

THESIS

A TIMELESS VISION

Submitted by

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Department of Art

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Summer, 1996



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MASTER OF FINE ARTS.

Committee on Graduate Work



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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

A TIMELESS VISION

Landscape and figure are timeless, universal, and venerable motifs that compel constant and continued examination. This group of works employs form, movement, and spatial relations that are elements evident in both themes. I approach my subjects with a history of memories, an awareness of my surroundings, and my psychological state at the moment. These portrayals of life as I experience it may, in a sense, all be seen as self-portraits.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To the printmaking faculty, my committee, colleagues, family, and closest friends, I take this opportunity to express my appreciation for their continued support and assistance offered in each unique way. James T. Dormer, my adviser, has my deepest respect and gratitude for his knowledge of the arts, critical analysis, teaching methods, conviction to the medium, integrity, compassionate understanding, and friendship. His encouragement to constantly search for something more and to continually challenge my way of working has proven to be the most crucial part of my aesthetic development. I am grateful to Stephen Simons for sharing difficulties and suggesting invaluable solutions to problems; and to Jack Orman, who always offers positive feedback and encouragement with a love and knowledge of printmaking that is overwhelmingly apparent and eternal. Thank you to David Ellerby for his belief in my drafting skills and teaching ability, and to Carol Mitchell for her positive support and friendship. All these people have contributed most to my graduate career.

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Finally, to the two people who mean the most to me, Damian Jennings, my son, and Leslee Becker, my dearest friend, I extend my deepest heartfelt appreciation. I am thankful for their patience, love, and understanding.

DEDICATION

It is my desire to dedicate this thesis to my undergraduate adviser, mentor, and friend, Linda R. Sokolowski. It was her constant belief in me and my work that helped make my admission to Colorado State University and the printmaking graduate program possible. In addition, her reassurance, support, encouragement, and confidence in my capabilities have remained consistent throughout my time here. Her love of and devotion to landscape and figurative imagery have always been a precious inspiration and example, and her dedication to the arts was initially responsible for the direction of my concentration.

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A TIMELESS VISION

"All pictures arise from a state of the soul, from the artist's relations with things and people, from a total visual impression."

--Richard Diebenkorn¹

Landscape and figure are timeless, universal, and venerable motifs that compel constant and continued examination. My landscape images represent nearby places, while my figurative images represent work directly from model observation. As an artist, I find that the elements of form, movement, and spatial relations evident in both have interchangeable considerations. Therefore, working from both subjects is important to me in my artistic and aesthetic development.

As an East Coast artist relocated to the West, I was initially interested in landscape. I was fascinated at first by searching for fresh and unique ways to capture the panoramic Western vistas filled with strange and unusual rock formations. I was compelled to try to communicate the sense of constant movement present in the formation of the land itself, and I discovered that communication of this movement was best achieved in intaglio printmaking by painting white ground directly on the metal plate surface. I discovered that the painterly handling of the medium produced images visually related to those of the early Seventeenth Century intaglio landscapes by Hercules Seghres, as well as to the ancient landscape paintings by the Chinese. Looking at these images was both exciting and eerie, when evaluating the years that separated all of them. However, as time passed and my attraction associated with

encountering new places lessened, I realized that making these vista images was no longer enough, and I began to search for a deeper meaning of and attachment to my subject.

Research into the life and work of Charles E. Burchfield, American landscape painter, provided some answers to my questions about personal relations to subject matter. Burchfield never traveled far from home to find his subject, and home for him included only two places-- Ohio as a child and young adult, and then western New York State for the remainder of his life. Looking at images of New York State made me long for places I remembered in the East, and this longing led me to realize that a deeper attachment to my subject matter came about when I could relate it to familiar memories.

Landscape is one of my choices as subject matter, because it does relate to my earliest memories. As a child, I lived on a dairy farm in Central New York and spent a large part of every day outside. I learned names of trees and wild flowers, as well as which mushrooms were good to eat and which were poisonous. I learned to love the elements and understand their value, even when it was cold, snowing, or raining. Picking berries, planting flowers, harvesting gardens, and building snow people were commonplace in my life. Gathering chestnuts, acorns, and sap were just as normal as waking each day. I walked in wooded areas filled with the smell of moss and the sound of running streams. I learned to recognize the sounds of insects, peeper frogs, birds, and wild animals. All these experiences combine to strengthen my love for and delight with the landscape.

After the realization of this memory connection transpired, I searched for more intimate spaces in order to feel a sense of familiarity with my landscape subjects. This realization also introduced a new set of technical considerations to my work. Beginning everything on site became important and essential. When these initial images were not begun directly on the printing surface, they were drawn on paper. Sometimes these drawings were

simply sketches with blocks of value and minimal line work, while at other times they were well-thought out drawings that required a few hours to complete. Reference to the monotyped landscapes Degas executed from memory helped me to understand what elements were necessary to form a cohesive sketch from which to work, while reference to the etchings and drawings of Rembrandt and Whistler was useful when the study of details became essential. Furthermore, whether the time spent drawing was short or long, I became part of each place I selected, and related the physical presence of these observed places to an essence of some place that I knew in the past. Then when I returned to the studio to work, I remembered specific events of the day. These events included the sounds I heard, the time of the day, the prevailing weather conditions, and my own psychological and emotional state. This "interior landscape" transported me back over and over again to that original site, and at the same time often connected me to an earlier, familiar time and place in my life.

Drawing has always been one of my favorite activities and this was a strong factor in my original motivation for becoming a printmaker. My desire to draw often and my discovery of "figurative associations" in the landscape images inspired my revived awareness and excitement about working directly from a model. Looking again at Rembrandt's work, and then at the figurative works of Richard Diebenkorn and Jim Dine led me to recognize how important it is to always broaden my selection of subject matter. Since I value the ability to work directly from observation, once more making prints became a challenge. I discovered that working on small lithograph stones was the most spontaneous way to accomplish this satisfactorily, and each stone image became a precious little gem for me.

