

LUMINIST ELEMENTS IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN LANDSCAPE PAINTING

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## INTRODUCTION

The tradition of American landscape painting developed at the beginning of the nineteenth century, almost two hundred years after settlers established the first American colonies. The subject matter of American painting before the 1820s consisted primarily of portraiture, allegorical themes and historical events. By the time Americans turned to the landscape for subject matter, the European landscape traditions of Claude, Poussin and the eighteenth century English landscape painters were well-established. Americans borrowed heavily from these European traditions in terms of both formal and conceptual concerns. It was not until the 1850s that a uniquely American approach to seeing and painting the landscape developed. This approach to landscape called luminism is described as "one of the most truly indigenous styles in the history of American art." Luminist paintings are characterized by brilliant light with an ethereal glow, mirror-like surfaces, a mood of serenity, and a representation of nature which is both real and idealized.

The identity of the luminist style is based on characteristics common to the paintings of a handful of artists working between 1850 and the 1870s -- Fitz Hugh Lane, Martin Johnson Heade, Sanford Gifford, John F. Kensett and Frederick Church. However, many of the elements of the original luminist style reappear to some degree in the work of a wide range of nineteenth and twentieth century American artists such as the genre painters Bingham and Mount, Eakins, Homer, Hopper and the Abstract Expressionists.<sup>1</sup> The presence of luminist elements in American art of the last hundred years is regarded as evidence of a uniquely American use of light and structure in painting. In the literature of American art, the connections made between luminism and subsequent American painting apply to art made through the 1950s;<sup>2</sup> no major studies have examined the presence of luminist elements in contemporary art, particularly contemporary landscape painting. The resurgence of landscape painting in America during the last twenty years raises the question of

whether luminist elements are present in this new American landscape painting. Do the elements of luminism, a uniquely American nineteenth century landscape painting style, reappear in the work of late twentieth century landscape painters?

Involved in this renaissance of American landscape painting are several artists whose formal and conceptual concerns appear to be closely linked to those of luminism. The work of these artists - April Gornik, Joan Nelson, Jane Wilson, Katherine Bowling and Keith Jacobshagen -- shares the luminist sensibility toward light, surface, mood and the balance of the real and ideal. Thus, I propose that an examination of the essential nature of luminism may offer important insights into the work of these contemporary American landscape painters.

## LUMINISM

A general definition of luminism was first developed in 1954 by John I.H. Bauer, the critic who coined the term. He defined luminism as:

... a polished and meticulous realism in which there is no sign of brushwork and no trace of impressionism, the atmospheric effects being achieved by infinitely careful gradations of tone, by the most exact study of the relative clarity of near and far objects and by a precise rendering of the variations in texture and color produced by direct or reflected rays.<sup>3</sup>

The surface of luminist paintings is smooth and glass-like and the forms are rendered with hard, distinct edges. Light as it appears in the sky and water is the dominant subject matter. The paintings of Lane and Kensett serve as examples of the luminist predilection for mirrored surfaces and glowing light (figs. 1, 2). Human beings are occasionally present, but more often, human presence is indicated by boats, a harbor or cultivated fields, as seen in the work of Martin Johnson Heade (fig. 3). The paintings have a horizontal format and are small in size but large in scale.

In support of the concept that luminism is a uniquely American style of landscape painting, Barbara Novak notes that not all of the elements of luminism are unique to American art, but it is

the combination of these elements that are indigenous:

While some qualities of luminism are indigenous, none is unique in the sense of being exclusive to America. Uniqueness in this sense is almost impossible to find in the history of art. There are only a limited number of formal factors the painter can rearrange and combine in any culture. But it is precisely this 'mix' of these factors that we can ultimately isolate as indigenous.<sup>4</sup>

In addition, she maintains that luminism is more than a combination of formal factors; it is fundamentally a way of seeing and representing the world that can be found in art that was made long after the original luminists developed the essential elements of the style:

"For luminism is ... a way of seeing so intimately related to the artist's idea of world and his relation to it that it can be identified not only in landscape painting but also in still life, genre, and portraiture. One of these modes of seeing that -- like Surrealism -- had few pure practitioners, it nonetheless touched upon and flavored the works of countless painters who worked ostensibly in other forms. Yet, as with Surrealism, it is precisely these widespread philosophical overtones that are important, for they are even larger than style, delving into fundamental attitudes toward being".<sup>5</sup>

Thus, luminism can be analyzed in conceptual terms as a way of seeing based on the artists' understanding of his/her world as well as a "mix" of formal factors. The most important conceptual elements of luminist painting are: a belief in the divinity of nature; a mode of representation based on a concept of nature rather than direct observation; a preference for the ideal over the real; and a mood of silence. The formal elements critical to an understanding of luminism are luminist light, a smooth paint surface and the use of small-sized surfaces to depict large scale landscapes.

