




The Daily 

IN MEMORIAM

## Jane Wilson, 1924–2015

January 15, 2015 | by [Nicole Rudick](#)



Jane Wilson, *Frozen Fields*, 2004, oil on linen, 30" x 36".  
Courtesy of DC Moore Gallery, New York.

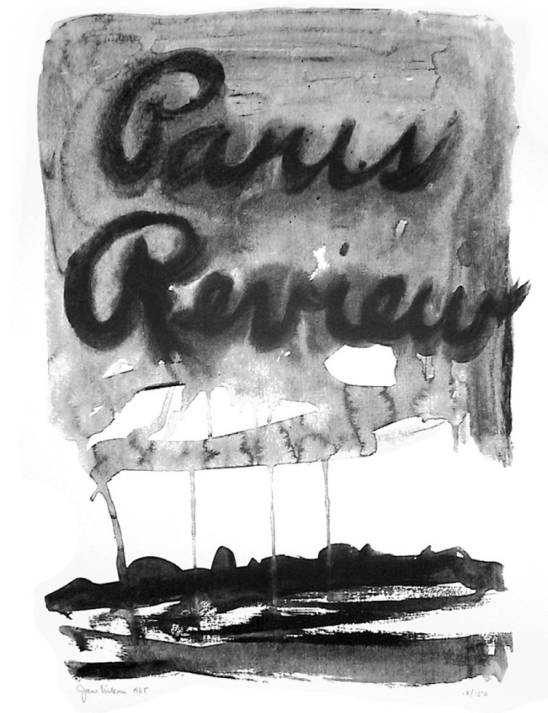
Last month, I got a peek at a private collection of work by the painter Jane Wilson. Tucked away in a Midtown East town-house office are a handful of her diminutive watercolors and a very large oil painting depicting one of Wilson's characteristic landscapes—a sweeping, hazy view of a sliver of land and a limitless sky.

Last fall, I saw a host of such paintings in Wilson's show at [DC Moore Gallery](#). Yet there's a difference between admiring her evocative landscapes—or, more precisely, skyscapes—in a gallery setting and discovering them in a secret spot, where, I imagine, they exist for their owner as a private portal, an escape—out of the office, out of the city, out of one's own life. Imagine sitting in a

darkened, quiet office and looking up at Wilson's plush, golden altocumulus clouds or at the purple and blue striations of storm clouds over a teal sky or at the dappled, cobalt blue of twilight. Where couldn't you go?

That exhibition was to be Wilson's last during her lifetime. She died Tuesday at the age of ninety.

I came to Wilson's art through the intersection of New York School poets, second-generation Abstract Expressionists, and the representational painters of the fifties. But Wilson also has a connection with *The Paris Review*. She was instrumental in the initiation of [our print series](#) in 1964; she served—unofficially it seems, as she was never on the masthead—as the director of the program and persuaded her friends—among them Jane Freilicher, Andy Warhol (who had chosen Wilson to be one of his *Screen Tests*), Helen Frankenthaler, and Robert Motherwell—to contribute prints to benefit the *Review*. Wilson herself made a [print for the series](#), of which a few are still available. It is, fittingly, a landscape, with *Paris Review* writ large in the sky. Four watercolor drips link the wash of sky to the ground below. It makes me think of the sky as a hot-air balloon, tethered to the basket of earth by these tenuous lines.



Wilson was born in Iowa in 1924 and left, for New York, when she was twenty-five. It might be that the expanse of sky under which she spent her formative years made a permanent impression on her—she herself believed it to be so. And yet, by her own recollection, she found something momentous in each landscape she encountered; the geography of the United States is imprinted on her memories of childhood vacations by car:

We went through the Badlands ... We went across the mountains, the valleys of California, and saw San Francisco completely engulfed in fog. I never really saw it until thirty years later when I returned. But that was my first ocean experience. The other trip was the southeastern United States with razorback hogs running wild, and Georgia where there was red dirt. It was unbelievable that the *ground* could be that color. Years later when I took a trip through France ... the train was suddenly traveling through red dirt ... I said, "Wait a minute, I've been here before."

The strata of distant land in her paintings lie like silt at the bottom of a river and remind me of the colored stripes of earth in Malevich's *Red Cavalry*. "I have conquered the lining of the colored sky," he once wrote. "I have plucked the colors, put them into the bag I have made, and tied it with a knot." Because Wilson's big skies are so abstractly rendered, with only hints of land and wisps of clouds, they are more like hymns to color than representations of places. Her work has been compared to Mark Rothko's clouds of color, but they also closely resemble Monet's landscapes, if you removed the people, the haystacks, the boats, and the trees. They have all the variation and

mood of a Turner painting, but none of the violent intensity, none of the outsize drama. James Schuyler characterized Wilson as “the eclectic, cultivated artist, whose nineteenth-century hero is Delacroix.” I like the way Wilson herself once expressed the affinity: “And Delacroix, Delacroix, Delacroix.”

In 1996, [April Gornik](#) contributed a print to our series. It also is an atmospheric evocation of the natural world, though a seascape, and one in which the ocean and sky meet roughly midway on the canvas. Wilson was a fan of Gornik’s work, about which she once said, “There is a sense of traveling across times and continents to a specific place.” I like that idea for Wilson’s work, too, but her’s is travel to a *nonspecific* place, someplace personal.

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<http://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2015/01/15/jane-wilson-1924-2015-2/>