



SALLYCOOK

*Sally Cook: 1960—Present* is organized by Liz Park, Curator, UB Art Galleries.  
Related programming is organized in partnership with UB Arts Collaboratory.

*Sally Cook: 1960—Present*

March 12—May 16, 2020

University at Buffalo Art Gallery, Center for the Arts

*Responses to Sally Cook*

Artists Brunch, Readings, and Songs with Alison D'Amato, Department of Theatre and Dance; Cristanne Miller, Department of English;  
Margaret Rhee, Department of Media Study

Saturday, March 28, 2020, 12:00—2:00 PM

Organized in partnership with UB Arts Collaboratory and presented with UB Humanities Institute

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UB Art Gallery

201 Center for the Arts

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**COVER:** *Self Portrait, Five Images*, c. 1985, acrylic on canvas with hand-painted frame, 30 x 30 inches (33.5 x 33.75 inches framed)

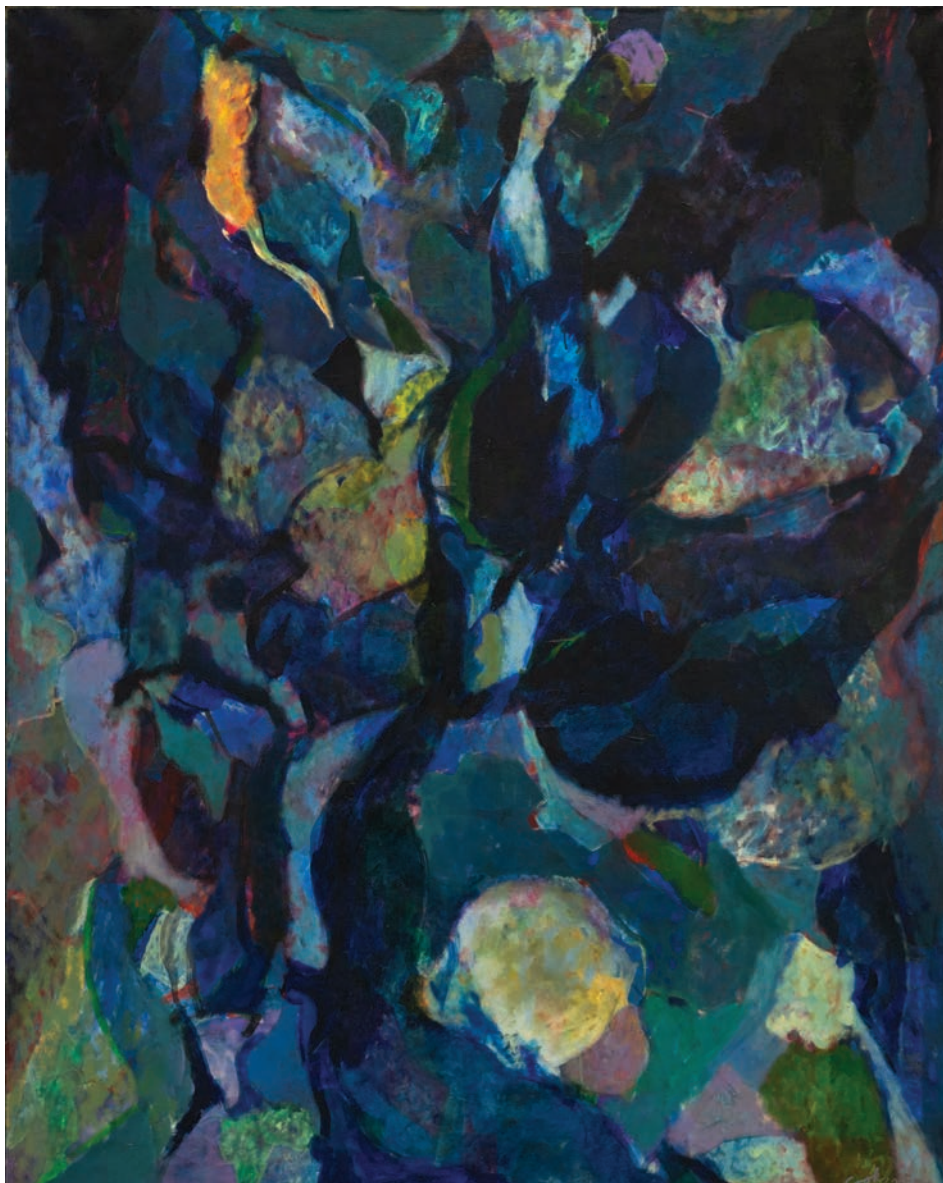
**BACK COVER:** *A Flag For Dolores IV*, 1965, acrylic on canvas, 18 x 24 inches



