

1978

## Passage

Randal Sumner  
*Portland State University, Portland, Oregon*

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### Recommended Citation

Sumner, Randal, "Passage" (1978). *Dissertations and Theses*. Paper 2657.  
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**PASSAGE**

by

**Randal Summer**

A terminal project report  
submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF FINE ARTS**

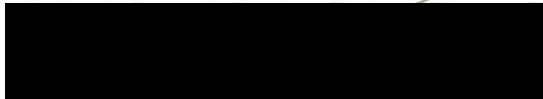
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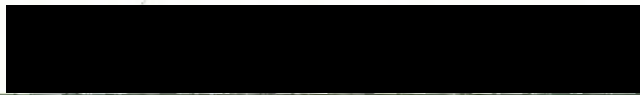
**Portland State University  
1978**

TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ART AND ARCHITECTURE:

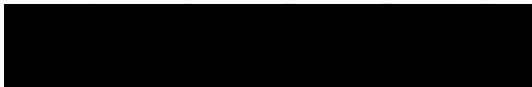
The members of the Committee approve the thesis of  
Randal Summer presented May 22, 1978.



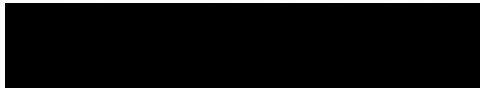
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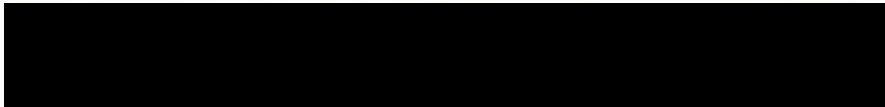
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APPROVED:



Leonard B. Kimbrell, Head, Department of Art and Architecture

## INTRODUCTION

The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science.

Albert Einstein

The work in my terminal project exhibition reflects ideas that have been constant in my work previous to my two-year M.F.A. studio experience. My last two years have been spent developing these ideas, as well as discarding and exploring others.

I have grouped my work by medium rather than by specific pieces. I find it impossible to consider a single work out of context of the larger series. Even an unsuccessful work has its place illuminating the direction of the entire production. I have tried to use drawing, lithography, and painting with a concern for their intrinsic properties. All the work has a common formal vocabulary, so I will try not to repeat similar problems or solutions that reoccur among different media.

For me each medium requires a different approach when one begins a work. An example is the labor involved in my pencil drawing as opposed to the experimental-spontaneity of my painting. This kind of shifting of emphasis I find a stimulating problem for personal discipline. I am interested in many areas of formal and psychological content, and how they apply to different media solutions.

## DRAWINGS

In the drawings the medium I used is graphite on plate finish bristol board. It is a medium I have used for several years and the one I am most comfortable with. The drawings in the M.F.A. show reflect many of the characteristics of my earlier work. From a primarily landscape-still-life experience I developed the new drawings around the human figure.

Formally, the drawings deal with a very contrived design space. It has been my desire to use all of the drawing area, to give a complete image rather than shapes placed randomly or areas tentatively rendered. Here I have approached drawing as a black/white problem. The strong blacks and pure whites must have a feel of solid presence, solid, not in the illusionary sense, but in the sense of dense forms, not easily penetrated. This concern for density and impenetrable space also enhances the mystery of the symbols involved. I have long been working with concepts of coincidental activity and soundlessness. By coincidental activity, I refer not so much to psychological content as to the formal content. The miniature works of the Mughal and Kangra Indian schools best illustrates this idea. Each work is self-contained and adjusts its design so that there is a kind of perfect harmonious presentation. There are no loose ends even when these miniature works defy the rational visual information presented.

