

THESIS

TWENTY-FOUR PRINTS

Submitted by  
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for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts  
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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY JOSEPH SCOTT HICKEL ENTITLED TWENTY-FOUR PRINTS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF FINE ARTS.

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## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

### TWENTY-FOUR PRINTS

Reflecting back on my prints of the past four years, I realize the motivating and compelling force that links them together is the presence of light as a major theme. The printmaking medium furnishes a broad range of value and variation within the marks themselves which enhance any type of light portrayed. The representational subject matter I use varies in theme and includes: vacant interior settings and landscapes; isolated figures; complex juxtaposition of objects and figures within interiors; and overlapping several figures within an environment. Each theme has a common involvement, the utilization of light. The light may define form, contain symbolic implications, or be used in such a manner to spark an emotional response within the viewer.

After researching the topic of light in black and white imagery, I've gained a better understanding of the desired emotional and atmospheric effects I can achieve with each type of light. With this broader understanding came further exploration of my personal self and ideas within my prints. For instance, I seldom let nature and it's actual representation of light draw absolute

conclusions in resolving my images. The creative image becomes it's own entity and not merely a visual representation of nature.

Pertaining to the content of my prints, I utilize five different types of light for their unique, atmospheric qualities. First, within my landscapes I favor a "universal" light, which is a soft, brightening of the atmosphere and overall distribution of light. A "universal" light does not depict harsh, flattened shadows, but rather it enhances the sense of illusionary depth within the environment. Second, my most frequently used type is a "compositional" or "structural" light, an invented light for the purpose of enhancing the composition and introducing abstractions. The third type is a "specific" or "direct" light, a dramatic, harsh light with deep, flattened shadows. A "direct" light is found in many of my interior prints, as is the fourth type, "transparent" light, that which shines through translucent material. The fifth type of light I utilize is "symbolic" light. I developed a greater understanding of this type after carefully studying Odilon Redon's graphic, visual images inspired by literary works. This "symbolic" light emanates from a specific object in an unnatural way implying spiritual, supernatural, or psychological overtones.

I find it difficult to separate my lifestyle and beliefs from entering into my work. My discernment of biblical Scripture and confirmed spiritual beliefs often

invade my prints in a subtle, symbolic fashion. Many of my images deal with strong values of light and dark and are the result of subtle interpretations of abstract, emotional feelings experienced on a spiritual level. These experiences are attempts to visually communicate feelings of peace, intimacy, quietude, stillness, and security. By themselves, the cold, mysterious, dark interiors rendered in my prints would evoke an uncomfortable and fearful uneasiness. However, my introducing an illuminating light within these environments provides a much needed sense of warmth, escape, and hope, thus, eliminating any discomfort and fear.

The reasons why I choose to depict empty interiors has to do with the subject of confrontation and intimacy. It appears more obvious in my portraits, especially the self-portrait images with their confronting gaze. However, the quiet interiors are just as confronting, but the brightly lit windows and open doorways provide a means to escape these primarily dark, uncomfortable interiors. I feel these interiors become less intimidating because of the balance of light and dark carried throughout the piece. All the interior prints are inspired by actual views of the interior of my house, but they are not about my home, they retain a universal quality. I am more interested in suggesting a feeling of peace and security from the warm glow of the light as opposed to a sense of discomfort, fear, and uneasiness implied by the dark, distorted,

enclosed interior. The dichotomy of the light and dark, with their symbolic connotations, has been an integral part of my imagery.

Creating an illusionary depth within my representational environments and figural depictions is important, however, the abstracting of space I choose to introduce is also important. I appreciate the flexibility of the printmaking medium, which enables me to alter and rearrange the values and spatial qualities drastically between proofs. The intaglio process not only yields a rich, broad, value range, but also provides the shallow depth of the raised line, a characteristic of the etching and engraving processes. The collograph technique reveals a similar raised line and a deeper embossment within the textural surfaces.

Earlier, I spoke in length of my use of light for symbolic implications. I also introduce objects and places that possess iconographic inferences. These symbols are not usually universal, but they do contain a specific meaning or deep-rooted experience in my past. Frequently, these symbolic objects are attached to a specific person, place, or event I feel compelled to communicate. The suggestive symbolic meaning of the presence of the window and open doorway is more common and easily interpreted. These two symbols provide a means of escape or an opportunity to go beyond the existing framework of the interior.

