

THE RELEVANCE OF THOMAS MORAN  
TO CONTEMPORARY LANDSCAPE PAINTERS

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Concentration research paper  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Fine Art  
Colorado State University  
Fort Collins, Colorado  
March 26, 1984

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THE RELEVANCE OF THOMAS MORAN  
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This paper has evolved from my desire to clarify the conflicts and contradictions arising out of my own work. I have increasingly desired to be specific about the landscape I portray, and I particularly admire Thomas Moran for this reason. At the same time I become totally absorbed with the nature of watercolor on paper, rather, the event of watercolor on paper, and the intrinsic qualities of lithographic processes. In trying to resolve (or expand) these contradictions I've discovered that similar inclinations prevail among contemporary landscapists, and that many of the attributes of Thomas Moran are highly developed in artists working today.

Thomas Moran came to the United States with his parents in 1844 when he was seven years old. Like Thomas Cole twenty-six years earlier, he came from an ugly, industrialized area of England; this background is likely to have contributed to his emphatic appreciation for a land so unspoiled and rich in natural beauty. The Moran family eventually settled in Philadelphia, and at age sixteen Thomas became apprenticed to an engraving firm, Scattergood & Telfer. He found the process of wood engraving tedious in the extreme, and he never mastered it; however, his employer acknowledged

the quality of his drawing and allowed him to make drawings for others to engrave. He soon became bored with the routine subjects of the drawings and spent increasing energy on his own watercolors, by trade of which he acquired numerous books, among them Turner's Liber Studiorum. Encouraged by sales of his watercolors, he left the engraving firm after nearly three years and shared a series of studios with his brother Edward. During this time he had no official instruction in painting, but received much advice and encouragement from James Hamilton, a Luminist of sorts, who some considered to be "the American Turner".<sup>1</sup>

The Liber Studiorum and various readings (he was a voracious reader) spurred Moran's desire for travel. "He longed for scenes of greater majesty and grandeur, for views as wild and sublime as those depicted in the Turner engravings."<sup>2</sup> His yearning for a wild and unspoiled landscape led him first to the Pictured Rocks area of Lake Superior in 1860. In 1861 he was able to go to England to study and copy Turner's paintings for several months. "He felt a new appreciation for Turner's subjective use of nature", and he was confirmed in his own interest in the transient details of nature.<sup>3</sup> Moran was also able to travel throughout England to sketch in numerous

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<sup>1</sup>Barbara Novak, Nature and Culture: American Landscape And Painting 1825-1875, (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1980), p. 249.

<sup>2</sup>Thurman Wilkins, Thomas Moran: Artist of the Mountains, (Norman Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), p. 29.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

places Turner had frequented. After his return to the United States in 1862, he taught for a while at the Philadelphia School of Design for Women. Within a decade he was increasingly employed as an illustrator, continuing to take sketching tours in the summers.

In 1866 and 1867 Moran took a second trip to Europe, first stopping in London to review Turner's work, then studying the work of Claude and visiting Fontainebleau. Moran was not impressed with the work of the Barbizon artists, but he did have an enjoyable visit with Corot. Later he and his wife, Mollie, visited Italy and the Alps, but he had none of the feeling for those "decent and well behaved" mountains that he would later develop for the Rockies.<sup>4</sup>

Moran first tried lithography in 1860, and in 1869 published a portfolio entitled Studies and Pictures, but his enthusiasm waned and he never attempted the process again. It is unclear whether his abandonment of the medium was caused by the accident which ruined the stone (his favorite drawing) before more than a dozen prints were pulled.<sup>5</sup> Irrespective of Moran's defection, at least two of the prints in Studies and Pictures are richly detailed, highly polished examples of the art of lithography. In the Forest, Wissahickon, 1868, (Plate 1), is a finely wrought account of rocks and trees which has a strong affinity with Charles Sheeler's well-known

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 51, (footnote #47).

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 56.

drawing of 1937, Rocks at Steichen's. Both Moran and Sheeler pay unmitigated attention to the minute details of rock and vegetation. Solitude, 1869, (Plate 2), is a scene set near Lake Superior and is at once naturalistic, richly perceived, and ever so slightly phantasmagoric, similar to the work of Rodolphe Bresdin.

Through a friend who was an editor of Scribner's Monthly, he obtained his first assignment for that magazine: drawings (for engravings) from sketches and a written account of Nathaniel Langford's expedition into Yellowstone of August, 1870. Through Langford he learned of F.V. Hayden's proposed expedition for 1871 and obtained a letter of introduction to Hayden and a loan to finance his trip, which he would repay with a dozen watercolors of the region.<sup>6</sup>

The physical hardships of the trip were irrelevant compared with the magnificence of the land and the fact that here Moran found himself as an artist. He completed numerous studies, finished watercolors, and by 1872, a huge oil painting, Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone, which was subsequently purchased by the United States government for \$10,000, as was The Chasm of the Colorado, 1873-74, (Plate 3). Through these paintings in the early 1870s, Moran attained, perhaps, the height of his fame, but he continued this pattern of work for over twenty years, going on a total of eight western expeditions. As his daughter, Ruth, wrote: "To him it was all

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<sup>6</sup>Carol Clark, Thomas Moran: Watercolors of the American West, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980), p. 15.

grandeur, beauty, color and light - nothing of man at all, but nature, virgin, unspoiled and lovely. In the Yellowstone country he found fairy-like color and form that his dreams could not rival."<sup>7</sup>

The society in which Moran lived believed in the unity of nature, religion and art. As Jules David Prown would write of Frederick Church, likewise Moran "combined a scientific interest in geology and the history of the earth with a theological belief that the best avenue to God could be found through the most dramatic natural phenomena of the earth itself."<sup>8</sup> "The American West yielded the perfect landscape for the expansionistic, scientific, patriotic, and romantic nineteenth-century mind embodied in Thomas Moran."<sup>9</sup> He beautifully filled a niche; his pictures demonstrated his capacity for indicating relevant detail as well as his highly trained memory, his appreciation of the sublime and his romantic imagination. His watercolors were distributed in Congress as part of a lobby to preserve unique areas by creating National Parks. Moran unequivocally stated his belief "that the grandest, most beautiful, or wonderful in nature, would, in capable hands, make the grandest, most beautiful or wonderful pictures, and the business of the great painter should be the representation of great scenes

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 21, (footnote #48).

<sup>8</sup>Jules David Prown, American Painting From Its Beginnings To The Armory Show, (New York: Rizzoli, 1977).

<sup>9</sup>Clark, op. cit., p. 21.

in nature".<sup>10</sup> At the same time, Moran did not hesitate to take artistic license with details in order to convey the overall truth and beauty of the impression nature made on him.

While it is not commonly held today that the grandest in nature makes the grandest in painting (and personal experience would dictate rather the opposite), there are numerous painters working from the landscape in a fairly straightforward way. Artists such as Susan Shatter, Ben Schonzeit, Neil Welliver and Fairfield Porter share many of the interrelated concerns of Thomas Moran: respect for the distinctive qualities of a given place, fidelity to observable phenomena with corresponding respect for detail, appreciation of the grand and exotic, and use of panorama. The remainder of this essay will explore attitudes and styles held in common as well as inevitable differences of approach between Moran and several contemporary landscape painters.

Thomas Moran had high regard for thereeness; in his watercolor study The Ruby Range, Nevada, 1897, (Plate 4), he gives significant information about the stark, jagged quality of the range, the relative size and structure of individual peaks, and dearth of vegetation. Much of the image is open; the light brown of the paper is an integral part of and uniquely appropriate to the buffy monochrome of the actuality. Opaque white is used to indicate sky and patches of snow. The austerity of technique adroitly parallels the serene rawness

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<sup>10</sup>Moran to Hayden, March 11, 1872, Letters Received, Hayden Survey, quoted in Wilkins, op. cit. p. 4.

of the scene. This study is comparable to Fairfield Porter's watercolor, Sketch for "Cliffs of Isle au Haut", 1974, (Plate 5). The white of the paper plays a vital part throughout sky, sea, rocks and cliffs. The taut, elegant style renders a concrete, highly articulate impression of the Maine coastline. Porter's painting, as Frank H. Goodyear, Jr. writes of Blue Landscape, "is true to nature at the same time that it is a triumph of sensitivity to the medium."<sup>11</sup> Here it is appropriate to mention that Moran partook of the nineteenth-century respect for finish in art, and did not intend his studies to be exhibited as finished works; nonetheless, like Porter's sketch, the work stands on its own merit.

For some artists there is an aspect of development that has to do with intimate association or identification with a given area. Just as Moran found his ultimate expression through the Yellowstone area, Fairfield Porter identifies with, becomes one with, the Southampton area of Long Island and Great Spruce Head Island, Maine. As Yellowstone was the perfect vehicle for Moran's artistic output, Southampton and Great Spruce Head perfectly express Porter's painterly sentiments. The Maine paintings of Neil Welliver similarly express a personality resonance as do the desert works of O'Keeffe and the marsh paintings of Heade. Welliver is at one with the structure of the Maine landscape. He is

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<sup>11</sup>Frank H. Goodyear, Jr., Contemporary American Realism Since 1960, (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1981), p. 128.

committed to wilderness and the "intangible values and spiritual universe which are found only in nature".<sup>12</sup> As Donald B. Kuspit writes of Welliver's work: "These are very unsocial pictures, and ecologically sound; they are devastatingly sane in their attitude to nature, altogether non-exploitative. It is in their asociality, if not explicit antisociality, that they link up with the grand American tradition of nineteenth-century landscape, particularly with Luminism."<sup>13</sup> Kuspit further comments on Welliver's "adroit awareness of nature's intensity in detail as much as in whole".<sup>14</sup>

Emphasis on the specificity of place and correlative fidelity to observed fact and esteem of detail are combined in contemporary work with an equal concern for the inherent qualities of the medium and the picture surface. Simultaneous concern with both, though not in the same degree as contemporaries, is evinced in Moran's numerous watercolors of the hot springs and geysers of Yellowstone and the Green River. The fluidity of watercolor is highly expressive of and consonant with the subject matter portrayed. In Great Blue Spring of the Lower Geyser Basin, 1872, (Plate 6), swirls of coppery orange, red and blue provide a perfect pictorial parallel to the stained, sinuous, wet rock formations, and the translucence

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<sup>12</sup>Robert M. Doty, "The Imagery of Neil Welliver", Art International, Vol. 25, No. 7-8, (S/O 1982), p. 41.

