

THESIS

SHAPES OF SOUNDS AND SILENCE

Submitted by
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In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts
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BY NILZA GRAU HAERTEL
ENTITLED SHAPES OF SOUNDS AND SILENCE
BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

Committee on Graduate Work

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

SHAPES OF SOUNDS AND SILENCE

My work is a constant search for a significant form that would embody a multiplicity of 'meanings' and not exhaust itself in one fixed 'interpretation.'

I feel a deep, reverential fascination for Nature's perfect harmony and order and for the everlasting beauty and spirituality of music.

As for the title of my thesis, it is important to clarify that I do not intend to convey the idea that a sound or a silence can be 'translated' into a visual form. The elements of sound, such as tonal color, loudness or softness, and those of visual form do not possess a fixed connotation as do words in a language, and therefore they can never be "literally" translated. The relation that I perceive, though, lies in an infinity of abstract patterns and logical formal structures that exist within both, and my work is about the perception of this everchanging relationship and the emotion that it creates within myself.

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To my parents
Armando and Lucia Grau

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THESIS DOCUMENTATION
SHAPES OF SOUNDS AND SILENCE

I chose to work with lithography and intaglio because I feel that the specific nature and characteristics of both techniques are ideally suited to the multiplicity of my personal feelings. I sometimes like to work with the directness and spontaneity that lithography can express, and other times I feel the need to work very slowly, building up my images step by step into intaglio plates. I also like this slow motion growth, because it brings to my mind a sense of intimacy, of quietness, of meditation.

When I am working, I relate directly to my medium, letting myself respond to its own 'language,' allowing its unique characteristics to surprise me, feeling the excitement of an unexpected visual beauty whenever it happens. Nevertheless, I do not hesitate to destroy what is called a 'happy accident' if I feel that it is not compatible to the whole of my image, because what I seek is a visual form which will be significant to my eyes, which will 'speak' to me about the things that I love, bring back memories or old sentiments long forgotten or even astonish me with new insights. I never begin with a preconceived 'idea,' and I never force that relationship which I mentioned earlier with music or nature. I am not afraid of changes or uncertainties because I believe they are the threshold of growth and the path towards truth. This is the reason why I never try to

repeat myself in my work, why I have no interest whatsoever in any 'formula' or any 'successful' way of dealing with a technique. For me, every image represents a new beginning. I am interested in the unknown and in subtleties of form that I have never seen before. In a mysterious way, this is what nature and music give me. No matter how many times I look at the same tree each time I see new wonders in it that I have never noticed before and every time I listen to a musical composition that I like, it will sound unique in a million subtle ways.

It is my belief that the magic of art lies in this inexhaustible power of communication, in this perennial 'openness' of meaning that excites our imagination and feelings, that brings us new insights, that makes us see 'more,' listen 'more,' and that heightens our sensitivity towards the world around us.

I find it very important to mention here, also, that in spite of my working mainly with an abstracted form, I firmly believe that figurative art, or an art that depicts reality as close as possible to what we actually see can also have all those attributes that I mentioned before; that perennial source of emotion and the 'openness' of meaning, provided that the artist is not interested only in illustrating an idea or in telling the viewers a story, because the artist perceives various 'levels' of reality. For a truly creative vision, the external appearance of things is mysterious, ambivalent and intriguing enough to be a worthy subject matter for a work of art.

To complete my reasoning, the value of a work of art will be revealed through its formal elements, whether they conform themselves into figurative or abstract images. In addition, in the same way in

which we accept the importance and significance of music even if we cannot define its 'literal' meaning, the visual arts also need no "help" from discursive thinking, because the articulation of its formal elements or, in other words, the way in which the elements were put together by the artist, will bring to the sensitive viewer its untranslatable significance.

Concerning my own work and subject matter, I can only say that I feel a sense of exhilaration whenever I am in an environment which was left almost untouched by man, to watch the serene vastness of the desert and breathe its scented air, and to admire the silent and elegant movement of the grasses or the majesty of canyon walls, represents for me treasured moments of pure visual beauty combined with the eloquent silence of nature. Nevertheless, in my everyday path I encounter unexpected sources of beauty and emotion in the most trivial things. This complex combination of emotion and meditation, of movement and stillness, of visual beauty, of sounds and silences is somehow filtered through my senses until they become part of me and will later, unconsciously, guide the selection of my images.