The subtle nuances one can achieve in printmaking are the major reason why I have an affinity for conceiving and working my images in this medium. The textural effects I can obtain through the soft ground and lift ground techniques, as well as the tusche wash variations in lithography, make it possible to attain subtle qualities that would be difficult, if not impossible, to repeat with such clarity in another art medium. Removing part of the metal surface of the intaglio plate in an area containing a line etch and adding more etched lines on top of the already present ones creates a delicate and subtle surface. This surface suggests a soft, flickering, almost undetectable light that advances and recedes in a given space. Furthermore, this subtle nuance would be difficult to recreate in another medium. These subtle characteristics I spoke about intrigue and fascinate me. Oftentimes, these subtle variations become the heart and soul of my prints.

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## DOCUMENTATION

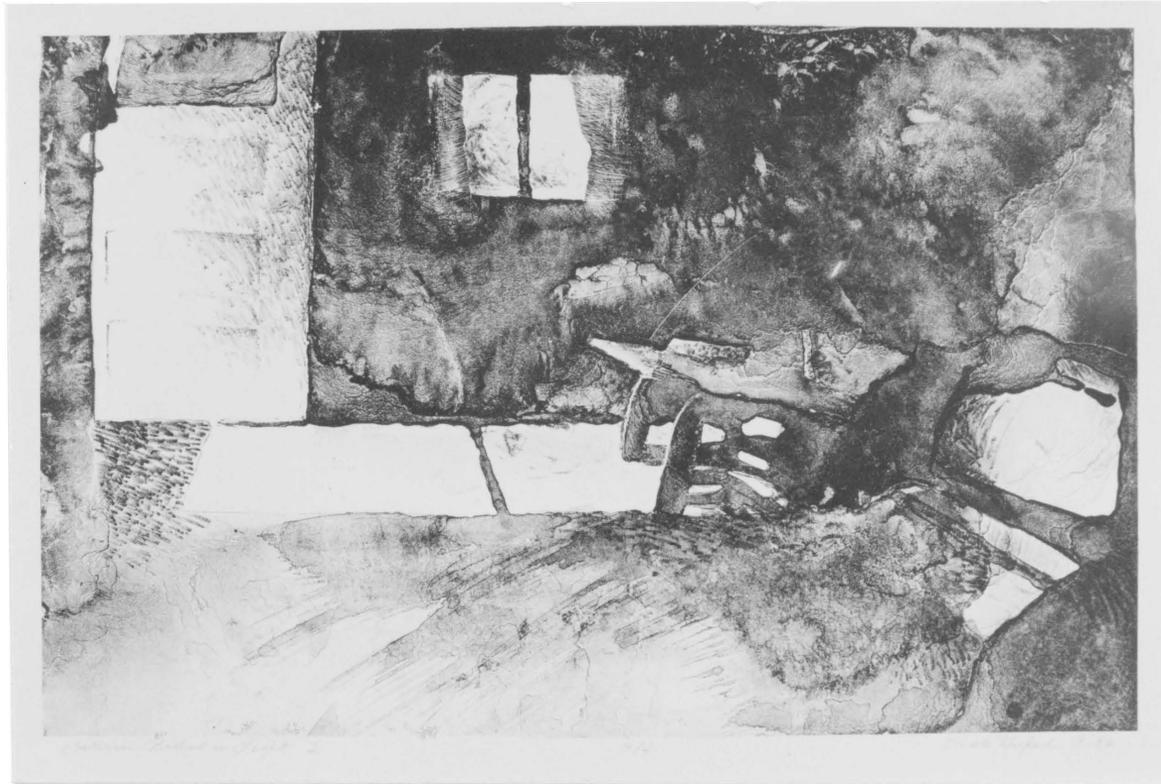