<sup>13</sup>Donald B. Kuspit, "Terrestrial Truth: Neil Welliver", Art in America, Vol. 71, No. 4, (April, 1983), p. 139.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

of the medium effectively indicates the vapors arising from the hot springs.

Neil Welliver's watercolor, Briggs Meadow, 1977, (Plate 7), deliciously liquid, a virtuoso display of technique, but it is also highly specific in a fresh way. Trees, both coniferous and deciduous, meandering stream, meadow, hill and clouds are all equally considered and of vital importance. In this, as in most of Welliver's work, there is a superabundance of information, a quality that was also noted, sometimes pejoratively, in Moran's work, particularly his oil paintings. This is consistent with both Welliver's and Moran's appreciation of the sheer exuberance of detail found in nature.

In a painting such as Big Flowage, 1979, (Plate 8), Welliver insists that the viewer see at once both the richness of the actual landscape and the sumptuous oil paint on the canvas. The colors are plausible referents to the actual scene, but blues of sky and river and green of trees take on their own force. While Moran is not totally subservient to nature, the scene depicted is of primary importance. In Welliver, both aspects vie for equal attention; the flat-tish, unmodulated quality of each color area contributes to the dialogue between the painting itself and the external landscape.

With Moran, as with Frederick Church and many other nineteenth-century landscapists, the devices of painting are used not to call attention to themselves, but to convey the

beauty of the land. With Welliver, properties unique to medium and the flattish quality within each color-shape announce irrevocably that this is a painted surface as well as a landscape. Welliver has stated "that his goal is to make a natural painting as fluid as a deKooning".<sup>15</sup> This thought is echoed by numerous contemporary landscapists who were influenced by the Abstract Expressionists. Wolf Kahn has likewise remarked that he wants "to paint Rothko over from nature".<sup>16</sup>

Robert Dash paints in a manner similar to both Porter and Welliver in that he never loses touch with a tactile, sensuous surface and simultaneously concerns himself with the appearance of the landscape. In A Walk in the Spring, 1973, (Plate 9), Dash fuses an Abstract Expressionist sense of immediacy and gesture with close attention to details of light and local environment. Particularly effective is unusual handling of power lines so that they become visually integrated with branches and the emphatic brushwork throughout the canvas. It should be noted that, unlike Porter and Welliver, Dash paints with a limited palette of acrylics, aiming for the final effect right from the start, and finds both the colors and rapid drying qualities much to his satisfaction.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Goodyear, op. cit., p. 131.

<sup>16</sup>Wolf Kahn, "What Is A Painter's Subject?" in Wolf Kahn, quoted in Goodyear, op. cit., p. 131.

<sup>17</sup>Susan E. Meyer, ed., 20 Landscape Painters and How They Work, (New York: Watson-Guption Publications, 1977), p. 58.

Jane Freilicher likewise combines a vigorous stroke and vivid portrayal of the particulars of eastern Long Island. The Pastel drawing, Study for Autumnal Landscape, 1978, (Plate 10), exhibits a rough linear quality and use of paper texture, particularly toward the edges of the drawing; these fuse nicely with a sense of intimate familiarity with the locale. This identification manifests itself even more strongly in such an inside-outside drawing as Flowers I (Red Poppies), 1978, (Plate 11), where several glasses of flowers on a table and park-like view out the window are, indeed, one entity.

Contemporary landscapists have been unavoidably influenced by the Abstract Expressionists, whether they started their careers painting abstractly and later moved into realism, or merely absorbed the contemporary artistic ethos. (I use the term "realism to include a wide variety of styles which share a primary involvement with and commitment to the external visual world). It has been argued that the Abstract Expressionists, in turn, "share significant characteristics with earlier traditions of American landscape painting".<sup>18</sup> It is interesting that the constraints on realistic expression began to loosen as the emphasis on abstraction began to harden. When Clement Greenberg codified and exalted flatness and truth to materials in his 1965 article, "Modernist Painting", he set the stage for the demise of those principles as

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<sup>18</sup>Goodyear, op. cit., p. 126.

sole concerns for serious painters. This is simply too limiting as a basis for all artistic expression, and it began to self-destruct as it ossified. Linda Nochlin explored the frustration with these limitations in 1973 when she queried: "Why is the flat better than the three-dimensional? Why is truth to the nature of the material more important than truth to nature or experience? Why are the demands of the medium more pressing than the demands of visual accuracy?"<sup>19</sup> The notions of truth to materials and integrity of the picture plane had become themselves restrictive and dogmatic, thus overreaching their usefulness. And, as Donald Juspit suggests in a 1979 essay on the work of Robert Ryman, the inevitable outcome of the reductionist process is nothing more than entropy.<sup>20</sup> John Arthur further elucidates the issue: "Whether out of bias or linear thinking, we were educated in the fifties and sixties to believe that the only valid intelligent contemporary (italics mine) American art excluded figurative and narrative elements".<sup>21</sup> He goes on to say in his introduction to Realist Drawings and Watercolors: "I believe that great art is inalienably anthropomorphic, and that the artist's visions and conceptions are perceived with

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<sup>19</sup>Linda Nochlin, "The Realist Criminal and the Abstract Law", Art in America, Vol. 61, No. Five, (S/O 1973), p. 55.

<sup>20</sup>Donald B. Kuspit, "Robert Ryman: Reductionism----> Entropy", Art in America, Vol. 67, No. 4, (July/August 1979), pp. 88-89.

<sup>21</sup>John Arthur, quoted in Gerrit Henry, "Painterly Realism and the Modern Landscape", Art in America, Vol. 69, (Sept. 1981), p. 112.

greater strength and clarity when his or her art refers to the human situation."<sup>22</sup>

Whether or not one accepts Arthur's statement, it is pertinent to another phenomenon of contemporary landscape painting: fidelity to observed fact is manifested in the cityscape. Some of these are slightly to significantly disagreeable or have a disturbing, foreboding quality. In Landscape With Four Towers, 1970, (Plate 12), Sidney Goodman imbues a broad expanse of urban area with ominous overtones. Four huge, vague and menacing towers cast against a lurid sky dominate an area of indefinite, industrial grayness, in front of which exists a bland, nondescript suburbia which seems blithely unaware of the ragged gash in the earth in the foreground. Goodman is "interested in the way man-made structures too often violate a place or a landscape", and this painting exhibits both his disgust at the ravaged condition of our environment and morbid curiosity about it; it is at once provoking, sensuous and repellant.<sup>23</sup> Goodman, like Moran, is unafraid of making a statement regarding environmental relevance to human beings.

Related to this are two similar paintings by Catherine Murphy: View of the World Trade Center From A Rose Garden, 1976, (Plate 13), and Elena, Harry and Alan in the Backyard,

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<sup>22</sup>John Arthur, Realist Drawings and Watercolors, (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1981), p. 7.

<sup>23</sup>Sidney Goodman quoted in Alan Gussow, ed., A Sense of Place: the Artist and the American Land, (New York: Friends of the Earth/Seabury Press, 1971), p. 10.

1978. In both a careful attention to detail emphasizes the progression from rose garden foreground to packed parking lot, through unpleasant high-density apartments to distant high-rise buildings, which in turn are dwarfed by the massive, intensive hunks of the World Trade Center. There is also a parallel progression from nourishing and intimate domestic greenery through indifferent squallor, to the vague unease caused by the disproportionate immensity of the World Trade Center, the blatant incongruity of which was noted caustically by John Jacobus in American Art of the Twentieth Century.<sup>24</sup> The mood of Murphy's paintings is one of human tenderness which tempers or exists within the inhumanity of the urban landscape. I believe, however, that Murphy's stance is akin to the thereness of Moran, not the critical denunciation of Jacobus. Less evocative than Murphy's are the cityscapes of Noel Mahaffey in which the city is treated as a "standardized object".<sup>25</sup> In St. Louis, Missouri, 1971, (Plate 14), the city is identifiable by its arch, but the subject could more appropriately be considered the anonymity of the city. There is a straight-on, deadpan quality that simply presents the view for what it is.

John Moore's city paintings are similarly anonymous vehicles for the play of light. The vertical views are standard for high-rise office or apartment buildings. In

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<sup>24</sup>Sam Hunter and John Jacobus, American Art of the 20th Century, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1973), p. 509..

<sup>25</sup>Goodyear, op. cit., p. 149.

both South, 1979, (Plate 15), and Cityscape, 1978, (Plate 16), the vertical format emphasizes the office window quality and some part of the foreground interior is included. The near-far contrast is quietly effective, itself more fascinating than narrative value or civic peculiarities.

