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TERRAIN IN TRANSITION

By

Jennifer Sullivan Carney

B.F.A. , University of Arizona, 1977

A thesis submitted to the faculty of the Graduate
School of the University of Colorado in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

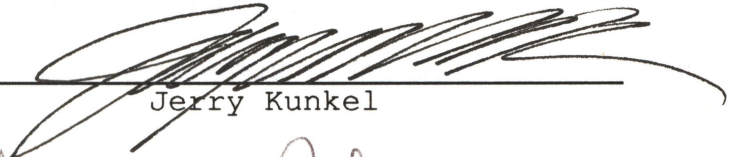
Department of Fine Arts, Creative Art

1991

This Thesis for the Master of Fine Arts Degree by
Jennifer Sullivan Carney
has been approved for the
Department of
Fine Art
by



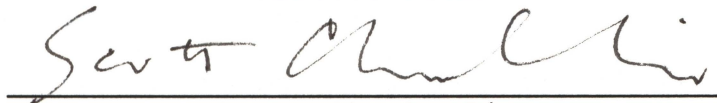
Charles Forsman



Jerry Kunkel



Celeste Rehm



Scott Chamberlin

Date 11/21/91

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is not an attempt to describe, define or use words to substitute for the actual work in my thesis exhibit. Words used to define the visual arts can imply a fixed answer, an easy solution, thus quick consumption and disposal of the product. One of the supportive arguments for painting, in this age when painting has been proclaimed to be dead by certain critics and artists, is that a painting can evoke reactions and capture the unspeakable. Further, a painting is a complex structure which at its best, slowly reveals itself. As Wayne Thiebaud has said, "Great painters will give you all of the secrets and none of the clues." Therefore, in opposition to the principle of instantaneous consumption a painting holds the opportunity to be less temporal and offer sustained exploration.

My work will be discussed via an interview format. The questions in quotes are those posed by faculty, those not in quotes are questions I have asked myself in the process of developing this body of work. Interspersed are quotes from artists and

philosophers. Lastly, is the inclusion of literary fragments which contribute to the peripheral nature of defining in words works of visual art.

Question: Why do you make this work?

Reply: I believe in a self-reliant approach to living in an indifferent universe. Contemplation of the natural world fortifies my spirit. From an empathetic connection to nature I come to understand much of human experience. Direct interaction with nature, a walk in the woods or traveling in a boat at river speed, exposes all of life. To an observant person, vivid examples of birth, growth, disease, death, decay and regeneration are revealed in a one square foot of forest ground.

Renaissance perspective introduced to art the separatist point of view. The person observing the activity in the picture is forever separated from the action. The industrial revolution furthered this notion of man as separate from nature by uprooting a large percentage of the populace from a rural and into an urban lifestyle. Each modern convenience introduced to society since the turn of the century has reinforced the insulation between people and the natural world, denying the connectedness of all animate and inanimate matter. By observing natural occurrences I continually discover that the complex

dilemmas of human life are synonymous with the conditions that other forms of life experience. Typically, many of these conditions are attributed exclusively to humans: ferocity, delicacy, strength, adaptation and patience. A Gila Monster can be fierce; an ice formation delicate; a stalk of asparagus in spring strong; the Ptarmigan adapts its coloration winter and summer; and a tree bleeds when wounded. Through visual interpretation of nature I try to simultaneously address ontological and biological issues.

Further, in nature all color, shape, texture, line and space can be found - the fundamentals of art.

"To recreate oneself under the conditions of art is, ideally, to bring to consciousness all of one's experience as material, and to realize it entirely in form."

Nietzsche, Henry James and the Artistic Will
by Stephen Donadio

These discoveries propel my life. Art making is my way of attempting to come to terms with the inevitability of a finite lifespan within the infinite cycle of the natural universe.

"Art is embedded in nature." Albrecht Durer

Question: "These paintings are figurative. Why choose to paint representational images rather than abstract paintings if the essence of human experience is what you are trying to capture?"

Reply: Abstract and non-objective paintings rely upon external conditions for definition: the context in which they are placed, the history of art which precedes them or the viewers personal experiences all can be used to interpret such imagery. In contrast, recognizable elements in my paintings provide factual clues to the viewer. The physical world around me provides the visual origins of my paintings. By allowing recognizable references to trees, water, vast spaces and geologic features to remain in the final images I acknowledge nature as my source. This invests a type of authenticity and truthfulness to the final painting.

I am not using the landscape as a metaphor for human conditions. Instead, I strive to paint the sameness of all things. The planet's condition is our condition. Humans resemble many other life forms in shape, color and texture.

The abstract structure of my paintings utilize devices such as compositional breaks, multiple pictorial elements and the addition of textural surfaces to reconfigure the traditional form of landscape. Such devices indicate that these paintings capture far more than an expected picture of a place.

Question: "What do you want the work to be?"

Reply: Each painting is an effort to manifest my non-verbal emotional quandary. The ideas behind the individual paintings are diverse. They stem from a broad personal reaction to human circumstance created by human manipulation of the places we inhabit. Other pieces are a reflection of a state of mind, derived from the contemplation of nature. Another source is the direct self-identification with massive and spacious geologic forms encountered in the outdoors.

"You must learn to wait properly."

"And how does one learn that?"