When luminism developed in the mid-nineteenth century, the prevalent concept of nature among Americans was the belief that the natural world was a symbol of various Godly attributes. Emerson wrote that "...The noblest ministry of nature is to stand as the apparition of God. It is the organ through which the universal spirit speaks to the individual, and strives to lead back the individual to it."<sup>6</sup> The nature of God himself, as well as the truths of creation, revelation, and the apocrypha were revealed in the natural world of mountains, waterfalls, rivers, forests and sky. If

nature was a revelator of the spiritual, then art about nature was one means of connecting mankind to God in nature. Thus the landscape artists did more than represent the physical facts of nature; landscape painting communicated Christian truths inherent in the natural world. Pure pictorial representation was balanced by an obligation to represent landscape in ways which effectively conveyed these truths. This obligation is one of the factors that led to the idealization of nature.<sup>7</sup>

The idealization of the natural world by luminist artists led to the dominance of a conceptual response to nature over a perceptual response. What the artists thought and felt about nature took precedence over what they saw in nature. They didn't entirely abandon visual truth, but what they saw was strongly tempered by their personal notion of the meaning to be found in the natural world which led them beyond realism to the realm of "hyper-realism". The landscape was depicted with "magnified intensity:"<sup>8</sup> light was painted with unnatural brilliance; the water was far more luminous than in nature; and the space was carefully controlled to maximize the impact of these exaggerations. Painting the landscape with "magnified intensity" creates the impression that the painting becomes things and places rather than the representation of them. Luminist light is light, not a representation of light. We see a reflection in water, not a painting about reflection. Kensett's painting of the Shrewsbury River (fig. 2) and Lane's painting of a scene at Norman's Woe (fig. 4) are examples of "magnified intensity" in terms of light and water. Another result of idealizing the landscape is that luminist paintings depicted places that could exist in any time and in many regions of America though the work was often based on real places.

The final conceptual element essential to a definition of luminist painting is the mood of stillness. Barbara Novak characterizes luminist silence in the following quotation:

Luminist silence, like luminist time, depends on measured control. Without movement between strokes or between units of form, we hear nothing. Luminist silence implies presence through the sense of thereness rather than through activity.<sup>9</sup>

The silence of luminism evokes a feeling of permanence; time is stopped and locked in a particular moment. Even in paintings of the ocean or stormy skies, it seems as if no movement could possibly occur in the moment described in the painting.

Light is the dominant characteristic of luminist painting and is the element most essential to a definition of the luminist style. Regardless of the setting (sky, sea, land), mood, or degree of idealization, the focus of all luminist painting is light. Light is also the luminist element that critics most commonly link to subsequent nineteenth and twentieth century painting. For the luminists, light was both a conceptual and a formal element in their work. As a concept, light symbolized the divine in nature. Luminist light is painted because it is an idea about God rather than a natural phenomenon to be represented realistically. The formal qualities of luminist light distinguish it from the kind of atmospheric light that is typical of most landscape painting. Light becomes subject matter and it is painted in cool colors in a manner which eliminates evidence of brushstrokes and thus creates a smooth surface.

The luminist conceptualization of light was based on transcendentalism and spiritualism, major movements of the first half of the 19th century with a widespread following among artists, writers, philosophers and theologians of this time. These movements were strongly influenced by the philosophy of Emerson. In Nature and Culture, Barbara Novak describes Emerson's notion of the spiritual meaning of light:

For Emerson, the soul in man 'is not an organ ... not a faculty, but a light ... From within or from behind, a light shines through us upon things and makes us aware that we are nothing, but the light is all'.<sup>10</sup>

In the realm of art, Emerson wrote that light was "the first of painters" and there was "no object so foul that intense light will not make beautiful."<sup>11</sup> Thus when luminist painters painted light, they were not simply copying the light they saw in the physical world; rather, they painted light as a

symbol of the spiritual world. For example, it has been suggested that Fitz Hugh Lane was a practicing spiritualist.<sup>12</sup> The glowing light in his painting "Christmas Cove" (fig. 5) is of another realm; it certainly doesn't evoke the kind of light that one would encounter under ordinary circumstances in the natural world.

As a formal element, light is the subject matter of luminist art; the sea, fields and sky serve as the visual structure for the display of light. Novak describes the formal qualities of luminist light:

Luminist light tends to be cool, not hot, hard not soft, palpable rather than fluid, planar rather than atmospherically diffuse. Luminist light radiates, gleams and suffuses on a different frequency than atmospheric light. With atmospheric light, which is essentially painterly and optical, air circulates between particles of strokes. Air cannot circulate between the particles of matter that comprise luminist light.<sup>13</sup>

Luminists created their light with cool blues, greens and purples (figs. 6, 7). When they employed warmer colors such as red to depict fiery evening sunsets, they used cooler reds that are close to purple on the color scale. Also, when warmer colors were used, they evoked the coolness of evening temperatures (figs. 8, 9). The smooth, glass-like surface of luminist light results from the absence of stroke, gesture and built-up layers of paint.