Conversely, Richard Haas's identification and involvement with New York City is apparent in his watercolors of the old and new structures of the city. Whether in a relative close-up such as 18th Street and Broadway, 1978, (Plate 17), or an aerial panorama like View of Manhattan, Brooklyn Bridge, 1979, (Plate 18), expresses a strong commitment to the city, and in View of 57th Street, 1978, (Plate 19), the juxtaposition of old and new buildings is presented with fascination and tenderness. It is not surprising that Haas has also executed monumental paintings on exterior walls of buildings and has proposed a series of "shadow murals...to be painted on blank exterior walls that would depict the shadows of razed buildings that once stood in the neighborhood."<sup>26</sup>

In contradistinction to the cityscapes of Mahaffey, Moore and Haas are the views of Yvonne Jacquette. Although like Mahaffey, Moore and Haas, Jacquette depicts aerial views (city from a safe place?), her works are more, for want of a better term, impressionistic. Her renditions of buildings and streets and traffic are sparkling and musical: Black

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<sup>26</sup>Goodyear, op. cit., p. 150.

Pastel, 1979, (Plate 20), is a rhythmic celebration of city vitality as is Park Row Aerial, 1982, (Plate 21). Both express enjoyment of and communion with the city not unlike Moran's fascination and communion with Yellowstone.

Cityscape panoramas describe many paintings of Rackstraw Downes, although he paints rural panoramas as well. A work such as Behind the Store at Prospect, 1979-1980, (Plate 22), exemplifies the straightforward, modest approach taken by Downes; the scene is neither dramatic nor picturesque, but has a simple, documentary attitude. A spatial, curving quality is slightly apparent in the tilt of buildings at the left, but his cityscapes demonstrate this to a much greater degree. Downes admires Brueghel and American naive painters who "embraced the reality of the world" and he believes that without documentary content art is all pretension.<sup>27</sup>

Large overall views easily lend themselves to panorama, which in turn can easily tend toward the spectacular. Both Thomas Moran and Susan Shatter have painted the Grand Canyon, and in both cases the nature of the painting is unavoidably affected by the overwhelming presence of the canyon. Both Moran's The Chasm of the Colorado, 1873-74, (Plate 3), and Shatter's Pima Point, 1982, (Plate 23), are large panoramic vistas that are, like the Grand Canyon itself, absorbingly intricate. Shatter expounds on the relentless complexities

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<sup>27</sup>Goodyear, op. cit., p. 134.

of the canyon with colors that are strong and insistent, and interlocking triangular forms which repeat themselves in endless permutations. There is no horizon line; one looks down into the canyon and can see neither the bottom nor the top. This emphasis on the no-escape quality heightens both the visual and emotional tension of the painting.

While Shatter has simplified detail and color, Moran<sup>1</sup> revels in details, their superabundance held in check by unity of pattern and subtlety of color. With Shatter the canyon is the pattern; with Moran the canyon is something awesome to behold, an unsurpassingly striking vista. Moran dwells on the moment after an afternoon storm, with mists arising from the hot-damp chasm bottoms, and the storm itself passing off to the left. Shatter, by eliminating the horizon, effectively excludes any sense of atmosphere; her colors of distant canyons and formations are nearly as strong as the foreground colors. Moran uses a standard aerial perspective of progressively paling colors and blurring forms. In both paintings we find the bottom of the canyon only intermittently and after close search.

Moran<sup>2</sup> painted for an urban Eastern public which was curious about the West, and even then, both nostalgic for rural views and hungry for exotic scenes.<sup>28</sup> Shatter paints for a public for whom scenes of the Grand Canyon have a picture postcard familiarity, a public many or most of whom

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<sup>28</sup>Clark, op. cit., p. 4.

have toured there, at least to the rim, and have been saturated with predigested, canned awe. Shatter shows that the Grand Canyon is still beyond our comprehension, she "gives us a nature that is sublime - that implies the infinite - not because it is like a cold abyss, but because it is exclusively physical."<sup>29</sup>

Shatter's work rather contradicts Frank Goodyear's remark that "the market for painting of "natural wonders" no longer exists, just as the wilderness has itself almost disappeared."<sup>30</sup> The search for the wild and exotic is still with us and is strongly manifested in other works by Susan Shatter who "has travelled to Peru, Greece, Canada and throughout southwestern United States to find the sort of exotic subject she prefers."<sup>31</sup> Her Cycladic Dome, 1978; (Plate 24), has a keen sense of an unusual, faraway place; it is a large (29 1/2" X 44 1/2") watercolor on absorbent paper in soft shades of pink, blue and lavender. The softness gives a dreamy, mysterious quality which is heightened by the dome-capped structure in the foreground. What may be, in actuality, an ordinary Grecian village is nonetheless exotic to Western eyes. A similarly softly-painted but garrishly colored manner in Panorama of Macchu Picchu, Peru, 1978, (Plate 25), endows the subject with an almost bizarre

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<sup>29</sup>Donald B. Kuspit, "Susan Shatter at Fischbach", Art in America, Vol. 70, No. (October, 1982), p. 135.

<sup>30</sup>Goodyear, op. cit., p. 125.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

aspect, which may stem as much from the Pop-postcard quality enlarged to over four feet by nine feet. Perhaps more successful is another large watercolor: Virginia River, 1979, (Plate 26). It has a direct and straightforward way of seeing the land and a curious dialogue between the soft, blotter-like quality of the paper surface and the hardness of the rocks.

Another "natural wonder" is Continental Divide, 1975, (Plate 27), by Ben Schonzeit. It is an immense (7' X 14') canvas composed of two square sections which resemble huge blow-ups of snapshots taken from the air. The two scenes are adjacent but not congruent, creating a startling v-composition by their misaligned horizons. As with Shatter's Macchu Picchu, a sense of wonder is curiously mixed with an almost droll amusement at the marvel of it all. Schonzeit combines the excitement of flight, unmitigated respect for the land and photographic accuracy with slight blurring and subtle changes. The odd juxtaposition serves only to heighten the impression of things being slightly askew. Certainly it is difficult for contemporary landscapists to attain a nature pantheism like that manifested in the nineteenth century, if only because of our limited access to unspoiled nature. A twentieth century pantheism would, however, not restrict itself to nature, and it might even encompass our cynicism and jaded visions.

Flameout Near the Cockscomb, 1980, (Plate 28), by Nicholas Boisvert shares with Shatter's Macchu Picchu and

Schonzeit's Continental Divide a tongue-in-cheek awe of the geologic sublime. It is painted as though it were a hand-colored, photographic blow-up. The arbitrary, garrish color gives the effect of a child's coloring book. (I recall, however, a spot in Capitol Reef National Park where several colors of rock in most unlikely configurations juxtapose in quite similar ways.) One wonders whether the message here is the desire to parody any sense of marvel.

Parody is definitely not a question with Harold Bruder, whose hauntingly simple version of the Colorado National Monument comes perhaps closest of any twentieth-century painters to the spirit with which Moran painted. Bruder states unequivocally: "I don't like New England. I don't like green mountains. I don't feel like painting them and I don't respond to green landscapes. I like desert, I like rocks, and I like the sense of the West. I can smell the air, feel the vast open sky."<sup>32</sup> His painting, Colorado National Monument, 1967, (Plate 29), conveys precisely this same sense of directness, simplicity and appreciation.

Other contemporary ventures into the wondrous have included Ian Hornak's Persephone Leaving, Variation II, 1975, (Plate 30), which strongly recalls Frederick Church's sublimely wild sky in Twilight in the Wilderness, 1860. Phillip Pearlstein has produced White House Ruin, Canyon de Chelly - Morning, 1975, and Temple at Abou Simbel, 1979, both straight-

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<sup>32</sup>Harold Bruder, quoted in Gussow, ed., op. cit., p. 88.

forward accounts of ruins. Gabriel Laderman has painted landscapes around Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia as well as Haystack Mountain, Vermont. Pearlstein and Laderman embody a directness and curiosity that is reminiscent of Turner and nineteenth-century topographical illustration.

Goodyear writes of "the nostalgia inherent in the landscape subject" and goes on to state that: "Critics have tended to associate contemporary landscape, more than other genres, with traditional issues, particularly those issues of importance to landscape painting in the nineteenth century."<sup>33</sup> Perhaps this has some bearing on the ultrastraightforward manner of artists such as Shatter, Hornak and Schonzeit, who paint as though the slightest hint of emotion will reduce their works to rubbish. It is as though they can not escape this dread of nostalgia, and nature, or the remaining relics of nature, must be approached only in a deadpan, tongue-in-cheek manner. Other landscapists paint without concern that an inherent nostalgia might trivialize their work. Porter, Welliver, Freilicher, Bruder and Dash do not fear nostalgia, nor sentiment, nor the inherent beauty of their subject. These qualities are not painted into their landscapes nor are they avoided. Whereas Moran extolled the beauty and sublimity and uniqueness of the land with all the devices and techniques of the painter's craft, Porter, Freilicher and Dash neither evade nor eulogise what

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<sup>33</sup>Goodyear, op. cit., p. 125.

they see, but present it with an equal sensibility toward the attributes of their craft. Downes unaffectedly embraces the reality of the world and "in advocating the position that detail is the natural component, not the enemy, of a sublime reality, Downes has assumed the role of the romantic realist whose work ultimately transcends documentation."<sup>34</sup> Just as Downe's position is not unlike Moran's a century earlier, other contemporary landscapists demonstrate, perhaps unwittingly, their affinities with the nineteenth-century.

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<sup>34</sup>Goodyear, op. cit., p. 134.