There are many methods available by which to execute a print, and I have used many of them to express my impression of both motifs. The variety of instruments and techniques employed were incorporated to produce specific results. Line drawings were achieved not

only with styluses, reed pens, and crayons, but also with unusual implements, such as screwdrivers and sticks. Large areas of value were accomplished in intaglio not only with soft ground textures and aquatints, but also with steel wool pads and scouring brushes. An especially satisfying method of executing both intaglio and lithographic prints for me was using a paint brush. Tusche washes produced an effect in lithography similar to the white ground results in intaglio with respect to what I see as the constant movement that gives a sense of life to both land and figure.

Incorporating an element of abstraction and communicating an essence of mystery are among some of the most important formal issues in my work, and finding the right degree of each is a constant struggle for me. Therefore, some of these images may be recognizable, while others are certainly not. I attempt to address these concerns by using suggested forms, rather than conventional representations of my subject. In addition, the variety of printmaking processes allows for changes in the image by the very nature of the printmaking technique selected. I often found it satisfying to do the same image in different methods, resulting in the repetition of particular images. Furthermore, printmaking allows for changes in the image directly on the printing plates, as well. While changes in lithographic images are not physically difficult, scraping and burnishing intaglio plates frequently became tiring, tedious, and uninteresting. When that happened, I took a moment again to look at Rembrandt's work, as well as the work of such artists as Piranesi and Meryon. The states of their intaglio prints reminded me what was possible with perseverance, and I returned to my own work with renewed enthusiasm.

WORK CITED

1. J. P. Hodin, et. al., eds. Art Since Mid-Century, The New Internationalism, Volume 2, Figurative Art. Greenwich: New York Graphic Soc., 1971, p. 151. From Gerald Nordland, Diebenkorn, catalogue of the retrospective exhibition 'Richard Diebenkorn', Washington Gallery of Modern Art, 1964.

PLATES



PLATE I. Glacier Gorge Stream
Intaglio (48 x 72 inches)

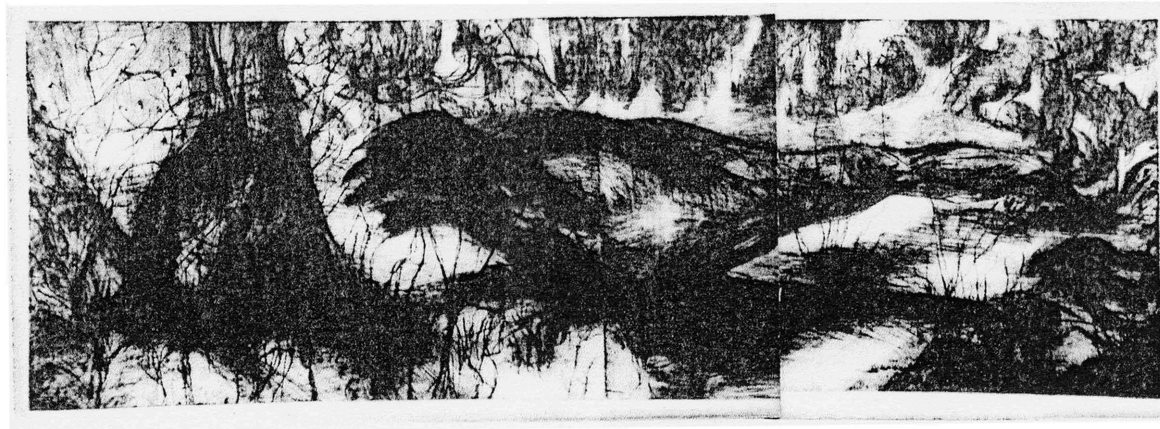


PLATE II. Highland Debris
Intaglio (24 x 72 inches)

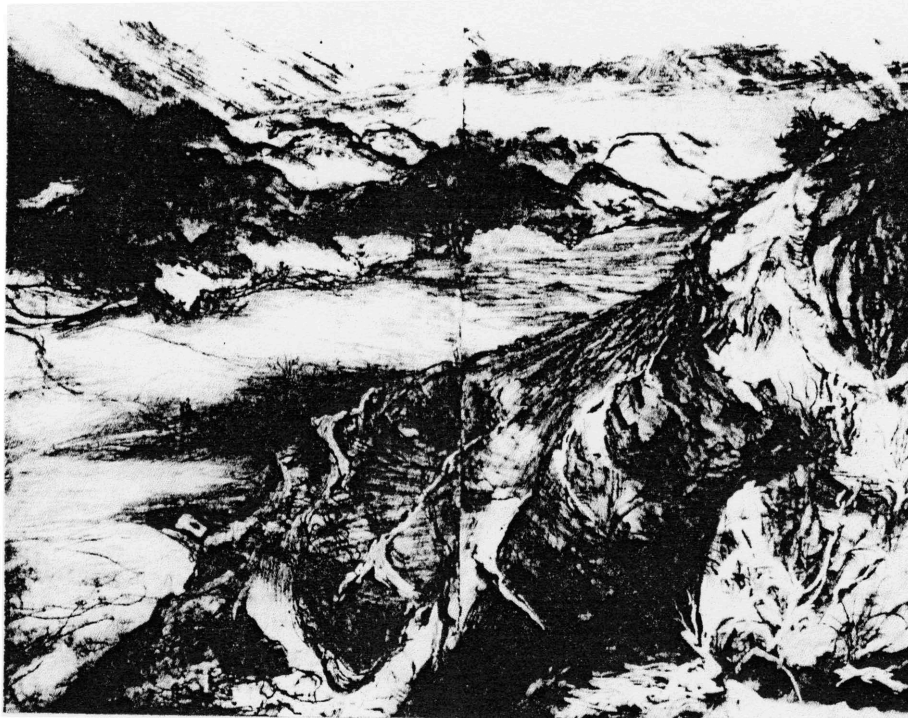


PLATE III. Winter on the Reservoir
Intaglio (36 x 48 inches)