Presently, I am working very emotionally with lithography, exploring large brushstrokes, rhythms and movement, in what I believe are structured compositions. At the same time, and as a counterbalance, I am working on my intaglio plates, in a slow and meticulous way, building up layer upon layer of intricate textures, as one would weave a fabric of intimate thoughts.

I don't know how long I will go on making prints in this way because there are so many other things that I want to explore. I am sure that I want to make etchings directly from nature, to make

elaborate abstract and figurative engravings and to try small meticulous lithographs... . But right now I am not concerned with that. Instead I follow my instincts, and I am comforted by the thought that my whole lifetime will not be enough to consume my motivation.

What I hope for is that my images wouldn't exhaust themselves after one first look, but will linger in the viewers' minds long enough to make them take a closer look at nature and cause them to find out for themselves the wonders that will never be completely captured.

PLATES

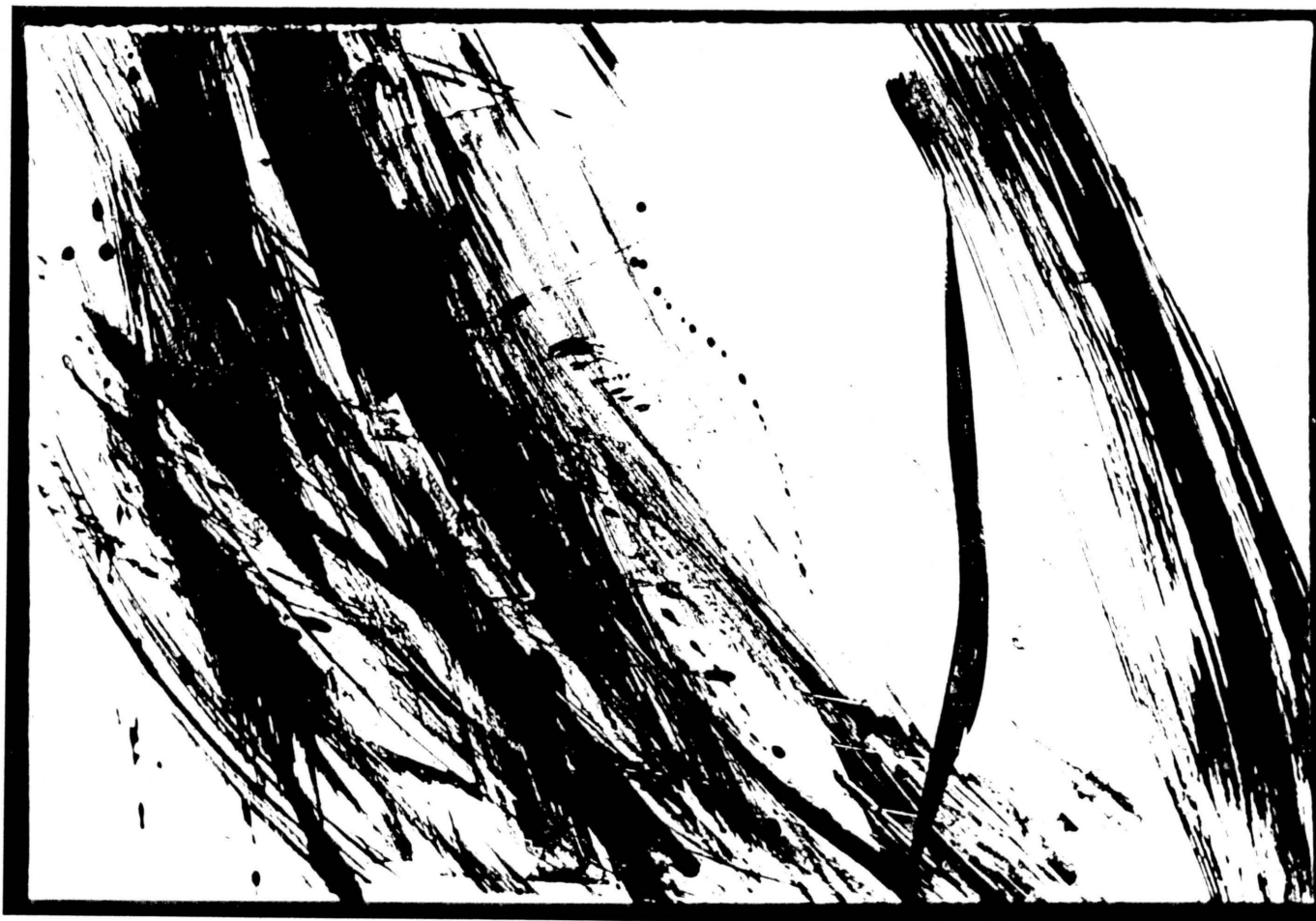


Plate 1. Echoes, Lithograph. 22 x 30". 1984.