# Sally Cook: 1960–Present

University at Buffalo Art Gallery, Center for the Arts

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*In The Forests Of The Night*, 1962, oil on canvas, 61.5 x 49.5 inches

# Sally Cook: 1960–Present

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## LIZ PARK

An astute observer and avid collector of things, Sally Cook is a Buffalo native, artist and poet whose practice spans six decades, beginning in the 1960s. Cook attended the Albright Art School on scholarship in the mid-1950s and spent her formative years in early 1960s New York City. Influenced by Abstract Expressionist painters of this time, her earliest paintings predominantly capture her experiments with layered and feathered strokes of color in swirling compositions that evoke either a sense of enclosure or an expanse. In Expressionism, Cook shares that, given her rural upbringing, she was, “looking for evidence of what I already knew of natural forms and processes—directional, composition, color, design, texture. All those things, for instance, might go to make a tree.”

Cook’s abstraction thus remained anchored to a world of concrete objects and familiar spaces of the artist’s psyche—be it the nocturnal woodland of *In the Forests Of The Night*, 1962, or the falls near the artist’s native city in *Black Niagara*, 1960. When Cook began to explore geometric abstraction, her penchant for objects and their details—birds and their wings, flowers and their petals—became more visible in the flattened shapes impressed on her canvas.

The scale and materials of her early work are unique to the artist’s experiment with abstraction and its capacity to relate to a place of her imagining. In time, Cook abandoned oil to adopt primarily acrylic and intimately sized canvases to focus on and exercise control over details. Landscapes became the backdrop to the figures and objects in her later bodies, but they remain foundational in much of her work.

In the early 1970s, Cook fully embraced figuration and representation through portraiture and still life—genres that gave her license to joyfully render rich and colorful details that have come to characterize her later bodies of work. The immediacy of the objects and people that inhabit the artist’s world now drove her creative pursuit. Cook departed from veiled and abstracted still life and portraiture such as *A Flag For Dolores*, 1965. Instead, the artist populated her paintings with her intimates and associates—her spouse, Bob Fisk; gallerist Martje More; friends, neighbors, colleagues—as well as with artists with whom she attempts conversations across time and place. *In The Backyard With Some Friends*, 1971–72 features a three-armed Cook, in the presence of Pablo Picasso, Henri Rousseau, Gertrude Stein—masters of modern poetry and painting—and her friend, Buffalo painter Margaret Kittinger Batson.

Cook proposes that a portrait is a type of still life: a person is a vessel for their thoughts. Hence, Cook approaches portraiture as a way to depict the sitter's inner psyche as expressed through the subjects' clothes, gestures, belongings, and surroundings. The 1969 commissioned portrait of art collector Charles Penney exemplifies Cook's approach to her subject. In *Charles Penney And His Growing Collection*, 1970, Cook painted him surrounded by objects that represent his divergent interests. In written correspondence, Penney requested:

*Primarily I'd like to have representation of some of my art collection and the beautiful objects in the house such as those Staffordshire china pieces of which I have a large collection mostly in storage. And also the willow trees, rocks, and water. And music for I have played the violin and sung much during my life. And the law if you can do it somehow since this is my profession. Other interests such as languages, travel, sports cars, etc. probably can't be shown. Well, you're a very creative person and will come up with good ideas, I'm sure.*

