



Twelve ways of Looking at a Painting

An Homage to Jean Hélion
and *"Le Grand Luxembourg"*

An exhibition produced by
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville
and the Midwest Paint Group

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and *"Le Grand Luxembourg"*

This book accompanies the exhibition of the same title at the Lovejoy Library, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, Installed October 17, 2013.

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Cover:
Jean Helion, *Le Grand Luxembourg*, 1956 (see page 9)

Pages 5 and 40
Portrait au miroir de Jean Héliion dans son atelier devant
"Grand Luxembourg" (huile sur toile), France ; Ile-de-France
; Paris ; Paris 06
Photographe Colomb, Denise, 1957,
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An Homage to Jean Héliion and "*Le Grand Luxembourg*"

Lovejoy Library
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville
October 17, 2013

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and the Midwest Paint Group

Jean Hélon

with

Bob Brock

Glen Cebulash

Deborah Chlebek

Tina Engels

Philip Hale

Timothy King

Lynette Lombard

Jeremy Long

Amy Maclennan

Michael Neary

Ron Weaver

Megan Williamson

All in all, after a journey through nature and working only from nature for two years,

I'm returning to my own domain, the world of concepts.

– Jean Hélion

Reversed mirror reflection of Jean
Hélion with *Le Grand Luxembourg*.
Uncropped photo on page 40.

Photograph by Denise Colomb



Le Grand Luxembourg

In February 2013, The University Museum at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville was approached by Glen Cebulash, Chair of the Department of Art and Art History at Wright State University, on behalf of the Midwest Paint Group. Individually and collectively, the twelve members of that group have been influenced by the work of the French artist, Jean Hélion.

Mr. Cebulash expressed the group's interest in creating a series of artworks in response to our Hélion painting. Through our conversations we came up with the idea of hosting a visual symposium in which the various artists present their work and establish what we hope is a visual dialogue among the artists that can be shared by a broader audience.

SIUE is fortunate to have in our collection an important painting by Hélion entitled Le Grand Luxembourg. Joseph Cantor of Carmel, Indiana donated this painting to the University in 1965 through the efforts of Katherine Kuh who was responsible for assembling the original art collection of SIUE. This painting came to SIUE rolled as one would a large rug. Due to the size of the piece, it had to be stretched in situ. Le Grand Luxembourg is an important work because it marked the height of Hélion's post-WWII departure from Universal Abstract painting and subsequent movement towards representational art.

Eric B. Barnett
Director
The University Museum
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

Jean Hélion

Le Grand Luxembourg

1954-57

Oil on canvas

118 x 156 inches

(10 x 13 feet)

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville



Jean Héliion

Original Sketch for Le Grand Luxembourg

1954

Drawing - Watercolor

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville



Jean Héliion

Study in October: Trees

1954

Drawing - Pen and Crayon

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville



Jean Héliion

Study of Trees, Statue & Bench in Winter

1954

Drawing - Crayon

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

I did not paint my study to the edge of the canvas, but floated it within the size of the larger format because I was searching for Héliion's structure. The sketches were additional searches. Some of the information in the sketches I carried into the painting.

I could not get myself to paint the women's arm. The intensity of the light arm and the location seemed to get in the way of some of the movement in the center of the painting.

My painting is not a color study. I changed Héliion's color relationships from the warm building to the cool sky because I felt it was too great of a step.

I see Helion's painting as a study of formal relationships through shapes and lines. Through studying, I saw many surprising relationships that I did not see before. I found that once I simplified out the smaller relationships, the structure started to make sense. The Héliion small relationships tend to hide these wonderful structural elements. The color also gets in the way of seeing the structure. By stripping those away, the painting makes more sense. When you analyze it away from the object oriented qualities, that's when the structure starts to become revealed.

Bob Brock

After Héliion

2013

Graphite and oil on panel

24 x 36 inches



I first encountered this painting as a black and white, postage-stamp sized reproduction in 2005. When I finally tracked it down in the Lovejoy Library at Southern Illinois University I was astonished by its grandeur and complexity, to say nothing of its size. I have lived with it now, so to speak, for many years and it has burrowed its way under my skin, but it remains essentially a mystery. Initially, I thought it would be fairly easy to “capture” this painting, but, after a series of false starts, I realized that my quarry was supremely elusive and all I could really do was join the hunt.

Glen Cebulash

Untitled (after Hélicon)

2013

Cut paper

16.25 x 20.5



My approach to this project was to drive to SIUE, paint in front of Le Grand Luxembourg, and see what happened. I wanted to respond directly to the presence of the painting: its actual color and scale. Many thanks to the dean and staff of Lovejoy Library for allowing me this opportunity to experience and respond to the Helion.