Fig. 1. Interior Bathed in Light I.  
Lithograph, 12-3/4" x 8-3/4", 1986



Fig. 2. In All His Glory. Drypoint on copper, 12" x 16", 1986



Fig. 3. Interior I. Etching on zinc,  
11-1/2" x 14-1/4", 1987

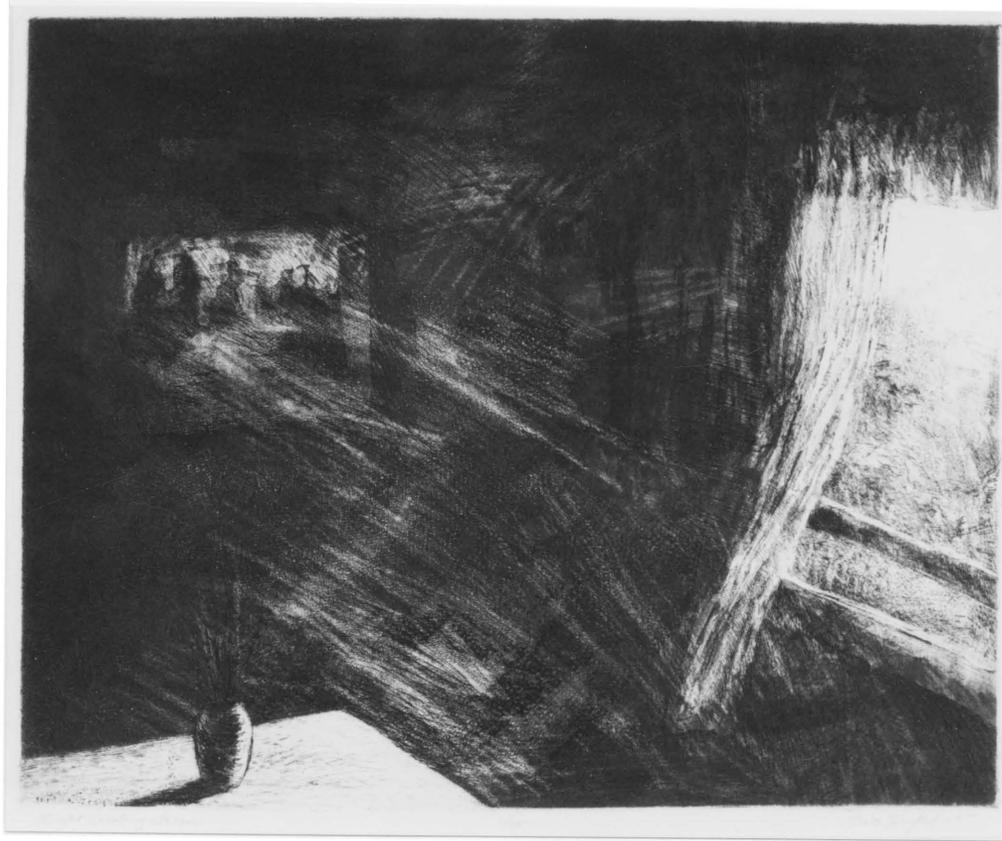


Fig. 4. Light Creating Form. Etching on zinc, 17-1/2" x 14-3/8", 1987



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1987

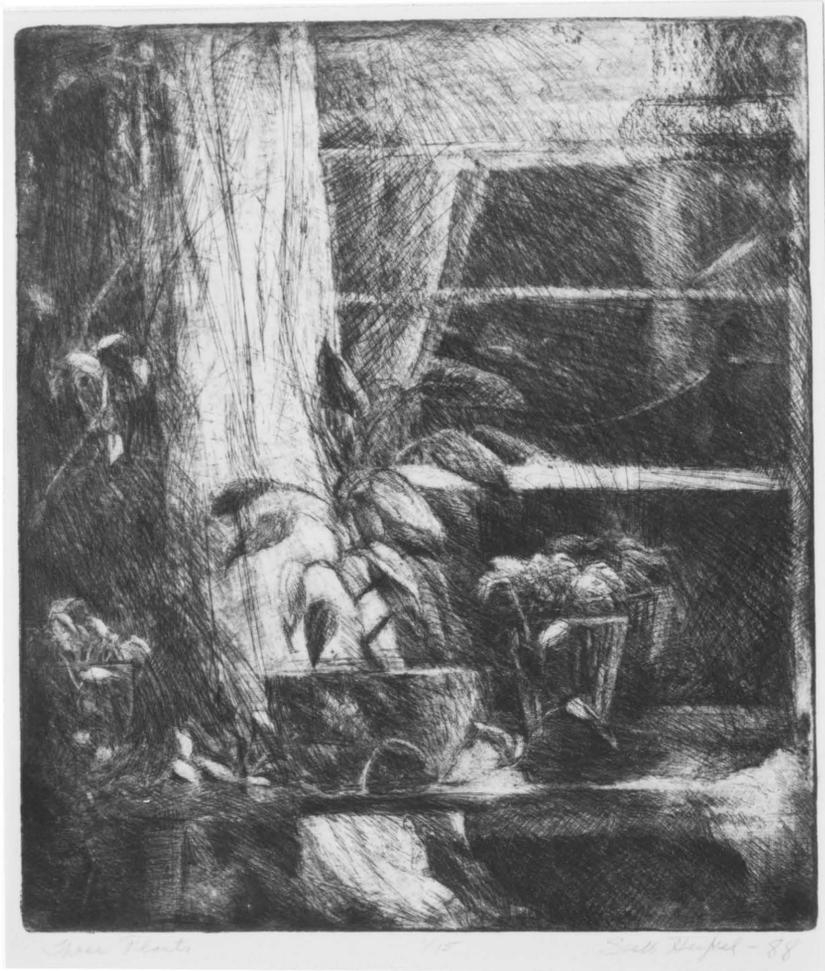


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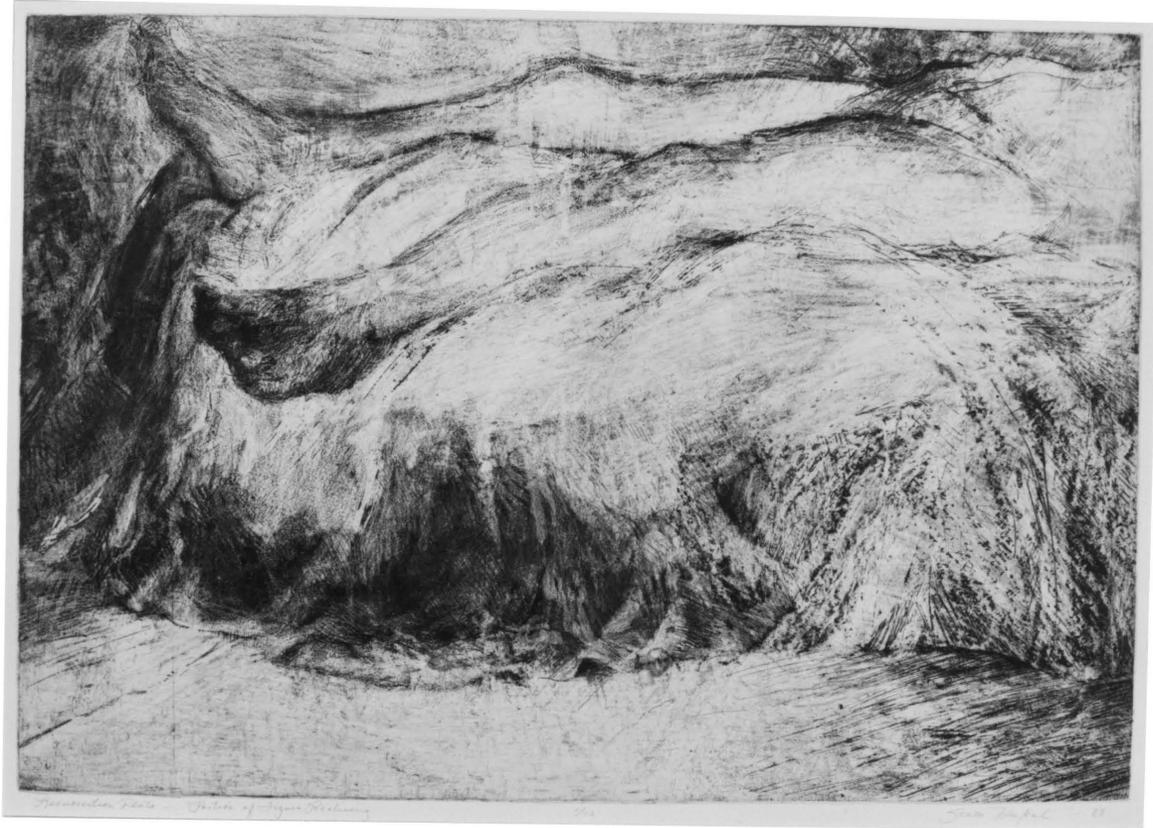