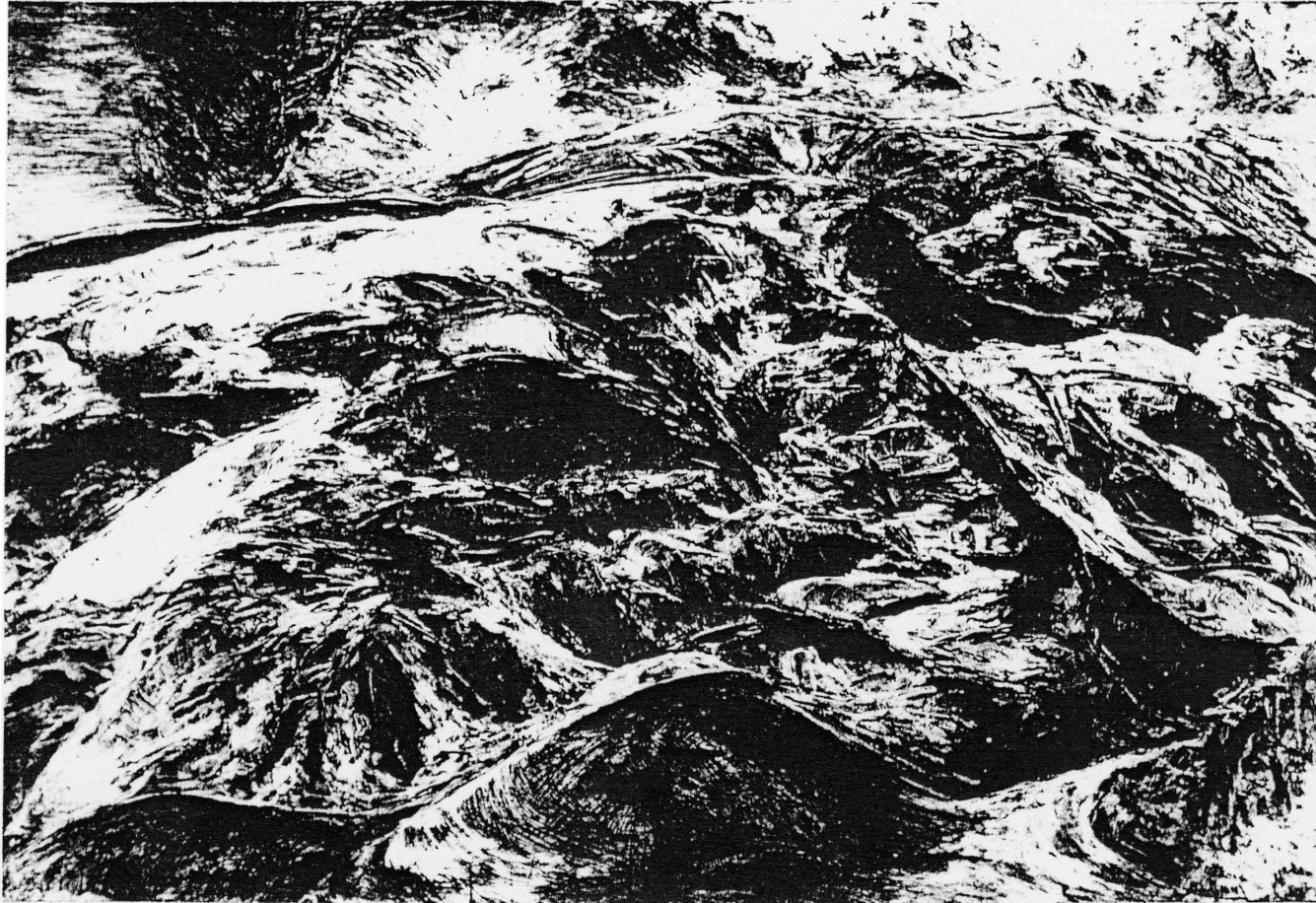


PLATE IV. Touching the Western Landscape
Intaglio (24 x 36 inches)

