

THESIS

VOYAGES OF MEMORY

Submitted by

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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER OUR
SUPERVISION BY DOUGLAS V. KOTTAL ENTITLED VOYAGES OF MEMORY
BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
OF MASTER OF FINE ARTS.

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

VOYAGES OF MEMORY

My work is inspired by things and places I have seen in my travels around the world. I travel extensively, especially in South America, continually exploring new places. When processed by memory, these places often become the initial gestural responses for my artwork.

I work abstractly, both in terms of non-representational forms, and in the idea of trying to “abstract” the essence of my response to a place as it develops (Washerwoman), a location or thing (Pucón), or an idea (Northern Lights). Working abstractly does not restrict me to a pre-conceived end image. Abstraction allows me to begin a work with a sense of adventure into the unknown. From the initial shaping of the metal I feel intimately engaged with the plate. I make marks at random, then look at the plate, make more marks, and continue to react to what the plate is telling me. Each work is a voyage of discovery. The journey on the plate parallels my physical journeys in the world – I go to see what’s there.

The automatism of just making marks in my explorations of unknown places is not totally random. It is not the automatic drawing of the Surrealists, tied completely to the unconscious. The beginning of a work is free and unconscious – just marks on a plate. However, much like Miro, as I continue to work, I often reach a point where something specific begins to suggest itself. If so, then further work on the plate is

carefully calculated from that point on to enhance or refine what has been suggested to me. That calculated development based on the specific suggestion is often tied to something I have experienced in the past. This is both as an abstract thought process (what is my response and how do I communicate it?), and as abstract form (how do I relate this experience to the viewer without using representation?). Processional developed when I saw figures clothed in robes as if in a ceremonial line – a stately procession of nobles out of a medieval manuscript.

The sense of adventure and discovery while I work is important to me, as it allows me to engage myself more emotionally in a work. I am able to focus more on what I sense as the feeling of a mountain, or the changing light of the Atacama Desert in Chile. I arrive at a point where I deliberately ask myself “What is the essence of this idea? How am I going to portray the ‘feeling’ of this; how will I communicate my reaction to the clarity and warmth of sunset at San Pedro de Atacama?” Like the printmaker Joseph Hecht, I then can deal with the development of the essence of the thing, as opposed to the thing itself. This essence is both physical in the image (Chavín de Huantar), and emotional (Tango) – how does the essence of a thing “look,” and what is/was my emotional feeling or reaction?

Working in the abstract allows me to concentrate freely on formal elements important to me. Luminosity is always part of a work – the luminosity of the Bolivian *altiplano*, the glow of light on the salt hills at San Pedro de Atacama (Tiwanaku, San Pedro de Atacama). I try to achieve vast space and depth, even in small prints, as that is my continuing impression of my physical world – the vault of the sky arching over me,

things sensed rather than seen, almost lost in the distance, space not as limited, but as infinite. I use line partly because I love it, but also because of the challenge of creating an image from this barest of bones of art. Movement and energy of line are important, as they also guide the eye around a work, and unify space and depth. Layers of line and form enhance movement, space, and depth (De la Sinestra).

I use intaglio techniques almost exclusively in my work, as they give me what I desire in my prints. No other printmaking process allows the range of possibilities that intaglio techniques do, especially in manipulation of the plate surface. I use a drillpoint (a metal burr driven by a flexible shaft motor at high rotation) as the resulting line has a distinctive energy and movement. Drillpoint lines have a rich softness, which enhances atmosphere and space. Engraving is part of my soul: it is a serene journey in making lines of a beautiful precision and clarity. When combined with drillpoint, engraving creates tension and contrast. Etching – often with extensive scraping and burnishing – provides solid values to provide weight, or to enhance light, space, and depth. Scraping and burnishing of a plate also allow the luminosity that is so important in defining light and space in my images. The combination of all these techniques results in a richness of linear elements and value that work to communicate the essence of the experiences that have affected me so deeply.