Deborah Chlebek

Helion Study

2013

Oil on paper

20 x 26 inches



Whether seeking repose, discord or simultaneity, Hélicon
conveys varied visual movements.

These might be elegant, comedic, tragic; soften or
pound to a beat.

...and abstraction, figuration both fuse and reject at
intersections of interest.

Tina Engels

Understudy

2013

Oil on canvas

16 x 18 inches



Most of the writing intelligentsia don't understand squat about painting. I was reading a book on Rembrandt the other night, and the writer was explaining that one of the key things that set Rembrandt off from his contemporary painters is that he painted the "soul" of the subjects he was painting. This was an older book, but I believe this is still a widely held theory with the writers. Possibly the reason that Hélión is not widely recognized as the genius he was is that the writers haven't been able to reduce his work into some type of socio-political formula.

Philip Hale

Hélión Study

2013

Oil on paper mounted on canvas

21 x 28 inches



As an undergraduate art student I had my best plastic revelation about painting from sketching one of Héliou's abstracts. I thought it looked like a Mondrian and a Léger combined into one work. The strange and unyielding shapes and forms were interlocking, causing the deformation of my conventional sense of space. The whole painting hinged on a balance of unstable shapes weaving into a tedious contained tension.

This same experience held true to my study of the Le Grand Luxembourg. It's all just under the skin of naturalism in this brilliant painting of a realistic and yet cartoonish scene of friends on an early autumn afternoon at their favorite park.

Timothy King

After Héliou's

Le Grand Luxembourg

2013 Pastel on board

28 x 36 inches



Hélien is full of surprises. What seems like a simple park scene becomes an accordion like space opening and contracting back into the stabilizing verticals. The woman is a pinwheel spiraling out connecting everyone and everything in her web. There are worlds of desire, intimacy and detachment in this image. Helion makes the ordinary extraordinary.

Lynette Lombard

After Hélien

2013

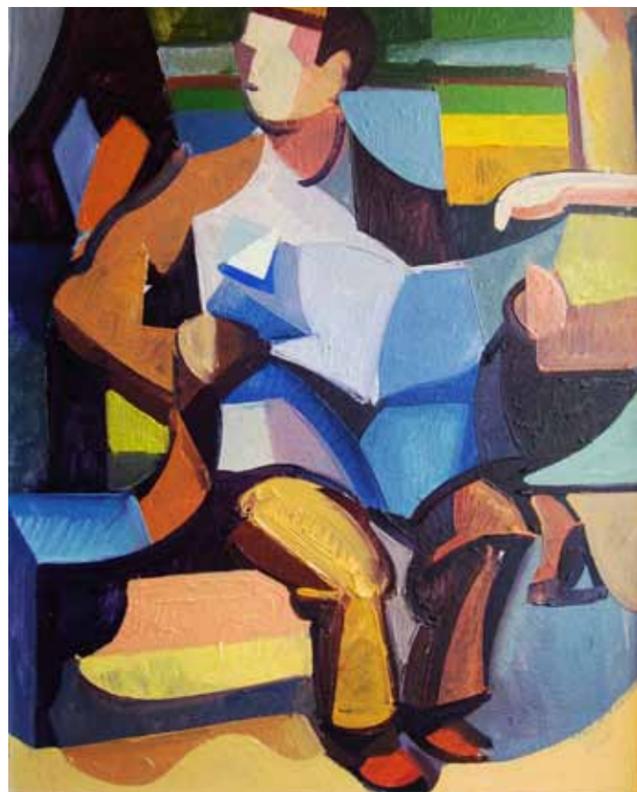
Charcoal on paper

24 x 30 inches



The act of painting is a confirmation of a
relationship, not an act of expression*

—Stanley Lewis



*Jean Helion, (exhibition catalog) April 7 to May 22, 1976
at Spencer A. Samuels & CO. LTD, 18 East 76 Street, New
York City

Jeremy Long

Le Grand Lux # 1

2013

Oil on paper

14 x 26 inches

Le Grand Lux # 2

2013

16 x 12 inches

Oil on paper



The Two-Step is another name for the Polka, a dance often associated with beer halls and Oktoberfests: exemplified by raucous, arm-sawing duos sashaying round a makeshift floor to sounds from an accordion. Success is marked by the avoidance of collisions with other couples careening through the sawdust and spilt beer. The ups and downs parallel my own experience in creating a response to Hélión's Le Grand Luxembourg.