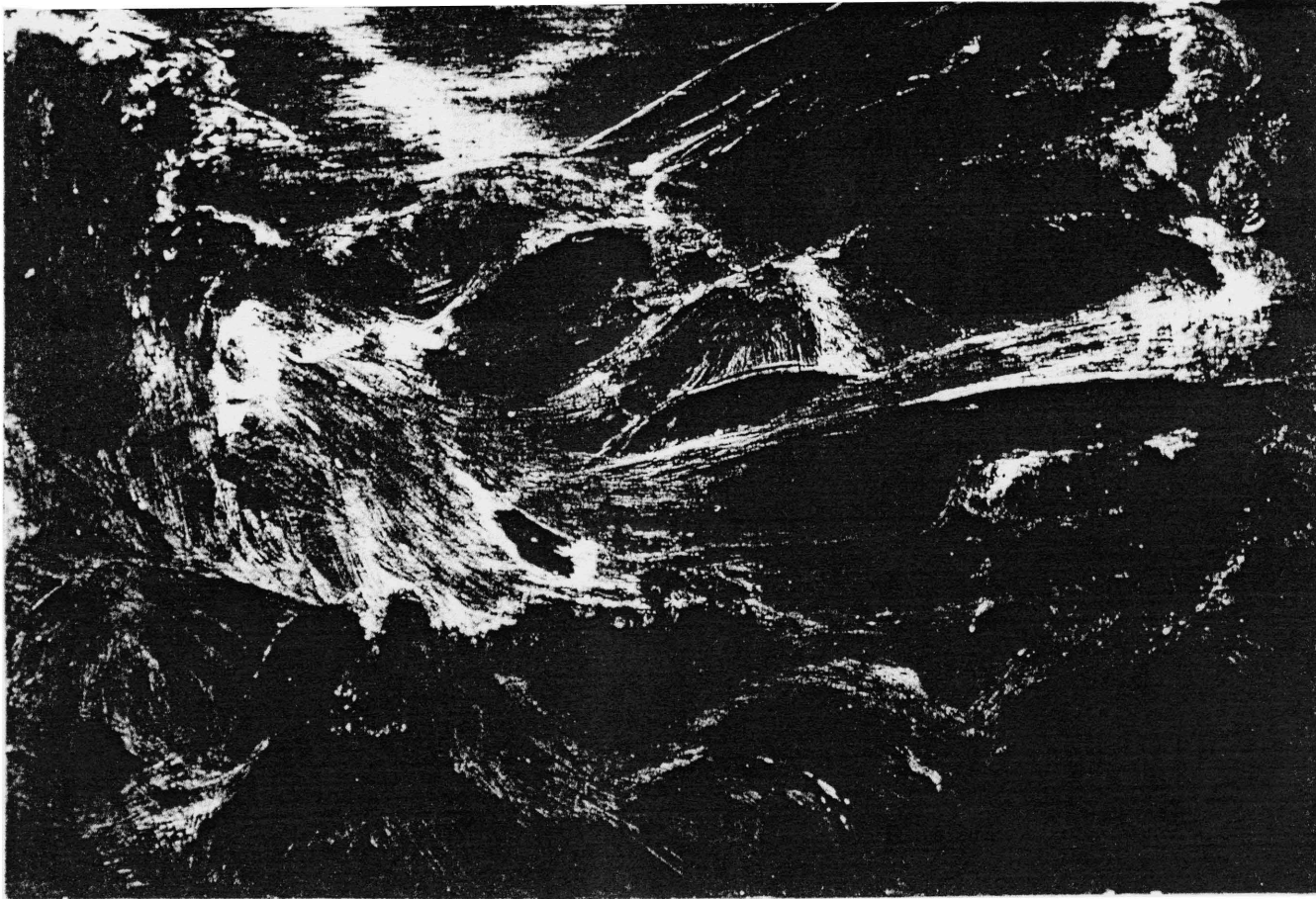


PLATE V. Reconfiguring the Western Landscape
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Intaglio (36 x 24 inches)



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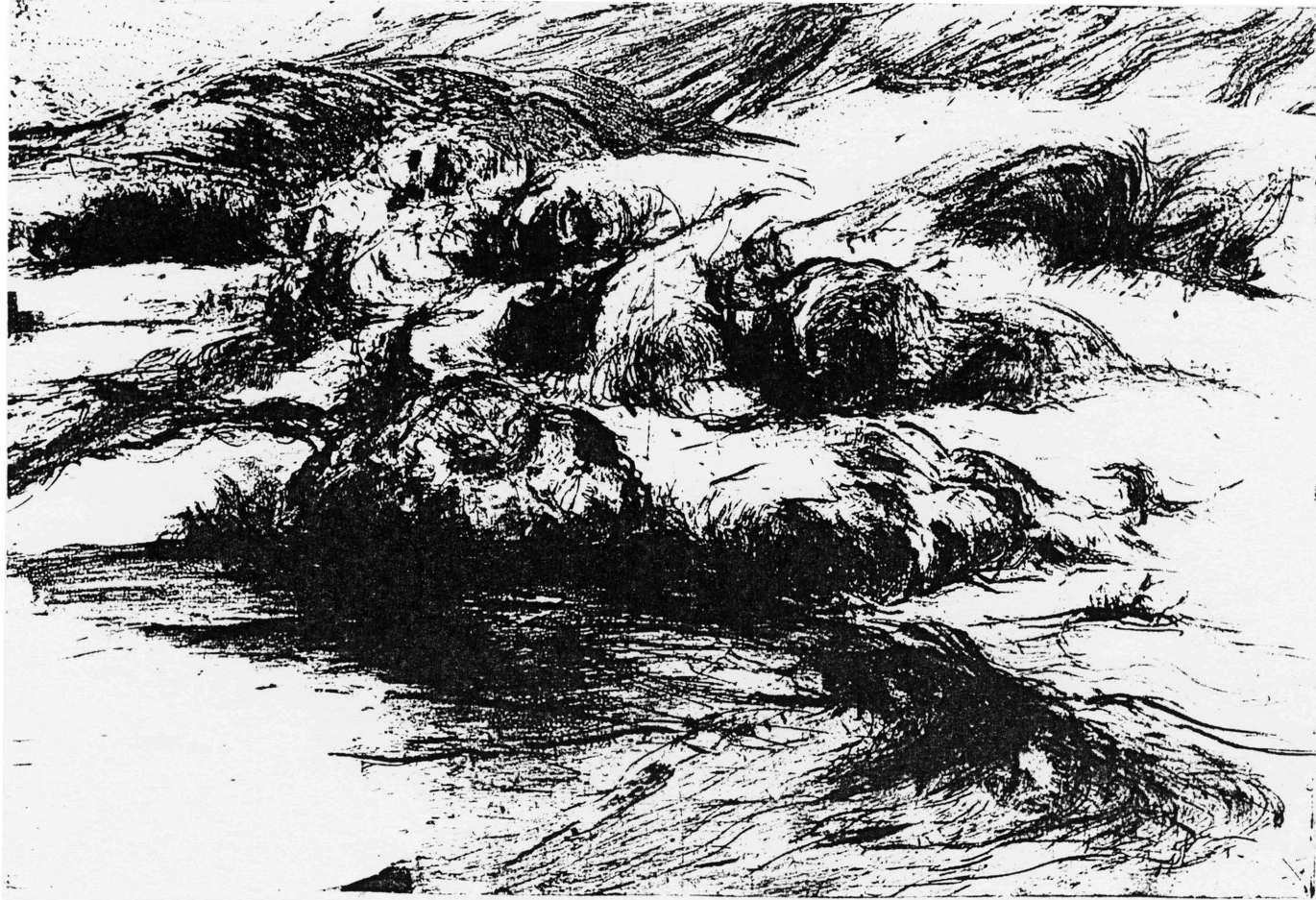