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PLATES



Plate 1. Thomas Moran, In the Forest, Wissahachkon, 1868,  
Lithograph,  $12\frac{1}{2}$  X 9 inches.



Plate 2. Thomas Moran, Solitude, 1869, Lithograph, 20 3/8 X 16 inches.



Plate 3. Thomas Moran, The Chasm of the Colorado, 1873-74,  
oil on canvas,  $84 \frac{3}{8} \times 144 \frac{3}{4}$  inches.

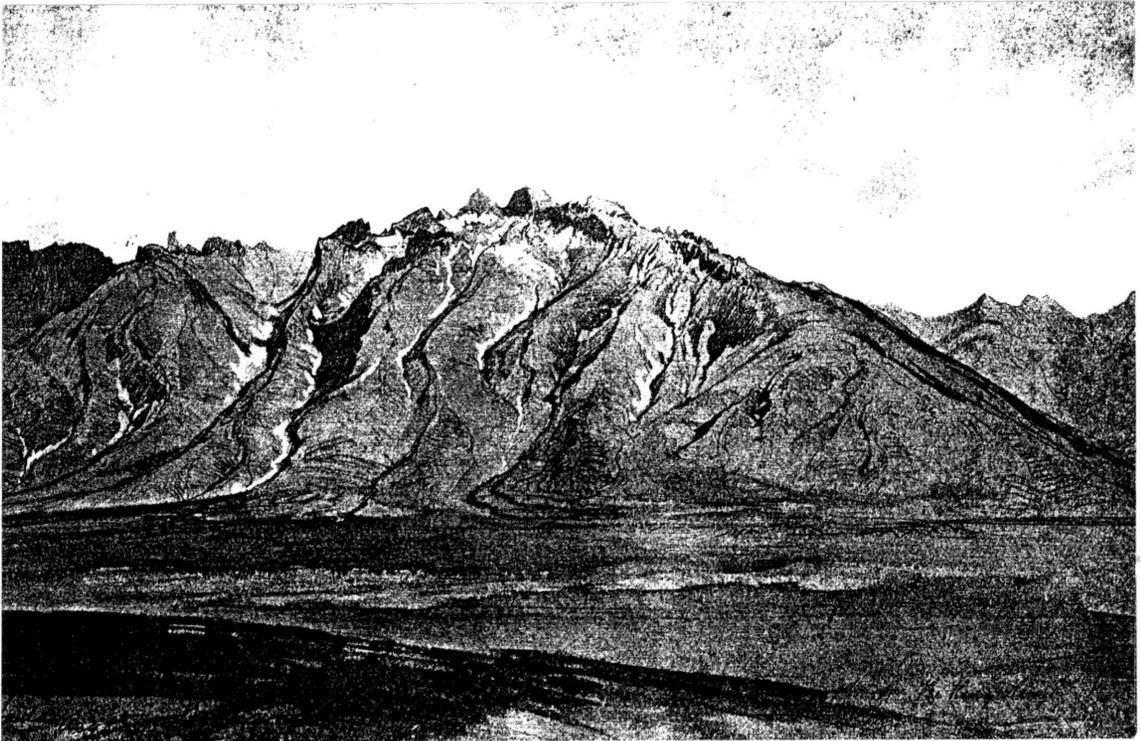


Plate 4. Thomas Moran, The Ruby Range, Nevada, 1879, Pencil, watercolor and opaque color, 8 1/2 X 14 3/8 inches.



Plate 5. Fairfield Porter, Sketch for "Cliffs of Isleau Haut", 1974, watercolor, 26 X 22 inches.

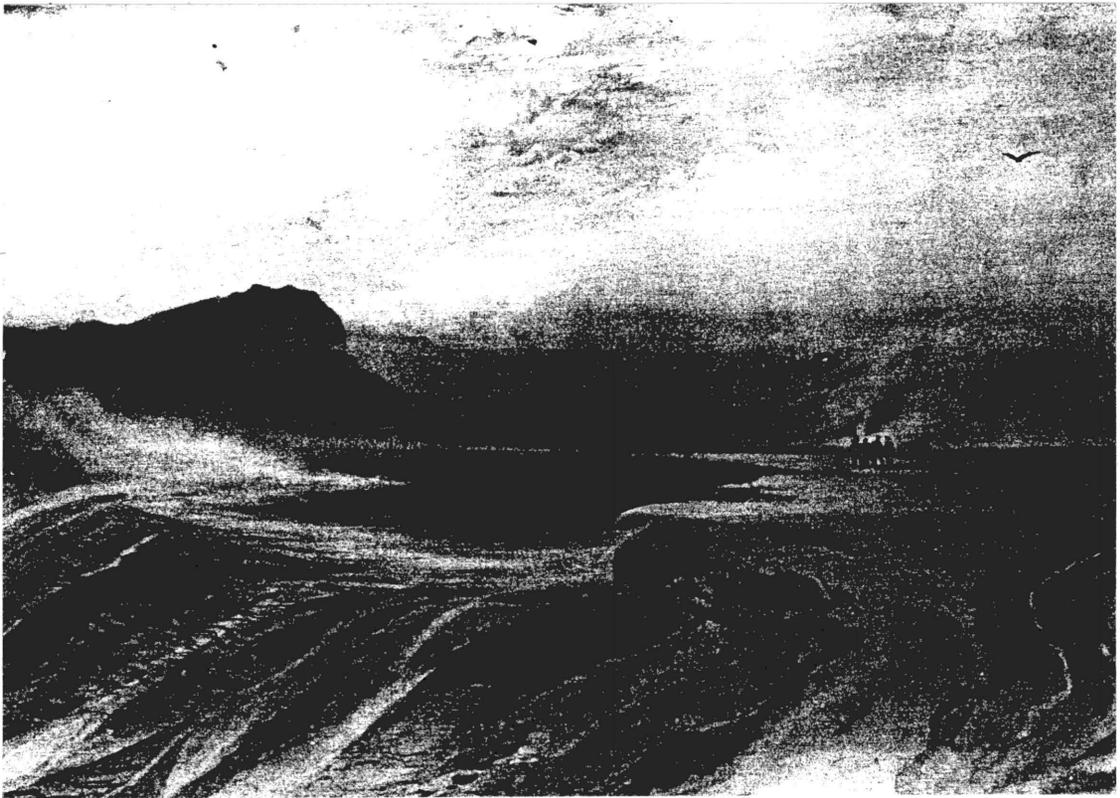


Plate 6. Thomas Moran, Great Blue Spring of the Lower Geyser Basin, 1872, watercolor and opaque color, 9 1/8 X 16 3/8 inches.

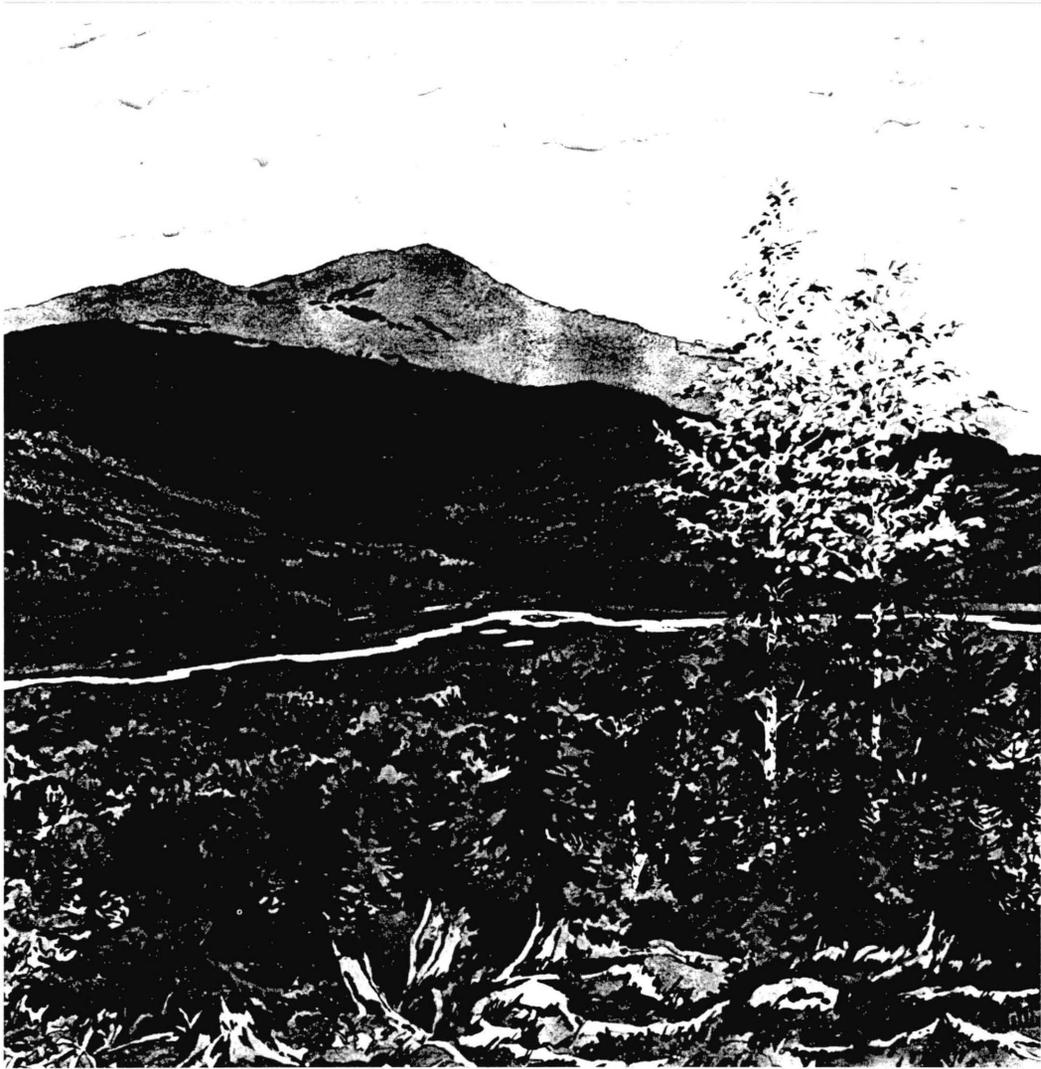


Plate 7. Neil Welliver, Briggs Meadow, 1977, watercolor, 29 5/8 X 30 1/4 inches.