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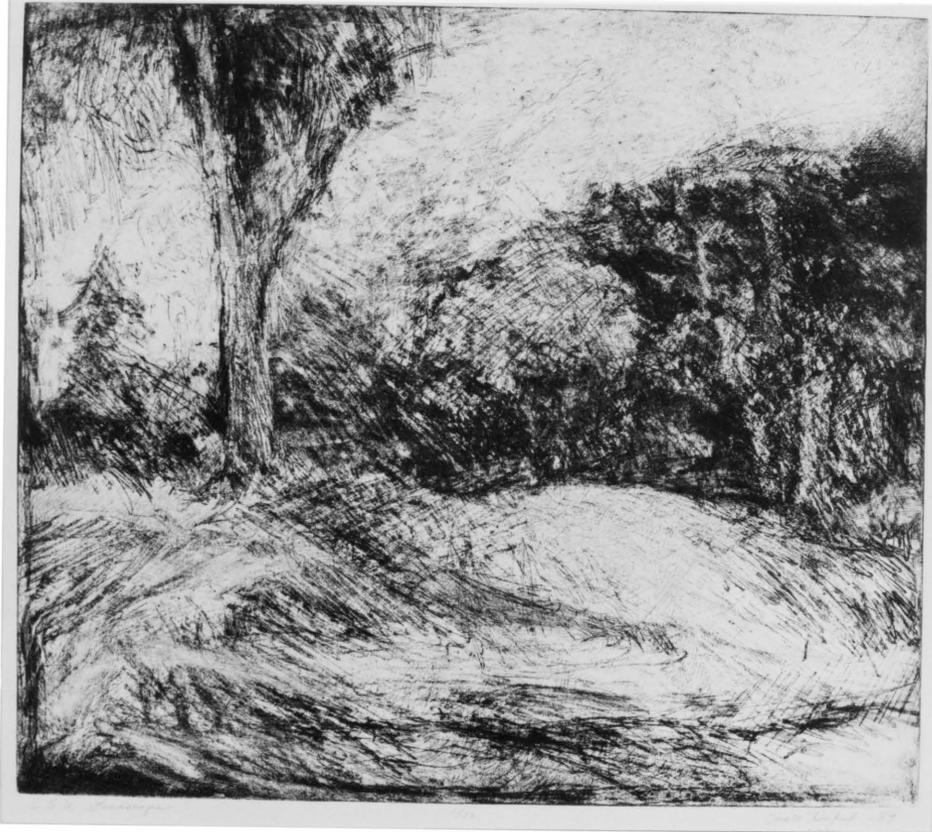


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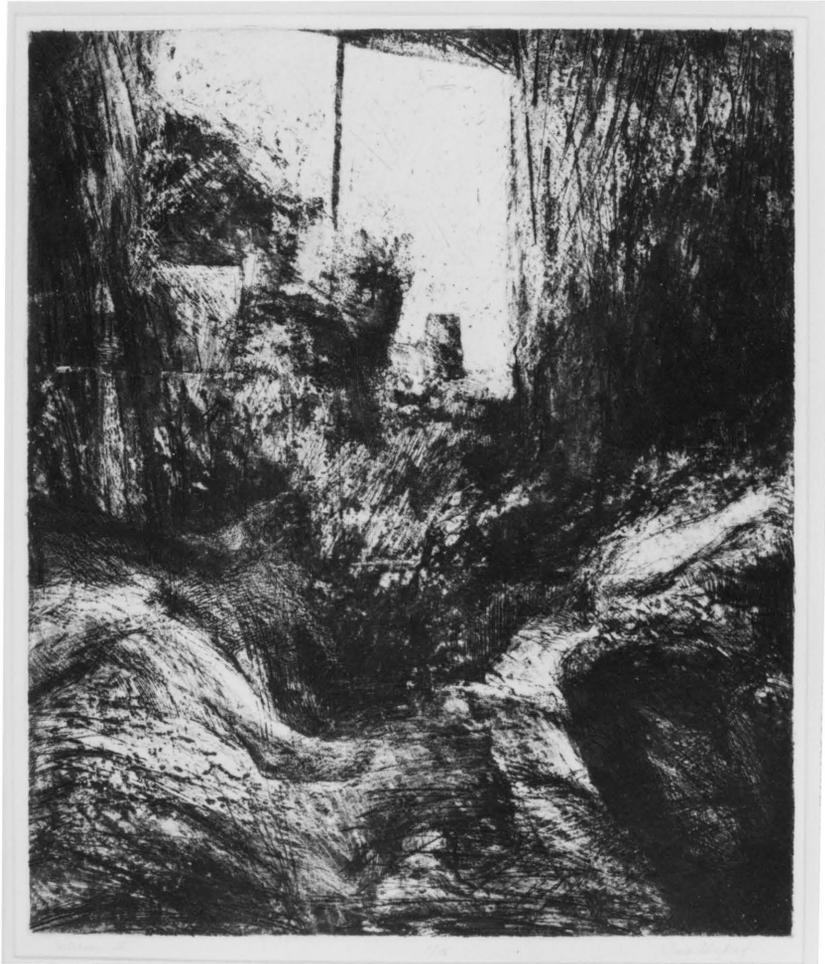