My color work is a departure from the use of line as its major component. It tends to focus more on solid color areas which interweave and overlap (Pucón). I use color for depth, space, form, and light and luminosity, and especially to achieve atmospheric light and depth. This is a direct response to my memories of the monumentality of the

stonework of the Inca, or the colors of the Atacama Desert. Intaglio techniques and transparent inks allow me to modify and manipulate the plate surface to achieve the luminous effects I want, as well as multiple shifts of value and hue through overprinting layers of transparent ink. Multiple overlays give weight and density to counterbalance atmosphere and luminosity; combined, they give greater depth and larger space (Veils). Specific colors in works are intuitive based on the memory of my response to experiences. They may relate to local colors of an area, but they convey more my emotional reaction to the brightness of a day at Tiwanaku, the colors of the Atacama desert at sunset, or spring at Pucón.

Throughout my work I try to convey the essence of the subject and my response to it. The development of a work may become a highly deliberative act in the later stages, but it is the feeling of the thing that is of overriding importance to me.

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Fig. 1, De la Sinestra, drillpoint, 16 x 10 in.



Fig. 2, Cityscape II, drillpoint, 10 x 7 in.



Fig. 3, Old Friends, drillpoint, 10 x 7 in.



Fig. 4, Washerwoman, drillpoint, 11 x 8.5 in.



Fig. 5, Processional, drillpoint and engraving, 6 x 5 in.



Fig. 6, Northern Lights, engraving with aquatint, 11 x 9 in.



Fig. 7, Crossroads, drillpoint with etching, drypoint, and engraving, 12 x 9 in.

