

THESIS

A ROAD: POETRY IN PAINTED LANDSCAPE

Submitted by
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In partial fulfillment of the requirements
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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

A ROAD: POETRY IN PAINTED LANDSCAPE

Landscapes reflected through the passing of time, light that is real "now", is only a memory a second later. Those memories that catch my mind's eye are what I attempt to hold, to examine, to understand through the painting process. My paintings allow those memories to become real once again and revisited.

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DEDICATION

To my wife Irene whose love, patience,
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A Road: Poetry in Painted Landscapes

Where I grew up in Southeast New Mexico, the summers are very hot and the winters mild. There would be the occasional snow storm that always seemed to melt faster than it fell. The wind blew from early March to early June. I used to think that the wind would some day blow all the dirt on the desert to Texas or Mexico, but it never did. There seemed to be an endless supply.

What impressed me most about nature in this part of New Mexico, where cotton farming and cattle ranching are as important to the city of Roswell as the businesses on Main Street, was the sky. The sky went on forever. One could not walk outside without the sky pulled over one's head and across the eyes. For me, a bad day was a bright cerulean blue sky. That usually meant one of two weather conditions; hotter than hell or windy with dust blowing off the surrounding desert, and it's still hotter than hell. Clouds of dust left very little to the imagination. A good day always had clouds to break up the blue sky. However, even a cloudy day could not make a day of wind and dirt bearable.

Thunderstorms were always a welcome sight. Rain is scarce in that part of the country. To this day there is still something very exciting as well as frightening to me when I see a gray sky about to shroud me. In "Late Fall Thunderstorm" (plate 1), color takes on a new meaning. Everything is so crisp and sharp because of the contrast of the remaining sunlight and the dark gray sky just before

all the sunlight is blocked by the clouds. The same atmospheric condition occurs just as the storm passes. Only after the storm, the smells change from cool and refreshing to the musty smell of humidity weighing me down. I've always enjoyed that frightening mysterious rush that occurred before the storm.

There is also something a bit un-natural about a rain storm off in the distance. I feel somewhat in awe watching a rain storm move across the landscape with lighting flashing from time to time. One cannot help but to feel safe with patchy blue skies overhead and at the same time anxious about all the forces taking place just a few miles away as in "New Mexico Rain" and "Summer Pasture Rain" (plates 2 and 3).

Vision In Landscape

In landscape

poems lay

trees groved in

filtered sun

purpled shade

blues and grays

Pasture rain

wet bovine

nibbling alfalfa

deep greens color
fields streaked by
yellow sunlight
racing beneath
cloud-quenched skies

Lazy deserted roads
meandering up
and down hills
curving to vanish
behind a wall
of trees
veiled by leaves
or evaporating in
the clouds
as raindrops
on hot asphalt
Brushed pigment
human emotion
nature sublime
trapped within
framed canvas

mounted on
the wall.

My home in Longmont, Colorado is somewhat like Roswell, New Mexico. The sky is just as big, the thunderstorms still look just as mysterious, the size of both towns are the same, and farmlands are all around me. Unlike Roswell, snow storms are much more frequent, the wind doesn't blow as hard, the sun is not nearly as hot, and the foothills and mountains are only fifteen miles, not seventy miles, away. It is comforting to know that even being hundreds of miles and many years away from where I grew up, I am still able to feel as though I've never left home.

During the summer of 1990 I was spending a lot of time in the city of Fort Collins, Colorado, about thirty-two miles north of Longmont. As one travels South from Fort Collins through Loveland, Colorado, the landscape changes from level ground to hills with Longmont being at a lower elevation than Loveland. On a very clear day one is able to look south and see Pikes Peak, one hundred and ten miles away. Looking west to the foothills and mountains, Long's Peak and the Twin Sisters tower above the valley. Rain storms are somewhat common along the foothill during the summer afternoons. "Afternoon Thunderstorm" (plate 4), was conceived after pulling off Highway 287 onto one of the many dirt roads in the area and watching a thunderstorm as it moved south along the foothills.

Passing The Time
-for Grandpa

I am faced
with crashing
thunderstorms
moving south along
the foothills
through Boulder
and on to Denver.