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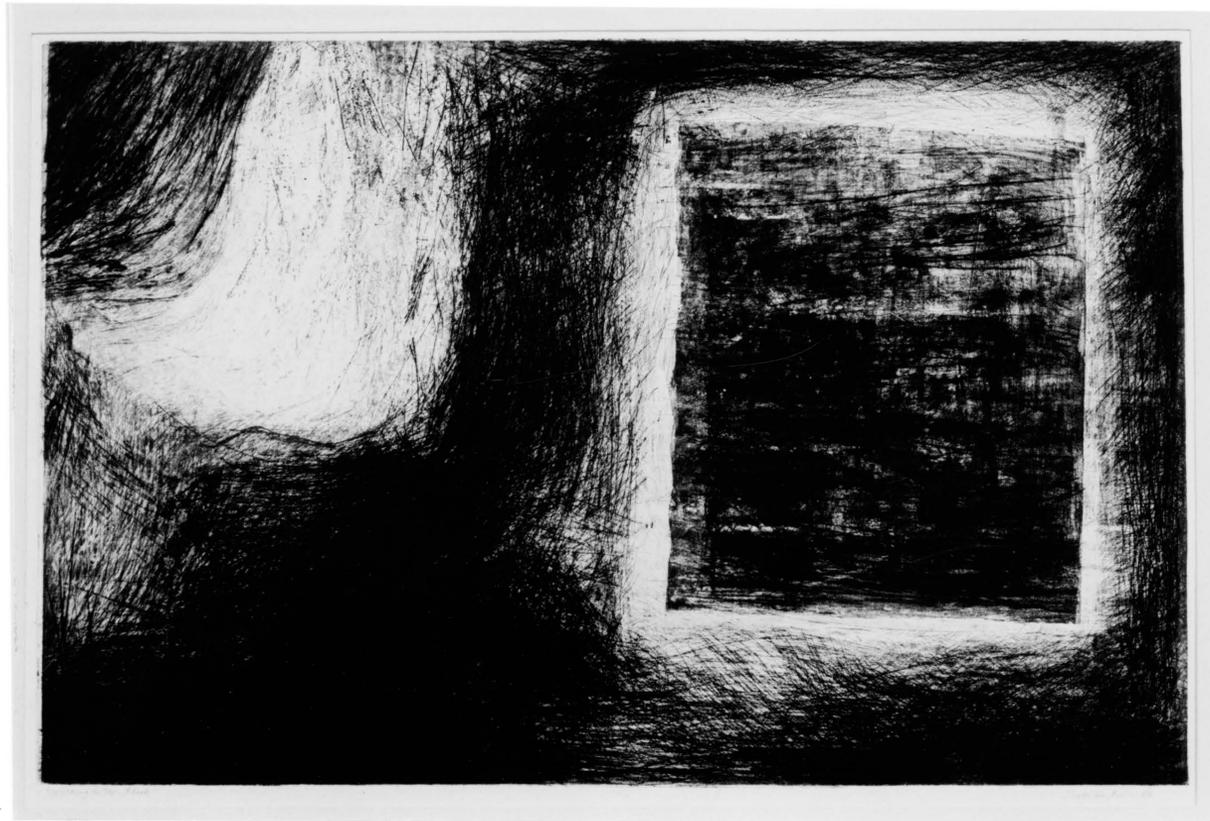


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Fig. 14. Interior Bathed in Morning Light. Etching on copper, 11" x 8-1/2", 1988



Fig. 15. Self-Portrait in Dark Mood.  
Etching, engraving on zinc,  
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Fig. 16. Seated Figure - "Early Morning Feeding." Lithograph, collograph, embossment on two plates, 16-1/2" x 22-1/2", 1987-89



Fig. 17. Portrait of the Infamous Washboard Musician. Etching, engraving on zinc, 17-3/4" x 23-3/4", 1988



