

University Gallery

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST
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The University Gallery of University of Massachusetts Amherst is honored to host *Light on the Familiar: The Paintings of Scott Prior* from January 29 through March 17, 2000. The exhibition is a retrospective selection of 45 of Prior's paintings completed between 1971 and 1999 and includes examples of his early surreal paintings and more recent paintings of the people, interiors, places and objects that are most familiar to him. *Light on the Familiar* was organized by the DeCordova Museum and Sculpture Park in Lincoln, Massachusetts where it was on view last fall. An opening reception for the exhibition's showing at the University Gallery will be held on Friday, January 28th from 5 to 7 p.m. and the artist will be present. Scott Prior will give a slide lecture about his work on Wednesday, February 9 at 7:30 p.m. in the University Gallery. All are welcome to attend.

Light on the Familiar is the first major exhibition of Prior's work to be presented in the Pioneer Valley, his home since 1967 when he came to Amherst to attend the University of Massachusetts. Prior is a 1971 graduate of the University's department of art from which he received a B.F.A. in printmaking. After college he settled in the area and taught himself to paint, finding a supportive artistic community among the so-called "Valley Realists": Randall Deihl, Robin Freedendfeld, Gregory Gillespie, the late Frances Cohen Gillespie and Jane Lund. As the exhibition's curator Rachel Rosenfield Lafo suggests, the realist style has found great acceptance in the Valley, perhaps because the area is largely populated by writers, academics, small presses, book artists and illustrators who are naturally receptive to literary art.

Prior's early surreal paintings combine realistically painted passages with odd and often humorous objects. The real and invented images are rendered in minute detail, and show Prior's absorption of the techniques and style of Renaissance painting which he combines with contemporary subject matter. One of his works from 1973, *Nimrod's Engineers*, depicts a small town nestled in a gentle landscape. In the painting's mid- and foreground are a spaceship-like dome, a smokestack, and several men with hardhats apparently surveying the area. Within this rural setting, the incongruous references to technology and industry are a wry commentary on the twentieth century's intrusion of technology on nature, a theme that has interested Prior throughout his career.

After 1980 Prior's interests turned to depicting natural phenomena – light as it bathes or illuminates places and things, time of day, and the change of seasons. Prior has said about his landscapes and still lifes painted in the 1980s and 1990s that he has been "...particularly interested in depicting solitude and light. Solitude because it can be illuminating. And light because it is like God's voice, the way it touches and plays over all things." Prior works from both photographs and life. After his marriage to Nanette Vonnegut in 1981 he began to incorporate portraits of real rather than invented people into his work. His family and their domestic surroundings have inspired a body of work

that includes the interiors, still lifes and landscapes of his daily life. Prior captures the sense of intimacy and tranquility that exists in the space of the everyday lives of the people he loves.

Scott Prior was born in Exeter, New Hampshire in 1949 and lives and works in Northampton, Massachusetts. He is represented in Boston by the Alpha Gallery and in New York by the Forum Gallery. His work has been the subject of numerous one person and group exhibitions and is included in significant private and public collections nationally. In addition to Prior's public lecture at the University Gallery, docent-led tours, family activities, and a teacher's workshop are planned. A 48-page catalogue of *Light on the Familiar: The Paintings of Scott Prior* will be available at the Gallery, and Prior's *Still Life in Autumn*, 1997, is available in poster format.

The University Gallery, located on the lower level of the Fine Arts Center, is open to the public from Tuesday through Friday, 11 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday from 2 to 5 p.m. The Gallery is also open during evening performances held in the Concert Hall of the Fine Arts Center. For further information, please call 413-545-3670.