

THESIS

VIEWS FROM A PATH

**Submitted by
Madeline Weisz
Art Department**

**In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, Colorado
Fall 1992**

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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY MADELINE WEISZ ENTITLED VIEWS FROM A PATH BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF FINE ARTS.

Committee on Graduate Work

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

Co-Advisor

[Redacted]

Advisor

[Redacted]

Department Head

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

VIEWS FROM A PATH

As an expression of the Tao, my view is ever-changing. It is a panorama. There is no stationary viewpoint and no fixed horizon. It is boundless. Chuang Tzu, the 4th century B.C. philosopher, observed that "the Tao cannot be conveyed by either words nor silence."¹ These prints are a means to transcend words and silence and convey man and nature as one.

The Tao, or literally "the Path" or "the Way," is an invisible and intangible aspect of nature. It is immanent in all things, and yet, as "mother" of all determinate things that can be named or described, the Tao itself is said to be beyond words.² As a flowing course which eludes clear vision and descriptive language, the Tao can be described as a vast continuum of which human beings are a part.

Because nature exists both inside and outside the observer/viewer, I have chosen not only to recreate the appearance of nature, but to employ the print process as a meditation of nature. As a method of realization, these prints do not describe reality in the usual sense. That is, they do not attempt to replicate optical reality.

When we think of ourselves as outside the realm of nature, we equate reality only with the material world which has an outer appearance that can be seen and felt. As such, reality appears as forms in three dimensional space; it has length, height, and breadth. This visible and tangible aspect of nature is what the Chinese call *wu*. As the dimensional and visual aspect of nature, *wu* literally means "matter, substance, thing, object, or the entire material world."³

The Tao, on the other hand is the invisible and intangible aspect of nature. The Tao can be sensed, but it cannot be seen. While *wu* pertains to appearances in space, Tao pertains to manifestations in time.⁴ Because humans recognize Tao only through the perceptions of *wu*, or form, they are inseparable and vital aspects of nature.

In terms of the visual arts, the apprehension of Tao is through form. Because the Tao gives rise to all form, yet is bound by none of them, and can be sensed, but not seen; the art form functions to point to a reality beyond form. These prints, as expressions of the Tao, are a means to awaken a sense of mystery and wonder that reveals a deeper, more meaningful reality -- a reality beyond form.

In placing the spiritual content of the subject within illusory realism, my work, at times is transformed to near abstraction. Once the etched image on the plate is printed, the resultant print is a mirror image of the original plate -- it is not the same image. Furthermore, during the etching process, many unexpected things occur. The varying strength of the etching acid, the unpredictable nature of the soft grounds, as well as the collage process that I employ, are all a part of the experiential aspect of creating the print. What becomes important, is the

mindful attention to what is happening "in the moment."

While these prints originate from images sketched on sight, they do not replicate optical reality. Because the mere representation of optical facts is only a partial view of the totality of nature, I use my imagination to rotate, re-shape, distort, and discover new forms in the process of making the print. In order to avoid the restrictive view of one point perspective, I place the viewer at a distance above the ground plane. Furthermore, I often tilt the ground plane so that the center of vision appears to be beyond human perspective. With these formal considerations in mind, the totality of nature is revealed within the microcosm of the print.

I have chosen to depict landscapes of mountains and water because although they belong to the material world, they evoke the spiritual realm. In Chinese thought, "mountain-water" or *shan-shui* are the two basic components of the natural environment.⁵ These two elements recall the ancient views of mountains as sacred sources of water and life. Rocks, the elements of mountains, are said to be the bones of the earth, while water is said to be its life blood. Likewise, the expression *shan-shui* brings to mind the *ying-yang* theory of complimentary opposites which is basic to the Taoist conception of reality.⁶

As the complimentary aspect of *Yang*, *Yin* represents the feminine, the negative, the moon, wetness, darkness, softness, quiescence, and the left. *Yang* represents the masculine, the positive, the sun, light, radiant, and the right. On the negative or *yin* side, these prints are dark and wet. They suggest solitude, desolation, and depth. They acknowledge the vulnerability of plant and animal life. On the positive or *yang* side, these prints are light and dry. They express the

magnificence of nature; its undaunted strength and persistence -- and its masculine height. As complimentary aspects of the Tao, *yin-yang* or light and dark -- one aspect does not exist without the other.