Confronted by Le Grand Luxembourg for the first time I was surprised at the scale of it and by the subtlety of its color. I set about to draw from it in an effort to come to an understanding of its rhythmic and spatial complexities. Back in the studio, I assembled a still life with an Hélión quote in mind: "When I come upon an object, I see all creation in it." A cast of characters (parts of broken toys, a paper-mache mask, etc.) were pulled out of the shoebox to audition for parts in the play referencing Hélión's Acts.

As the characters were arranged I began to feel rhythms and relationships corresponding to the Hélión. Painting from the still life, the narrative took on life: the looks and asides, mutterings and guarded reactions charged the air between the forms. The result is a Two-Step with Hélión, a simple dance with a master.

Amy MacLennan

Two Step with Hélión

2013

Acrylic on watercolor paper

18 x 28 inches



I had the good luck to be introduced to Hélion's work early on, as I first began to grapple with the slippery evasions of oil paint. His images are part and parcel with my early development, more of a foundational sentiment than a stylistic influence. During periods of frustration and doubt, he's a touchstone, reminding me that there's no need to get fancy if the feeling is true.

Plus I enjoy his tender mechanics. Push down on a woman's arm over here and the man at the other end of the picture turns his head. The pulleys and hinges, colors and shapes are precisely assembled. You can barely hear the creak and whir.

Michael Neary

Hélion Sings the News

2013

Acrylic on BFK

24 x38 inches



I don't love this Héliou painting and I think that's part of why I like it. It's not trying to be "beautiful" as are many wonderful paintings that succeed in being beautiful. It's really someone being himself which I value so greatly. It's very original is it not?

Ron Weaver
Le Grand Luxembourg
Study after Héliou
2013
Acrylic on canvas
24 x 36 inches



The more I drew from the *Hélion*, the more I saw. The more I saw, the deeper I went. The structure of the painting is packed, dense and solid.

The big, sweeping moves and the small intimate ones were a pleasure to follow with my brush. What an amazing painting to respond to – *Helion* is a master.

Megan Williamson

After Hélion

2013

Sumi ink on claycoat paper

14 x 18 inches



The Gardener and the Painter

Letter from Jean Hélion to Charles Pully, University
Architect of Southern Illinois University Carbondale
September 11, 1966.

X Hélion
4 rue michélet
Paris 6
Sept 11, 1966

Dear M. Pulley

I hope that you have well received the 3 watercolours of 1954 that Kath. Kuh wrote me to mail you. One is the very first sketch for this Grand Luxembourg; the 2 others are studies of the park, the bench, the alley in the Luxembourg Garden where I placed the group.

I kept on drawing on the spot way into the winter until it froze so that I suffered too much and asked a gardener if they had any bench in repair, in a stack where I could draw without freezing.

"No" - but he took me to the superintendent of the garden. Ill looking in my working clothes, I told this very distinguished man "You do not know me, I am sure, but I need one of your benches to make a large picture. Do you have one to spare?"

No, we don't, he said and called his head gardener: "Dig one bench out, and take it to this man's studio."

X I kept it in my large studio, on 15 avenue de l'Observatoire, for 2 years. The sculptor Bill Chattaway helped me to build a base, for it. The painter Charles Marks took the photographs of that bench, seen with the pictures, and both of us posing as the main characters, that I trust Katherine has forwarded to you as a diapositive.

Perhaps this little story - which is mentioned in one of the very first issues of the Art magazine "L'Oeil" - will amuse you.

Mr Charles Marks who is now back to the States for the winter will order a complete set of these diapositives and hold them at your disposal.

I enclose a bill for the drawings.

Sincerely yours
Hélion

I saw a handsome photograph of the inside of the Lovejoy Library. My picture is superbly placed. Thank you.

Hélion
4 m Michelet
Paris 6
Sept 11, 1966

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Jean Hélon in his study in 1957. Photograph by Denise Colomb



Bob Brock and Timothy King with *Le Grand Luxembourg* (to be replaced by MPG group photo)

Jean Hélion: Selected Exhibitions*

2008 De Rodchenko a Sol Lewitt - Galeria Guillermo de Osma, Madrid (group)

2007 X mal ICH - Städtische Galerie Fruchthalle Rastatt, Rastatt (group)

Die Erneuerung des Sehens - Kunstmuseum Winterthur, Winterthur (group)

2006 Orangerie, 1934 - les Peintres de la réalité - Musée National de l'Orangerie, Paris (group)

Exil und Moderne – H.W. Janson und die Sammlung der Washington University in St. Louis - Museum für Neue Kunst, Freiburg (group)