Plate 8. Neil Welliver, Big Flowage, 1979, oil on canvas,  
96 X 96 inches.



Plate 9. Robert Dash, A Walk in the Spring, 1973, acrylic on canvas, 70 X 60 inches.



Plate 10. Jane Freilicher, Study for Autumnal Landscape, 1978, pastel, 29 1/2 X 24 inches.

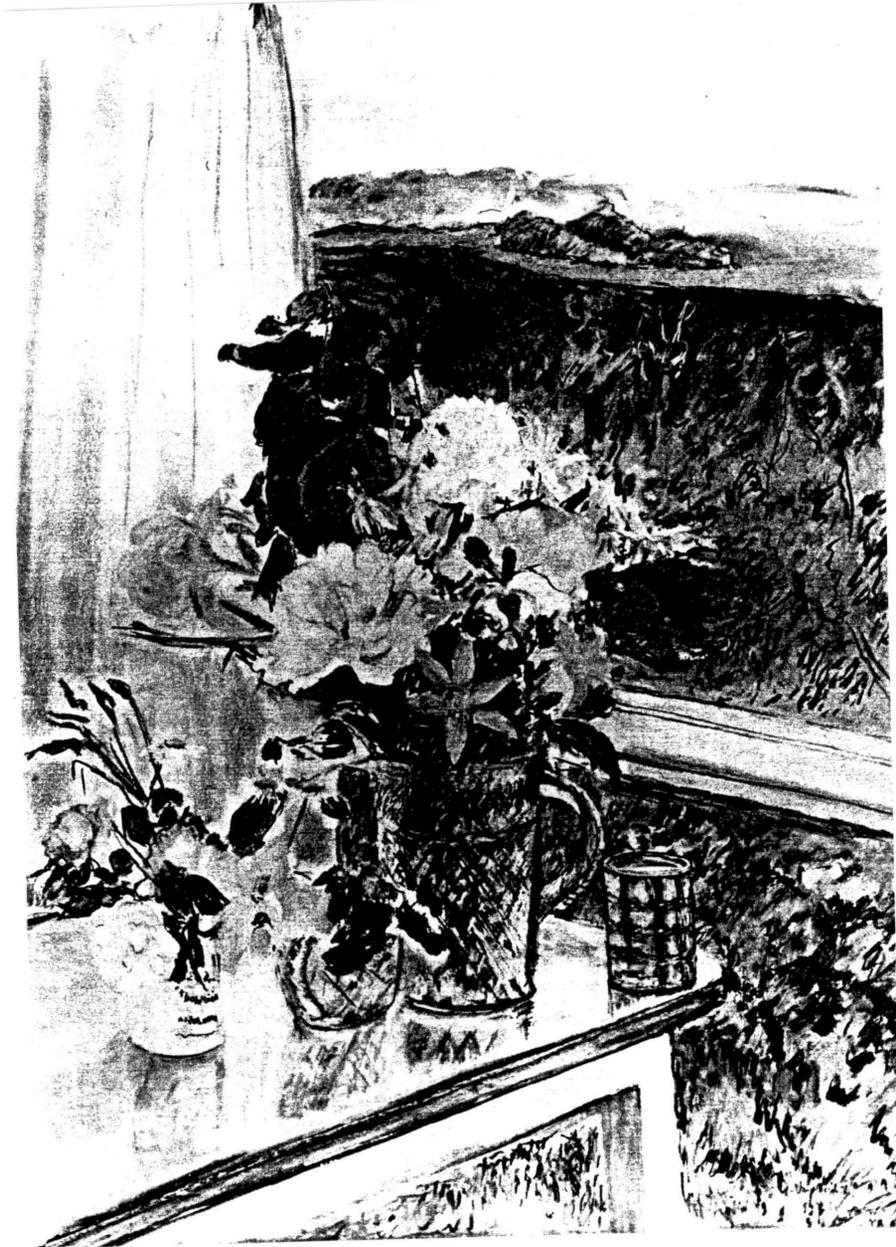


Plate 11. Jane Freilicher, Flowers I (Red Poppies), 1978, pastel, 41 1/2 X 29 1/2 inches.

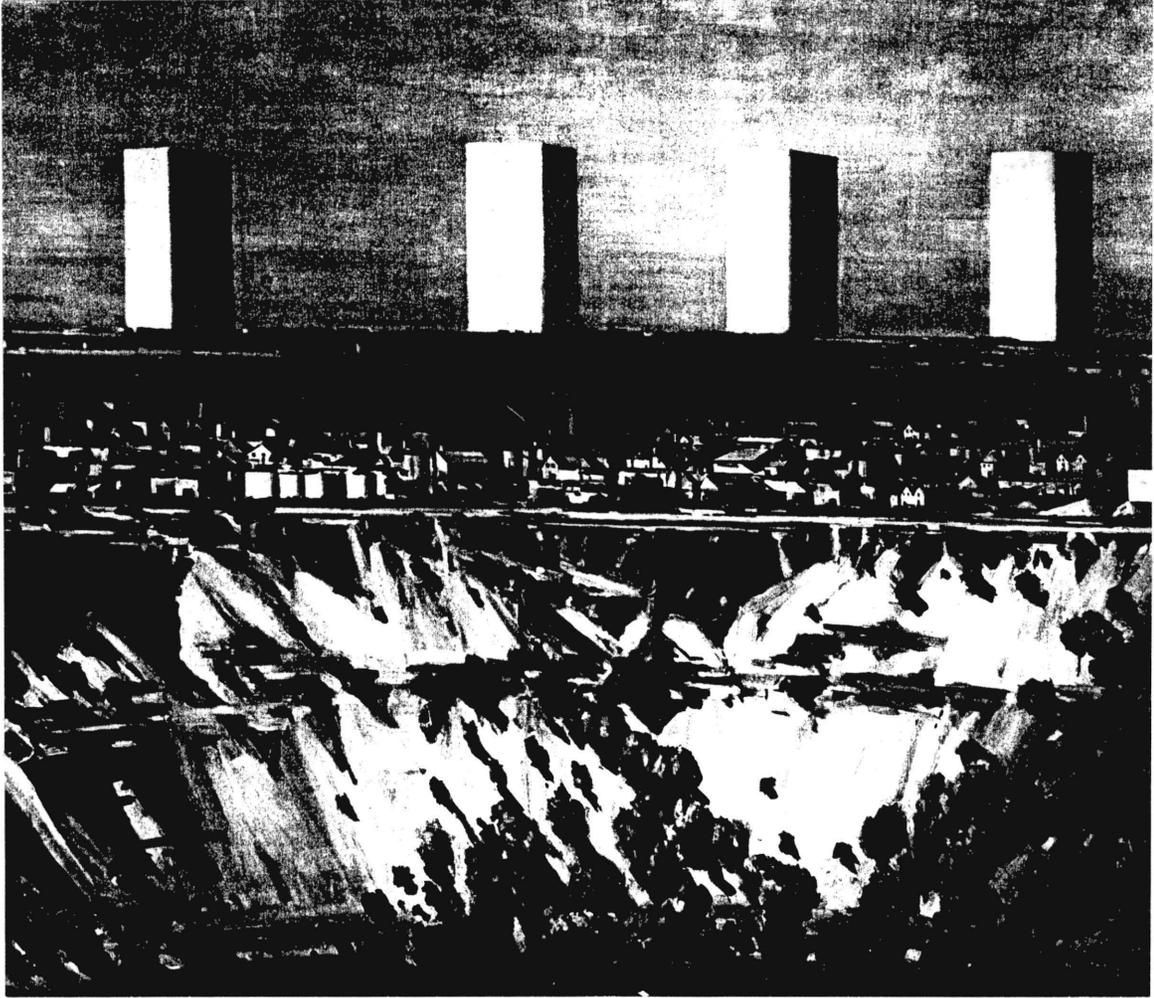


Plate 12. Sidney Goodman, Landscape With Four Towers, 1970, oil on canvas, 54 1/2 X 66 1/2 inches.