Plate 2. Untitled, Lithograph. 22 x 30". 1984.

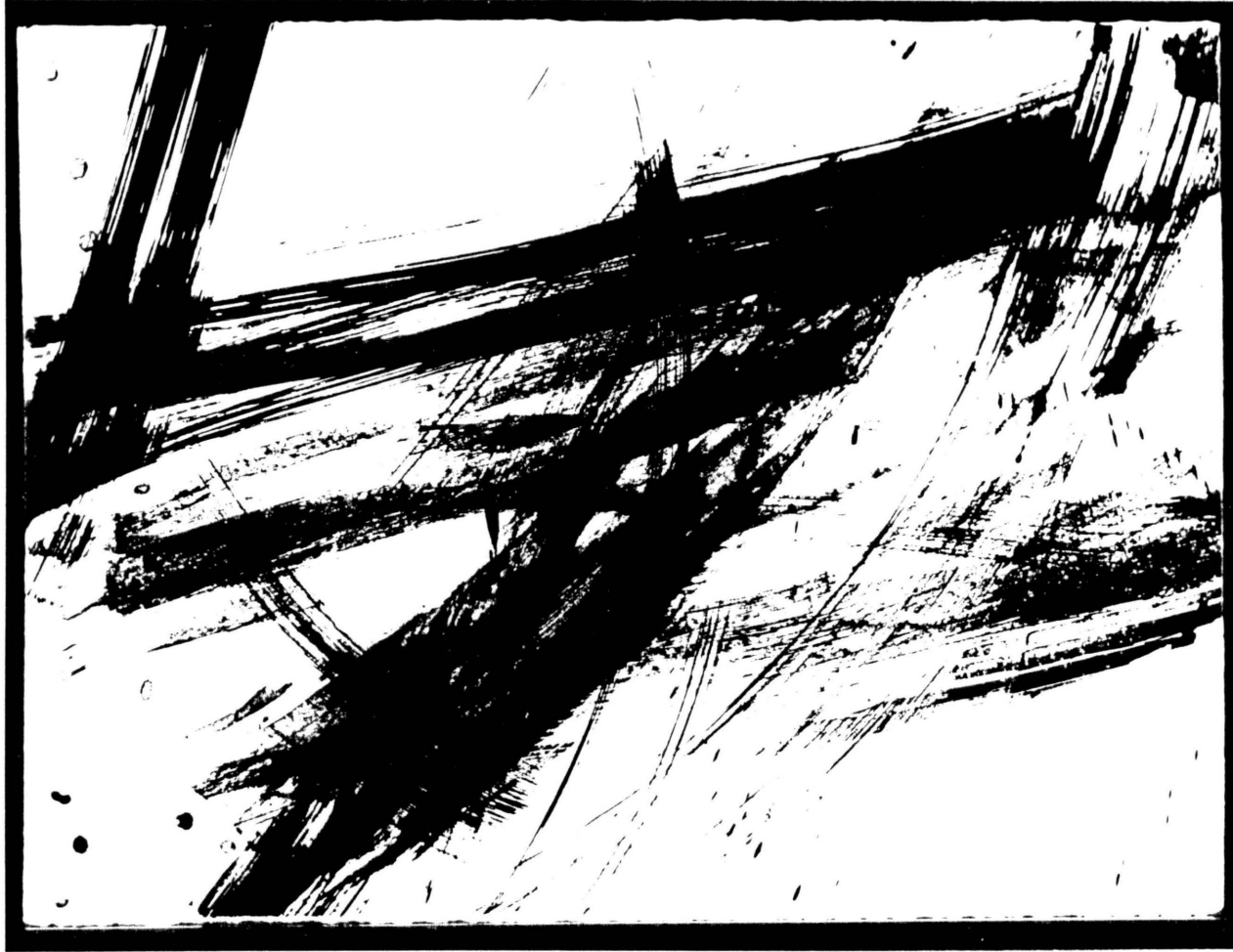


Plate 3. Untitled, Lithograph. 22 x 30". 1984.