The apprehension of Tao's intangible and invisible nature is what moves me to create images. As a process of realization, art is the door to this invisible realm. The photographer, Ansel Adams acknowledged this when he said, "We all move on the fringes of eternity and are sometimes granted vistas through the fabric of illusion."⁷

By expressing a realm of experience beyond the power of words to describe, these prints are my vistas through the fabric of illusion. I hope these images evoke a sense of wonder and awe that send the viewer to a realm of existence where subject and object, or man and nature, are one.

Madeline Weisz
Department of Art
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, Colorado 80523
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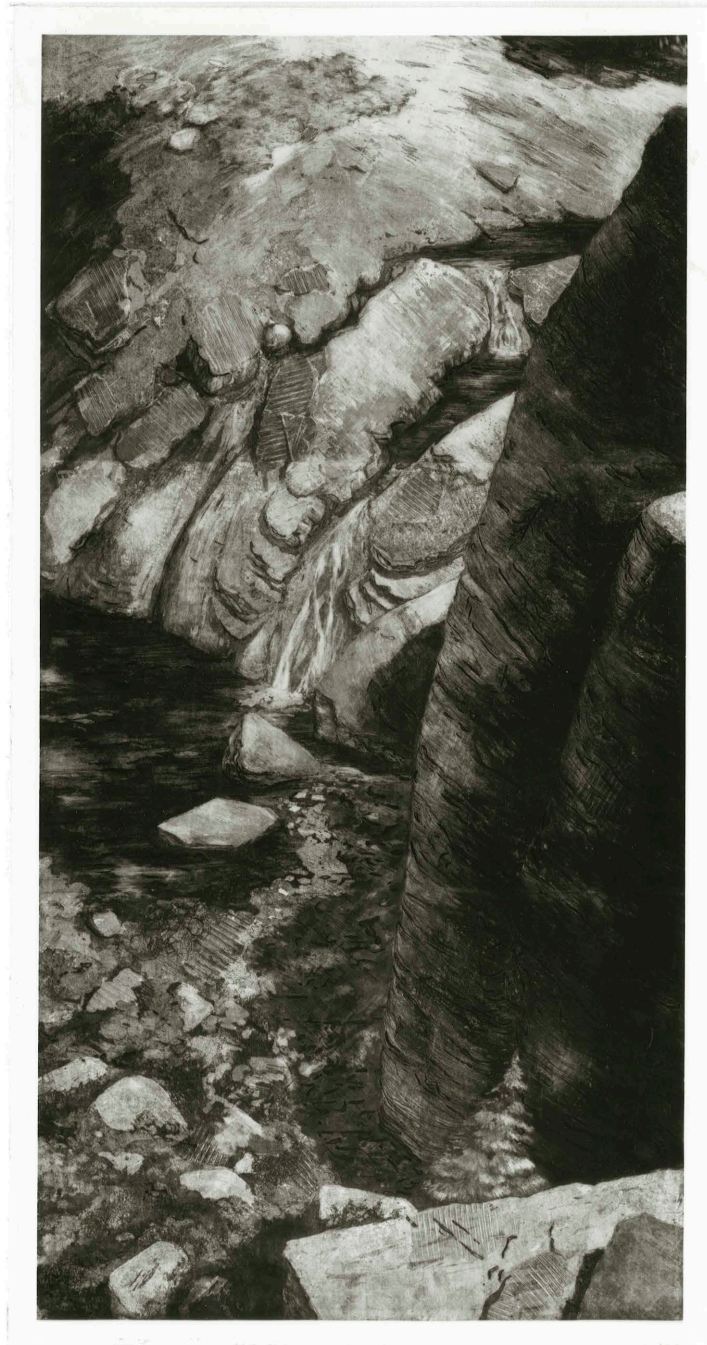


PLATE I: FALLS
Etching, 75" x 39"



PLATE II: AS ABOVE SO BELOW
Etching, 39" x 98"



PLATE III: THE NARROWS
Etching, 39" x 98"

