

ALEXANDRE

Emily Nelligan



Emily Nelligan: *Early Drawings*

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Alexandre

25 East 73rd Street, New York 10021

New York . . . Alexandre is pleased to present *Early Drawings*, a selection of rarely exhibited charcoal drawings by Emily Nelligan (American, 1924–2018). The stirringly evocative works span the early years of her artistic practice, reflecting the start of her lifelong commitment to the landscapes of Great Cranberry Island, Maine, her sole subject. The twenty-four drawings all date from before 1975 with only a few previously shown, and never together as a group.

The shadowy and ethereal world of Nelligan's charcoal drawings reveals a remarkably deep connection between artist, landscape, and medium. For many years, she and her husband, artist Marvin Bileck, led a quiet, private life, alternating between the Lower East Side (later rural Connecticut) and Cranberry Island, very rarely exhibiting their works publicly. The attachment she felt to the island is evident in the high contrast dreaminess of her landscapes, lovingly crafted in devotion to the land, sea, and stormy skies.

Her early drawings are generally a few inches larger in size than the ten inches wide and seven inches tall that she settled on in the late 1970s. They serve as delicate and intimate snapshots of the small island, which is only two miles long and home to forty year-round residents. With some dark as a starless sky, and others as light as mist, this selection of works captures fleeting moments of light and atmosphere in monochrome. Although Nelligan led a rather reclusive life, her secretive, abstract charcoal drawings hold worlds of emotion, and stand apart in their lyrical ability to capture the endless nuances of the island's contours and specificities—from rocky shores to cloudy horizons.

In the words of fellow Cranberry Isle artist Charles E. Wadsworth, "Hers is a graphic poetry which grows out of the most precise observation...Joining the stated with the unstated, the tangible with the intangible, and the manifest with the mysterious, her drawings are quietly passionate tributes to seen and unseen realities. Small in scale, large in concept, they are modest and unceremonial acts of worship."

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Formally trained as a painter at Cooper Union in the 1940s, Nelligan later switched to charcoal because of the cost of materials. Her painterly sensibilities echo through her charcoal compositions, which convey a specific mood which would be impossible with paint. While Nelligan was a well-loved artist among a few artists and critics of her time, she did not receive her first full-scale exhibition until 2000, at the Bowdoin College Museum of Art. Her work was first exhibited at Alexandre Gallery in 2005. *Early Drawings* is the gallery's eighth show of her work.

Images: Emily Nelligan, *Untitled*, 1965, charcoal on paper, 10 x 13 1/4 inches, © Estate of Emily Nelligan, courtesy Alexandre Gallery, New York.

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