

# ALEXANDRE

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ART / ARCHITECTURE

## A Landscape That Carries a Life's Worth of Emotion

By DEBORAH WEISGALL

BRUNSWICK, Me. **E**MILY NELLIGAN's charcoal drawings are almost all the same size: 10 inches wide by 7 inches high. Some are dark as a moonless night, some pale as fog. They all depict the same landscape: Great Cranberry Island, southwest of Mount Desert Island in Maine. Twenty-six of them, reticent and lyrical, ring a gallery at the Bowdoin College Museum of Art here. In their minimal steel frames, they hang like sudden windows: instants of light and air translated into black and white.

At first glance, they might be photographs, with their intricate interplay of lights and darks. "Untitled, Cranberry Island, 21 July, 1997" catches the delicate gradations of gray in a sunset sky, an array of clouds almost too subtle to be drawn. But these drawings also read as abstractions, the landscape — clouds, rocks and ocean — pared to emotion.

This show, "Littoral Abstractions," which continues until Sept. 3, is one of the few times Ms. Nelligan, who has been making drawings for more than 50 years, has permitted them to be shown publicly. "I remember the first time I saw one of her drawings," said Katy Kline, the director of the Bowdoin Museum. "It

was during a studio visit with another artist, Lois Dodd, and I remember looking up, and hung fairly high on the wall was a very quiet, very soft, dark drawing. I kept looking at it; it was as if I were hearing a solo cello, and I asked, 'Whose is that?'"

Ms. Nelligan's work has long been a well-kept secret. Meyer Schapiro, Hilton Kramer, Wolf Kahn and Richard Pousette-Dart are among those who have collected her drawings, but her last two solo exhibitions took place in 1991 in out-of-the-way places, one sponsored by the Connecticut Commission on the Arts at the Legal Offices Building Library in Hartford, and the other at Maine Coast Artists, a nonprofit gallery in Rockport.



Bowdoin College Museum of Art

"Untitled, Cranberry Island, 25 October 94 No. 1," a charcoal-on-paper drawing by Emily Nelligan.

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