PLATE VIII. Lake Dowdy
Intaglio (24 x 36 inches)



PLATE IX. Becca's Rock I
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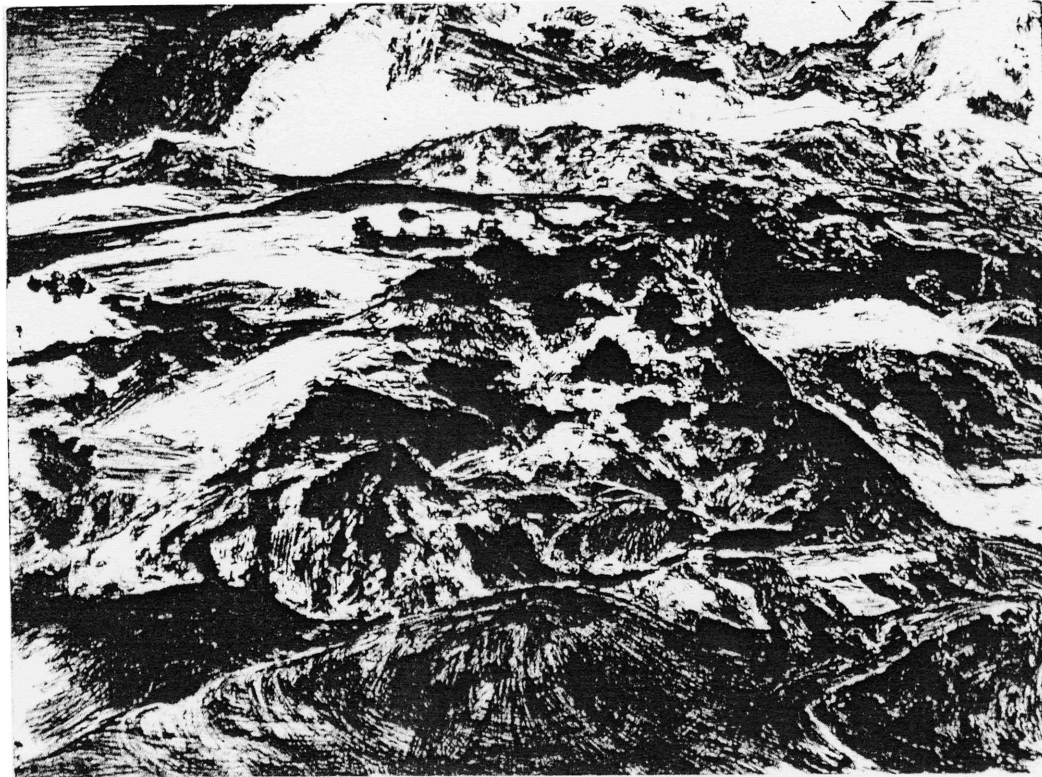


PLATE XI. Early Morning Storm
Intaglio (18 x 24 inches)

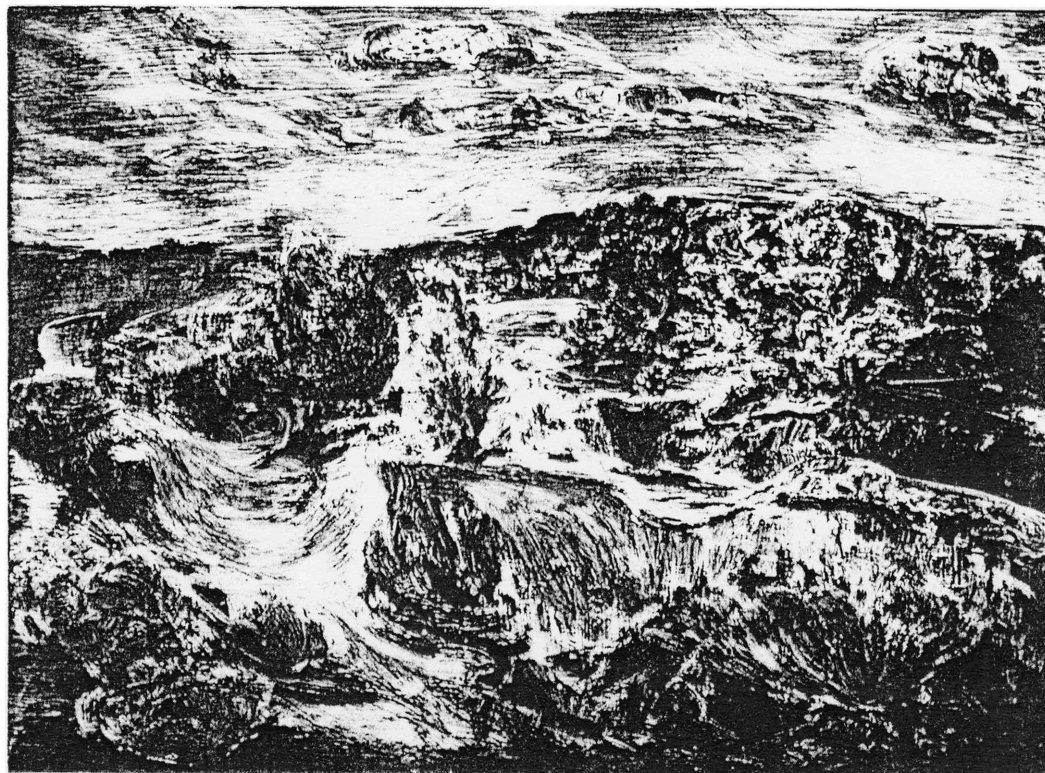


PLATE XII. Santa Fe
Intaglio (18 x 24 inches)



PLATE XIII. Late Afternoon, Route 34
Intaglio (18 x 24 inches)



PLATE XIV. Becca's Rock III
Lithograph (17 x 23 inches)

