



JENNIFER BARTLETT

Sea Wall (1985)



Sea Wall, 1985, Installation at Locks Gallery, 2026
Oil on three canvases; mixed-media elements: 5 boats, 5 houses, 4 step stones, 4 sea wall elements, 1 seahorse chair

Jennifer Bartlett introduced three-dimensional elements into her work for the first time in 1984, a development that would shape much of her output throughout the decade. (Her first sculptural installation was a commission for the Volvo headquarters in Gothenburg, Sweden). In her process, the painting always came first, with sculptural counterparts emerging as direct replications of the pictorial imagery. *Sea Wall* (1985) was originally shown at the Brooklyn Museum as part of her traveling retrospective in 1985. A significant exhibition of works from this period took place at the Milwaukee Art Museum in *Jennifer Bartlett: Recent Work* (1988-89).

With *Sea Wall* (1985), she draws upon consistently recurring motifs, such as the house and the boat, which serve as proxies for both their universal and personal meanings and relationship to the concept of “home.”



Jennifer Bartlett, *Sea Wall* [painting], 1985, Oil on three canvases, 84 x 369 inches

Cinematic and sprawling, *Sea Wall* draws upon Bartlett's fascination with the ocean and its duplicitous mysteries—endlessness and immediacy, transparency and darkness, arrival and departure. Though she lived and worked in New York City for most of her life, Bartlett was born in Long Beach, CA in 1941—the same year construction of the Long Beach Breakwater seawall began. The development would continue throughout the 1940s and forever change the local residents' physical and psychological relationship to their surroundings.

In this expansive installation, objects range from minimalist, pastel-painted boats and houses to highly idiosyncratic, vernacular structures, including a seahorse-shaped bench made of seashells and sandy cement and a tin shack built from flattened coffee cans. The assortment of sculptures mirrors the monumental painting in the background, and the gallery becomes the ocean with the viewer standing in its depths.