Fig. 18. The Guitar Never Tuned; The Art Never Compromised.  
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Fig. 19. Portrait of Ed in Blue.  
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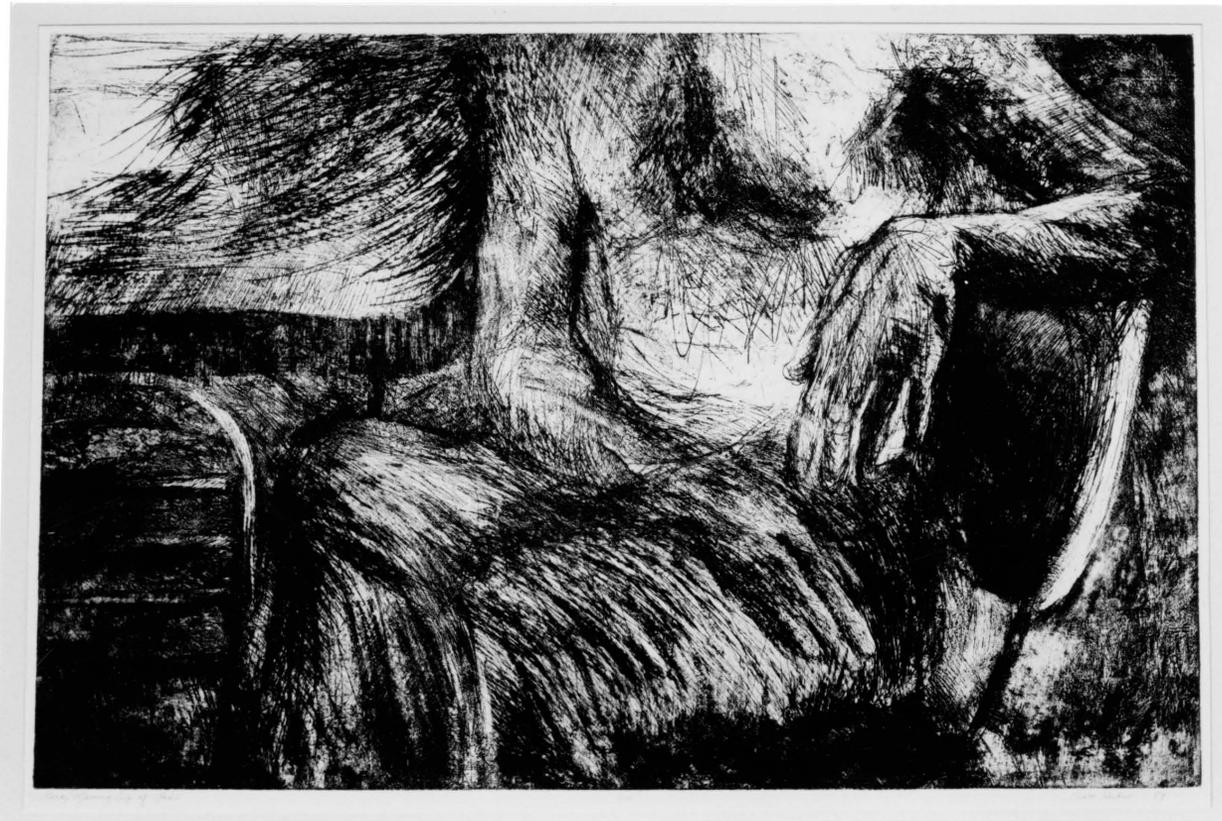


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Fig. 21. Schackel Barn - "A View to the Entrance to the Loft." Etching on zinc, 17-3/4" x 23-3/4", 1989