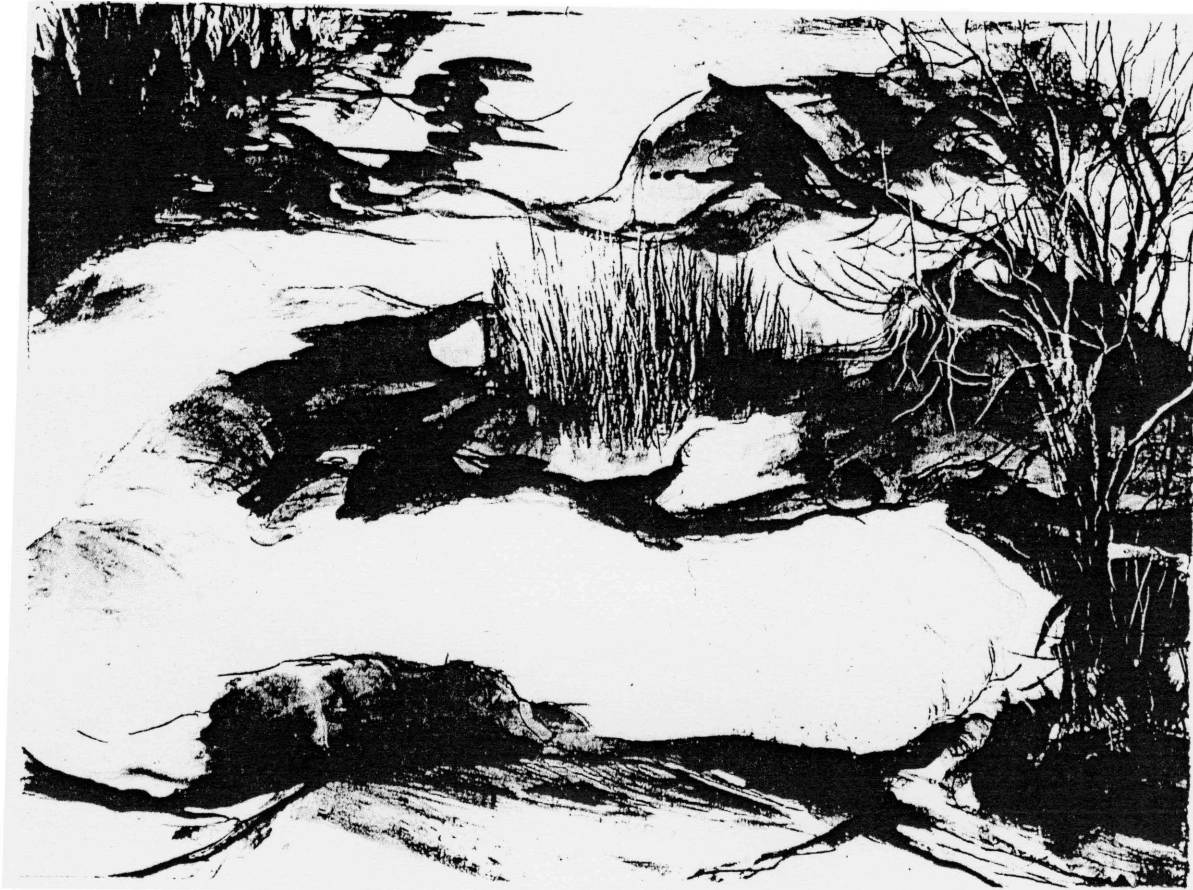


PLATE XV. Meadow at Spring Creek
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PLATE XVI. Glacier Stream
Lithograph (17 x 23 inches)



PLATE XVII. Cache La Poudre
Lithograph (17 x 23 inches)