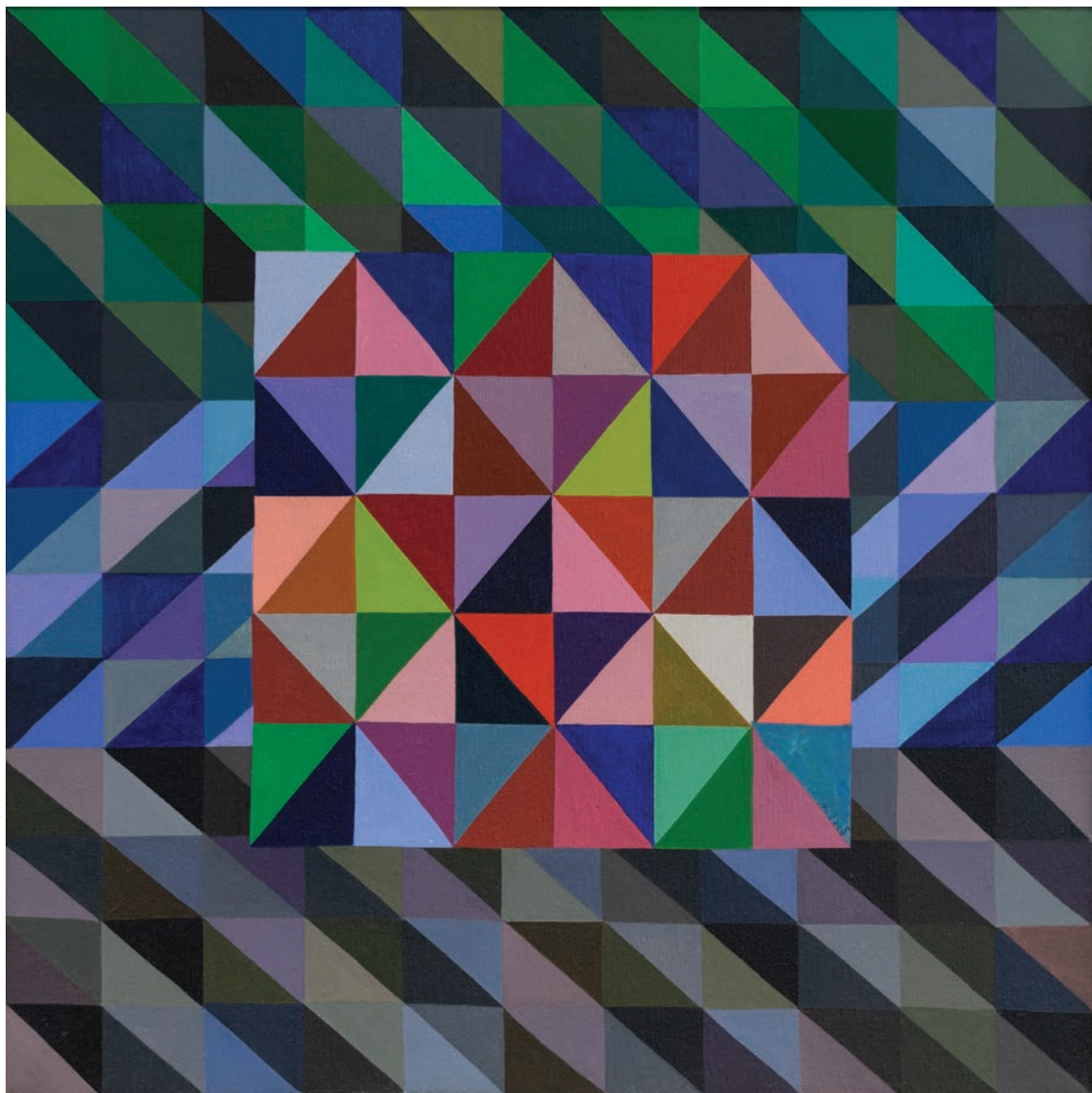
Duly referencing photographs made especially for this portraiture, Cook faithfully rendered selected objects from his collection to convey Penney's wide-ranging taste, status, and personality.

The artist takes the same incisive approach to depicting herself. Self-portraits are a recurring motif for Cook. This ready-subject has offered the artist a repeated opportunity to revisit past works, different states of mind, and multiple facets of her artistic interests in such paintings as *Self Portrait*, *Five Images* and *Some Things I Might Have Collected*. The above-mentioned *In The Backyard With Some Friends* imagines the

artist in a coterie of modernist poets and painters, teasing out parts of herself reflected in their personage and oeuvre. *The Poets Light The Lamps* similarly illustrates Cook's desired and imagined companionship with nineteenth-century American poet Emily Dickinson. In the painting, Cook and Dickinson are portrayed in perfect symmetry. Dressed in costumes from their own periods and flanked by a pair of lamps, each bears an armful of flowers. The title references Dickinson's poem "The Poets light but Lamps," which contrasts the mortality of artists with the enduring nature of works they create.

In her parallel practice as a poet, Cook finds inspiration in the figure of Emily Dickinson, who appears in many of the artist's dreamlike interiors and in her landscape paintings of New England. Conjuring Dickinson as a poetic companion, Cook has composed poems that have been collected in two volumes *Making Music* and *The View From Here*. These capture some of the spirited play with words that echo the vibrant contrasts of colors and crisply rendered shapes that make up her paintings.

In considering her overall creative output in text and in paint, Cook ponders, "What does red taste like? Does lemon yellow mute that taste? Can a flower be seen as F sharp, or a string of small leaves play arpeggios?" The artist's synesthetic explorations perfume the decades-long career that this exhibition represents. The painted flowers and food galore, for instance, evoke scent and taste. The artist and "some things" that she might have collected tempt a touch. They invite immediate and personal connections to the little things that surround us—a nudge to examine extraordinary details of the ordinary through art and poetry.



