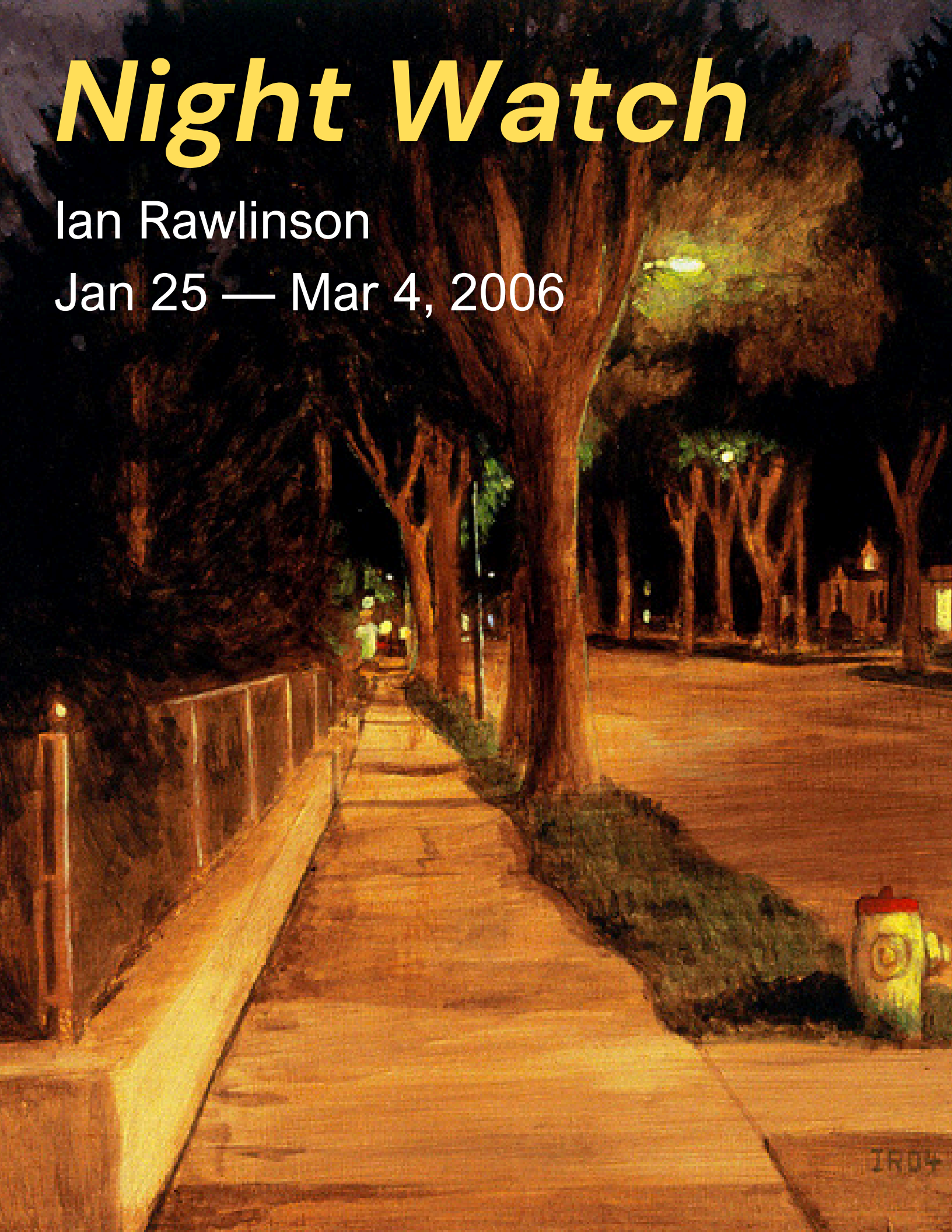


Night Watch

Ian Rawlinson

Jan 25 — Mar 4, 2006



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By David Garneau



Point of Interest, Ian Rawlinson, 2004, acrylic on wood panel, 7.5 x 11.25 inches. Collection of Donna Bergan & Fred Baker, Calgary, AB.

The title of Ian Rawlinson's exhibition, *Night Watch*, is an allusion to Rembrandt that is too heavy a burden for these modest paintings to bear. The inflated association is a false lead that contaminates our appreciation of Rawlinson's work on its own merits. While his sienna scenes do recall an "old Master" look, their relationship to Rembrandt is analogous to the relationship between Wine Gum candy and real wine.

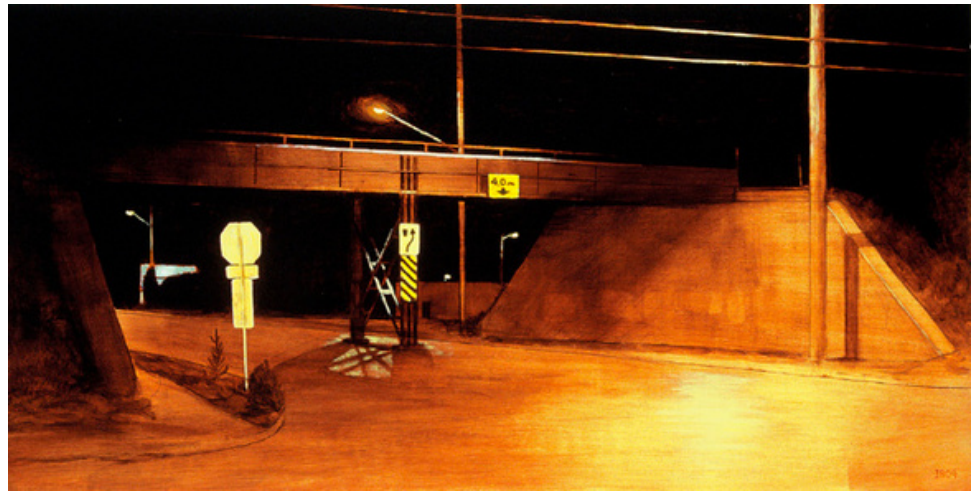
While both artists glaze over white gesso to achieve luminosity, Rembrandt's grounds are impastoed with thick white paint and nervous with curving marks which, when swabbed and teased with oil glaze-loaded brushes, create living surfaces. Rawlinson's grounds are flat, the acrylic paint anaemic beneath a glossy finish. If this is an homage to Rembrandt it is not to the master's paintings observed in the flesh, but as seen in slick, flat reproductions.

