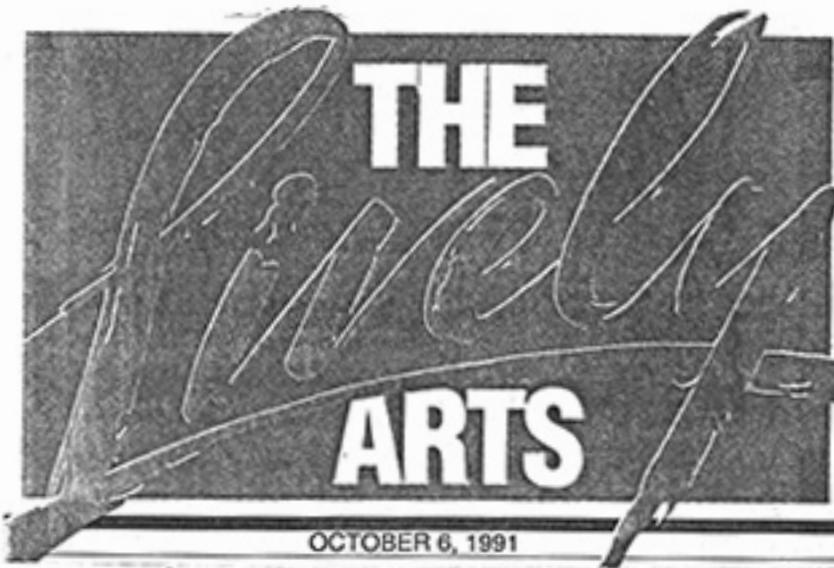


the art of elias friedensohn

articles & reviews

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Guided by the power of wings

Artist shows airports in a different light

ART REVIEW

By John Zeaman
Record Art Critic

We so rarely encounter an artist anymore whose paintings function on all the levels of which painting is capable. That is, an artist who understands abstract values, who can orchestrate complex compositions that include figures, interiors, and landscapes, and who can make both a social and a personal statement.

Elias Friedensohn, who died of

cancer at age 66 a little more than a month ago, was such an artist. Friedensohn, who lived in Leonia, was a professor emeritus at Queens College and had 32 one-man shows in his career. His paintings are on view at the A.J. Lederman Fine Art gallery in Hoboken. The show, "Airports: Power and Patience," was planned before the artist's death. Most of the paintings were done in the past two years, and quite a number were completed in the last year of his life.

Artists who want to make the kinds of statements that Friedensohn aspired to are always in search of a vehicle — a subject or motif. Friedensohn found it in the most unlikely of places — the high-tech, cavernous spaces of international airports.

For Friedensohn, the airport

was a metaphor for our time. Airports represent the global village in which we live, a world made smaller by speed and technology, but also a world made more alienating and impersonal, and — in the case of terrorism — one in which violence can be random and unpredictable.

There are two kinds of airport paintings in this show. Those like "Delayed Flight" and "Waiting" are surprisingly lovely paintings with a distinctly French touch. Friedensohn lavished the same kind of attention on these interiors of steel, glass, and plastic as Vuillard did on his intimate turn-of-the-century sitting rooms. Like many of the paintings in this show, the pictures are about waiting. Waiting, he seems to say, is the human condition.

But where the act of waiting en-

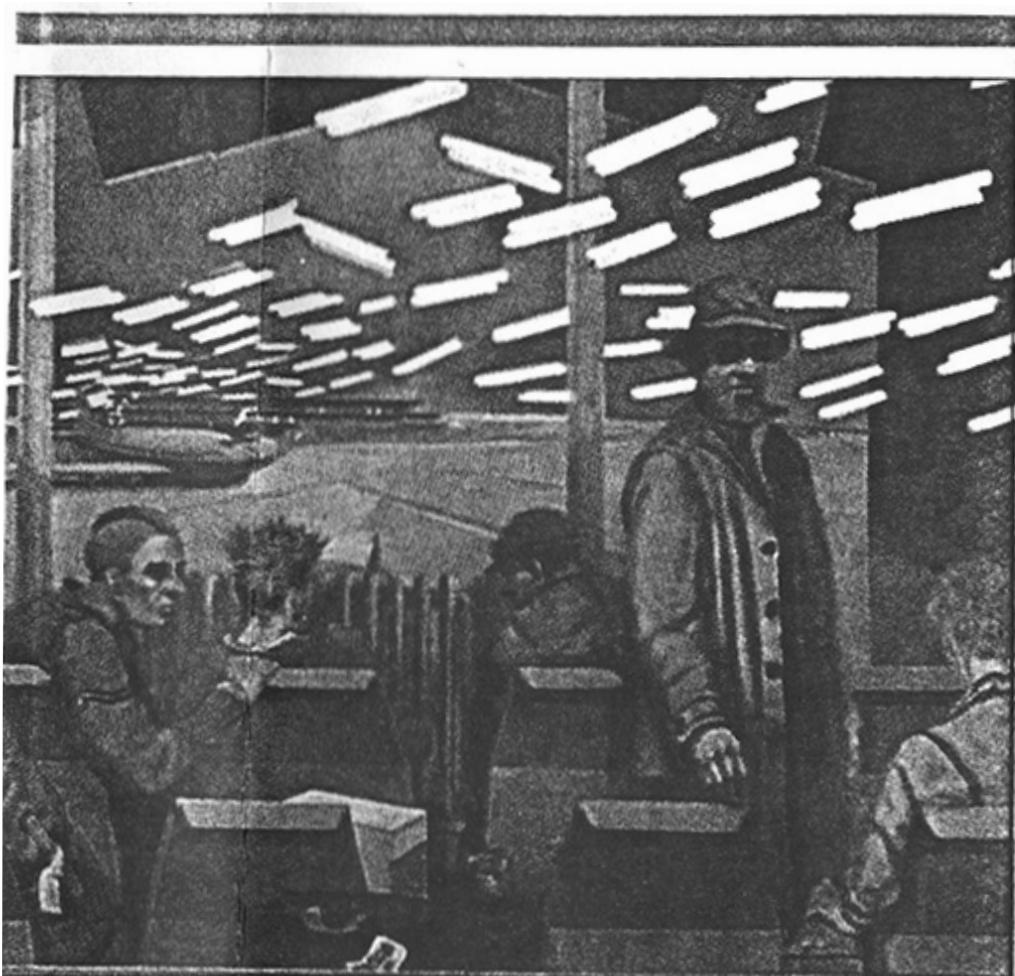
genders paranoia in some paintings, in these it seems to open up a meditative space that makes the appreciation of beauty possible. It is a beauty that seeps in like the rosy light of sunset or the long shadows of late afternoon, creating wonderful patterns on unpromising expanses of floor and glass.

These paintings make us aware of what a strange environment an airport is, a place where the primary inhabitants are not so much people as flying machines and where the distinction between inside and outside is always blurred. Our eyes are repeatedly drawn from the waiting rooms to the out-

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In "Terrorist at Heathrow," the major painting in the exhibit, Friedensohn leaves a viewer guessing about who the terrorist is.