"By letting go of yourself, leaving yourself and everything yours behind you, so decisively, that nothing more is left of you but a purposeless tension."

"So I must become purposeless-on purpose?"

Zen in the Art of Archery
by Eugen Herrigel

Increasingly, I find my willingness to push the paintings beyond a comfortable or safe point has brought a different communicative power to the pieces. This has required me to initiate an intuitive leap of faith in the process of making a painting. The abandon has ultimately brought the paintings closer to becoming what I have long contemplated conceptually.

Question: "Would you consider that you don't need to make REAL ART out of that greasy kid stuff [oil paint]? Maybe, you should use another medium?"

Reply: Oil and acrylic paint in combination with commonplace house construction materials like caulk, linoleum tiles and duct tape are the mediums with which I feel least encumbered. Building an image, session by session, focusing in and editing, allows me to hone a painting. Painted illusion and many formal elements of art including color theory, gestural marks and the line as a division of a plane, remain a constant source of interest to me as tools in a diverse visual language. These elements surface predominately in two-dimensional art.

The affinity I feel with this fluid medium typically enables me to use it quite unconsciously allowing the concepts underlying the work to take form. David Hockney stops using a medium as soon as he has mastered its technical characteristics. Yet, I find the versatility of paint and the history of painting both provide an inexhaustible source of possibility with which one can make an image.

The color selections in the paintings are grounded in the possibilities of natural phenomenon. Occasionally, the color is a projection of what a place could look like in a specific set of circumstances.

Despite oil painting's weighty traditions or perhaps because of it, humor can be found to dispel it's mystification. Looking up several colors which

predominate my palette I have found such lively descriptions as:

"As you can see, ultramarine is workhorse, a solid citizen who never calls attention to himself but is always ready to help when you need him."

"Cadmium Red Deep - Frankly, I list this color here just as a matter of completeness since few painters use it."

"Cerulean Blue - This is another special purpose color, favored mainly by landscape painters."

"Naples Yellow - This beautiful, neglected hue comes under the optional heading, but it's habit forming once you try it."

Creative Color for the Oil Painter
by Weldon Blake

Paint is the material of choice each morning as I enter my studio. As a medium it requires a level of engagement which ultimately results in an intuitive arrival at the finished painting.

Question: "For many people today "landscape painting", however broadly one wishes to use the term, is a thing of the past. Confronted with this notion where do you see your work fitting in a contemporary art world?"

Reply: I am not alone in making a choice to base my art on observable and recognizable nature. Form and originality are not sacrificed in this choice. Many contemporary artists are painting new visions using landscape imagery which results in forceful aesthetic experiences. Donald Sultan, Joan Snyder, Neil Jenny, Don Suggs, April Gornik and Joan Nelson are but a few


artists who despite their radically varied motivations, techniques and formats are creating art which provokes deep reactions and raises meaningful current issues.

My paintings have not been devised to fit current fashions in art. They result from my experience and interest in the world around me. The imagery in the paintings include my original undergraduate work in geology, as well as my years living on a working cattle ranch in Arizona and subsequent amateur interests in geography, atmospheric sciences and recreation.

As fewer people in our culture understand the natural environment my reflections on a vanishing world can only increase in relevance.

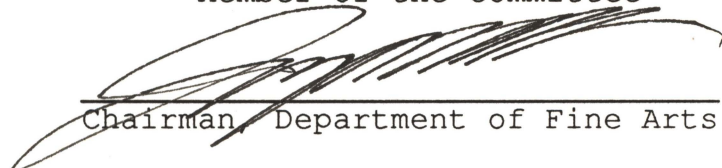
I would like to extend my special thanks to my Graduate committee for their consistent and challenging support. Through his devotion to the natural world, Chuck Forsman, my advisor, has proved a valuable mentor. Jerry Kunkel's quick wit and openness to nontraditional art avenues sparked unimagined changes in my work. George Woodman fortified my formal interests in art making and provided the rare opportunity to work on a public art commission from which I learned, "There is no such thing as an ugly color."

In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree Master of Fine Arts
Jennifer Sullivan Carney
has submitted this written thesis
as a supplement to the creative thesis
and eight slides
which are in the permanent possession of the
University of Colorado and recorded with the
Department of Fine Arts

Approved by 
Chairman of the Committee


Member of the Committee


Member of the Committee


Chairman, Department of Fine Arts

Number of Slides and Medium

- | | | |
|---|-------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Oil on Canvas | 73"x 64" | <u>Dissolution</u> |
| 2. Oil on Canvas
Ash, Plexiglass,
Hardboard | 73"x 76.25" | <u>Canopy to Ashes</u> |
| 3. Acrylic on
Linoleum | 12"x 24" | <u>Birch Cycles</u> |
| 4. Oil, Acrylic, Duct
Tape, Hardboard | 72"x 89" | <u>Divisive Desires</u> |
| 5. Oil, Pastel,
Hardboard | 48"x 79" | <u>Requiem</u> |
| 6. Acrylic on
Linoleum | 12"x 12" | <u>Violation II</u> |
| 7. Acrylic on Canvas | 71.5"x 96" | <u>Reflection II</u> |
| 8. Acrylic, Oil
Hardboard | 53"x 92" | <u>Evolution</u> |