Plate 4. Woods' Sounds and Silence, Lithograph. 18 x 24". 1983.



Plate 5. Spring, Lithograph. 22 x 30". 1984.



Plate 6. Grass and Water, Lithograph. 22 x 30". 1984.



Plate 7. Water Wings, Lithograph. 19 2/8 x 30". 1984.



Plate 8. Impromptu II, Lithograph. 19 2/8 x 20". 1984.



Plate 9. Dark Chords, Lithograph. 19 x 30". 1984.



Plate 10. Adagio, Lithograph. 12 2/8 x 15". 1983.



Plate 11. Door, Lithograph. 12 x 19". 1983.

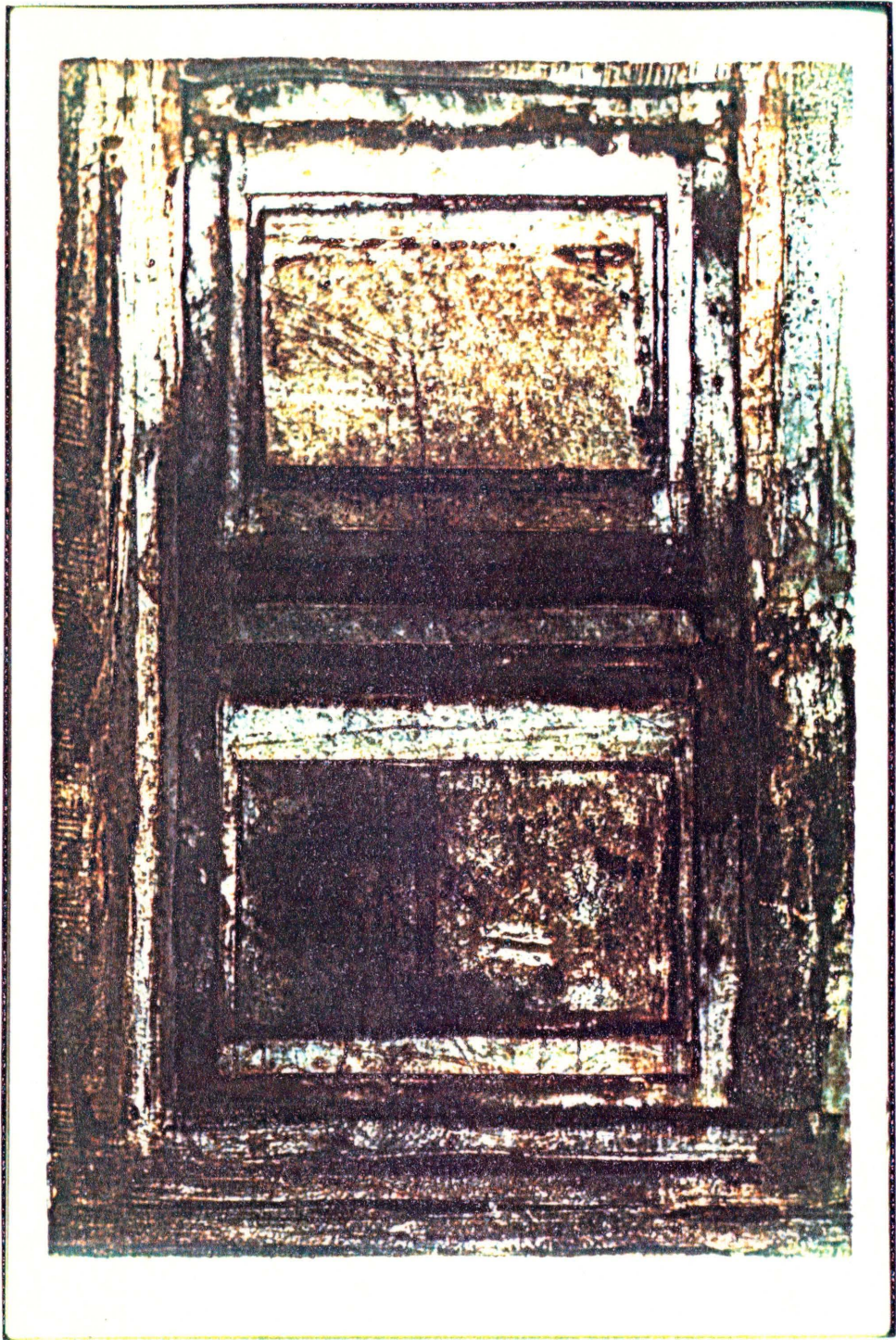


Plate 12. Door #2, Color intaglio, 11 3/8 x 17 2/8". 1984.