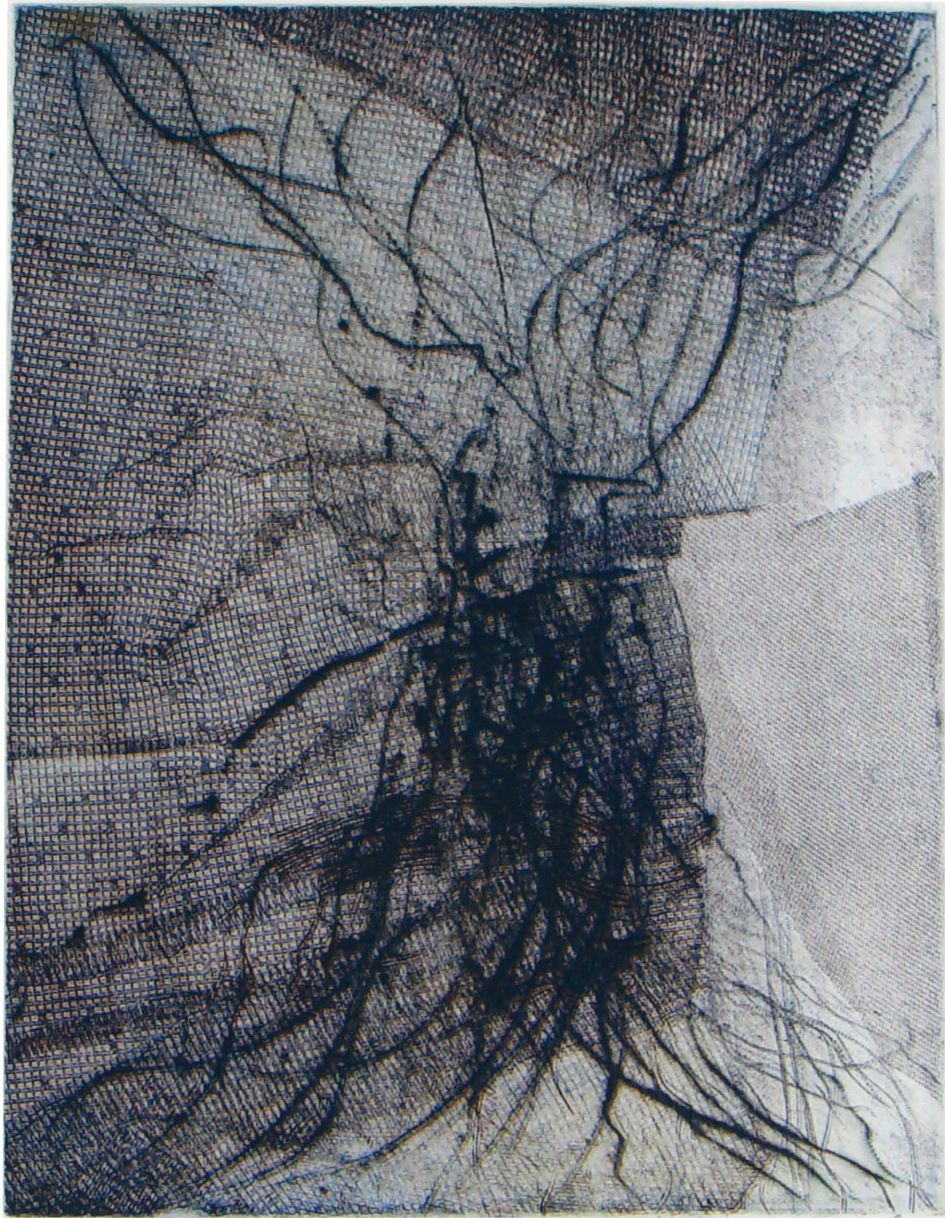


Fig. 8, Gravity, two-color etching with drillpoint, drypoint, and engraving, 13 x 10 in.



Fig. 9, End of the Line, etching with drillpoint and drypoint, 23.25 x 15 in.



Fig. 10, San Pedro de Atacama, three-color etching with drillpoint, 20 x 11.5 in.



Fig. 11, Tango, three-color etching with drillpoint and drypoint, 11 x 8 in.

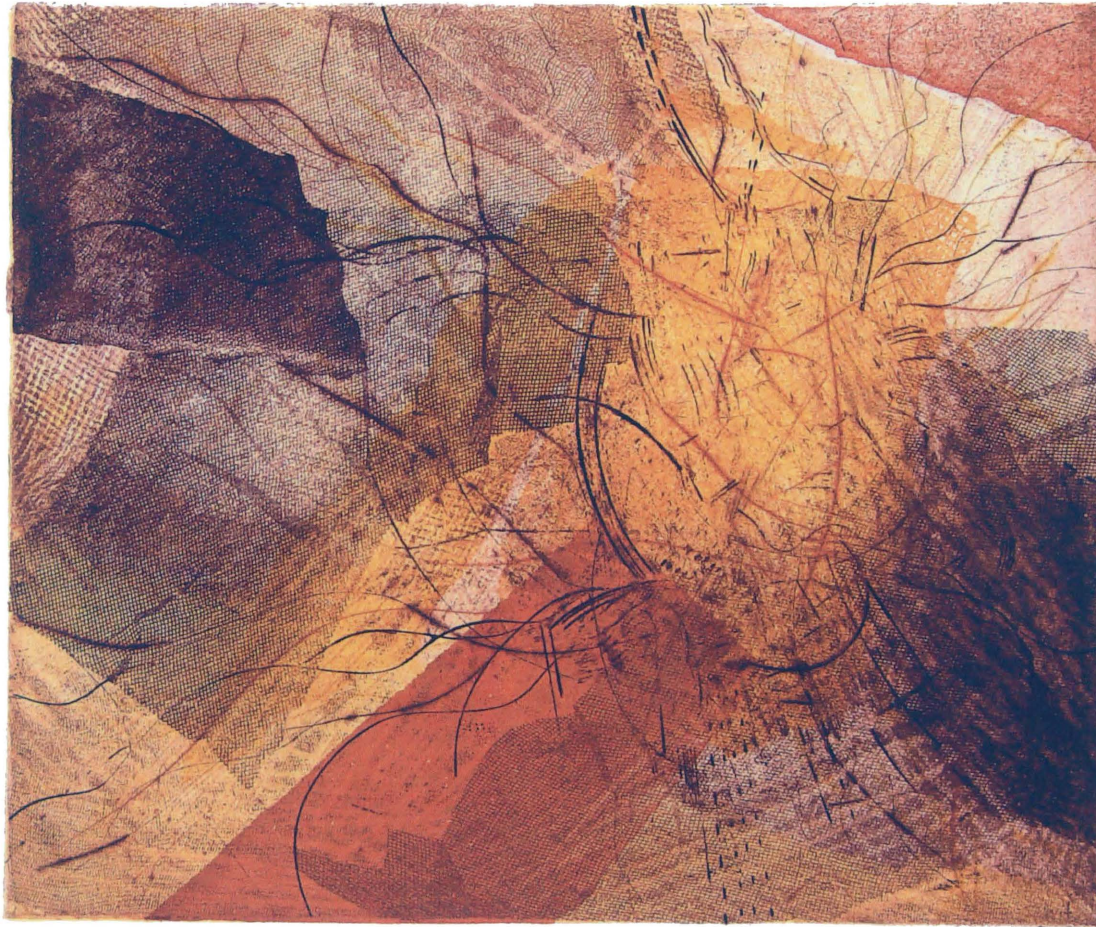


Fig. 12, Sunrise, three-color etching with drypoint and engraving, 10 x 12 in.