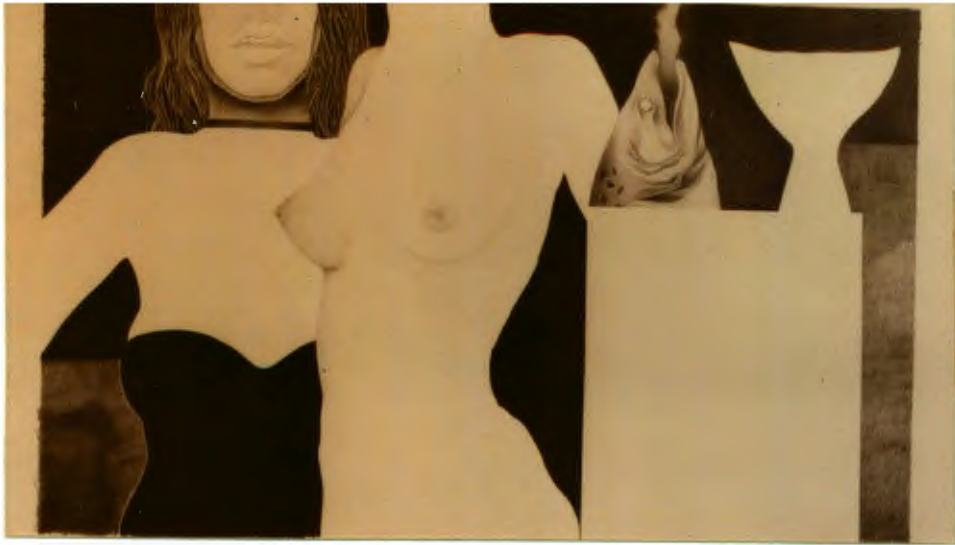
Soundlessness is difficult to communicate visually. I try to

implement the idea several ways. First is the use of strong horizontals. This is an intuitive decision, but the horizontal does seem to be the most serene direction. The horizontal idea also carries over into the rectangular format. The solid dark areas also contribute to this concept of stillness. I feel that the black areas form an elegant kind of barrier that excludes the viewer, and by leaving the viewer out of the activity makes him more a witness than a participant. I have begun to use architectural forms to implement this idea of a barrier. In the drawings "Museum Pieces" and "Pink Stockings" one looks past the barrier, or through it into the smaller opening passages. The individual shapes also convey this sense of stillness by their static configuration. Much of this influence comes from the New York painter Richard Lindner who uses design to detach the viewer from the overpowering sexual symbolism in his work. This is the difficult lesson of control that is very important in the drawings.

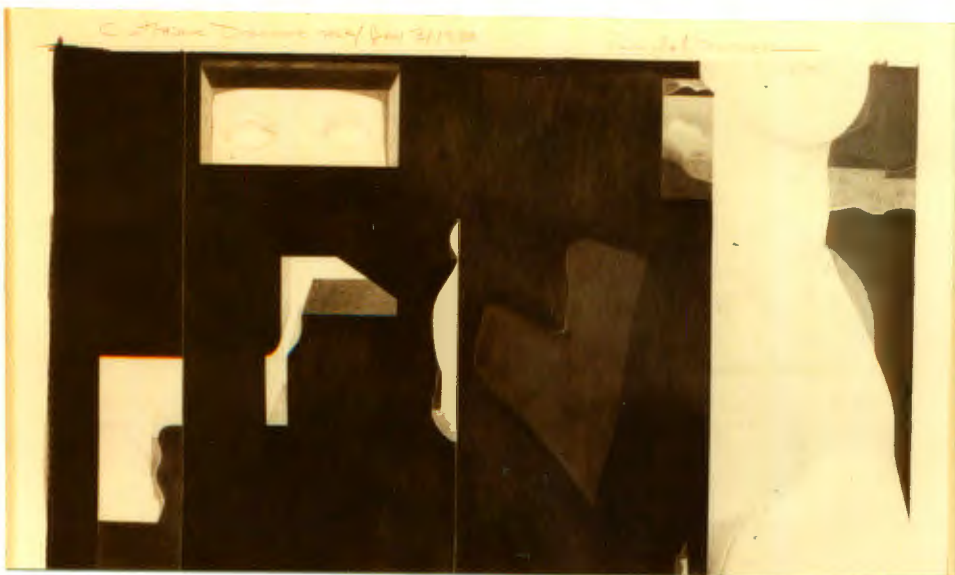
The psychological content of the drawings hinges on the interpretation of symbolism concerning the female figures. I cannot make much of a statement about them, because I simply do not know yet how I feel about them. They may have much to do with fashion, in that I am fascinated with what women wear, or do not wear. The idea of drawing sections of the anatomy instead of the entire figure is an idea popularized by men's magazines. They reflect a catalog-like display of different female types. Obviously, these images deal heavily in a quality of mystery. I do not feel it is unfair to say that they may also be an unsolved mystery to the artist.

Much of my work deals with impressions of moments or places and

not with exact references. I never work from a model or on a location. It is in the studio itself that these images are born. This is an important point, as it illustrates the lack of necessity for direct visual reference. I had used the fish as a symbol for three years before I realized it had something to do with the concept of freedom. Now when I use it, it has a specific connotation. Perhaps the overriding symbol is the use of the medium in a black/white dichotomy. Black/white, life/death, male/female and so on--the concept of opposite pieces in some larger puzzle or contest.