The final formal element cited as essential to the unique character of luminist art is the relationship between size and scale in luminist painting. Luminist paintings are small, though the spaces they describe are vast. The small size offers the viewer an intimacy with the image. With few exceptions, luminist paintings typically have dimensions of 10 to 30 inches. This dichotomy between size and scale is not only a formal device but also further evidence of the conceptual nature of luminist art. For the luminists, it was not necessary to represent the vast grandeur of American nature on large surfaces as the Hudson River painters did. The grandeur of nature was mental and could just as easily be evoked on modestly-sized surfaces which invite an intimate view.

The essence of the American luminist style, a unique combination of conceptual and formal

elements, is well summarized by Novak:

In the luminist painting, the eradication of stroke nullifies process and assists a confrontation with detail. It also transforms atmospheric "effect" from active painterly bravura into a pure and constant light in which reside the most interesting paradoxes of nineteenth-century American painting. They are paradoxes which, with extraordinary subtlety, engage in a dialectic that guides the onlooker toward a lucid transcendentalism. The clarity of this luminist atmosphere is applicable both to air and crystal, to hard and soft, to mirror and void. These reversible dematerializations serve to abolish two egos -- first that of the artists, then the spectator's. Absorbed in contemplation of a world without movement, the spectator is brought into a wordless dialogues with nature, which quickly becomes the monologue of transcendental unity.<sup>14</sup>

### LUMINIST ELEMENTS IN LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY LANDSCAPE PAINTING

A study of luminism suggests that landscape painting involves issues that are far more complex than a straightforward and objective representation of the natural world. Human beings imbue the natural world with a myriad of meaning. Landscape painting can be a means of communicating one's personal understanding of transcendent meaning in nature. Luminist artists clearly made choices about how to represent the landscape which were not based on the visual realities they encountered. They employed light as subject for reasons other than the fact that light happened to be present in the landscape on the day that the painting was made. Luminists also chose to idealize the landscape because of their understanding of the divine in nature. To support their concept of the relationship between nature and the divine, they made specific formal choices which communicated their ideas in visual terms. If contemporary artists make some of the same choices as the luminists, can one draw the same conclusions about their approach to art-making?

The work of five artists involved in the new American landscape painting movement -- Katherine Bowling, April Gornik, Keith Jacobshagen, Joan Nelson and Jane Wilson (hereby referred to as the group of five) -- seems to be closely connected to that of the luminists because of the strong, glowing light which is the visual focus of the work. Other luminist formal elements variously



employed by these artists are the smooth surface and the depiction of vast landscape spaces dominated by sky or water on modestly-sized surfaces. (For a detailed discussion of each artist, see the appendix.) Comparing the work of the group of five with that of the luminists reveals similarities that go beyond the purely visual; the artists also share conceptual concerns which are the bases for their approach to landscape art.

Before examining the specific elements of luminism that are present in the work of the group of five, it is important to note that critics and one artist link their work to that of the luminists in general terms. In a survey of the literature covering the work of these contemporary artists, there are a surprising number of direct references comparing their art to that of the luminists, particularly regarding the use of light. In reference to the Jane Wilson painting "American Light, 1991" (fig. 10), one reviewer describes her painting in terms that could easily apply to luminist paintings such as Church's "Twilight in the Wilderness" (fig. 9) or Gifford's "Hook Mountain, Near Nyack, on the Hudson" (fig. 11):

American Light, 1991 -- a powerful work bringing together the objective face and inner spirit of nature -- fairly shimmers with painterly effects. Recalling the 19th century luminist landscapes, this work boasts a glorious stretch of sky filled with billowing clouds that reflect the sun's rays."<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, Joan Nelson's approach to landscape painting is linked with the Hudson River artists and the luminist Heade: "On one hand, she is working in a typically American vein of romantic landscape paintings -- in a tradition with ties to Albert Bierstadt and Martin Johnson Heade -- and yet she is doing it from reproductions of other works of art."<sup>16</sup> Keith Jacobshagen's work is linked to a "tradition of landscape painting that can be traced back through the American luminists to the German Romantics of the early 19th century."<sup>17</sup> His work is characterized by "an almost palpable, brooding stillness ... charged by a dusky drama of atmosphere and light created by an updated Luminist palette".<sup>18</sup> The painting "Mad Days, Dog Days" (fig.12) is an example of the atmosphere

and light in Jacobshagen's paintings which is similar to that in Church's "View Near Stockbridge" (fig. 13). April Gornik is another artist whose work is linked to the luminist style by the critics and by the artist herself. "She feels that her work has closer affinities to that of the quieter, more understated 19th century American luminists, especially Martin Johnson Heade."<sup>19</sup> The impending storm in "Thunderhead" (fig. 14) has a feeling of quiet foreboding found in Heade's "Thunderstorm Over Narragansett Bay" (fig. 15).

