

Exhibits

February brings visual diversity via a diver, drawings with a French connection and paintings from the "river's edge."

By Mike May

"PAUL THEK: DIVER, A RETROSPECTIVE": FEB. 5-MAY 1

It's interesting to recall that the first Carnegie International to have a title—"Life on Mars"—used an "untitled" painting of planet Earth as one of its signature images. This compelling piece in the 2008-09 show was a striking portrait of our world painted on now-yellowing pages of broadsheet newspaper.

The artist, the late Paul Thek, was showcased within that International with a kind of mini-retrospective. Featured were paintings, drawings, notebooks and sculpture.

Thek (1933-1988) and his world are now the focus of a new exhibit, "Paul Thek: Diver, A Retrospective," opening this month at Carnegie Museum of Art, which co-organized this traveling show with the Whitney Museum of American Art. It's the first major show in America to look back on the career of this multifaceted creative force—Thek also was an installation artist—whose work resists easy labeling, but can be described as lyrical, disturbing, enigmatic, ethereal, spiritual or profane.

An American artist who spent time both in Europe and in America and whose work was shown on both continents, Thek lived a colorful, bohemian but also sad life, cut short by AIDS. (It could make a compelling movie.) His star has risen, set but now appears to be on the rise again.

Here's how co-curators Lynn Zelevansky, Carnegie Museum of Art director, and Elisabeth Sussman, a curator at the Whitney, view Thek and his influence: "If today his art appears more relevant than ever, it may be because so many in the art world have hearkened to Thek's tune and moved closer to the art he made: an art directly about the body; an art of moods, mysteries and communal ideas; an art that was ephemeral, disrespectful of the conditions of museums and that essentially ceased to exist once an exhibition closed."

The unusual word in the title for the show—"Diver"—references paintings done by Thek in the late 1960s said to be inspired by an ancient fresco, "Tomb of the Diver," unearthed in Italy. (Interesting bit of trivia: Among the many jobs held by Thek during his lifetime was lifeguard.) Keying in on this painting, the curators see it



Detail of "France Thanking Heaven for the Recovery of Louis XV" by Charles-Antoine Coypel, 1744. Black and white chalks with brush and gray wash and touches of red chalk on cream.

as "a metaphor for the artist's plunge into the unknown and the ongoing pursuit of meaning that is present in all of Thek's art."

Among the some 130 objects you'll see in the show are his sculptural "meat pieces," which helped launch his career, as well as "Untitled (Dwarf Parade Table)" and "Fisherman in Excelsis," a latex cast of Thek's body with casts of fish attached, bound to the underside of a table and hung from the ceiling.

Zelevansky and artist Paul McCarthy will discuss "Paul Thek, the Artist's Artist" on Sat., Feb. 19, from 5 to 6 p.m. in Carnegie Lecture Hall. (4400 Forbes Ave., Oakland. Feb. 5-May 1: Tues.-Wed., Fri.-Sat.: 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Thurs., 10 a.m.-8 p.m.; Sun., noon-5 p.m. Adults, \$15; seniors, \$12; students, children 3-18, \$11; members, children under 3, free. Info: 412/622-3131, cmoa.org)

"STORIED PAST: FRENCH DRAWINGS FROM THE BLANTON MUSEUM OF ART": FEB. 5-APRIL 17

Four centuries of French art viewed from the perspective of drawing are the focus for "Storied Past: French Drawings From the Blanton Museum of Art," opening this month at the Frick Art Museum.

The pieces for this show, which comprises 70 drawings made between 1500 and 1900, come from an unlikely place: The Blanton Museum is located at the University of Texas at Austin, which received a large gift of drawings for its permanent collection more than a decade ago.

What you'll see is an art-history timeline, moving from the mannerism of the late Renaissance period to baroque, rococo, neo-classical, Barbizon, Orientalism and more—and attention is paid to such institutions as the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture, a leading cultural force, especially during the 17th and 18th centuries. The works on view

include sketches, preparatory drawings and drawing for drawing's sake, and subjects range from religious to mythological, architectural and landscape. Among the artists represented are Jacques Callot, Antoine Watteau, Jean-Baptiste Greuze, Jean-Honoré Fragonard, Theodore Rousseau and Théodore-Alexandre Steinlen.

Pieces from the drawing exhibit will be cross-referenced with paintings in the Frick's permanent collection, and other paintings will be complemented by examples of decorative arts, providing a richer comprehension of the 18th century in particular. (Frick Art & Historical Center, 7227 Reynolds St., Point Breeze. Feb. 5-April 17: Tues.-Sun., 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Free. Info: 412/412-371-0600, thefrickpittsburgh.org)

"AMERICAN LANDSCAPES: TREASURES FROM THE PARRISH ART MUSEUM"; "AT THE RIVER'S EDGE: PAINTINGS BY PATRICK RUANE": JAN. 30-APRIL 24

Two shows at Westmoreland Museum of American Art may inspire a trip to Greensburg, Pa. when crocuses begin to push their blossoms through the snow.

"American Landscapes: Treasures From the Parrish Art Museum" features 39 19th- and 20th-century paintings from the collection of this museum in Southampton, N.Y. As part of the show, we're invited to "consider how these images of place can trigger our memory, stir our feelings and kindle a yearning for the reassuring familiarity of the past." As a complement, more specific American landscapes—inspired by the Allegheny River—are the focus for "At the River's Edge," featuring paintings by Glenshaw artist Patrick Ruane.

(221 N. Main St., Greensburg. Wed.-Sun., 11 a.m.-5 p.m., Thurs., 11 a.m.-9 p.m. \$5, suggested admission fee for adults; students, kids 12 and under, free. Info: 724/837-1500, wmmuseumaa.org)