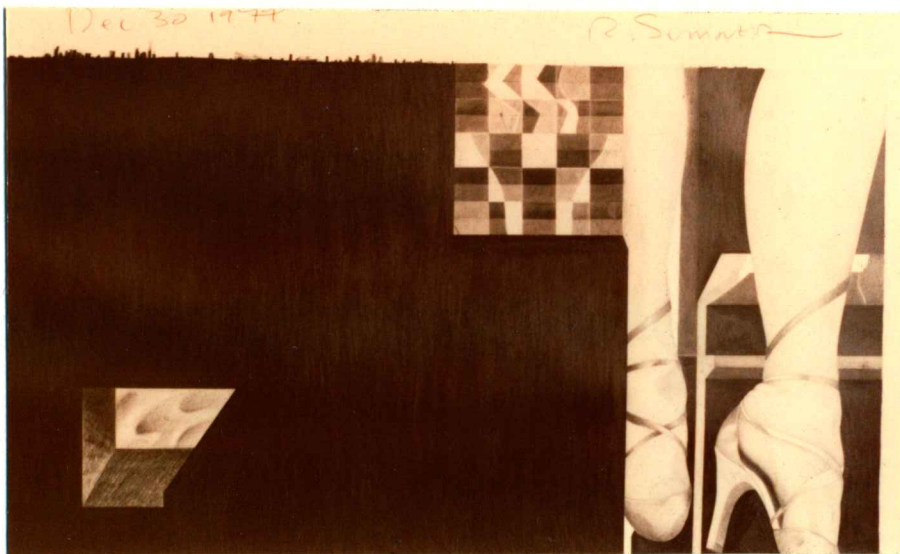


Marilyn Mask

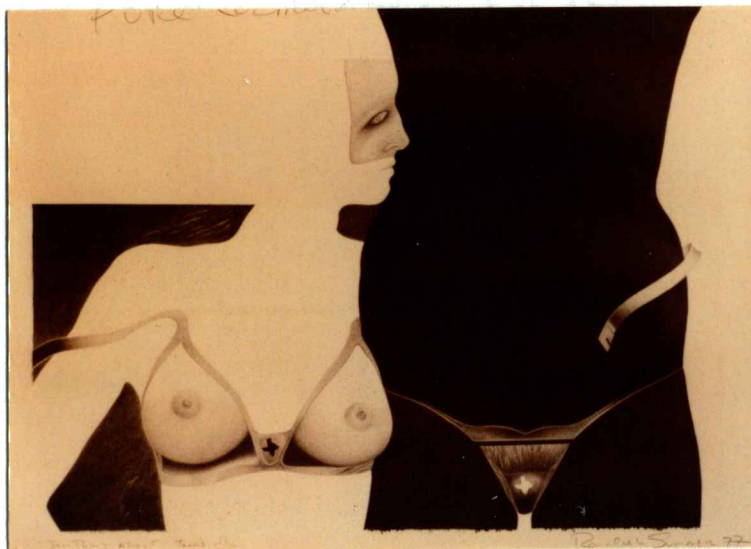


Museum Pieces

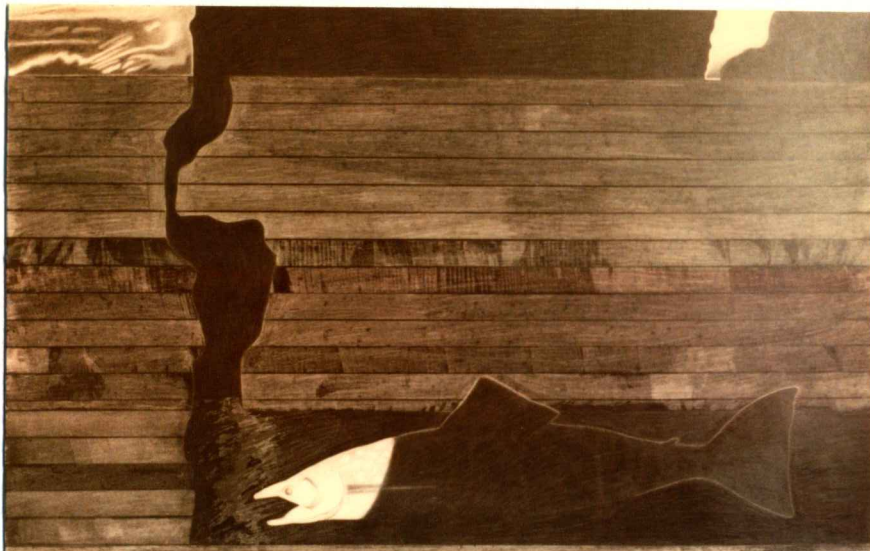




Pink Stockings



Cullen Davis



Night Fish

## LITHOGRAPHS

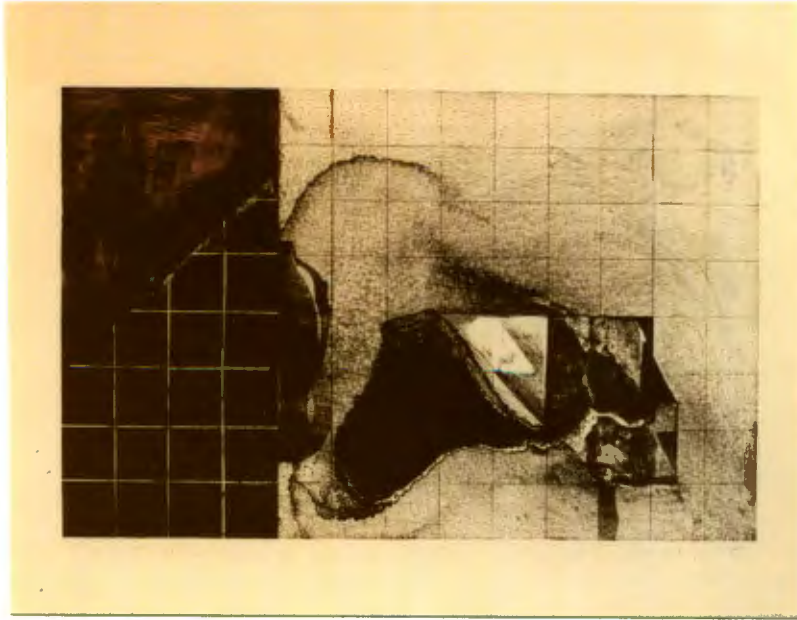
The medium in these works is color lithography, using aluminum plates. I have been actively working in lithography since 1974 and in this last series I have begun to feel some real control of the medium. As in the drawings, there is much emphasis on the opposition of black/white and geometric/organic.

The lithographs more than the drawings exhibit my concern with the control of space. I see the grid that appears in them not as a geometric entity, but rather as a tool to control two-inch square areas. The grid is also underplayed to let areas seek their own visual depth instead of flattening the entire image. In the print "Blue Wine", the black is not overpowering to the lighter negative space. They seem to struggle