Fig. 13, Pucón, four-color etching with drypoint, 9.75 x 13.25 in.

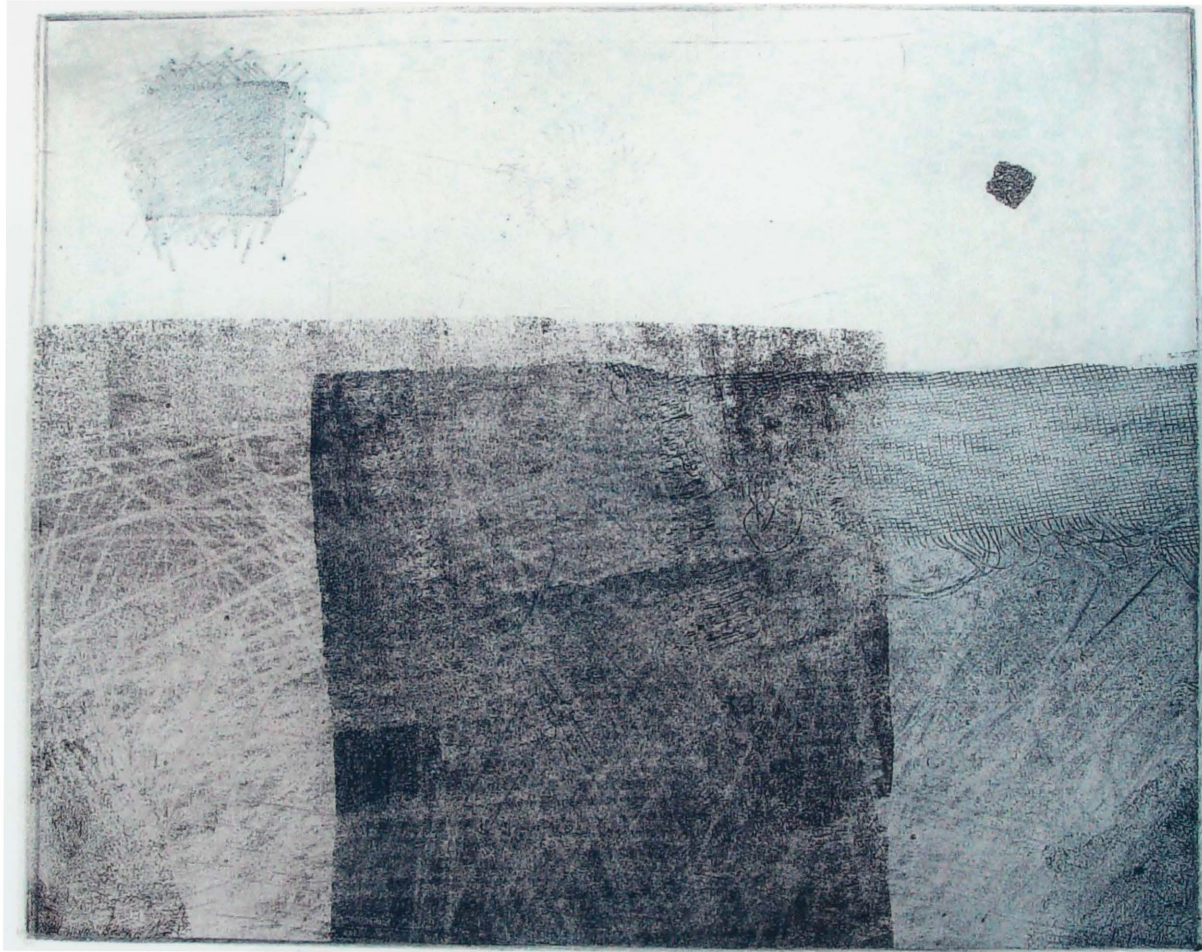


Fig. 14, Tiwanaku, two-color etching, 12 x 15 in.