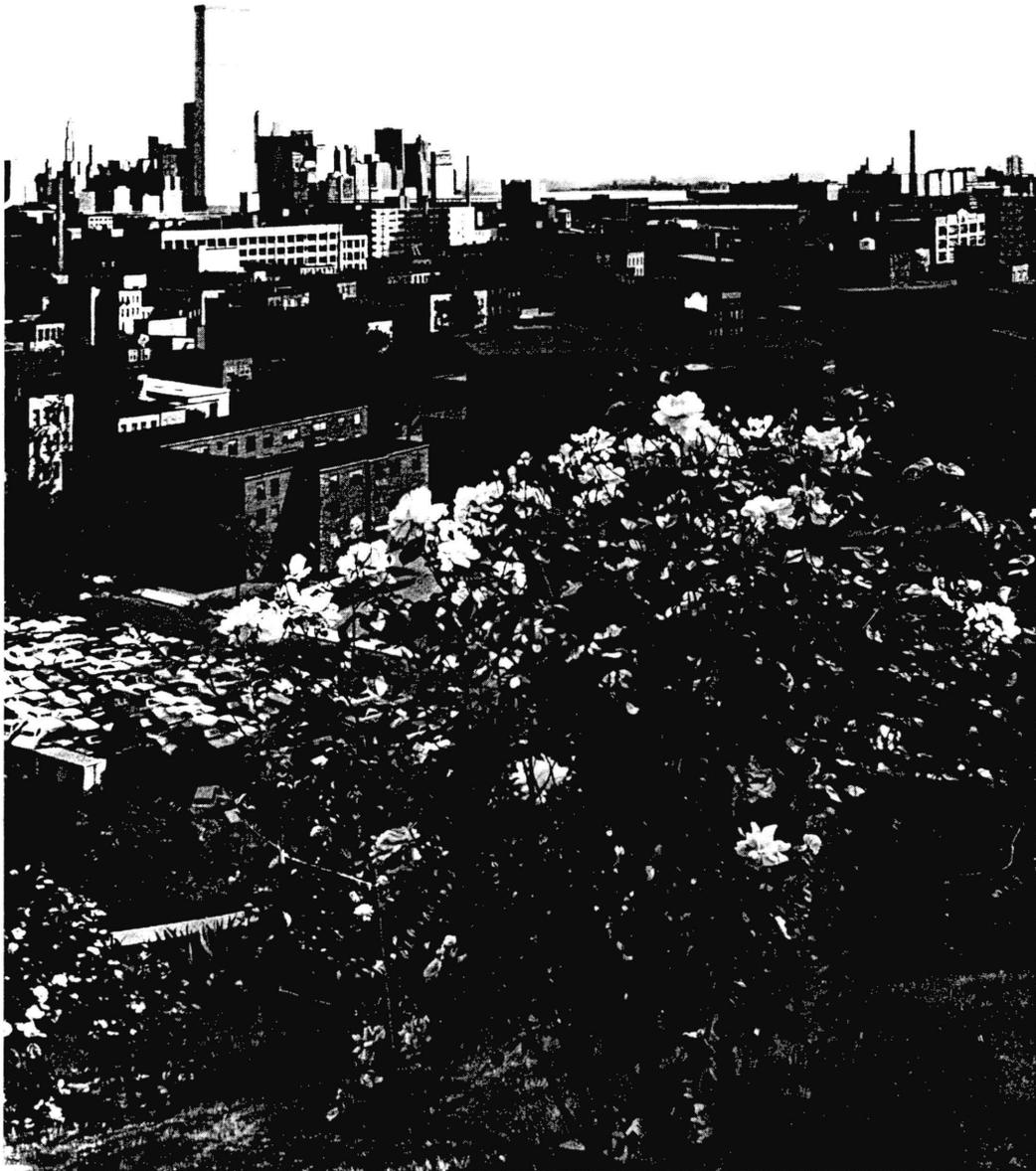


Plate 13. Catherine Murphy, View of World Trade Center from a Rose Garden, 1976, oil on canvas, 37 X 29 inches.



Plate 14. Noel Mahaffey, St. Louis, Missouri, 1971, acrylic on canvas, 60 X 72 inches.



Plate 15. John Moore, South, 1979, oil on canvas, 72 X 48 inches.

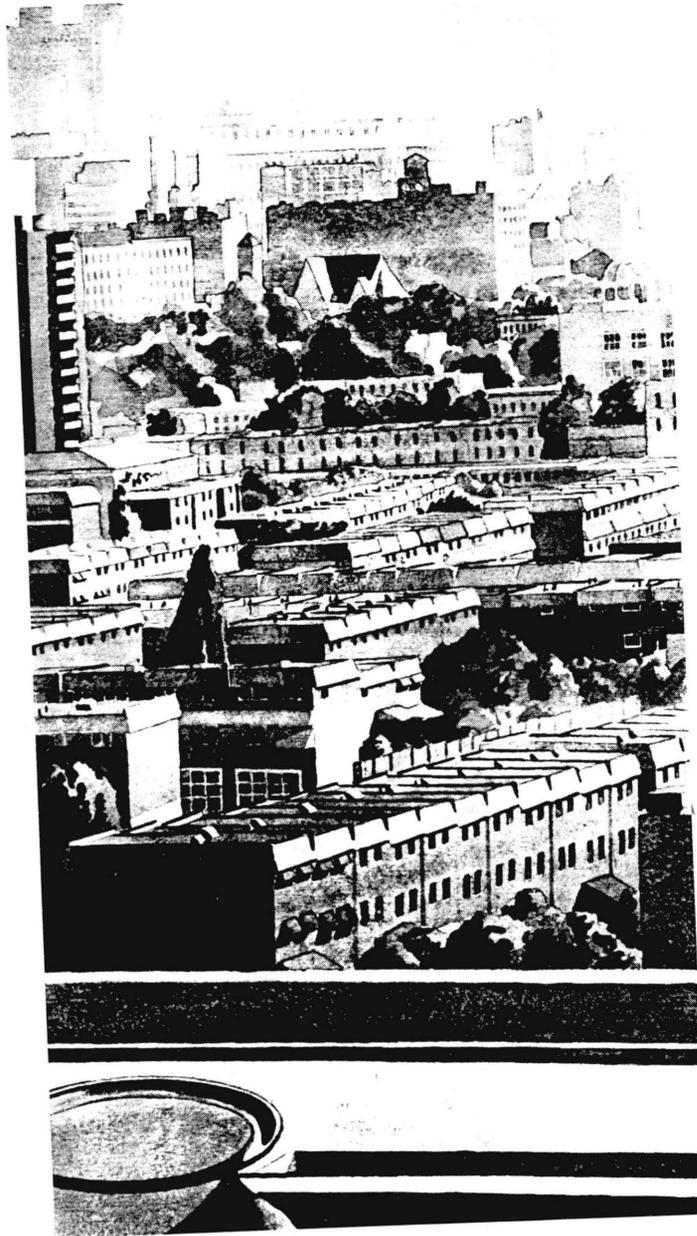


Plate 16. John Moore, Cityscape, 1978, watercolor, 24 1/2 X 10 inches.

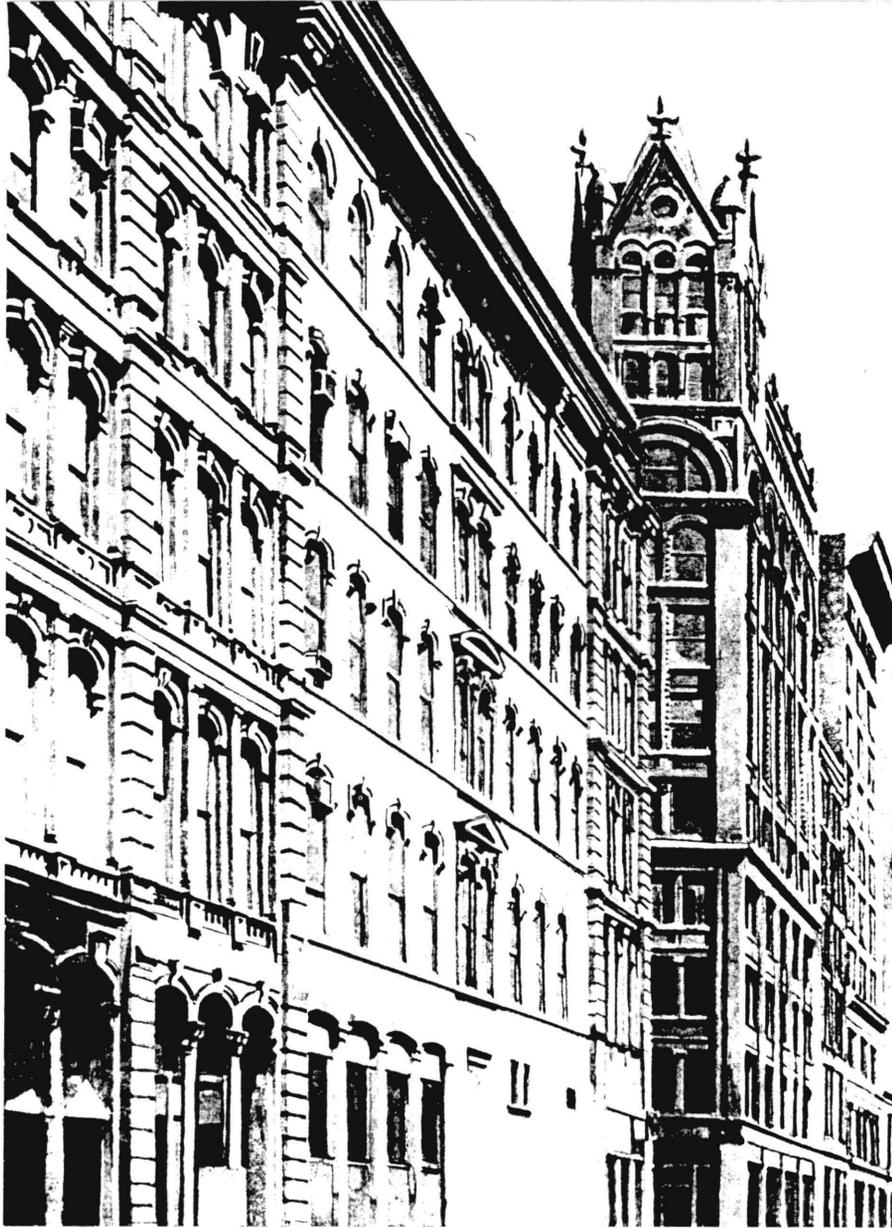


Plate 17. Richard Haas, 18th Street and Broadway, 1978, pencil and watercolor, 28  $\frac{7}{16}$  X 21  $\frac{1}{4}$  inches.