for dominance, but neither area is more important. Another formal consideration deals with the inset shapes, in some cases, placing them out of alignment with the black gridded area as in "Orange" and "Blue Wine", in others putting these inset shapes in the negative space, but aligned with the grid, as in "Pink Choice". It is the nature of tusche itself to make organic cloud-like shapes. I have tried to use this property as a balance to large black areas. Again, as in the drawings I use the strong horizontal format, not for its serene connotation, but as a playing board to move the shapes across and into the formal confrontation of black and white. There is a kind of competition between the large geometric blacks and the more organic negative space.

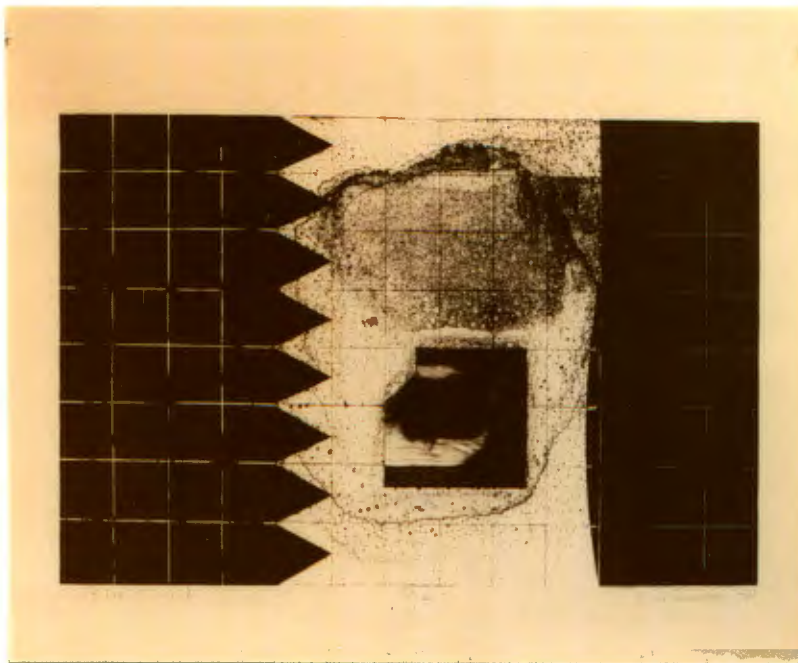
I see these areas competing for the entire surface. In both the drawings and prints, the main formal problem is shape, and the choice of proportion as it concerns each inter-related shape.

