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Landscapes

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LANDSCAPES

BY

Will Barnes

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

MFA PHOTOGRAPHY PROGRAM

School of Photographic Arts and Sciences

Rochester Institute of Technology

Rochester, New York

November 1985

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Permission Statement

I, Will Barnes, prefer to be contacted each time a request for re-production is made. I can be reached at the following address:

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Date: November 26, 1985

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OPENING STATEMENT

As stated in my thesis proposal, an important realization for me has been that nature is an outward manifestation of spirit. The one that has become the many. I can now add to this - the many are now trying to become the One. Thus on an outward level all of nature is constantly changing - evolving to the One. This constant change of samsara¹ is the thread that binds past, present and future. I have also come to realize that each change is influenced by what has come before: Karma², and all events in nature and life can be reduced to cause and effect.

Photographing the landscape has helped me to understand that while change is inevitable, each stage has its own beauty and lesson if I am able to appreciate them.

THE CREATIVE PROCESS (Technical and Spiritual)

When I began my studies at Rochester Institute of Technology, I had two goals in mind. The first and less defined was to continue to grow as an artist. The second was to increase my technical photographic skills.

I remember in the first quarter of Photo-Core class³ having technical problems with my work. Black and white darkroom work at the Institute had resulted in prints that were low in contrast - flat. Being enrolled in the zone system course that first quarter, I had the opportunity to do film index testing for calibration. The test results, however, did not lead to proper contrast prints on a "normal" photographic paper. About this time, each MFA student was given

¹Samsara (SKT samāra), the indefinitely repeating cycles of birth, death and rebirth.

²Karma (SKT), the force generated by a person's actions that perpetuate transmigration and in its ethical consequences to determine his destiny in his next existence, cause and effect.

³Photo-Core class - required course sequence for graduate photography majors. Emphasis is placed on the individual's learning to generate and intensify his or her personal statement through photography.

a copy of Dr. Richard J. Henry's book Controls in Black and White Photography⁴. In this book, I found the answer to my contrast problem. Dr. Henry had found that when contrast printing or using a cold-light enlarger with any so called "normal" grade of photography paper, a negative density range of about 1.45 is required to get a full tonal range. This is a substantial increase from the usually recommended 1.05 on which my original tests were based. I increased my negative density range to Dr. Henry's suggested range and negatives made to this new standard printed with correct contrast on a "normal" photographic paper using a cold-light enlarger. With this technical problem solved I felt I could now give my full attention to finding a way of making my own statement as an artist. I tried photographing many different types of subjects: people, man-made objects, natural objects; in many different settings: the city, the country, the studio, etc. I tried using color materials just for a change. Finally the ultimate attempt, taping over the viewfinder of my 35mm camera or keeping the back shut on my 4x5 field camera while making exposures. The results were interesting and very different but they were not satisfying me. I had tried all of these techniques based on influences, assignments and advise given in Photo-Core classes. I finally stopped trying to find a way to make my own statement as an artist and just went out to the country and resumed making landscape pictures. I photographed the landscape exclusively, making an abundance of images although at the time I was unsure where this would lead.

During this period I read an article by Michael A. Smith⁵. His writings would help me overcome the doubts about the direction my work had taken. In his article, Michael states, "The point is that we should not have to try to do our thing. Making one's own statement as an artist is not a goal to strive toward but

⁴Dr. Richard J. Henry, Controls in Black and White Photography. (Monterey, CA. 1983), p. 103.

⁵Michael A. Smith, American Photographer.

is something which overtakes one in the course of living and working fully". With this insight I know I should continue photographing the landscape even though most of my instructors and colleagues were not responding positively to my images. Although I did not fully realize it at the time, the reason it felt "right" to go into landscape to make pictures was the oneness I was attaining when along there.

I was beginning to become dissatisfied with the technical quality of my work. The images had good contrast but were not technically satisfying on an [?] intuitive level. Only later did I completely understand why. It was due to the physical senses being heightened by the increase in intuitive awareness I experienced when alone in the landscape. Based on this I felt that my images needed to be richer in detail so I began using an 8x10 view camera and making contact prints. These images better communicated what I was experiencing when alone in the landscape. Another technical change also occurred at this time. I was introduced to Azo⁶ contact printing paper by a professor at the institute. Azo has a better tonal range and is easier to use when making contact prints because it has a slower speed. Slower speed means that it needs more light to expose it than the faster speed enlarging papers I had been using. By being able to use a brighter light in making the exposures, I was better able to see, through the contact printing frame, the parts of the negative I was dodging or burning. Soon after discovering Azo paper, I got the chance to meet Michael A. Smith through Gunther Cartwright. Since Michael's article had influenced me so much, I was eager to meet him. Soon a trip was planned to Ottsville, Pennsylvania where the artist resides and works, to show him my work and to "check him out". Michael was supportive of the work I showed him although he felt it could be improved technically. He suggested I try using Amidol⁷ developer with the

⁶Azo; contact printing paper manufactured by Kodak, silver chloride.