*A Flowering*, 1965, acrylic on canvas, 22 x 22 inches





*Charles Penney And His Growing Collection*, 1970, acrylic on canvas, 36 x 46 inches  
Collection of the Burchfield Penney Art Center. Image courtesy of the artist and the Burchfield Penney Art Center





*In The Backyard With Some Friends*, 1971–72, acrylic on canvas, 36 x 46 inches  
Collection of Daniel and Shelley Fogel

# Artist Reflections

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SALLY COOK

## On Early Years and Abstract Expressionism

At the time Abstract Expressionism was bubbling up in a grubby corner of East Tenth Street in Manhattan, I was a recently graduated art student in Buffalo studying with painter Peter Busa. GO TO TENTH STREET—THAT'S WHERE IT'S AT! he would shout, shattering the sanctity of the studio, making sly asides to his more advanced students. Some of us took him seriously; only three of us went.

What I learned then stayed with me and was transmuted into a thread which has woven itself through my entire career. I believe in experiment. So long as the guidelines are clear, the mind needs stretching. But an experiment must be recognized for what it is. Though many see an experiment as a finished product, it is solely a means to one.

I had never seen much Abstract Expressionism. Seeing it was a shocker because I had expected it to be more diverse. I concluded the idea had potential and began to probe, looking for evidence of what I already knew of natural forms and processes—directional, composition, color, design, texture—all those things, for instance, that might go to make a tree.



*Black Niagara*, 1960, oil on canvas, 70 x 55 inches





*The Bird Who Died From Sleeping Too Much*, 1967, acrylic on canvas, 40 x 30 inches

## On Geometric Abstraction and Figuration

Though I continued on with Abstract Expressionism for a while, my head was faster than my brush, and I became interested in Geometrics. Now I was working more with the three-dimensional, solid blocks of color, and their placement and relationship on the canvas, and how it might affect the viewer. Certain shapes and known symbols, placement of horizon lines, for instance, stood for foliage and fractured areas. A psychological portrait and landscapes of the interior could be painted in this manner with such a geometric language.

I had always been interested in the figurative. As I began to paint geometric people and objects, the figurative moved to the fore. I began to express more ideas about the inner person, plant, or creature as I painted them. Then I thought about time, what it does, and how one might paint it. Richness of pattern and texture required more consideration of synesthesia (a crossing over of the senses), and how common it actually is. What does red taste like? Does lemon yellow mute that taste? Can a flower be seen as F sharp, or a string of small leaves play arpeggios? It seemed as if, by adding more dimensions, I was getting more and more of a painting.

## On Food and Consumption

I often paint food. Consider food. Can one eat symbolically? In my view, one sometimes eats frugally, as a physical expression of the lack of nourishment from an uncaring art community. Those rich, heavily laden bowls of fruit, cake, or—especially—pasta are visual expressions of the plentitude of what might have, could have, and should have been offered and received, but in reality, may never be. Notice the lack of table silver; one has the food but can never begin to consume it. It is ideas like these that easily crisscross over into my poems: this disconcerting lack.





*Some Things I Might Have Collected*, c. 1990, acrylic on canvas with hand painted frame, 12 x 16 inches (15.875 x 19.875 inches framed)



*The Poets Light The Lamp*, 2000, acrylic on canvas with hand painted frame, 16 x 20 inches (21.375 x 25.375 inches framed)

## Color Songs

by Sally Cook

*When an arpeggio takes flight,  
It shoes you green, in minor tones.  
A small flute, made of malachite;  
One sprightly saint's transmuted bones.*

*How rich the sound that orange makes,  
So clear and unequivocal.  
The simple path to Heaven it takes  
Lies in each marigold's bright ball.*

*As ochre slants the autumn sun,  
Momentum carries you along  
The ancient path that orb's begun,  
The echo of a brassy gong.*



# Works in the Exhibition

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All works by Sally Cook. All works courtesy of the Artist and  
Eleven Twenty Projects except where noted otherwise.