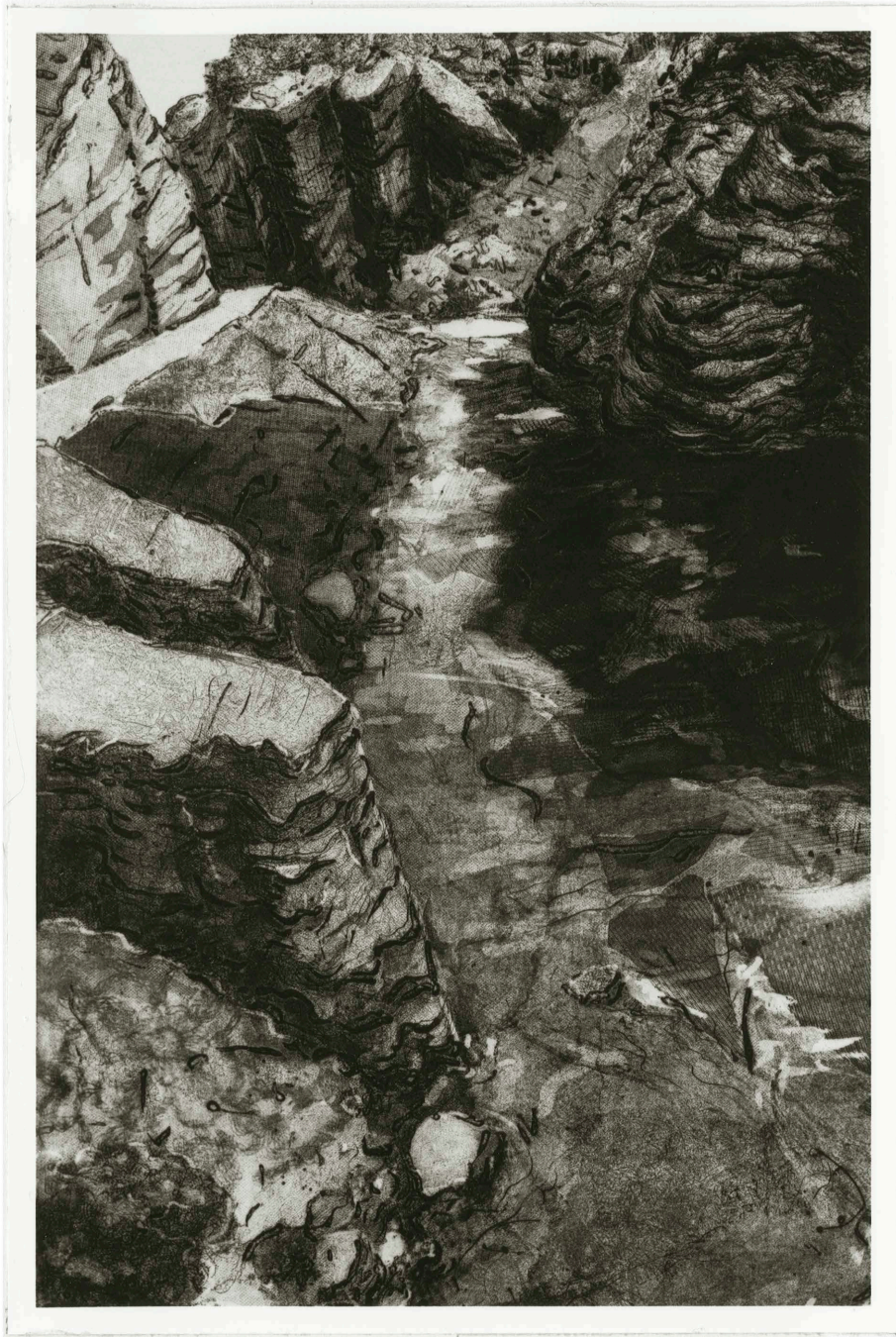


PLATE IV: Detail of THE NARROWS
24" x 36"



PLATE V: VERTIGO
Etching, 38" x 50"



PLATE VI: CAÑON
Etching, 38" x 50"



PLATE VII: CONFLUENCE
Etching, 38" x 71"

ENDNOTES

¹ Mai-mai Sze, The Way of Chinese Painting (New York, Vintage Books, 1959), p.3.

² Sze, p. 17.

³ Wucius Wong, The Tao of Chinese Landscape Painting (New York, Vintage Books, 1991), p.15.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Edwin Bernbaum, Sacred Mountains of the World (San Francisco, Sierra Club Books, 1990), p. 226.

⁶ Sze, p. 105.

⁷ Bernbaum, p. 235.

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Sze, Mai-mai. The Way of Chinese Painting. New York: Vintage Books, 1959.

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