The above are examples of connections in general terms made between the group of five and the luminists in the recent journal literature. It is also striking to note that many of the words used to describe the contemporary landscapes are the same as those used to describe luminism. Light in the contemporary paintings is described as luminous, glowing, palpable and shimmering. The landscapes are idealized, classical, sublime and filled with brooding stillness. These generalized connections between the work of the group of five and the luminists lay the groundwork for an exploration of the specific formal and conceptual elements common to their work.

The importance of light to a painting and in the landscape is the primary and most obvious visual connection between the luminists and the contemporary landscape painters. April Gornik has been strongly influenced by many elements of the Hudson River School and the luminists.<sup>20</sup> She creates luminous, glowing skies with thin smooth layers of paint on linen. She also tends to use the cool palette of the luminists (fig. 17). Like the luminists, Joan Nelson creates fields of sky which literally glow; they are light, not representations of light (fig. 18):

The skies into which the individual trees and shrubs protrude are suffused with light. As a description, 'glowing' does not do justice to this effect. These panels nearly hum with light. Yet as in 19th-century Luminist canvases, there is no identifiable source for the profound illumination.<sup>21</sup>

The same is true of the light in Katherine Bowling's work (fig. 19) as described in the following quotation:

As evocations of light breaking through darkness -- it [the light] mingles with late afternoon shadows in some paintings, pierces the gloom of night in others -- these paintings recall the Romantic fascination with light as a metaphor for truth and spirit. By and large, however, for Bowling light is ultimately less metaphysical than abstract.<sup>22</sup>

In reviews of Jane Wilson's work, there are references to the radiant and "luminous sky suffused with delicately gradated blues, yellows and touches of green and lavender..." and other descriptions of sky and light such as "shimmering", "heavenly", "poetic", etc.<sup>23</sup> The beauty of the light in her work is evident in the painting "Lifting Storm, Water Mill" (fig. 19). Thus it is clear that for the luminists and the group of five, light is central to their paintings and is intended to represent more than a true-to-life reproduction of light in nature.

The group of five paints light in the cooler palette of the luminists with a surface that is smooth and non-gestural. Only in the work of Jane Wilson is some evidence of brushwork visible. However, her painting surfaces are smooth because the color is built up in thin layers of well-blended, overlapping strokes.

The last formal similarity between luminism and the group of five is the relationship between size and scale. The work of all of the contemporary artists depicts nature on a vast scale although the size of the work varies. Wilson and Jacobshagen tend to work on small surfaces (approximately 15" dimensions). Bowling's work is intermediately-sized (30" to 50" dimensions) whereas Gornik and Wilson work on large canvases (80" to 100" dimensions). Thus all of the artists depict nature on a large scale, but only three of the five share the luminist predilection for recreating the capaciousness of sky and open landscapes on a small surface.

April Gornik's analysis of the luminist style could serve as a summary of the conceptual impulses underlying the group of five's approach to making landscape paintings:

I began to see that the luminists were not simply recording scenes; in fact, they did not make traditionally realistic paintings at all. They achieved something new in the history of art: instead of providing an illusionary window on reality, they attempted to recreate a landscape's

experience for the viewer. For each of them, depicting the way the world actually looked was not nearly as important as conveying the sensation, the spiritual essence of the landscape. Their paintings were not so much depictions as they were complex machines of special effects.<sup>24</sup>

"A landscape's experience" is the meaning that contemporary society finds in the natural world. Like the luminists, the group of five approach nature with the attitude that there is more to the natural world than the purely visual. They attribute spiritual and mystical qualities to nature. They differ in their understanding of the character of the spiritual -- for luminists it is specifically Christian, for the group of five it is not. Many contemporary artists accept the "transformative mystical implications"<sup>25</sup> of the natural world, implications which seem to be essential to our experience as human beings. The group of five, like the luminists, do not simply copy the visual characteristics of the natural world; rather, their work evokes the mystery, the primeval and the spiritual in nature. The contemporary painters "approach landscape not to transcribe but to transform"<sup>26</sup> and their work is as related to the artists' ideas about nature as it is to the visual realities of the natural world.