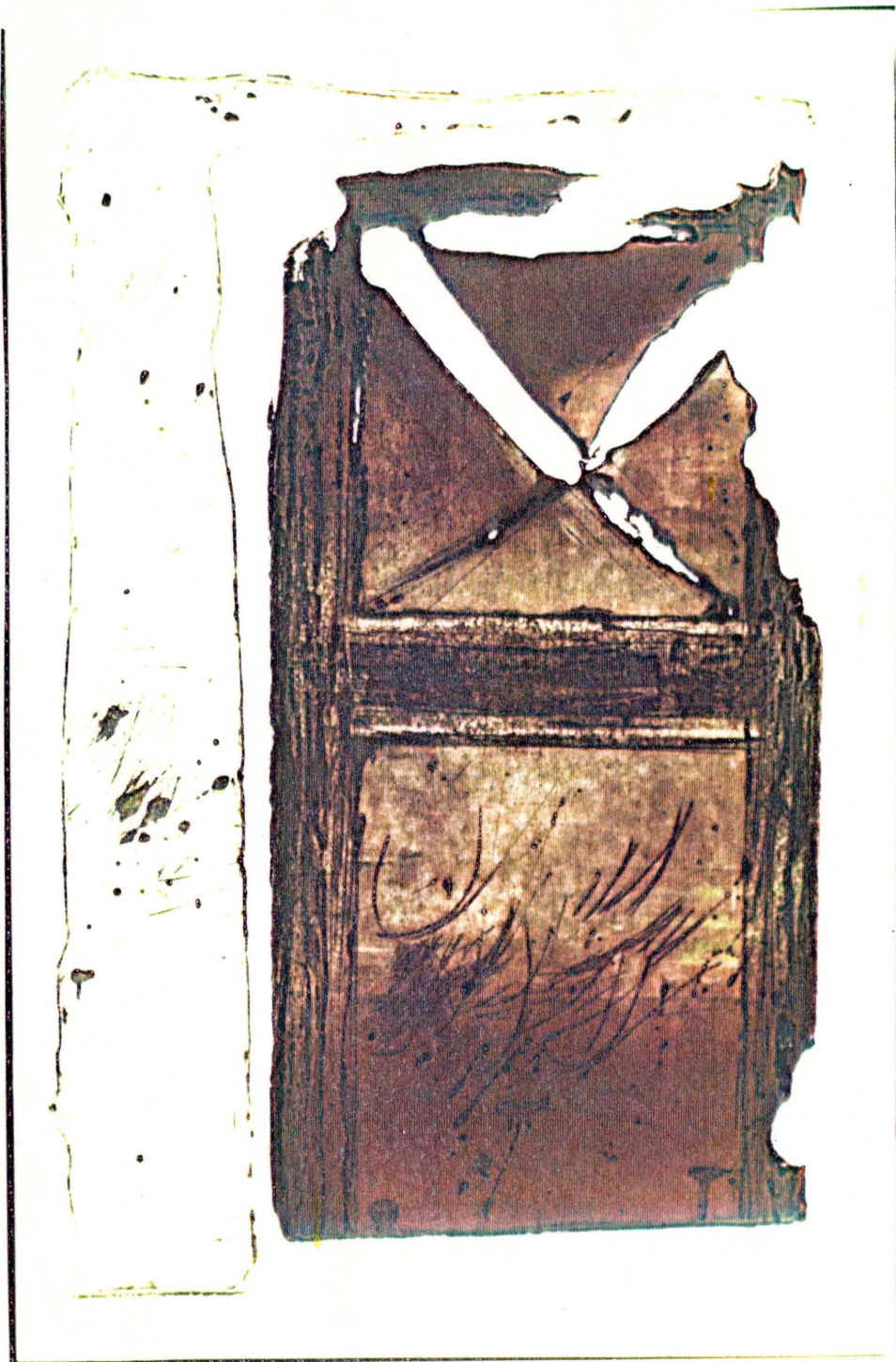


Plate 13. Door, color intaglio. 11 x 17 7/8". 1983.