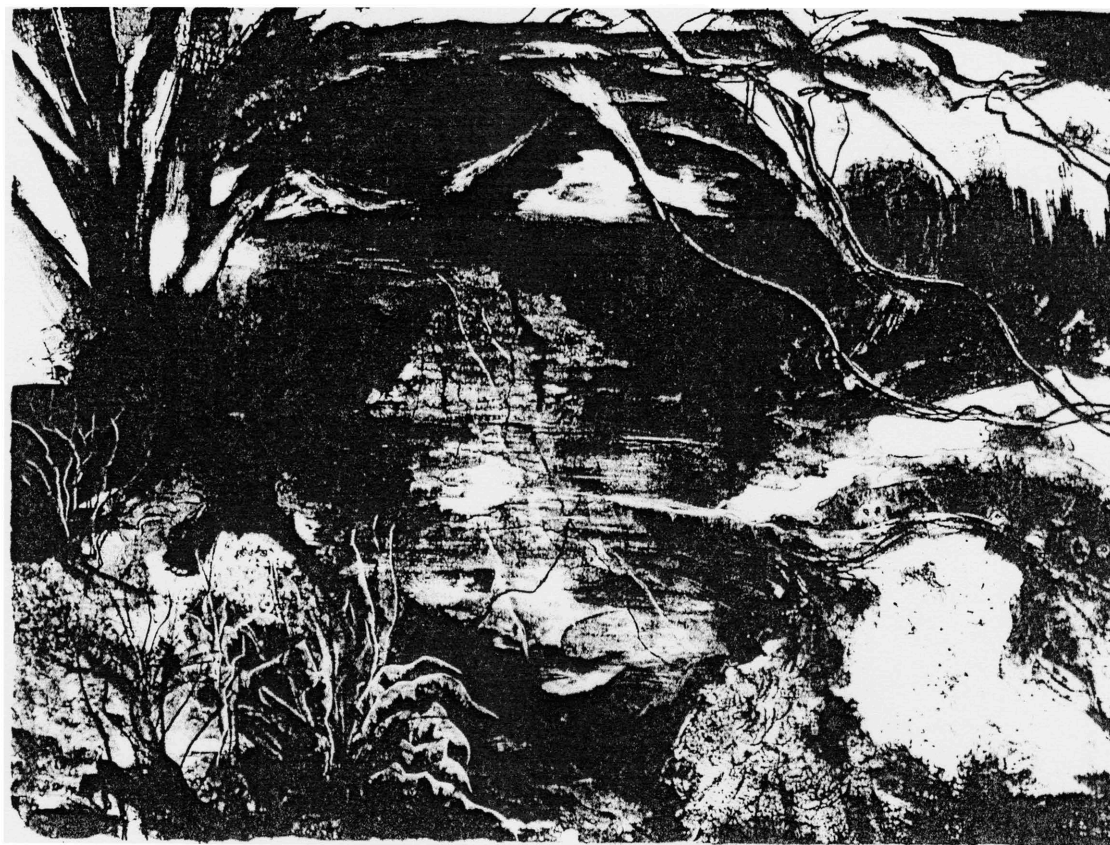


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PLATE XIX. Fall Sunlight
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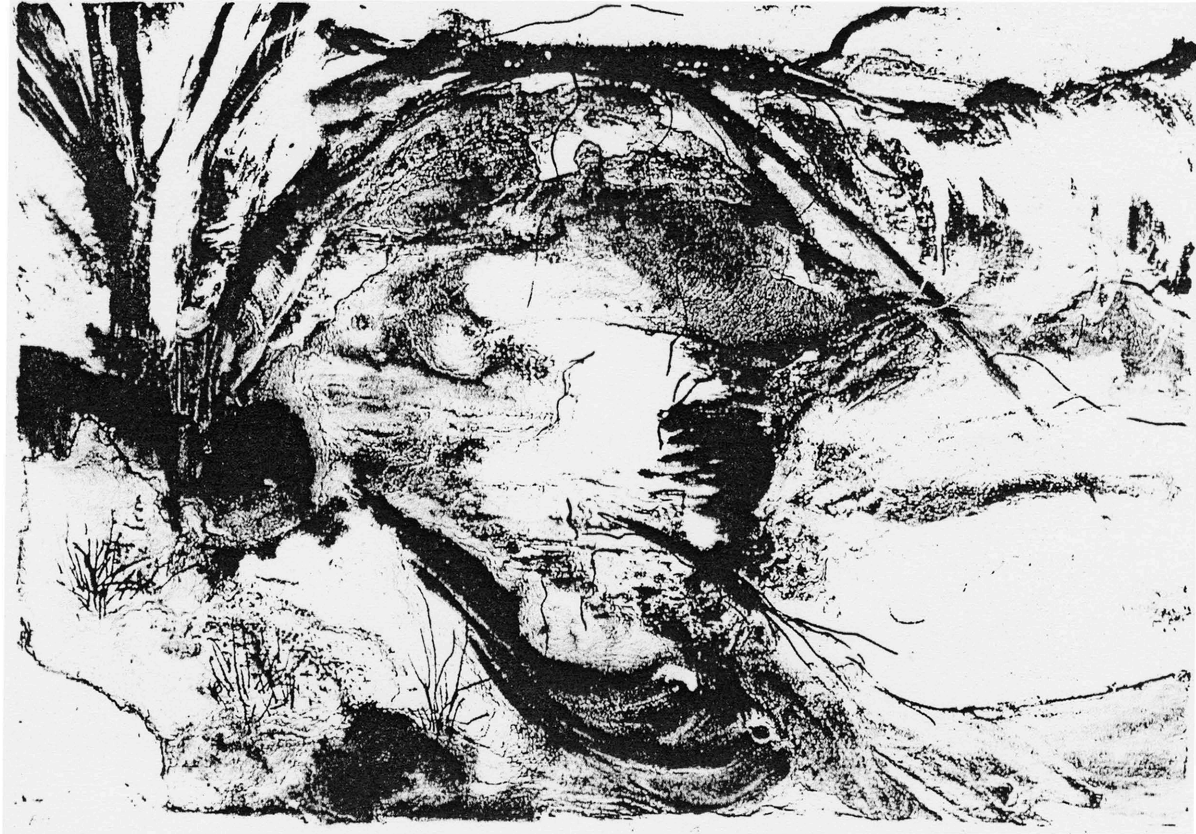


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PLATE XXIII. Laurie on Chair
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PLATE XXIV. Tamara
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PLATE XXV. Standing Figure
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PLATE XXVI. Bill on Stool
Lithograph (9 x 7 inches)



PLATE XXVII. Bill Standing
Lithograph (9 x 7 inches)



PLATE XXVIII. Figure Standing
Lithograph (9 x 6 inches)



PLATE XXIX. Carol with Book
Lithograph (8 1/2 x 6 1/2 inches)



PLATE XXX. Kaaren Seated
Lithograph (8 1/2 x 6 inches)