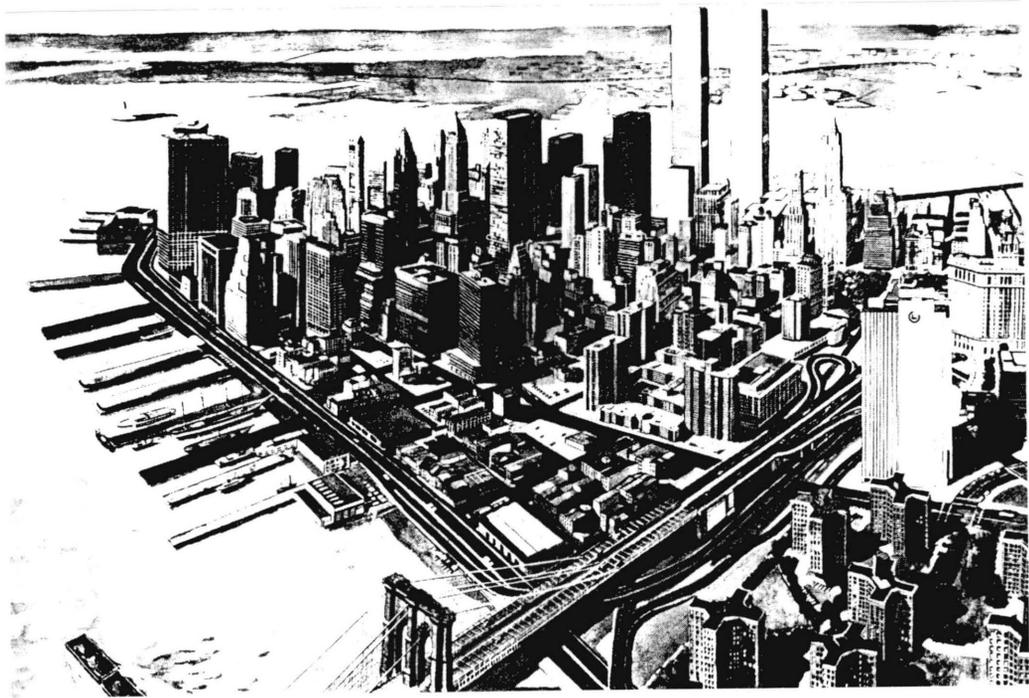


Plate 18. Richard Haas, View of Manhattan, Brooklyn Bridge, 1979, watercolor, 27 1/2 X 42 1/2 inches.

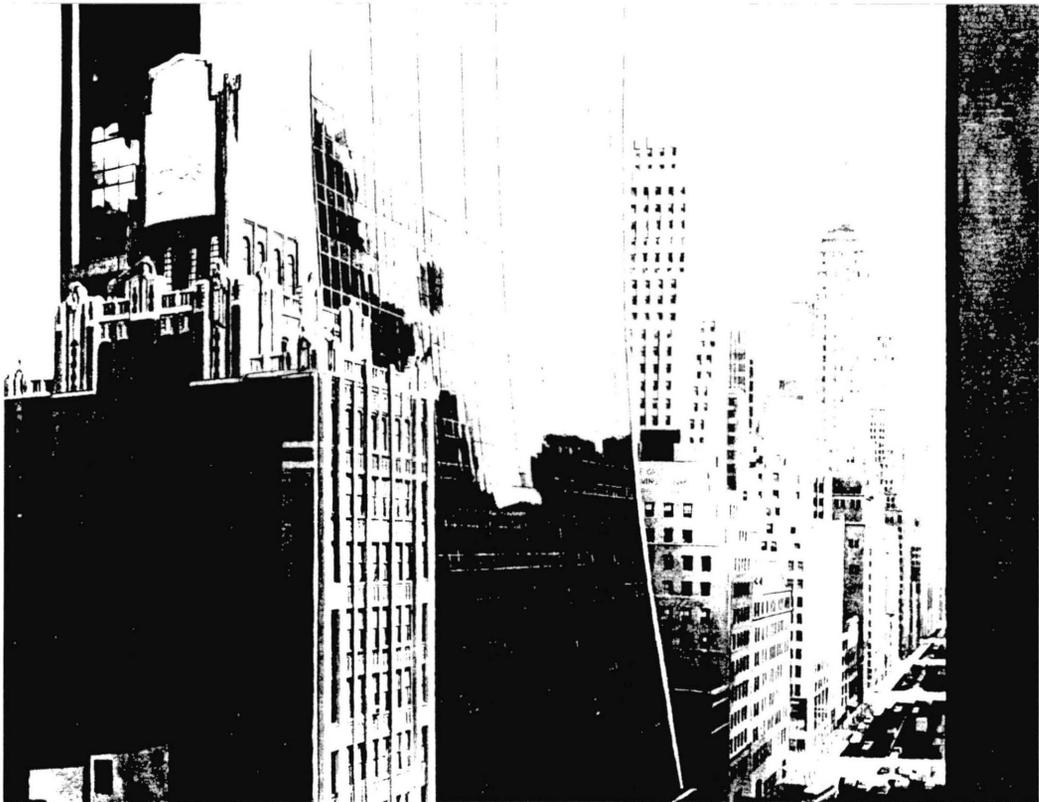


Plate 19. Richard Haas, View of 57th Street, 1978, watercolor, 26 X 33 1/4 inches.

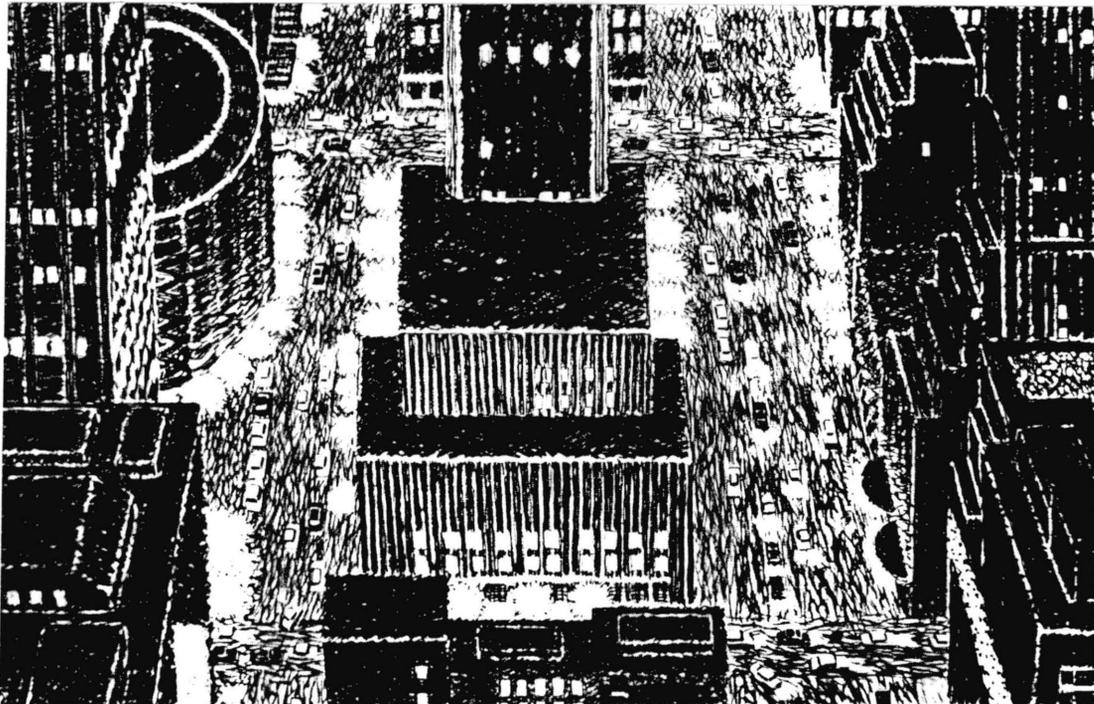


Plate 20. Yvonne Jacquette, Black Pastel, 1979, pastel on swiss vellum, 37 3/4 X 74 inches.

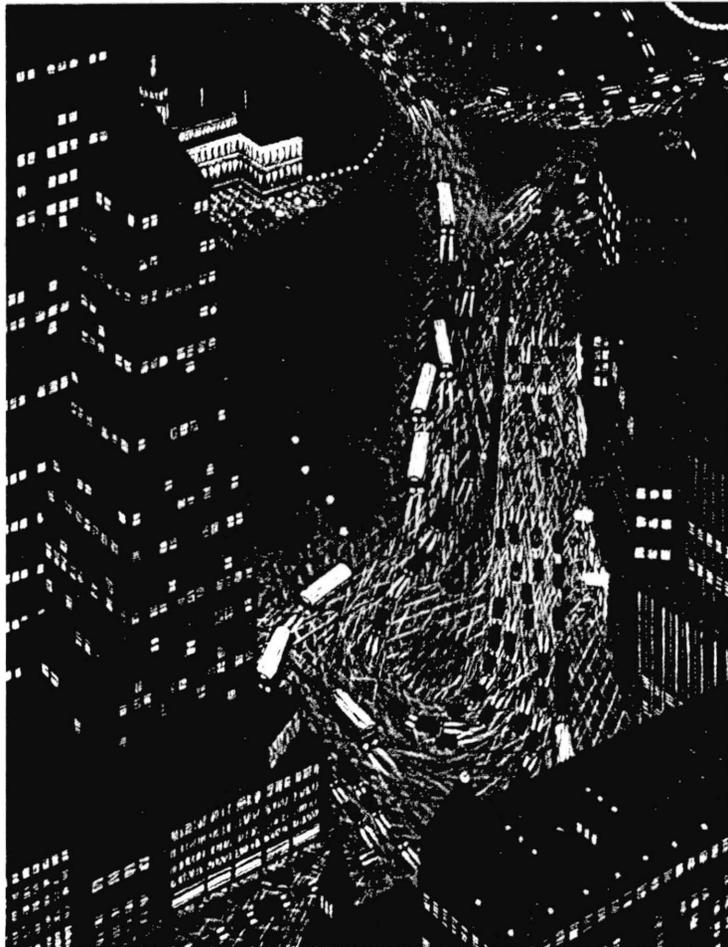


Plate 21. Yvonne Jacquette, Park Row Aerial, 1982, oil on canvas, 90 X 70 inches.