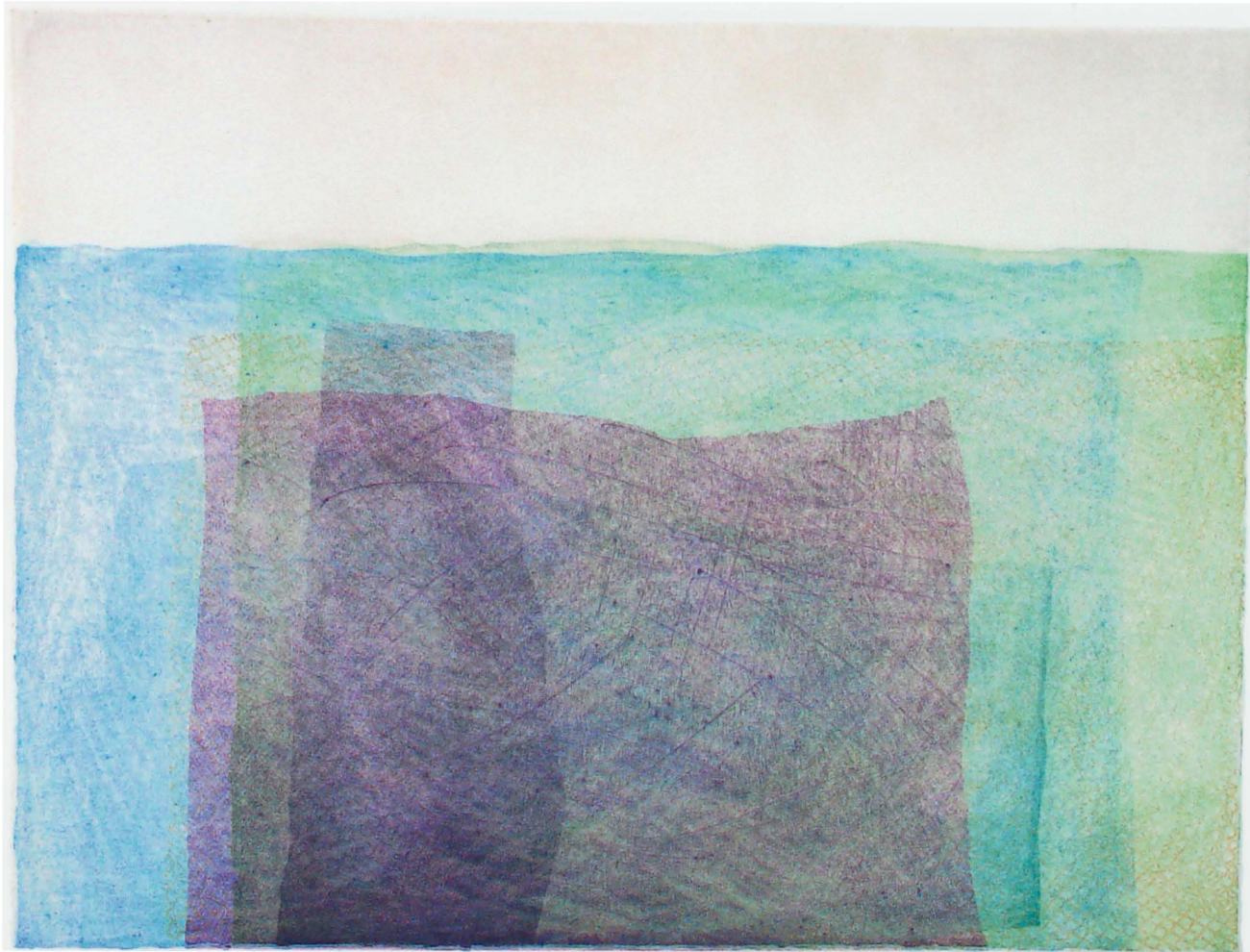


Fig. 15, Chavín de Huantar, five-color etching, 18 x 24 in.



Fig. 16, Veils, nine-color etching, 18 x 24 in.



Fig. 17, My Back Yard, two-color lithograph, 45 x 33 in.