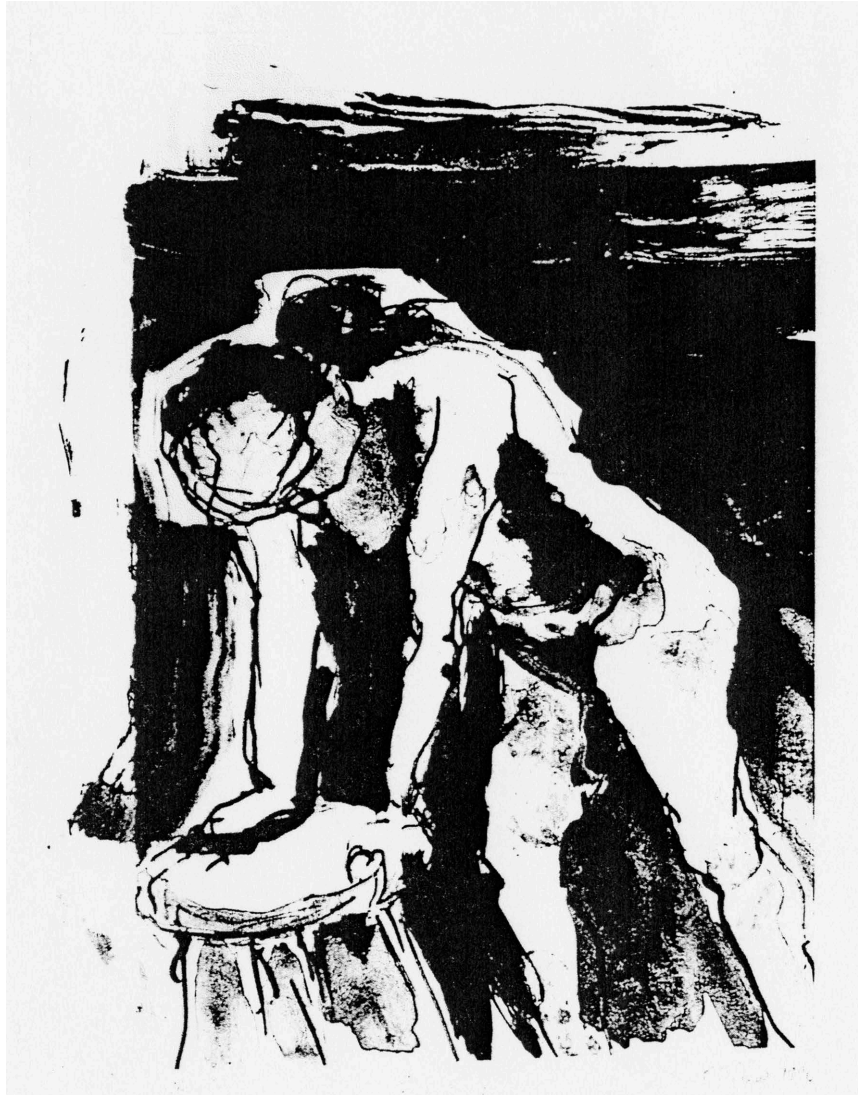


PLATE XXXI. Energy
Lithograph (9 1/2 x 7 inches)



PLATE XXXII. The Lounge
Lithograph (8 1/2 x 6 1/2 inches)



PLATE XXXIII. Tamara's Back
Lithograph (9 x 8 inches)

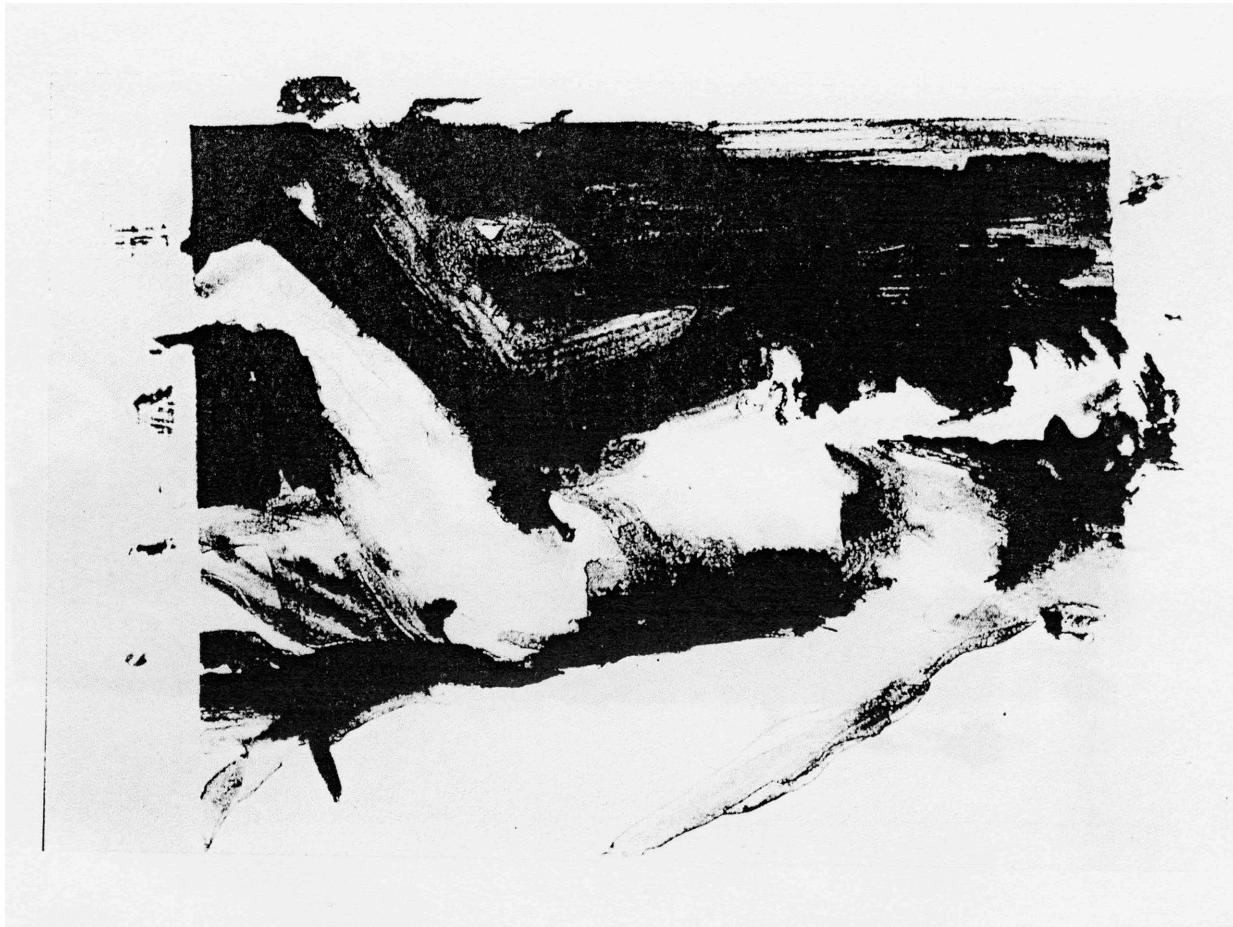


PLATE XXXIV. Figure at Rest
Lithograph (7 x 9 1/2 inches)



PLATE XXXV. Profile
Lithograph (10 x 5 inches)