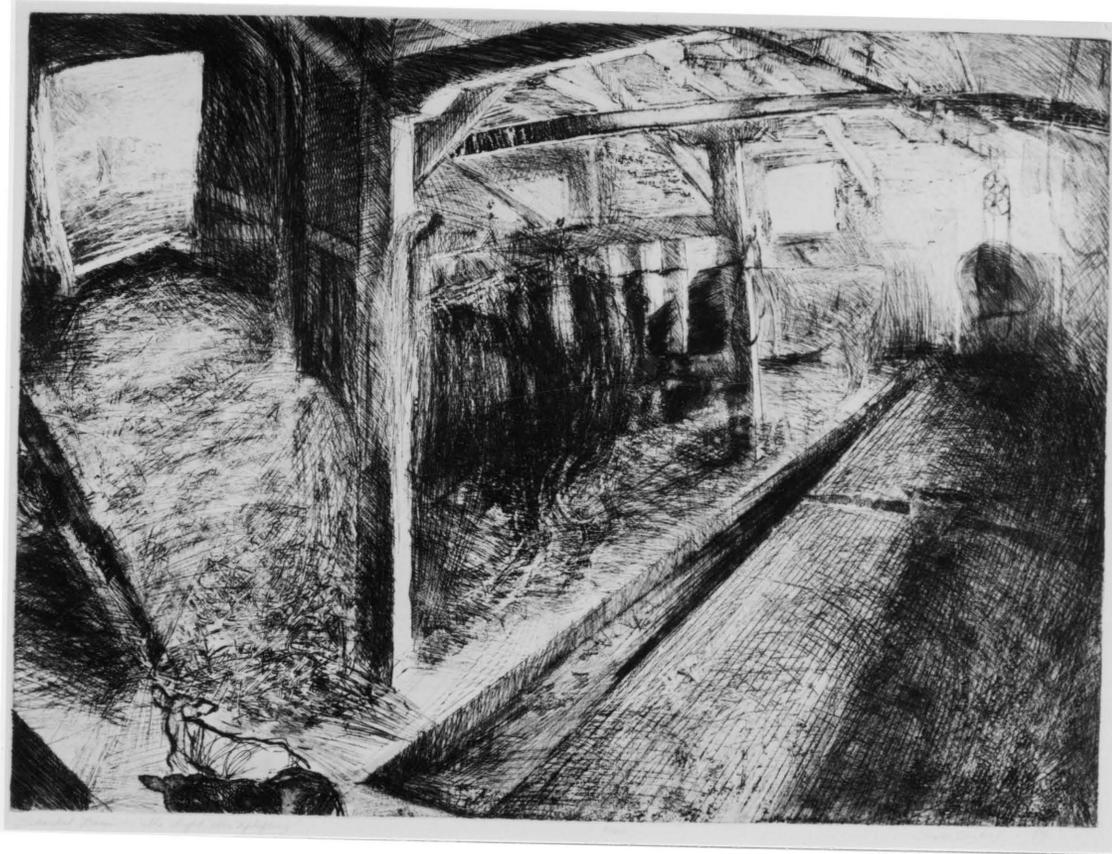


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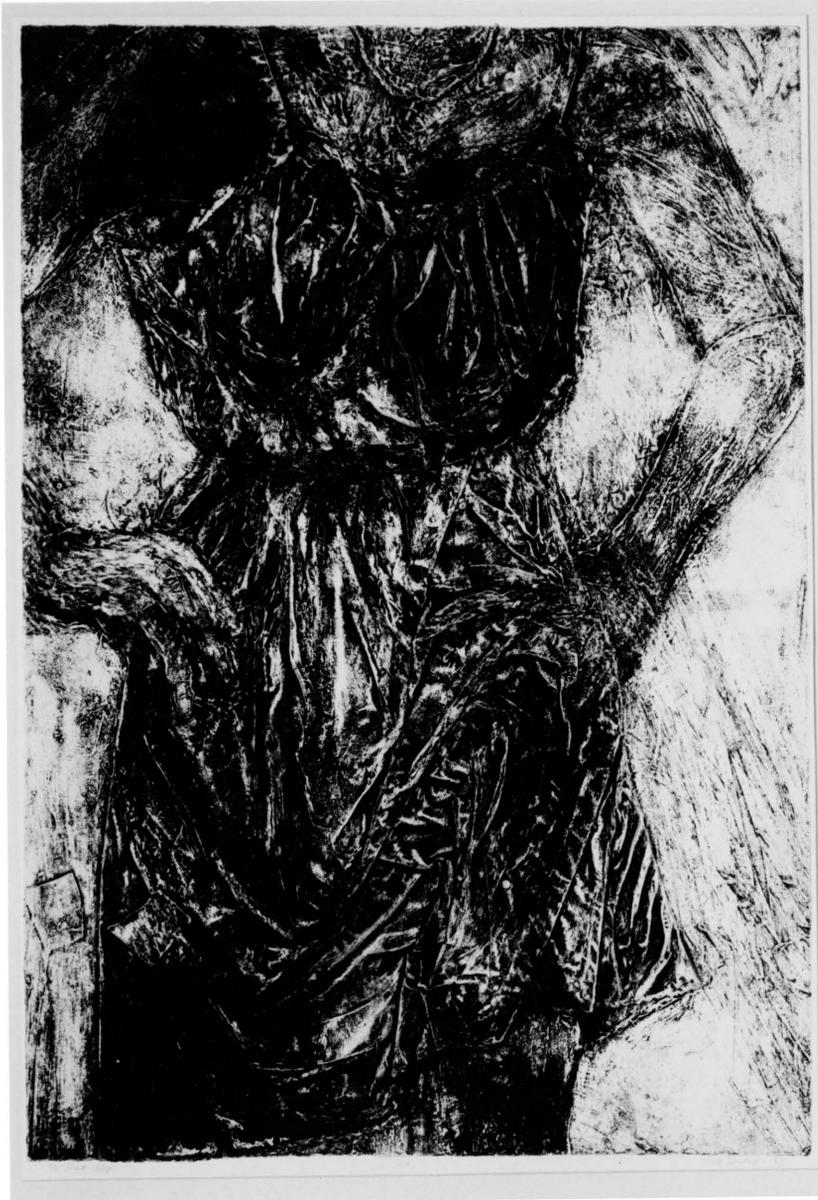


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