This transformation of the objective visual reality of the landscape into a subjective response to nature is a conceptual approach to landscape painting embraced by the group of five. They base their work on what they see in nature; however, what they see is secondary to what they feel or think about nature. Gornik believes that "nature is imagined or concocted, not dutifully recorded"<sup>27</sup> in landscape painting. A subjective interpretation of the landscape is an important aspect of Katherine Bowling's work. She describes her approach to representing landscape in an interview with critic Sue Scott:

I don't consider my work to be about specific places or renderings of anything in particular. They are about mood and memory. I have come to realize that I am more interested in depicting a psychological space. A space where many people can enter and have their own thoughts that are not to be directed in a single way.<sup>28</sup>

Critic Buzz Spector characterizes Jacobshagen's landscapes as "not a portrait of a definite place at

a definite time, but of an ideal place at an ideal time."<sup>29</sup> The subjective nature of Wilson's work is described in an excerpt from a review by John Ash and seen in the painting "Sun After Rain" (fig. 20):

These are not so much paintings of specific locations as studies of the passage of time and weather. The landscapes are as much remembered as seen. The fields and shores of Long Island are imbued with memories of an Iowa childhood -- the vast skies and 'endless vistas of America' (to use Wilson's own phrase). It is this fusion of the real and the ideal, the past and the present, rather than any direct borrowings from the Abstract Expressionists, that accounts for the element of abstraction in her work.<sup>30</sup>

The extent to which these artists conceptualize nature is demonstrated by how much they rely on the natural world as the source of their paintings. Much of Jacobshagen's work is done on site and his work is the most descriptive of specific places.<sup>31</sup> Gornik relies on photographs and memory for her landscape images rather than on-site drawings.<sup>32</sup> In the past, Bowling based her work on polaroids but now tends to let drips of paint suggest landscape imagery.<sup>33</sup> Finally, Joan Nelson gathers her landscape imagery from the old master paintings of Lorraine, Fragonard, Constable and others.<sup>34</sup> Thus to some degree, all of these artists base their work on what they see in nature. Yet the representation of nature in their paintings is tempered by their intellectual concept of nature and emotional response to the natural world. Like the luminists, the group of five paint spaces that are not specific to a place.

The mood in the paintings of the group of five is one of quiet stillness, like that in the luminist paintings. John Ash describes the contemplative mood of a Wilson landscape:

The typical Wilson landscape, with its very low horizon and luminous sky suffused with delicately gradated blues, yellows and touches of green and lavender, induces a mood of contemplative quiet -- but there is more to her work than quietism. There is also drama and splendor.<sup>35</sup>

Jacobshagen's paintings also have some of the drama and splendor of clouds and sunset while retaining a mood of stillness. The work of Bowling and Nelson has a mood of eternal quiet, giving

the impression that nothing could possibly alter that mood (figs. 18, 19). Gornik's work has the mood of stillness but also evokes a sense of foreboding with the hint of an impending storm or the inclusion of a strange landscape (fig. 15).

It is clear that many elements of luminism reappear in the work of the group of five. These contemporary landscape painters choose to incorporate luminist formal and conceptual elements into their work for many of the same reasons that the luminists did. The predominant elements of luminism found in their work are those which celebrate the light and space of the American landscape. Their art-making process involves a subjective exploration of the transcendent, spiritual meanings that human beings ascribe to the natural world rather than a realistic representation of visual truth. To express the spiritual, they idealize the landscape by heightening the intensity of the light and the vastness of American space. These contemporary artists incorporate luminist elements into their work because they share the luminist sensibility toward making art about the American landscape. Luminism is based on a personal response to the unique and compelling nature of the American landscape experience -- to the brilliance of the light and the vast spaces -- and on the American preoccupation with the natural world which began when the first settlers were both overwhelmed and enchanted by the American wilderness.

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## APPENDIX

### April Gornik

April Gornik is probably the best known artist in the group of five. Her work is large (averaging approximately 80" x 100") and is characterized by simple landscape forms (figs 21, 22). Her compositions are dominated by sky and/or water without reference to human activity or narrative. The skies are vast in scale and are imbued with haunting light. Her ideas for the landscapes are based on photographs and memory without evoking specific places. Her painting surfaces are "smooth, flat and precise"<sup>1</sup> with space which is organized in a classical manner of receding planes. The mood of the paintings is one of "uneasy provocative stillness or threatening undercurrents..."<sup>2</sup> Gornik acknowledges that she is influenced by the early 19th century landscape painters such as Church and Bierstadt, and especially the luminist Heade.<sup>3</sup>

