

# Weekend

## The New York Times

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 1989

---

### Mary Lucier

Greenberg, Wilson Gallery  
560 Broadway (at Prince Street)  
Through Nov. 25

The most distinguished individual new work of art now showing in town may well be the 21-minute 7-screen video installation called "Wilderness," by Mary Lucier, at the Greenberg, Wilson Gallery. In effect it is a meditation on American landscape — to be precise, the Northeast seaboard from the mouth of the Hudson northward to Newfoundland. We see it more or less as it was when the Hudson River School and the Luminists worked it over, 100 and more years ago, and we also see it as it is now. Ms. Lucier doesn't preach, doesn't deal in flashy contrasts, and leaves us to draw our own conclusions. She suggests, at most, that one kind of hugeness has yielded, in part, to another kind of hugeness.

Urn, column and plinth hoist the seven screens to seven different heights. The images that come and go are at once the same and not the same. (The sequence of images works to a rhythm that can be identified in musical terms as A/B/A/B/C/B/C.) As a result, and although the tempo is slow and even, there is more going on at any one time than we can consciously absorb. Furthermore, the image may open on the full screen and suddenly pull back until it fills no more than half the screen. At such times an image of an old-style picture frame comes from nowhere and thrusts it toward us.

---

By JOHN RUSSELL

---

The seascape is seen in terms either of the sea breaking on rocks in the foreground or of vast, barely ruffled waters stretching away to a distant landfall. In neither case is there any sign of a human presence. But when the image moves to shores deep under snow, a threadbare hammock recurs, slung from a tree and blown this way and that by fierce and audible winds. Outside and far away, mountain and iceberg set the tone.

There is also a bare tree, outlined against sky and snow, that brings Caspar David Friedrich to mind. Horses appear both as working animals and as auxiliaries for the hunter's amusement. Interiors are spare, intense and free of all trivial encumbrance. (When a pot appears in close-up, with the letters WARE conspicuous on it, we can read it as short for BEWARE, if we care to do so.)

From the present day, a gigantic industrial locomotive trundles from time to time through the factory that is its natural home. And when the cycle is all done, indoors merges with outdoors in the memory, and a solitary fisherman appears as a graphic element in the immensities of nature, and the snow is everywhere present to us, just as it is in the last paragraph of "The Dead," by James Joyce. A considerable experience.

---