***Black Niagara***, 1960  
oil on canvas  
70 x 55 inches

***Convergence***, c. 1960  
oil on canvas  
47.375 x 35.75 inches

***Liver Of The Roses***, 1960  
oil on canvas  
70 x 55 inches

***Night + Day, April (study)***, 1960  
crayon on paper  
9.5 x 9.5 inches

***Night Mist (study)***, 1960  
crayon on paper  
10.875 x 14 inches

***Purple Wings***, 1960  
crayon on paper  
11 x 8.5 inches

***The Brown One***, 1960  
oil on canvas  
50 x 50 inches

***The Crescent***, c. 1960  
acrylic on canvas  
18 x 24 inches

***White Painting***, c. 1960  
oil on canvas  
24 x 36 inches

***In The Forests Of The Night***, 1962  
oil on canvas  
61.5 x 49.5 inches

***A Flag For Dolores II (study)***, 1965  
watercolor on paper  
10.5 x 8.5 inches

***A Flag For Dolores III (study)***, 1965  
watercolor on paper  
10.25 x 8.5 inches

***A Flag For Dolores IV***, 1965  
acrylic on canvas  
18 x 24 inches

***A Flag For Dolores IV (study)***, c. 1965  
watercolor on paper  
8.125 x 10.25 inches

***A Flowering***, 1965  
acrylic on canvas  
22 x 22 inches

***Starflower***, 1966  
acrylic on canvas  
40 x 30 inches

***The Bird Who Died From  
Sleeping Too Much***, 1967  
acrylic on canvas  
40 x 30 inches

***The Blue Seed***, 1967  
acrylic on canvas with varnish  
24 x 24 inches

***The Pod***, 1967  
acrylic on canvas  
42 x 42 inches

***Evening Eggplants***, c. 1969  
oil on canvas  
18 x 20 inches  
Private collection

***Jewels Of The Middle Ground IV***, 1969  
acrylic on canvas with varnish and hand-  
painted frame  
20 x 20 inches  
21 x 21 inches framed

***Charles Penney And  
His Growing Collection***, 1970  
acrylic on canvas  
36 x 46 inches  
Collection of the Burchfield Penney Art Center  
Gift of Charles Rand Penney, 1991

***Gallery Without Walls  
[Portrait Of Martje More]***, c. 1970  
acrylic on canvas  
25 x 18 inches  
Collection of the Burchfield Penney Art Center  
Gift of Martje V. More, 2016

***I Go To Africa***, 1971  
acrylic on canvas  
36 x 46 inches  
Courtesy of John Fatta and  
Eleven Twenty Projects

***Portrait Of A Friend*, 1971**

acrylic on canvas with varnish and hand-painted frame  
36 x 36 inches  
41 x 41.5 inches framed

***In The Backyard With Some Friends*, 1971-72**

acrylic on canvas  
36 x 46 inches  
Courtesy of Daniel and Shelley Fogel

***Steven On His Way To Italy*, 1972**

acrylic on canvas  
18 x 24 inches

***Portrait Of Another Friend*, 1973**

acrylic on canvas  
28 x 20 inches  
Courtesy of Daniel and Shelley Fogel

***Gypsy At The Carnival Of Life*, 1976**

acrylic on canvas  
30 x 40 inches  
Private collection

***On The Edge*, c. 1980**

acrylic on canvas  
30 x 40 inches  
Collection of the Burchfield Penney Art Center  
Purchased with funds from an anonymous donor

***God Gave A Crow A Piece Of Cheese; He Turned Around And Gave Me These*, 1983**

acrylic on canvas  
24 x 30 inches  
Courtesy of Daniel and Shelley Fogel

***Self Portrait, Five Images*, c. 1985**

acrylic on canvas with hand-painted frame  
30 x 30 inches  
33.5 x 33.75 inches framed

***White Garden, Emily Dickinson*, 1986**

acrylic on canvas with hand-painted frame  
32 x 28 inches  
41.5 x 41.5 inches framed  
Courtesy of Daren and Patty Dabrowski

***Some Things I Might Have Collected*, c. 1990**

acrylic on canvas with hand-painted frame  
12 x 16 inches  
15.875 x 19.875 inches framed

***Floral Fantasy*, 1994-5**

acrylic on canvas with hand-painted frame  
20 x 24 inches  
25.625 x 29.5 inches framed

***The Light Is From Mozart*, 1996**

acrylic on canvas with hand-painted frame  
16 x 20 inches  
21.5 x 25.5 inches framed

***Blue Oranges*, 1999-00**

acrylic on canvas with hand-painted frame  
14 x 14 inches  
19.5 x 19.5 inches framed

***As New England Used To Be*, 2000**

acrylic on canvas with hand-painted frame  
20 x 24 inches  
25.25 x 29.25 inches framed

***Beauty Crowds Me*, 2000**

acrylic on canvas with hand-painted frame  
24 x 20 inches  
29.5 x 23.625 inches framed

***The Poets Light The Lamps*, 2000**

acrylic on canvas with hand-painted frame  
16 x 20 inches  
21.375 x 25.375 inches framed