⁷Amidol Developer, very potent paper developer used by well-known photographer, Edward Weston.

Azo paper because it would allow me to get the maximum tonal range and tonal separation from the Azo paper. He willingly shared with me his formula for Amidol developer and instructions in its use. His final bit of advice at our parting was for me to continue making lots of landscape images.

When I tried the Amidol developer I found the prints were superior to any I had made previously. I now felt that on a technical level I could produce prints that fully met my need to represent the heightened senses I was attaining when alone in the landscape.

Since my first year was quickly coming to an end, it was time to write my thesis proposal and select board members. Writing the proposal was relatively easy since I had a definite direction to my work. Finding appropriate board members was not. I needed individuals who were able to accept my working exclusively in black and white contact printing. Also, they had to have an understanding of landscape photography and be open to my interest in eastern philosophy and its influence on my work.

Gunther Cartwright and Tim Callahan were chosen because they were accepting of my working in the contact print tradition and they both had a feeling for landscape photography. Dr. Johnston has a history of interest and experience with eastern philosophy and would be understanding of how it related to my work. Unfortunately, not long after the board was formed and the proposal accepted, Dr. Johnston became ill and did not recover in time to actively participate in the thesis process.

Although Gunther and Tim were more interested in the visual and technical aspects of my work, we did spend some of the time in our almost weekly meetings talking about the spiritual aspects of my work and how it was communicated. When I first began to show my images to Tim and Gunther, most of them were close-ups taken at sandpits. Now, as then, I am very interested in the samsara of inani-

mate matter and sand pits are environments which change very rapidly. I could return day after day to the same pit and find new creations; one day a puddle, the next, beautiful patterns of cracking mud (see slide #1). Because of the use of a long focal length lens and the point of view used, the scale of most of these sand pit images is ambiguous. While my original intent was not to create images with ambiguous scale, they happened as a result of my seeing the same forces of change at work on a pile of sand as I saw on a mountain. I photographed the effects of these forces such that the images intuitively looked right. Spiritually the images are about the unseen forces of change and the ambiguous scale allows the viewer to see the effects of these forces more clearly. Visually the ambiguous scale acts as a point of entry to the photographs for some viewers. The motif of ambiguous scale reoccurs throughout my work even as I began to photograph larger areas. The shift, however, to photographing larger areas of the landscape was gradual. The first image made in this direction was of the riverbed taken from the Mt. Morris dam (see slide # 2). In this image one can easily see the current state of the riverbed: water level, cracks in the mud, log on the shallows, etc. But it is also possible to feel the temporariness of this state based on the natural forces which although not seen are intuitively felt in the image. This theme, space/time as Wynn Bullock called it, deals with slices of the samasara of objects and is prevalent throughout the thesis work. I have come to realize that our perception of nature and life is based on which slice of its samsara we concentrate our awareness.

During this time in which I was changing to photographing larger areas of the landscape, Gunther and Tim dropped a bomb in one of our meetings. They very strongly suggested that I try enlarging some of my images just to see what effect it would have on them and how I would feel about enlargements. Needless

to say, this came as quite a surprise to me and only after much prompting did I agree to it. The plan was for me to come in on a Saturday when Tim would be working in the Color Center⁸ and use the 8x10 enlarger. Several Saturday's went by but I never made it in. Something inside of me just would not cooperate and the idea was finally dropped by all three of us. Looking back, I am pleased that I did not make enlargements because it forced me to be more creative in other ways, i.e., segmented images. Also I still feel the contact print better communicates what I feel when photographing the landscape.

Another important aspect of my images is the point of view used. Most of the images were taken using a POV that looks down on the landscape as if seeing it while floating or flying. It was not until after the images were made and the three of us were discussing the POV did I realize that this forces the viewer to look at the images from an angle that is not associated with everyday consciousness. The POV used reminds me of the descriptions of how things look to persons experiencing "out of the body" states. For me it helps communicate the feeling I have when intensely photographing the landscape. I lose body awareness and feel as if the image is being seen and made through me rather than by me. I believe this experience is a result of the marriage of the intuitive and ego aspects that takes place during the creative process.