2005 Jean Hélion - Museo Picasso, Barcelona (solo)

Hélion - Galerie Patrice Trigano, Paris (solo)

2004 Jean Hélion - Centre Pompidou - Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris (solo)

2002 Hommage à François Pluchart - FRAC - Bourgogne, Dijon (group)

1999 Drawing Exhibitions, Drawing Center, New York (traveled to Armand Hammer Museum of Art, Los Angeles) (group)

1997 Galerie Piltzer Paris, France

1988 Zentrum für Kunstausstellungen der D.D.R., Berlin (solo)

1984 Abstractionism and Everyday Myths, Lenbachhaus, Munich

1979 Hélion. Drawings 1930-1978, Centre Georges Pompidou Paris, Athens, Strasbourg

1977 Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris Paris, France

1982 Musée d'Etat Luxembourg

1976 Spencer Samuels Gallery, New York (solo)

1975 Galerie St. Germain, Paris (solo)

1972 Galerie René Andrieu, Toulouse (solo)

1969 Galleria Eunomia, Milan

1967 Willard Gallery, New York

1966 Leicester Galleries, London

1965 Leicester Galleries, London

1964 Paintings from 1929 to 1964, Gallery of Modern Art New York, NY

1962 Peintures 1929-1939, Galerie Louis Carré, Paris (solo)

1961 Calerie Cahiers d'Art, Paris (solo)

1958 Calerie Cahiers d'Art, Paris (solo)

1956 Calerie Cahiers d'Art, Paris (solo)

1944 Recent Work, Museum of Fine Art Baltimore, MD

1937 San Francisco Museum of Art (solo)

1936 The Valentine Gallery New York, NY

1933 Gallery John Becker, New York (solo)

1932 Galerie Pierre Paris, France(solo)

* Artnet

<http://www.artnet.com/artists/jean-helion/>

MIDWEST PAINT GROUP

midwest-paint-group.org

Artist cooperative, established in 1999

Bob Brock (Missouri) Glen Cebulash (Ohio)
Deborah Chlebek (Ohio) Tina Engels (Illinois)
Philip Hale (Ohio/Costa Rica) Timothy King (Illinois)
Lynette Lombard (Illinois) Jeremy Long (Ohio)
Amy MacLennan (Illinois) Michael Neary (Illinois)
Ron Weaver (Arizona) Megan Williamson (Illinois)

EXHIBITIONS

Realism and Its Discontents: Midwest Paint Group with Gabriel Laderman

Robert and Elaine Stein Galleries, Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio (March 27–May 6, 2012)
Gallery G, Manchester University, North Manchester, Indiana (Sept 14–Nov 25, 2012)

The Figure: A Midwest Paint Group Exhibition

Leedy-Voukos Art Center, Kansas City, Missouri (Nov. 2010–Jan. 2011)
Alexander Hogue Gallery The University of Tulsa, Oklahoma (March 2011)
Handwerker Gallery Ithaca College, Ithaca, New York (Sept.–Oct. 2011)

East meets Midwest, New Visions of Figurative Painting

The Beverly Art Center, Chicago, IL (Apr.–May 2010)
Hoffman-LaChance Contemporary, St. Louis, MO (Jun.–Aug. 2010)
Westbeth Gallery, New York, NY (Sept.–Oct. 2010)
Andrews Gallery, College of William & Mary, Williamsburg, VA (Jan.–Feb. 2011)

Works from Perception: Paintings by the Midwest Paint Group

Sheldon Swope Museum of Art, Terre Haute, IN (Feb.–Mar. 2009)
The Albrecht-Kemper Museum of Art, St. Joseph, MO (Sept.–Nov. 2010)
George A. Spiva Center for the Arts, Joplin, MO (Jan. – Feb. 2010)
Campanella Gallery, Park University, Parkville, MO (Mar.–Apr. 2010)
The Adrian Brewer Gallery, at the Wentworth Military Academy, Lexington, MO (Mar.–Apr. 2010)

Pride of Place: The Midwest Paint Group.

Summer Sight Program, Ryerson Woods Conservation Preserve, Deerfield, IL (Jul.–Aug. 2008)

New Works by the Midwest Paint Group

Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology, Terre Haute, IN (Sept.– Dec. 2007)

Post Abstract Figuration: Paintings of the Midwest Paint Group

Zhou B. Center, 33 Collective Gallery, Chicago (Dec. 2005)

Crossroads: Midwest Paint Group

Up Left Gallery, Terre Haute, IN (Jun.–Jul. 2002)

Midwest Paint Group online Internet Gallery, since 1999
midwest-paint-group.org