A rain-sheet
hides Long's Peak
and the Twin Sisters
as it passes
like the day
you let me
climb a mountain
in New Mexico
at the foot
of our camp.

My teenage fear
never recognized
the danger you saw

but watched my ascent
through field glasses
while holding your breath
wondering whatever
made you say "yes."

You can't remember.

You can't remember

what was said
five minutes ago.

You ask me how

the kids are, not
knowing who I am
and that I haven't
any children.

Your mind moves on like

the seasons forgetting
last years flowers or
the snow storms
that melt the next day.

Grandpa's tears

can't wash the dust
off fifty-six years

you've forgotten.

He cries anyway

wondering

what it is he could have done

to stop the decay

within your mind

and wishing it were

he, not you.

Grandpa's Catholic God

is not much comfort

through tears of

"Thy will be done"

while committing you

to a nursing home

ending those fifty-six years

never before apart.

The smell of pine trees

and a soft breeze

tired from its

down-hill journey

blowing off Long's Peak

and rolling over the foothills
brings me back
to the thunderstorms
long since past
and a humid warm sun.

I know of no human beings that, once they are up from a night's sleep, does not enjoy watching the sun rise. The air is crisp, fresh, and generally very peaceful before the day's noise fills the land. In "Early Morning Mountain" (plate 5). The shadow from trees and bushes are so long and purple as the sun starts to rise. One can sit and watch the colors of a landscape move from purple to yellow, then to pinks, blues, and greens all in a very short time. If there was a rain storm or a snowfall during the night, words crumble before the sensations of sight and smell of such a morning. "Morning Landscape With Snow" (plate 6), was conceived during one such morning. After the sun has risen on a summer's day, before the air is hot and heavy, who could drive down a road lined with shade trees and not wish to stop and daydream beneath the cool shade?

The emotions and ideas in my paintings are concerned primarily with a romanticism as it relates to an unspoiled nature. I acknowledge my existence and the existence of mankind through the roads, signs, telephone poles, fences and a house or two.

I paint my sentiments and my present life. I paint the emotions I remember feeling as a child watching nature and the senses I experience in my travels back to my homeland, New Mexico, and the farmlands and foothills near my home in Longmont, Colorado.

My paintings of roads are not about the road. They are about the nature on either side and above the road. The roads simply serve to bind the series, leading me to the nature that exists outside cities and towns and guides me through the paintings. They are a metaphor of my life. As far as the eye can see, the road of life sometimes goes on forever. More often than not, the roads of my life bend or run steadily up a hill and drop off sharply only to reveal more bends and hills. I have no clue as to what lies around the bend or the other side of the hill. This causes a point, a tension that makes life both interesting and worth weathering the unexpected storms that are encountered in it.

The hopes and dreams I have for life are echoed in my paintings, for instance, the ray of sunlight under a threatening sky as in "Late Fall Thunderstorm" (plate 1), or a view of the next mountain peak to climb or the next grove of shade trees off in the distance as in "Farmlands Northeast of Longmont, Colorado" (plate 7). The road to these goals is not always visible or understood, but the hope and desire to reach the goals still remain. The telephone poles and road signs serve as both guidance and obstructions to the happiness of a tranquil view. As with life, we encounter personalities who provide leadership and direction to help us meet our goals. Their guidance is

often times needed, but not always applauded. Sometimes our guides hinder the progress along the road of our aspirations, causing more tension and frustration.

By painting the landscape in a representational approach, I hope to be able to conjure up those "special" sensations people might have when watching nature's more subtle or dramatic moods. More often than not, these moods are seen or felt for very short periods of time. They are "special" in that when we do recognize nature out of the ordinary, we are generally busy doing other things that demand more of our attention.

Summer's Past

Blowing dust off Long's Peak

veiled by snow clouds thick as cold honey.

Clouds hooked by pointed peaks

pulled back inside mountains.

Cold dry wind chills denim

sandpaper throat and peanut brittle fingers.

Travelling up 287 between

Longmont and Ft. Collins thinking about

naked tree's leaves blown to Kansas
buried in fields of plowed corn.

Mental-Scaping

Traveling roads
painting trees
shape and color
rendered light
shining through clouds
forming
images before me,
vast landscapes
spread miles wide
and high
touching the clouds
that seem to rise
among the stars.