During one of our sessions, Gunther asked me if I had ever considered showing four particular images mounted together, these four were of the same section of cliff wall at Letchworth Park. I had thought of hanging these images in a group but not of mounting them together on one board (see slide #3). Before coming to Rochester Institute of Technology, I had worked as a multi-image producer, therefore the idea of showing several images together was not entirely new to me. Following Gunther's suggestion, I mounted the images together before our next meeting and was very excited by the new piece this created.

⁸Color Center - lab area at School of Photographic Arts and Science at Rochester Institute of Technology devoted to color print production.

It expanded my idea of using the relationship that natural objects have to one another as a means for gaining more insight into their manifestation. This push from Gunther was all I needed to begin experimenting with segmented images as a means to spiritual and visual expression.

One form of working with segmented images received its technical birth from the way in which I do test strips while printing. Since I had begun using a contact printer, test strips were done by cutting a sheet of printing paper into strips and exposing each piece at a different time interval. Usually the same area of the negative is exposed for each strip. To compare the strips, I laid them side by side in a tray. I had been using this technique for some time but only after creating the first segmented image did I see how the repeating image strengthened the visual and spiritual message of certain photographs. In this segmented image technique, I found a form of expression for an aspect of the landscape that I had not been able to convey in my other work. Having seen and felt a rhythmic, almost musical flow in the landscape based on visual and spiritual relationship of natural objects, my new technique allowed me to create images that reflected this. I found I could maintain control over how the elements repeated by the selection of the photograph to be used for segmentation and the sequencing of the segments. The original image used to make this form of segmented image had to be chosen not only for its natural elements but also because of its ability to be cut and sequenced in such a manner that the viewer could form a visual closure.⁹ Without closure, the new image could not be accepted by the viewer as a visual whole or gestalt¹⁰. All of these particular segmented images were made by taking three identical copies of the same image and cutting each into thirds. The segments are then mounted

⁹ Visual Closure; the gestalt principle that nearly complete familiar lines and shapes tend to be perceived and remembered as being more nearly complete.

¹⁰ Gestalt; unit with properties not derivable from its parts in summation.

in a sequence that best communicates the visual/spiritual message intended (see slide # 4). On a suggestion made by Dr. Zakia, Chairman of the MFA Photography program, these segmented images are called triptychs because of the use of three photographs cut into thirds.

HANGING THE SHOW

The gallery space I desired for my show was not too difficult to achieve using one half of the RIT Photo gallery. I wanted the space to be relatively small compared to that used by my colleague with whom I was sharing the gallery. In addition, I wanted the space to have a feeling of intimacy since my works are contact prints and I wished to encourage close examination. However, I did not wish the space to be so small as to be uncomfortable. The panels were arranged simply but with sufficient angles to prevent it from being boring. The lighting used was a mixture of daylight (when available) and flood lamps (tungsten) at such a level to give the best possible contrast to the images.

Although I spent many hours looking at the work prior to the final sequencing in the gallery, I experienced much frustration in finding a sequence that worked both visually and spiritually. The difficulty I had in sequencing was due to the variety of my work; triptychs, close-ups, etc. Gunther had some helpful suggestions and from our collaboration came the decision not to frame the work but put it under glass and use "L" pins to hang the pieces. We decided on this because in order for the sequencing to work, the viewer needed to feel a visual and spiritual flowing of energy from one image to the next and frames could interrupt this flow. The flow of energy was also enhanced by doing groupings of pieces (see slide #5). The groupings were based on two considerations. One was visual flow, how easily the eye could move from one print to another and from one group to another group. The other consideration was spiritual flow. This was achieved by using the elements in the prints (water, sand, rock, etc.) and the changes the prints showed these elements going through. I was

very pleased with the final sequencing because it made the show come together as a spiritual/visual whole.

THE SHARING

The thesis sharing was another learning experience for me. The aspects of my work that I thought to be the most important: POV, scale, etc., were not as important to some others. Much of the discussion focused on the triptychs. Several people saw these as a dramatic break from my other more traditional images and wanted to know how they had originated.

To these persons, the triptychs were visually out of place with the more numerous single image pieces in the show. Unfortunately, they did not understand that the sequencing of single images in groups functioned as large segmented pieces and that the entire show was one segmented piece. There were others who were sensitive enough to comprehend how the visual, technical and spiritual aspects of the show functioned as a whole.

CONCLUSION

In the publication Untitled 24, Jim Alinder states, "An irrespressible desire of photographers during the past century has been to capture the essence of the American landscape. Many of its remarkable land formations have been so over-exposed as to become cliches. Thus, the challenge for contemporary photographers, rather than to make another photograph of the same subject matter, is to restate the landscape issue in ways in which are spiritually and visually meaningful." While my work is intentionally visually pleasureable, it goes beyond this. For those with the insight to understand it has a deeper spiritual message. For myself, the show was simply a stopping long enough to share with others what has been realized, what is being contemplated and an indication of where the search is headed.

