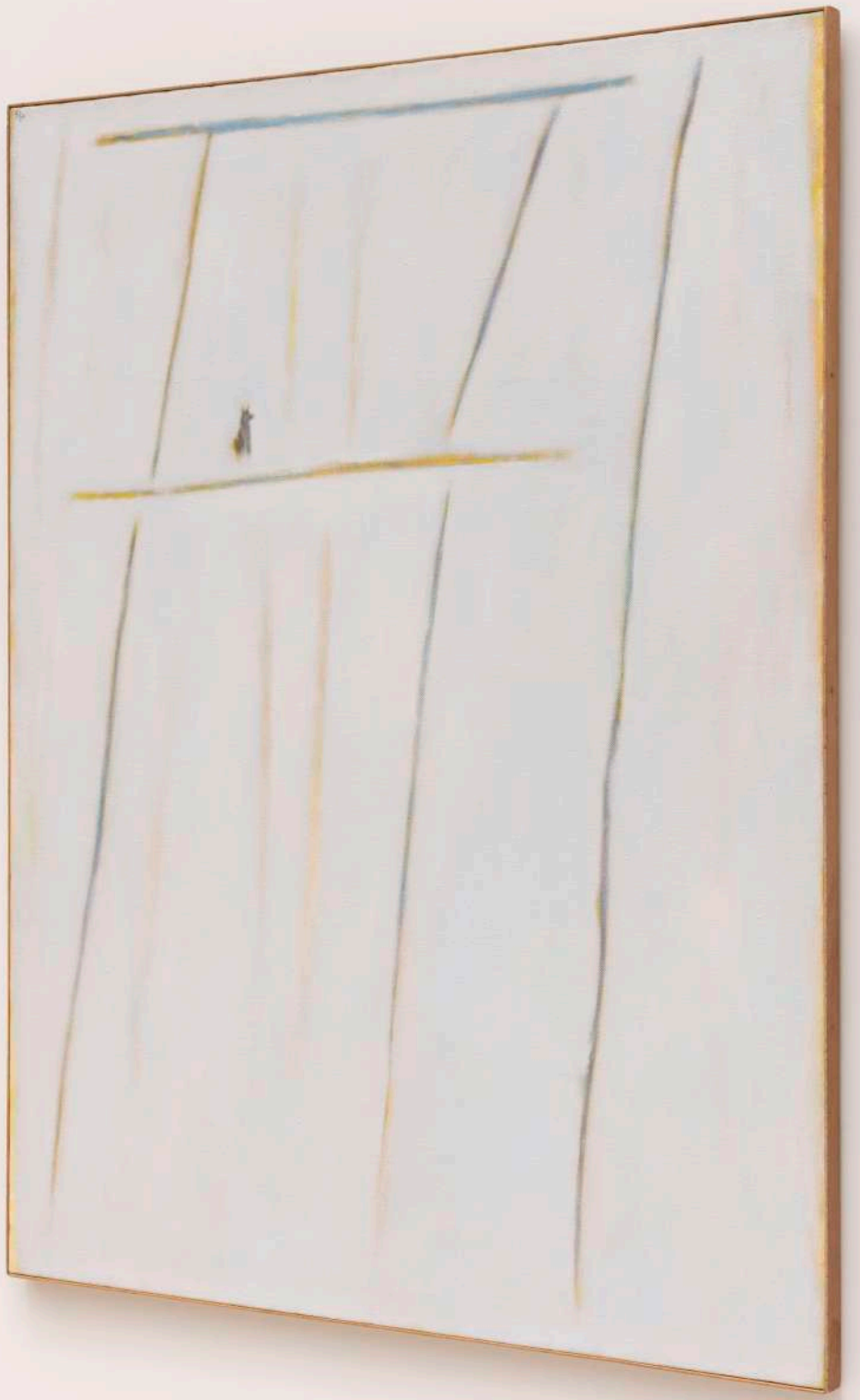
Fred Reichman

Winter Pears and Fig, 1966
Alkyd on canvas
23 x 30 3/4 in.

Fred Reichman

After the Rain, Up the Street, Sitting Dog, 1974
Oil on linen
48 1/4 x 36 1/4 in.

Like many homes in San Francisco, the Reichman family lived at the base of a steep hill. Time and again, the quiet banality of the surrounding neighborhood became a perfect muse for Fred's paintings. *After the Rain, Up the Street, Sitting Dog* captures such a moment: an unbothered dog resting uphill, paused in the lull of a winter storm. As with many of Reichman's titles, the phrasing reflects his enduring sensitivity to the cadence and economy of haiku.



Fred Reichman

Snail and Rain Across the Path, 1963
Oil on canvas
42 1/2 x 64 3/4 in.

Snail and Rain Across the Path resists narrative closure, instead asking the viewer to linger with ordinary events as they unfold over time. In this way, the work echoes the logic of a Zen koan; less a problem to be solved than an invitation to sustained presence and quiet awareness.