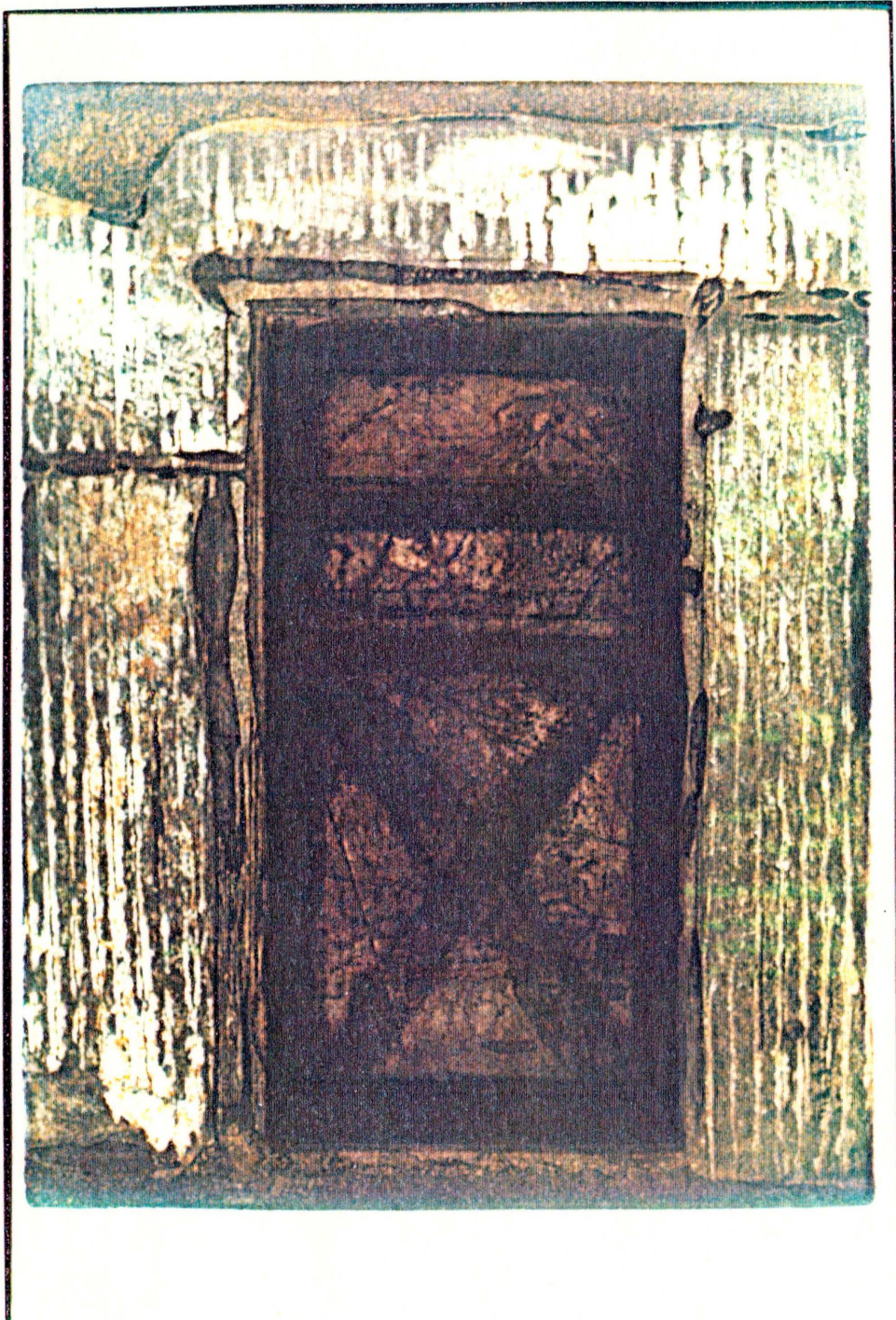


Plate 14. Closed Door #1, Color intaglio. 9 x 12". 1983.



Plate 15. Sounds and Silence, Lithograph. 22 x 30". 1984.



Plate 16. Canyon Wall, Lithograph. 22 x 30". 1985.