Night Watch features eighteen urban nocturnes set in handsome dark frames. It opens with a suite of three small works: a colour digital print, a drawing based on the print (with some compositional changes), and the resulting painting, *Before the Rain*. The studies are meant to indicate that although the Saskatoon artist does not work out of doors from nature — Oh, but that he would! — but from photographs in a studio, he is not a slavish photorealist. These subtle alterations, however, do not improve content; they are formal changes. And this is his strong suit. Rawlinson is a restless and innovative composer. Especially interesting are his sloping compositions involving overpasses and walkways, as in *Seeker*.

Rawlinson's paintings are closer to Whistler's ambiguous nocturnes than Rembrandt's illustrational shooting party. Like Whistler, Rawlinson's best works play between abstraction and representation. The surprising *Spring Thaw* is an unresolvable abstraction from a distance. It is a pleasure to slowly approach it and have the scene make sense in fits and starts. The experience recalls the occasions during a leisurely evening walk when our eyes attempt to make sense of indistinct objects and scenery.

Because there is little sign of a struggle, of a wrestling with improbable materials to eke out a miracle, I find myself thinking less about Rawlinson the painter and more about Rawlinson the photographer, the introverted nocturnal flaneur trolling the city in search of visual poetry. Or perhaps he is a hunter, a stalker cruising for ocular delights, a drive-by shooter taking hundreds of pictures and sorting out the pretty bodies later. He certainly is oddly chaste for a voyeur. He never looks into windows or behind the bushes. His is an Emersonian eye, disembodied and floating through the city recording all it sees but scrupulously avoiding anything untoward.

Rawlinson's best works capture scenes of unexpected loveliness in the most unlikely places. But he could use just a little more strangeness, a little more of the feeling rather than just the appearance of his experience. Out alone in the night, the primal mind alternates between feelings Of Hunter and prey.



Sleep Walk, Ian Rawlinson, 2004, acrylic on wood panel, 15 x 30 inches. Collection of Dan Ring, Saskatoon, SK.

But no fear, threat, strangeness, or much feeling besides detached, melancholic observation is allowed to creep beneath these candied surfaces.

I like these paintings, but I want to like them more. Rawlinson paints well enough but too often takes short cuts and races to a picture rather than slowly evolving a painting. His is a strong talent that may evolve into brilliance if he adds to his formalist strengths a deeper interest in affect, and embodies his peculiar evening ritual into paintings rather than just appearances.

IAN RAWLINSON

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Education

- 1992 - Graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the University of Saskatchewan,
Saskatoon
Workshops
- 1995 - Resident, Vermont Studio Center, Johnson, Vermont, USA. Guest Artists: Selina
Trieff, James Gahagan, and Terry Winters.
- 1994 - Participant, Emma Lake Artists Workshop, Emma Lake Saskatchewan. Guest
Artists: Janet Fish and Vic Cicansky.
- 1992 - Participant, Emma Lake Artists Workshop, Guest Artists: Evan Penny and
Susanna Heller.

Solo Exhibitions

- 2003 - Opacity, Agnes Bugera Gallery, Edmonton, Alberta
- 2002 – Recent Paintings, Darrell Bell Gallery, Saskatoon
- 1997 - Dialogue: Recent Still Lifes, Frances Morrison Gallery, Saskatoon Public Library
- 1992 - Totem: BFA Exhibition, Gordon Snelgrove Gallery, Murray Memorial Building,
University of Saskatchewan.

Group Exhibitions

- 2001 - Ghost Town: 5 Saskatoon Artists. Mendel Art Gallery. Saskatoon
- 2001 - Viewing Distance: New Works by Saskatchewan Artists , Art Gallery of Swift
Current, Estevan NEC Art Gallery, Moose Jaw Art Museum, Prince Albert Little Gallery.
- 2000 - Opening Exhibition, Darrell Bell Gallery, with Darrell Bell, Lee Brady,
Scott Macleod, Trevor MacDonald.
- 1999 - Confections: Small Scale Paintings. with Lynne Graham, Amanda Immelman,
Laura St. Pierre, Daniel Unger, Susan Unger, Emma Williams and Marlene
Yuzak. St. Thomas Moore Gallery, University of Saskatchewan..
- 1993 - Working with the 'Still Life'. With Connie Freedy, George Glenn and Judith Zinkan.
Dennis Evans Fine Arts, Saskatoon.

Awards

- 2001 – Saskatchewan Arts Board Creative 'C' Grant

Collections

- The Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatoon
The Moose Jaw Art Museum, Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan.
The Saskatchewan Arts Board