### Jane Wilson

Several elements of Jane Wilson's work place her squarely in the luminist mode. She takes the luminist position of artistic anonymity: "The artist effaces herself; all of her technique and skill are placed at the service of a final effect of radiant simplicity -- nothing but earth, sky and sea."<sup>4</sup> She doesn't work with specific places but evokes a "personal vision conveying a sensation of light and color that leads inward rather than outward."<sup>5</sup> Her large canvases (approximately 60" x 80") describe the light and luminosity found in the American landscape. Like the luminists, her work is seen as a "fusion of the real and ideal, the past and the present".<sup>6</sup> One major element of Wilson's work which differs from that of the luminists is the surface of her paintings. She achieves the glowing, translucent light in her paintings by building up thin layers of oil paint to create soft-edged atmospheric skies in the manner of the Abstract Expressionists, particularly Rothko. Her surfaces

are more atmospheric and soft-edged than the smooth glass-like surfaces of luminist painting (figs. 23, 24).<sup>7</sup>

### Joan Nelson

The inclusion of Joan Nelson in this study is based on two factors -- the small size of her work and the intensely luminous light of her landscapes. The size of her work averages 15" x 15" and yet the parts of trees thrusting into the picture space evokes the vastness and infinity of a western sky. John Cheim, gallery director, stated that "one small painting holds a terrific amount of space, the space of a large painting."<sup>8</sup> She paints portraits of trees based not on observation but on trees in reproductions of old master paintings. Thus, the natural world that triggers her work is the most conceptual of the group. The light in her paintings, created with layers of paint, wax medium and varnish, becomes real light (figs. 25, 26). Timothy Cohrs compares her light to the luminists in Arts Magazine:

The skies ... are suffused with light. As a description, glowing does not do justice to this effect. These panels nearly hum with light. Yet as in 19th-century Luminist canvases, there is no identifiable source for the profound illumination.<sup>9</sup>

### Katherine Bowling

The work of Katherine Bowling is also included here primarily because of the nature of the light in her paintings and the smooth, flat surfaces (figs. 27, 28). The light glows and shimmers and often seems to be the subject of the paintings. The light in her work is described by Eleanor Heartney:

As evocations of light breaking through darkness -- it mingles with late afternoon shadows in some paintings, pierces the gloom of night in others -- these paintings recall the Romantic fascination with light as a metaphor for truth and spirit. By and large, however, for Bowling light is ultimately less metaphysical than abstract.<sup>10</sup>

It is obvious that the impulse behind her use of light and her reliance on nature as subject matter is different from that of the luminists. Though she does use photographic images as the starting point for her work, she has increasingly relied on the action of the paint during the initial application to suggest the natural forms of the painting. Her work seems to be "more about the nature of painting landscapes than about landscape itself."<sup>11</sup> This also connects her to the luminists whose work was as much about the manifestation of God in nature as about landscape. Bowling's surfaces are smooth and flat and built up in layers. They evoke the hard, smooth surfaces of luminist painting.

### Keith Jacobshagen

Keith Jacobshagen is the lesser known of the group. Like the luminists, he works on a small canvases while depicting vast skies and open farmland. His work is based on nature in a specific place -- the midwest. His work is most closely based on the reality of the natural world that he sees and yet like the luminists, there is an element of the ideal in his work (fig. 29). His work was described as "not a portrait of a definite place at a definite time, but of an ideal place at an ideal time. The late evening sky has an almost palpable, brooding stillness...".<sup>12</sup> Thus, Jacobshagen is linked to the luminists in terms of the size/scale relationships in his work, the ideal/real balance, the stillness, and the importance of light in the landscape.

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## FIGURES



Figure 1.

