

ALEXANDRE

Art in America

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John Walker: *Seal Point Series*
#26, 2005, oil on bingo card,
7¼ by 5½ inches; at Nielsen.

BOSTON

John Walker at Nielsen

The British-born painter John Walker has turned his attention to the Maine coast over the past dozen or so years. Drawn to the rawness and changing weather of the ironbound littoral, to tidal reaches and island-accented views, Walker has in previous work translated the scene near his home in Walpole into very large paintings covered with a profusion of explosive marks.

Walker's "Seal Point" series, painted over the summer of 2005, takes a similar tack but in a greatly reduced format. Each of several hundred oils is painted on an old bingo card (mainstay of New England church and grange gatherings), measuring around 7¼ by 5½ inches. Landscapes painted atop the simple grids of random numbers and lettering sometimes completely obscure the printed ground, but just as often bits and pieces of black numerals or letters peek through, offering a visually engaging palimpsest. The paint tends to

be thick, its surface a dervish of broad brushstrokes, impasto squiggles and color patches.

The selected pieces shown at Nielsen were pinned to the walls, mostly singly, apart from a few grouped arrangements (in a related exhibition, mounted at Knoedler in New York, the paintings were individually framed). From across the room the paintings projected the rough lineaments of the Maine coast—striations and strata of rocky ledges, watery expanses, points of land surmounted by free-form clouds, a rainbow, squall and sunset.

In *Seal Point Series* #3, the light of the full moon casts an irregular wriggle of white through dark and viscous sky and water. It recalls the romanticism of Albert Pinkham Ryder, but without any narrative elements. A number of pieces feature a prominently placed large rounded capital E (sometimes with a fourth appendage) painted into the scene. What is this Arp-like shape? Coastal inlets? Points of land?

Like a poet writing a sonnet series—John Berryman, for instance—Walker seems to thrive in the constricted format, meeting the challenge of space with gusto and intuitive zeal. In a statement included in the book that serves as the exhibition catalogue, Walker cites a wistful Winston Churchill: "Happy are the painters for they shall not be lonely. Light and colour, peace and hope, will keep them company to the end . . . of the day." Walker bears out the sentiment of this statement in his playful work.
—Carl Little

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