I have deleted the color proofing process in the lithographs. This adds an element of surprise for myself during the final printing. The color is a consideration not about a single color, but about my best decision-making color choices.

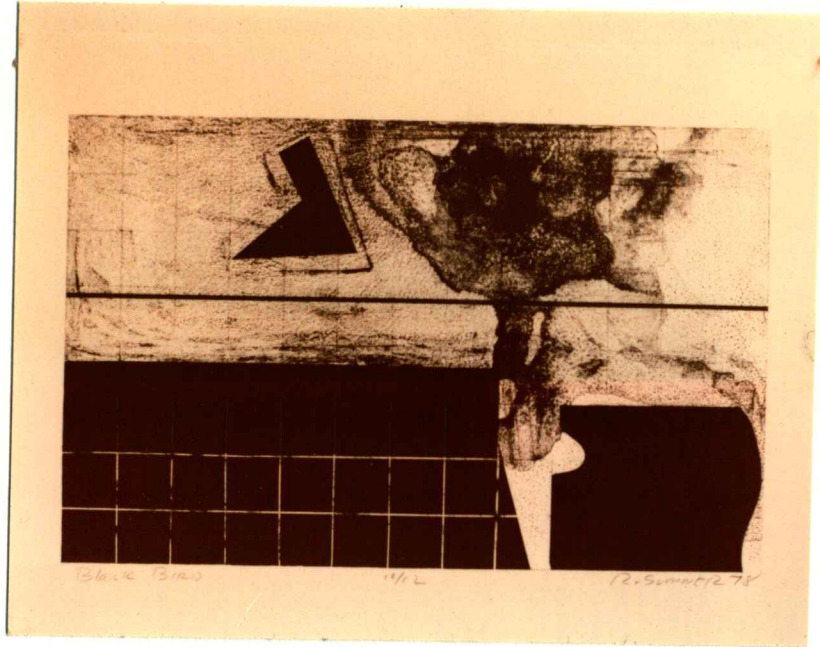
The psychological content is simple, and is visually explained in my interpretation of the medium. It may also be explained in terms of male/female interrelations, the more aggressive shapes opposing passive or curved areas. In "Blue Choice", the left side challenges the right for possession of the center inset. Another point of view is that the black architectural structures are in a contest with the organic forces of nature.