Fred Reichman

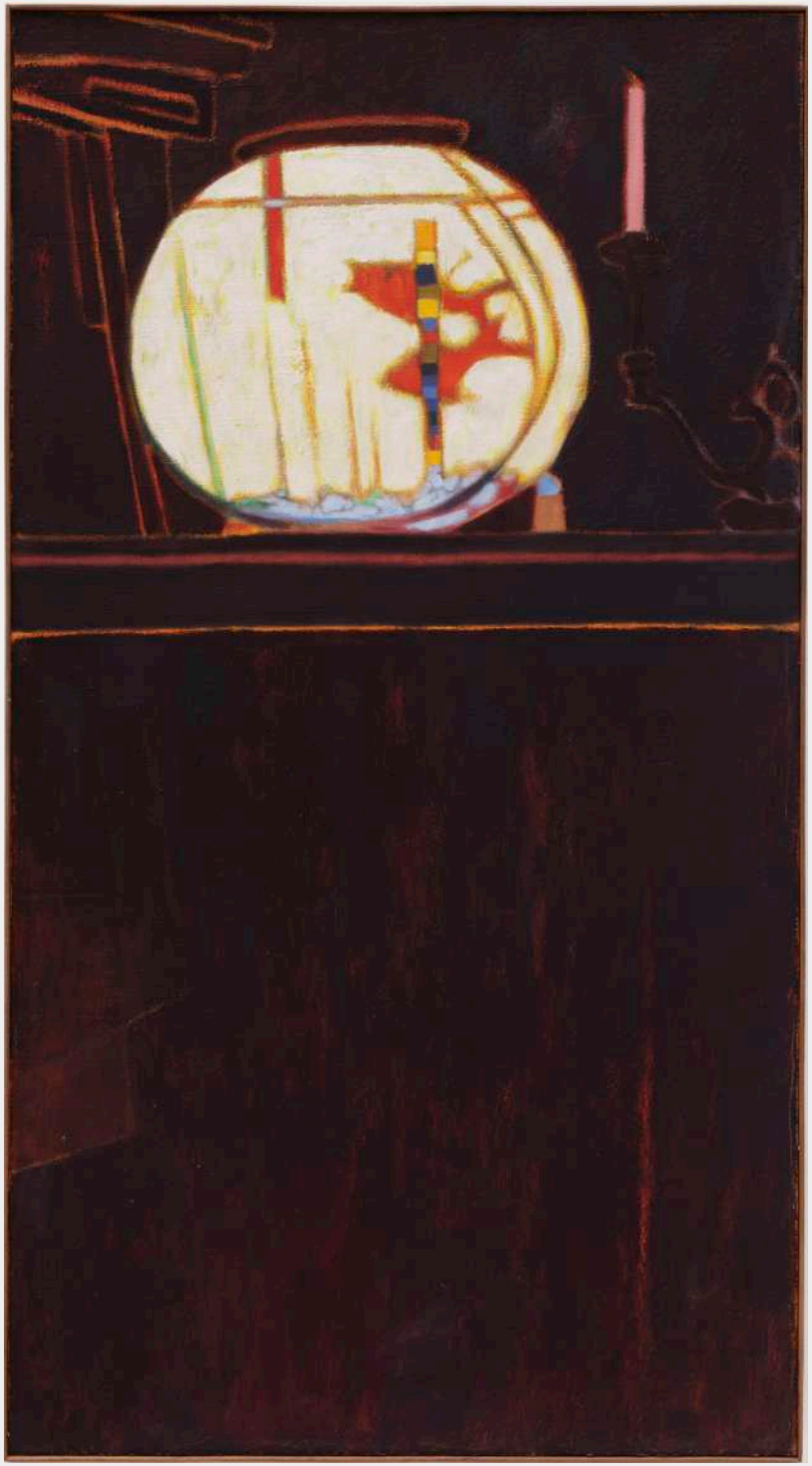
Two Brushes in a Yokohama Studio, 1982
Alkyd on canvas
38 3/8 x 14 1/2 in.

As a devoted student of Japanese Zen Buddhism, Fred studied under the teachings of Shunryu Suzuki Roshi and was invited to accompany him on a return trip to Yokohama in the mid-1980s. During this journey, Fred produced a small group of studies, among which *Two Brushes in a Yokohama Studio* stands out for its quiet clarity. The painting depicts Suzuki Roshi's calligraphy brushes suspended in a zendo during a moment of rest.

Fred Reichman

Summer at Tioga Junction, 1976
Oil on canvas
60 1/4 x 72 1/4 in.

In reference to the highest scenic motor route in California, *Summer at Tioga Junction* captures the still heat of a Sierra Nevada excursion in mid-summer at the Eastern entrance to Yosemite National Park.



Fred Reichman

For Matthew's Colored Strip, 1969
Oil on canvas
44 1/4 x 24 1/4 in.

Fred Reichman's deep affection for his children is evident throughout his work, from the tenderness of his imagery to the elegiac cadence of his titles and the intimate scenes drawn from daily life. *Matthew's Colored Strip*, made as a gift for his son's fifth birthday, depicts Matthew's beloved goldfish alongside a simple ornamental strip of paper used to decorate the bowl.

Fred Reichman

Horsescape, 1976
Oil on canvas
43 1/4 x 37 1/8 in.

In the open expanses of the Marin Headlands, Fred and his wife often rode horses on the many trails between the Tennesse and Gerbode Valleys. The abstracted image of a horse's midsection, weighted at the bottom of the picture, is only interrupted by two birds mid-flight.