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Appendix A

Equipment, Materials, Formulas

The equipment, materials and formulas listed here were used in the making of the images for the thesis.

Equipment:

Camera: 8x10 Burke & James View Camera
8x10 Kodak Master View Camera
11x14 Burke & James View Camera

Lens : 19 in. American Scientific
16½ in. Fujinon
21 in. Ross-Dagor

Films : Kodak Plus-X Professional Sheet Film
Kodak Super-XX Sheet Film

Film

Developer : HC 110 dilution B

Paper : Azo Contact Printing Paper

Paper

Developer : Amidol - formula used:

30 grams Sodium sulfite
3 grams citric acid (crystal)
2 cc potassium bromide (10% solution)
8 grams Amidol
1 liter H₂O

Selenium

Toner : All prints are slightly toned. This is done by adding 3 oz. of Selenium toner per gallon of hypo cleaning agent.

THESIS PROPOSAL

LANDSCAPES

Willard R. Barnes, Jr.
October 13, 1983

THESIS BOARD MEMBERS

Dr. Robert H. Johnston
Dean of College of Fine and Applied Arts
Rochester Institute of Technology

*Gunther Cartwright
Assistant Professor
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G. C.

Tim Callahan
Lecturer
School of Photographic Arts and Science
Rochester Institute of Technology

SPECIAL ADVISORS

Michael A. Smith
Photographic Artist

Douglas Busch
President: DeGolden Busch Camera Company

* Chairman

PURPOSE

To photograph nature that I may learn from her and further develop in Self¹-realization. From my own writings and those of others, I will collect the statements that have served as my guideposts along the path of Self-realization.

BACKGROUND

In the woods next to our house, at the beach or in the mountains some of my fondest memories of childhood are of playing surrounded by nature. Now, as then, I easily get in touch with my-Self when surrounded by nature. It is this state of "in touchness with my-Self" that leads to realization.

One of the most important realizations that I have had is that nature is an outward manifestation of spirit. I have begun to feel nature not just as the many but as the one and have realized that whether she appears as man, tree or rock, she is the same - light. Wynn Bullock put it aptly, "When I feel a rock is as much of a miracle as a man, then I feel in touch with the universe. Not the object rock, not the form rock but the light that is the rock."²

When I began to make photographs, I instinctively turned to nature as subject. Soon I understood the making of photographs and the photographs themselves to be a part of my sadhana. Another aspect of my sadhana has been the written word, both my own and that of others. There are times when a photograph will stimulate an idea and when I read a complementary statement, the idea is strengthened. With this reinforcement the idea can become a realization.

PROCEDURE

I will continue to explore the works of eastern writers such as Paramahansa Yogananda, Swami Sri Yukteswar, Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Ghandi, Omar Kayan and Rabindranth Tagore. Western writers who continue to influence my work are: Thoreau, Walt Whitman, Sri Daya Mata, Brother Anandamoy and Ram Das (Richard Albert). Artists whose work I look to for inspiration include: Edward Weston, Brancusi, Georgia O'Keefe, Wynn Bullock, Paul Caponigro, Minor White and Michael A. Smith.

¹Self - Capitalized to denote the atman or soul as distinguished from the ordinary self which is the personality or ego. The Self is individualized spirit.

²Wynn Bullock: The History of Photography Series, (page 9), Aperture, Inc., Millerton, NY

To make the images, contact prints will be made from large format negatives using black & white materials. All films will be tested for correct ASA and development time.

Since I am working with large format equipment, I have enlisted the advice of Michael A. Smith and Dough Busch, both noted for their expertise in this area. With their advice, I have worked out the problems of getting necessary equipment and supplies.

I have estimated the cost of supplies to produce my thesis to be between \$400 and \$600. This amount includes the cost of chemicals not available from SPAS ChemMix, photographic paper, film and mounting supplies.

I will meet regularly with the members of my thesis board for the prints to be critiqued for both technical and visual qualities.

My thesis show is scheduled for the week of April 13-20, 1984. I will continue to make prints until the beginning of April at which time, considering the advice of my thesis board, a final selection will be made for the show. Prints chosen will be mounted and matted the first two weeks of April.

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Thesis Sharing

F A ■ P H O T O G R A P H Y ■ R O C H E S T E R ■ I N S T I T U T E ■ O F ■ T E C H N O L O G Y

April 18, 1984

11:00 am

RIT Photo Gallery

LANDSCAPES

Will Barnes