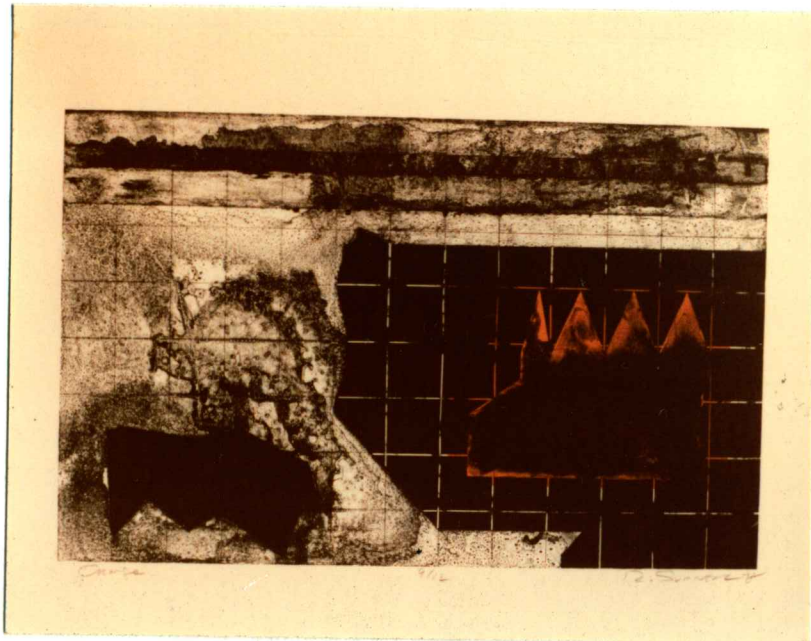
Pink Choice



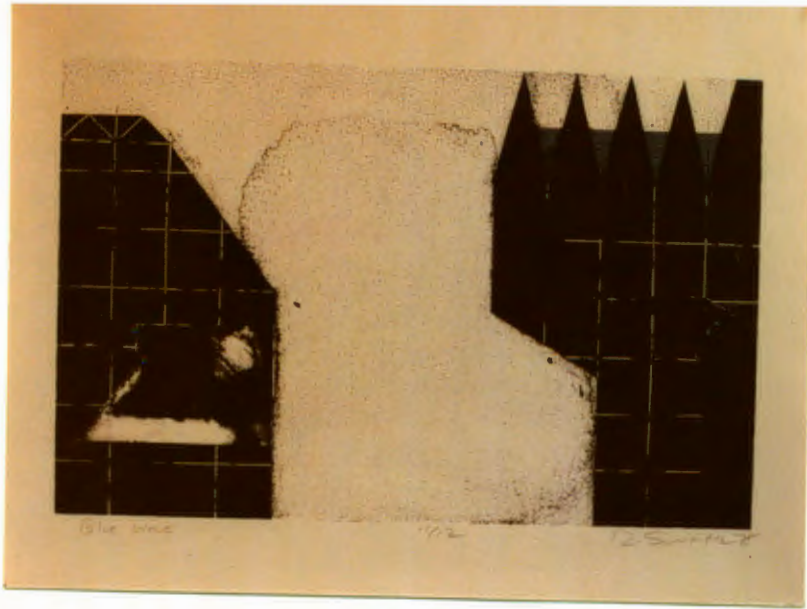
Blue Choice



Black Bird



Orange



Blue Wine

## PAINTINGS

The medium is oil paint on canvas and paper. I approach painting as a fluid, sensual medium. I am not interested in reproducing the drawings on canvas, but the last few paintings, including "Passage" and "Kite" have direct references to the kind of architectural environment found in the prints and drawings in this show. The inset idea is important in all the paintings. They function as small areas of intense activity, surrounded by a color field. The insets are, for me, small passages of mystery through a violent kind of paint manipulation. I try to play these passages off the colored fields to give both the inset and the field more intensity. The control necessary in the prints and drawings is sacrificed for a more intuitive working method in the paintings. This makes the formal decisions about the work more difficult. It has only been recently that I have started adjusting small areas in the paintings, instead of changing whole fields. There is a structure underlying the surface paint that betrays this struggle for balance between color and shape.

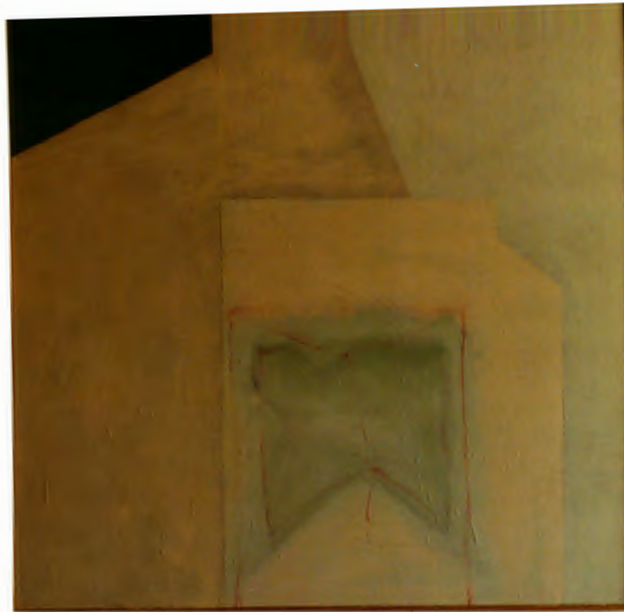
The use of color and space refers to landscapes that have influenced my way of seeing the world, the strong horizontals found in both the Midwestern plain and Hawaiian sea horizon. In both places the viewer is aware of the distortion and change that distance gives color. My use of color also reflects twilight or night color when shapes become indistinct, and the colors fuse. A close hue range is



the result of these considerations of both distance and time of day. It is this time of day that heightens for me the mystery of unseen activity.