Fitz Hugh Lane, Boston Harbor at Sunset, 1850.  
26 1/4 x 42 inches



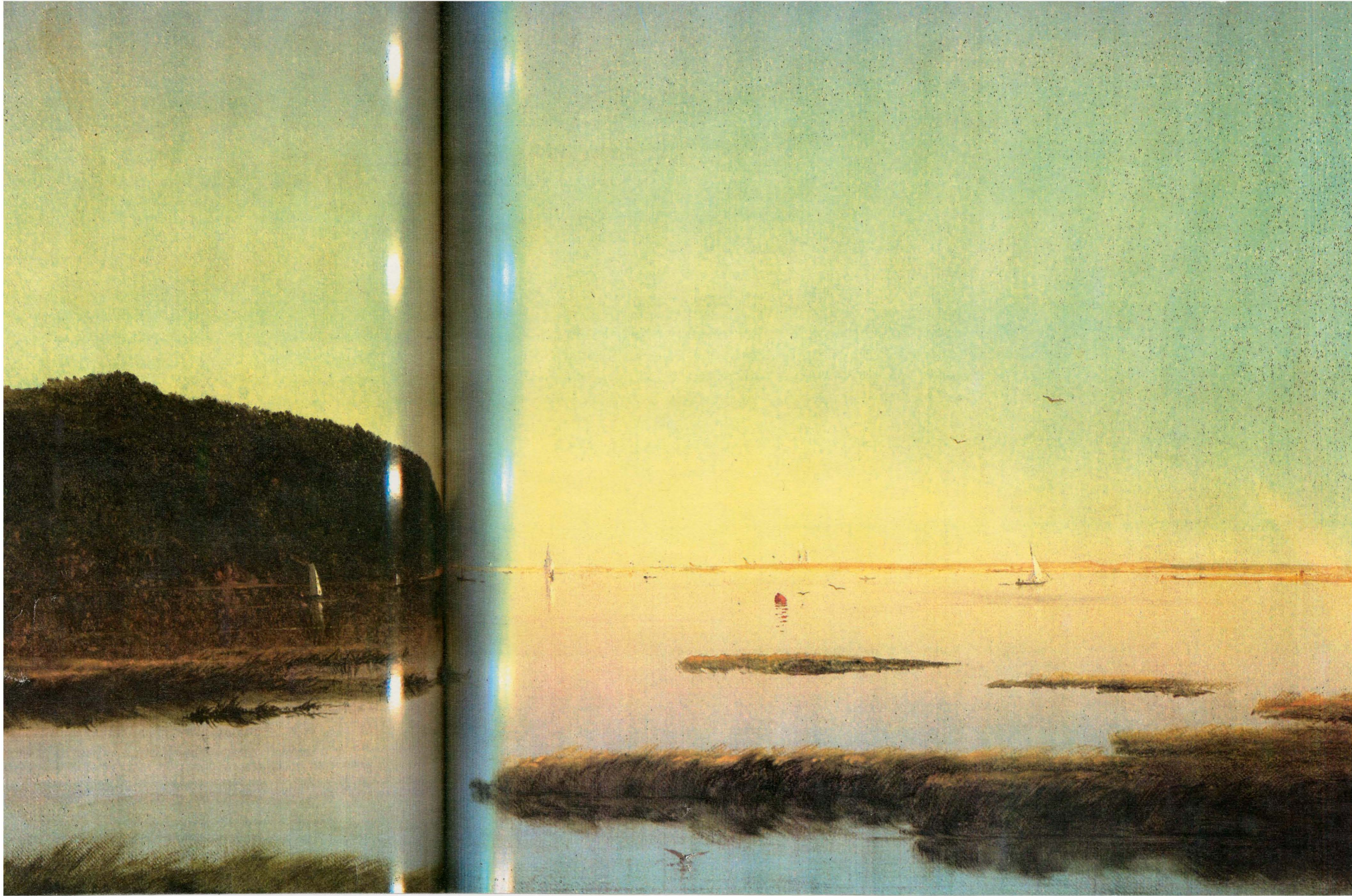


Figure 2.

John F. Kensett, View of the Shrewsbury River, NJ, 1856 - 1859.  
12 x 20 inches



Figure 3. Martin Johnson Heade, Sunrise on the Marshes, 1863.



Figure 4.

Fitz Hugh Lane, Western Shore with Norman's Woe, 1862.  
21 1/2 x 35 1/2 inches



Figure 5. Fitz Hugh Lane, Christmas Cove, 1863.  
15 1/2 x 24 inches



Figure 6.

Martin Johnson Heade, Sudden Shower, Newbury Marshes, 1865 - 75.



Figure 7. Fitz Hugh Lane, Approaching Storm, Owl's Head, 1860.  
24 x 39 5/8 inches



Figure 8.

Martin Johnson Heade, Duck Hunters in the Marshes, 1866.



Figure 9.

Frederick Edwin Church, Twilight in the Wilderness, 1860.  
40 x 64 inches





Figure 10.

Jane Wilson, American Light, 1991.  
80 x 74 inches



Figure 11.

Sanford Gifford, Hook Mountain, Near Nyack, on the Hudson, 1866.



Figure 12.

Keith Jacobshagen, Mid days, Dog Days, 1989.  
40 x 44 inches



Figure 13.

Frederick Edwin Church, View Near Stockbridge, 1845 - 1854.  
27 1/2 x 40 inches.



Figure 14.

April Gornik, Thunderhead, 1985.



Figure 15. Martin Johnson Heade, Thunderstorm Over Narragansett Bay, 1868.



Figure 16.

April Gornik, Cloudburst, 1988.



Figure 17. Joan Nelson, Untitled #281, 1990.