Land images

fill my mind
like dammed water
fills a lake

then spill over the top.

Tree lined road

shadowed as it turns

into distant greens

and faded purples.

The unseen road

imagined in your mind

takes a new life,

one on its own.

Weather clouds

casting shadows

upon land,

thunderstorms

rumbling through valleys

of corn, wheat

and the hay fields

of a farmer's sweat.

Rows of dirt

plowed

seeds not planted

muddied

as rain empties
the sky
and moves pass
chased by
a warm sun.

The same sun
that rises pink
atop an early
morning mountain
or spears the ground
with shafts of warmth
after an evening snow
left frozen ground
and crystal cold air.

Standing high
as any mortal could
to breath in nature
reflected through open eyes
as fields of yellow,
blues and greens.

Sky meets the horizon

and the sublime on earth.

Looking down a road

following signs

and telephone poles

like so many crucifixes

leading to houses

that measles the land.

While my words

can describe

they are frustrated

before my paintings

like a man without legs

who cannot walk

or a bird with wings

who cannot fly.

My emotions are spoken

with brush and color

a language seen and felt

stronger

than heard.

THE PAINTING EXPERIENCE

As a painter I am most interested in conveying the emotional response I feel toward the landscapes that are very much a part of my life. Through the process of painting I am able to examine as well as respond to the emotions I feel about a particular landscape. Most often it is some physical attribute about the land that first draws me to it as a painting. An example might be a color I continually see while being out in nature such as how the color pink moves down a mountain side during the sunrises as in "Early Morning Mountain" (plate 5). Another example might be the contrast between the light and dark of an approaching storm as in "Late Fall Thunderstorm" or "Changing Light Before The Storm" (plate 1 & 9).

Landscape is naturally very tactile. Through the use of thick and thin paint applications I try to feel the land with pigment. I am not concerned with having a painting end by being a site specific picture. During the process of applying paint to the canvas a brush stroke might inadvertently suggest a change in contour or a land form not perceived through the sketch or photograph. Through this "give and take" conversation between the canvas and myself, the painting begins to take on a life of its own. My use of color is largely intuitive and based on a number of years painting out doors. As color is being developed, so is the light conditions. Light too is based on direct observation of the landscape and remembering my emotional response to a particular natural phenomenon such as rain, snow, or intense sun light and shadows. While scale may have a very big

impact on how a painting is viewed emotionally, it has little to do with the emotional response I may have toward the landscape. The consideration of scale is based on an intellectual process in working out the composition. I feel my emotional response to the landscape should remain the same no matter what the scale.

Finally, the introduction of poetry with my painting is an attempt to keep in mind the emotional responses I feel for the land. It is very easy to let the painting go off into a totally different direction psychologically. The purpose of my art is to explore, to try and define and understand the meaning of not only my life but the meaning of life around me. My paintings are allowed to grow into their own landscape as long as I can still feel the essence of the landscape I live in. My poetry helps reinforce this idea.



Plate 1. Late Fall Thunderstorm - oil on canvas - 42" X 60"



Plate 2. New Mexico Rain - oil on canvas - 38 1/2" X 40 1/2"



Plate 3. Summer Pasture Rain - oil on canvas - 42" X 60"



Plate 4. Afternoon Thunderstorm - oil on canvas - 48" X 72"



Plate 5. Early Morning Mountain - oil on masonite 39 3/4" X 48"



Plate 6. Morning Landscape With Snow - oil on canvas 24" X 30"



Plate 7. Farmlands Northeast Of Longmont, Colorado - oil on canvas
20" X 24"



Plate 8. A Warm December Day - oil on canvas - 42" X 60"



Plate 9. Changing Light Before The Storm - oil on canvas - 15 1/2" X
26 1/2"



Plate 10. 55 Miles An Hour - oil on canvas - 60" X 72"



Plate 11. Highway Leading To A New Mexico Sunset - oil on canvas
15 1/4" X 21 1/4"



Plate 12. Rain Soaked Roads - oil on canvas - 42" X 60"



Plate 13. Long Shadowed Sunset - oil on masonite - 18" X 36"