The strong horizontal landscapes can also be traced to the activity of fly-fishing. It is an activity much like the concentration involved in painting. The fisherman's intimate involvement in the steady horizontal river-flow balances the delicacy of the "fly-presentation". Both fly-fishing and painting require a similar mental intensity. In the painting "Spirit" the single brush stroke through the center inset illustrates the improvisation of gesture--The kind of spontaneous act fly fishermen and artists often make.

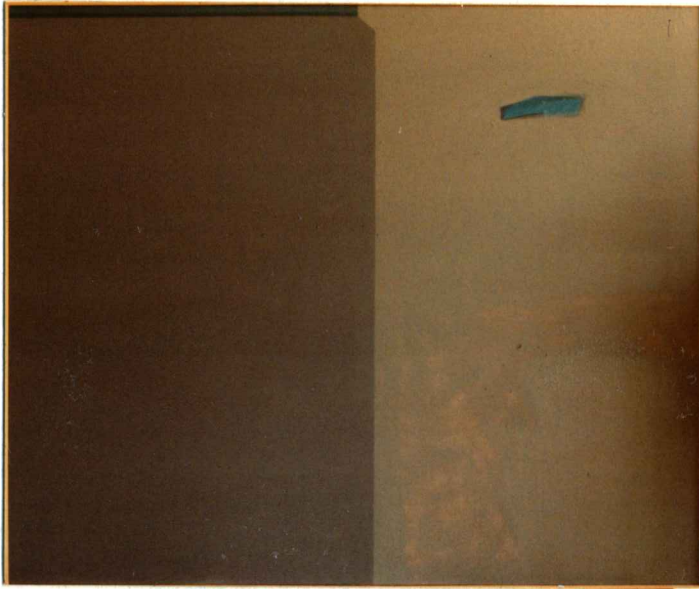
I try to understand painting from the canvas out, instead of from the surface in. Most of the artists I've seen who emulate the style of Richard Diebenkorn, the currently popularized California artist, appear to work from the surface in. The debt I owe Diebenkorn is not so much in the final appearance of the paintings but his view of the process of painting. Diebenkorn works on his paintings a long time, editing and re-editing, challenging and considering. It is a process of adjusting the canvas conceptually and physically. The evolution of my painting surfaces tell the story of my indecision, tentativeness and finally, the formulation of a solution.