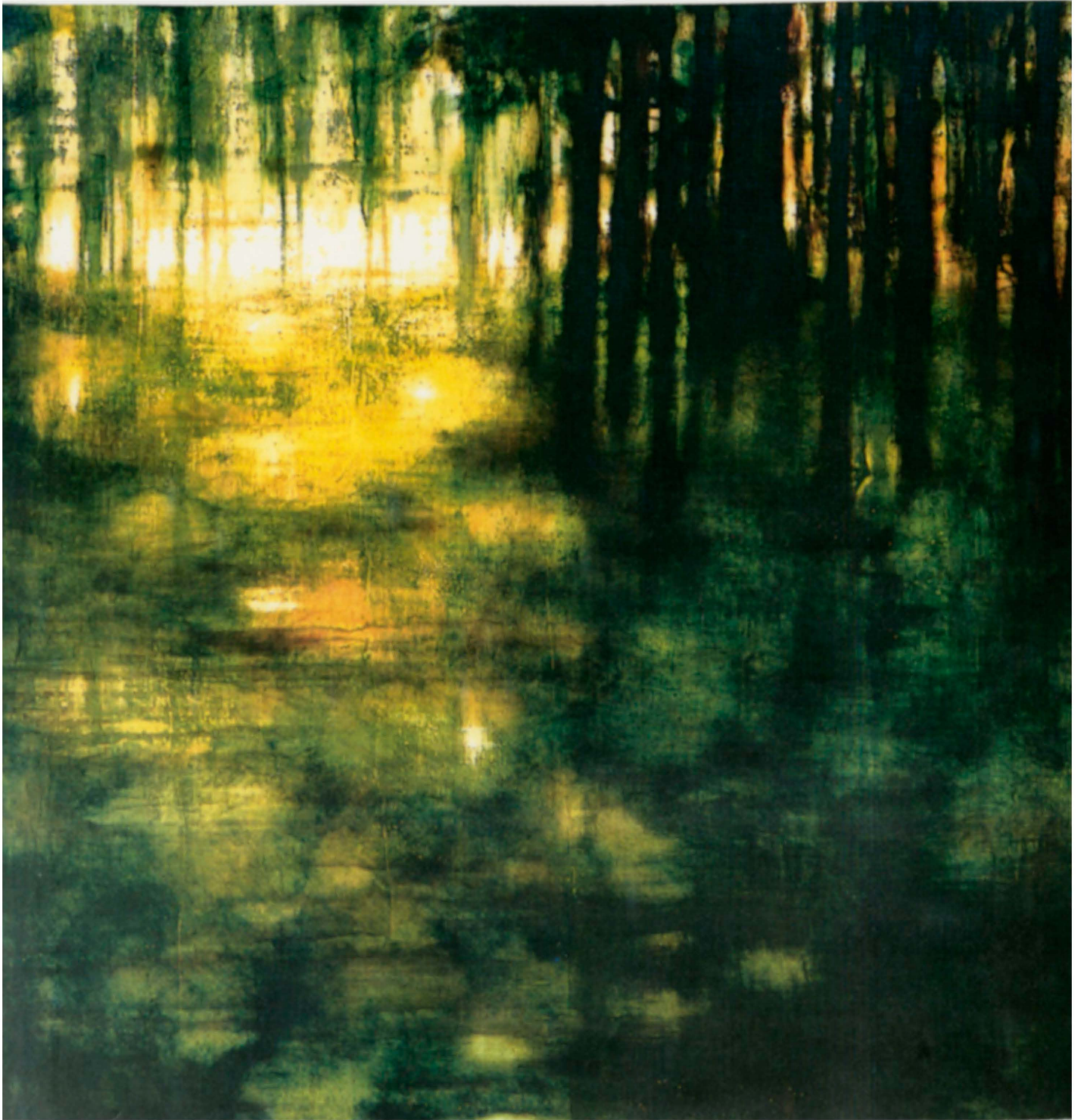


Figure 18. Katherine Bowling, Cadence, 1992.  
48 x 48 inches



Figure 19.

Jane Wilson, Lifting Storm, Water Mill, 1985.  
60 x 80 inches



Figure 20. Jane Wilson, Sun After Rain, 1990.  
60 x 70 inches



Figure 21. April Gornik, Source, 1989.



Figure 22.

April Gornik, Quiet During the Flood.



Figure 23. Jane Wilson, Divided House, 1985.  
14 x 20 inches



Figure 24.

Jane Wilson, Hurricane Watch, 1990.  
34 x 40 inches



Figure 25. Joan Nelson, Untitled, 1987.  
19 x 19 inches



Figure 26.

Joan Nelson, Untitled, 1987.  
16 x 15 inches





Figure 27. Katherine Bowling, Time, 1992.  
48 x 80 inches



Figure 28. Katherine Bowling, Plantation, 1987.  
24 x 24 inches



Figure 29.

Keith Jacobshagen, Road to Raymond, 1983.  
46 x 46 inches.