Plate 22. Rackstraw Downs, Behind the Store at Prospect,  
1979-1980, oil on canvas, 18 3/4 X 46 3/4 inches.



Plate 23. Susan Shatter, Pima Point, 1982, oil on canvas, 45 X 91 inches.



Plate 24. Susan Shatter, Cycladic Dome, 1978, watercolor, 29 1/2 X 44 1/2 inches.

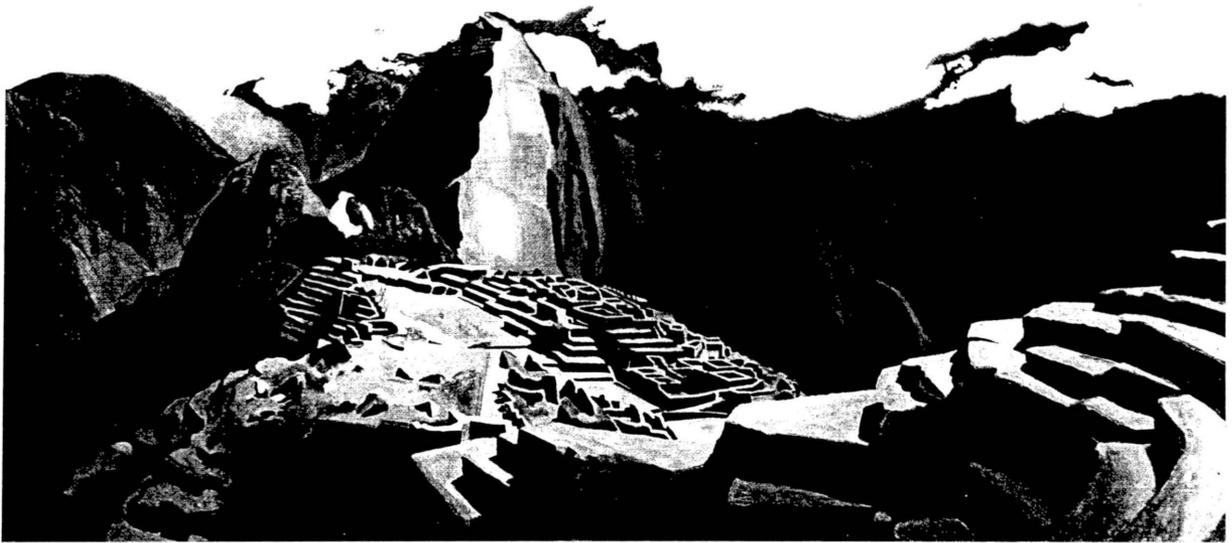


Plate 25. Susan Shatter, Panorama of Macchu Picchu, Peru, 1978, acrylic on paper mounted on linen, 48 1/2 X 113 1/2.



Plate 26. Susan Shatter, Virginia River, 1979, watercolor and pencil, 37  $\frac{3}{4}$  X 49  $\frac{3}{8}$  inches.

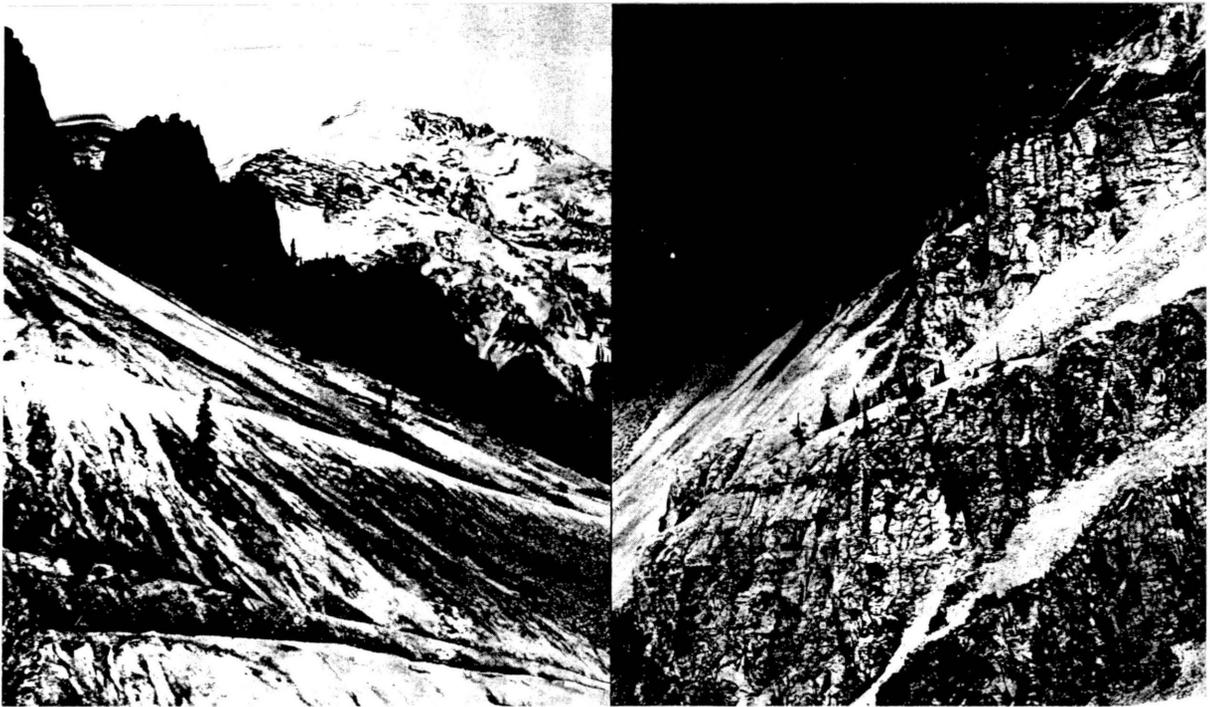


Plate 27. Ben Schonzeit, Continental Divide, 1975, acrylic on canvas, 84 X 168 inches.

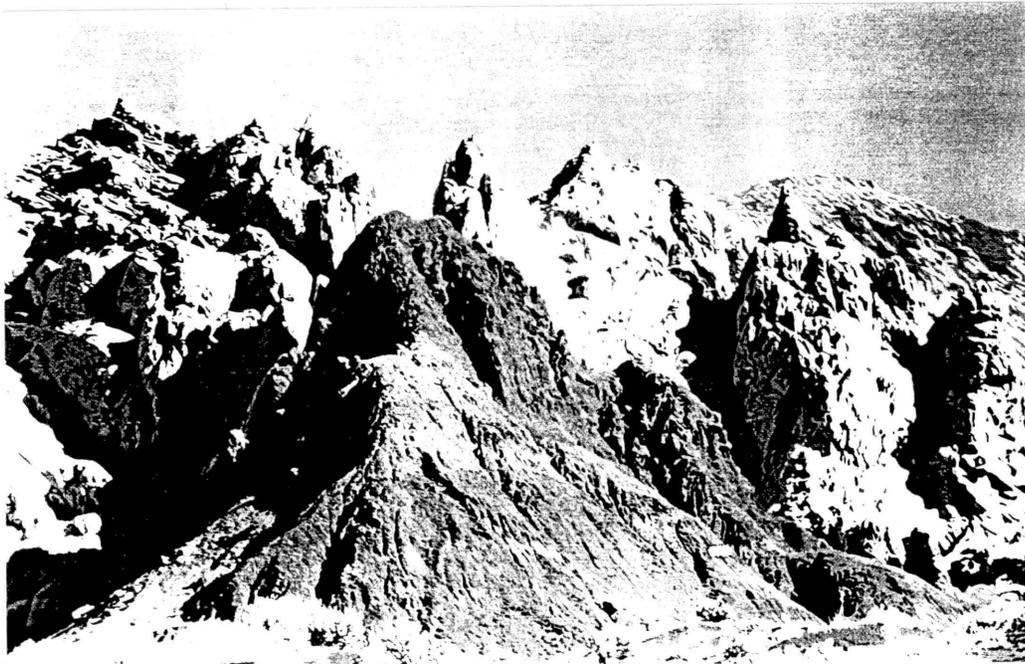


Plate 28. Nickolas Boisvert, Flameout near the Cockscomb, 1980, acrylic on paper, 29 X 45 inches.



PLate 29. Harold Bruder, Colorado National Monument, 1967,  
oil on canvas, 18 X 18 inches.



Plate 30. Ian Hornak, Persephone Leaving, Variation II, 1975, oil on canvas, 72 X 48 inches.