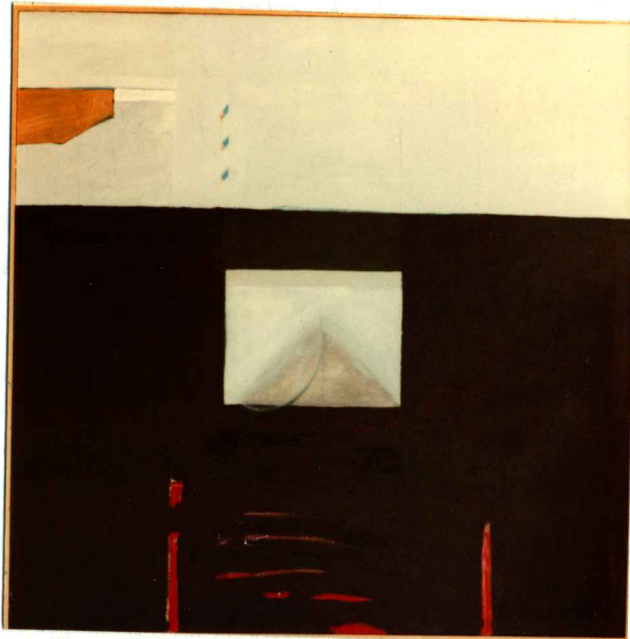
Kite



Elizabeth



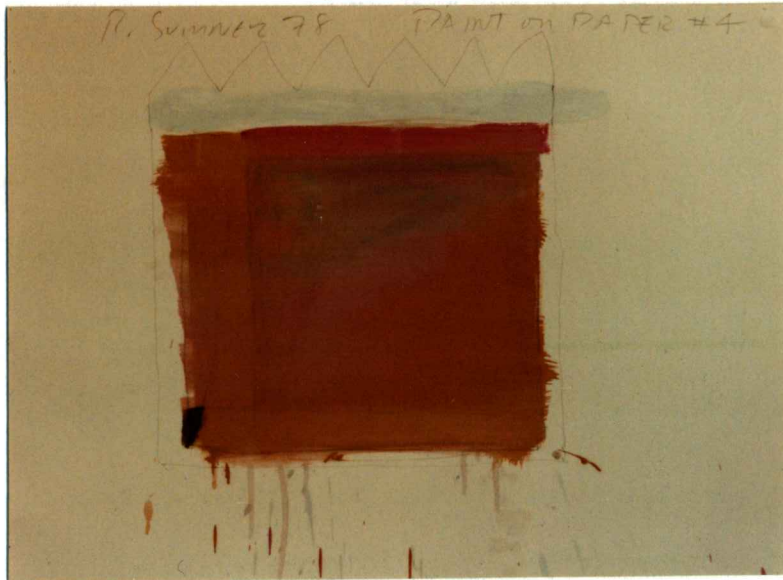
Passage



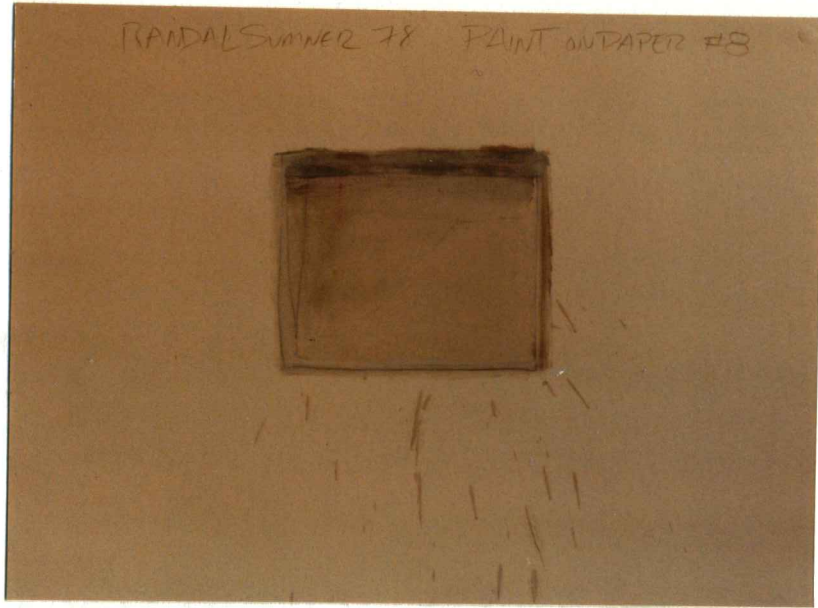
Spirit



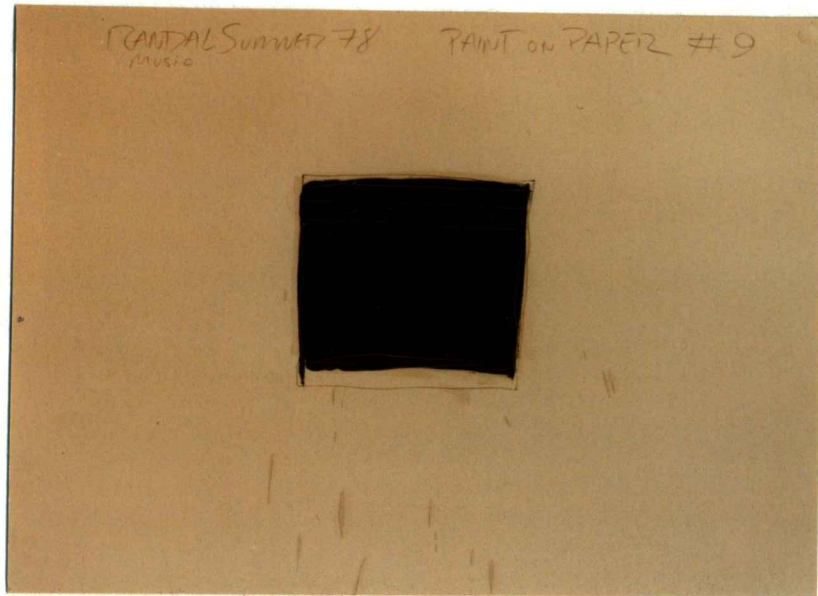
Night Shade



Paint on Paper #4



Paint on Paper #8



Paint on Paper #9

## CONCLUSION

This is the process of making art for me: To make consistent formal decisions, and still listen to my visual intuition.