

A SERIES OF OIL AND WATERCOLOR PAINTINGS

by

JOHN C. BRAUN

A TERMINAL PROJECT

Presented to the School of Architecture and Allied Arts
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

JUNE 1954

APPROVED:



(Advisor)

3 Gift (#11.58)

The graduate student, choosing to direct his energies and further his experience in painting and drawing, should avail himself wholeheartedly to the percepts and concepts of his instructors and associates. Perhaps the period of undergraduate work can be characterized as an opportunity for gaining an awareness of particulars; such as acquiring an observable knowledge of the tools and techniques of his practice and a general familiarization with works done in painting and related fields. If so, the graduate student, while continuing to expand his grasp of process and of things done must work for an order of experience whereby outward observable knowledge and knowledge from within through thought exist mutually and unite to form a sympathetic and cyclic pattern. It seems to me that observation can be characterized as impersonal and inner thought as personal.

My paintings, in over all character, express an impersonal attitude--at least there is a quality of this nature about them that disturbs me. This criticism is constructive for me and has no disparaging connotation for those who have, conscientiously, assisted my development. The impersonal self in my work is alarmingly evident--the sameness in stylistic character throughout attests to this.

Apparently I was trying to excell as a painter in name; to initiate a recognizable self-expression and not to enlarge my experiences whereby the paintings would be a natural consequence.

I see that my development has been toward "observing" how to be a painter, and the knowledge I have accumulated has not, except in a few instances and probably only recognizable by me, served me in personal growth. Certainly I have assimilated parts and aspects about painting which have sharpened my perceptual and mental discriminations, but in few paintings is there more than a fragment of personal responsibility--these fragments are very important to me. I feel that in painting many of my works I have been too self conscious; as a consequence they have meaning for me now as more or less summaries of self. I want more than this. I have now no illusions about objectifying all there is about painting although if I were to continue in the direction so much of my work declares, it might well be toward this aim.

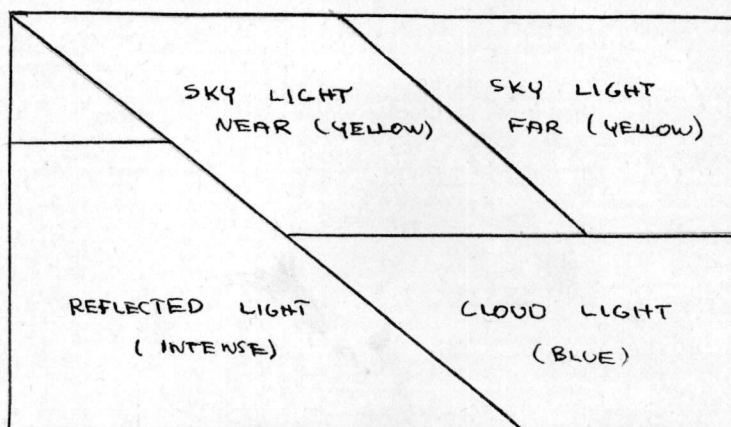
The differentiation between observation and inner growth is familiar to me as it was, I recall, an over emphasis on observation while studying architecture that precipitated my move to painting and drawing--a kind of poetry seemed insipient in painting which at the time I was not able to realize in my architectural studies. I have discovered this poetry to some degree although I feel that I have imposed on my painting

experiences much of the same condition of imbalance which so disturbed me in architecture. I have learned a great deal while exploring painting about architecture--especially in differentiating between the two fields of practice.

I find it difficult for me to verbalize about this inner aspect of experience. It is synthesis, conscientious and responsible; it is earned, preceded and followed by objectification; it is the source of intuition, inspiration, poetry and faith. To observe is not enough--there is a subsequent phase--a phase where observation fuses with the personal self to emerge as a new experience. Complacency is not resident here; unhappily I confess that pride has instigated many of my inquiries; with pride as a motivator one becomes fearful and can only hope at best for a facsimile of understanding.

This spring I did a series of landscapes in oil back of which was the intention to remove from the edge of my consciousness the influence of past experience, pertaining to the behavior of the visual process, and to draw from a visible nature as much unprejudiced awareness as possible. This was a good idea, perhaps not with landscapes, but the linkage I established was not constructive. After I brought them back from the field I arrogantly imposed on them the ideas I had at that time of what makes a painting a painting. Inwardly this isn't what I wanted to do.

I short circuited understanding by the intervention on my part of this presumptuousness. As a consequence most of them reveal to me only complacency and artfulness. There are exceptions in parts of several of this series-- particularly the one named "Tule Lake Hills." It was done quickly and spontaneously and has an expressive quality which is meaningful to me. It was the first one painted of this group--I value it. The painting "Alley" has significance for me--but for other reasons. I suspect there is a seed of something here, as if my experiences fused and enabled me to tune color to something more than a concert-pitch of past or present observations. Already it needs more tuning; I have visions, ideas, about color. The painting "Valley Floor" is a composite of much impersonal experience; certainly I did not bring to awareness all of my past experience--it would be folly to think I could-- but in general the painting does symbolize for me a review of things done, at this stage. I haven't finished it-- perhaps I gave up too soon. The idea was this:



I have done a number of watercolors and only in a few instances have I used the medium to express something meaningful to me. Mostly they reveal an interest in the medium and evidence a certain propensity for color harmony and surface order.

Of the watercolors I painted in the summer of 1952 I have included six as instances in which I used the palette and water medium as an instrument to express my inquiries and sensations. The two works "Sea and Rocks" and "Rocks and Sea" are important to me as I felt that the medium was serving me to make a statement on paper of the forceful and tireless meeting of water and stone. The shapes and colors are a result of a series of explorations to see if I could express this dramatic quality. The work called "Tree Light" was an effort to establish a set of pigment relationships which would evoke an image of the shimmering, evanescent quality of light on leaves; interestingly the palette and medium were used differently in giving pictorial realization to this aspect of perception. I think at the time I thought I was using the palette as light; later I discovered this to be untrue. The work "Green Still-life" is a good testimony of my development and understanding to this point. Although I did work here with such interests as axial, planar and volumatic symmetries of objects represented related to surface symmetry and with the exciting linkage of space evoking ideas and the essentially two dimensionality of the paper, I feel that ultimately

most of my decisions were predicated on a rather naive feeling for color harmony--which was only partially stimulated by the set-up. I was primarily interested in color; shapes, sizes and patterns were probably at first quite close in relationship to what I saw but were readily modified or eliminated depending on what I thought the painting as a colored surface needed. If I was using color to serve an expression it was not a deliberate and understood characterization, but one which evolved from an additive process until it either satisfied or exhausted me. I do not undervalue this process. The fifth watercolor called "Flowers" was a rather exuberant response to a rich and sense appealing arrangement of colors; I enjoyed doing it and find that the tensions produced by the almost dissonant color combinations stimulating as a color experience. Later this exuberance became frivolous as the painting "House and Trees" reveals. It was painted out of delectation and its sweetness makes me uncomfortable.

The watercolors of the following summer if seen individually might suggest a growth development on my part. There is a difference--a stylistic difference. I have discovered that the paintings of this series which are significant to me are the first ones. At the time I felt that I had lost the technique which I vainly felt I had earned the preceding summer; successively the paintings became more suave and sophisticated. Paintings from the beginning of this series are "Mountain Scene", "The Cobergs"

and "Rocky Mountains." The painting "Valley Floor" was painted later in the summer. Again my intent was, at the beginning, to let visual events impose on me and then to shape from my discoveries suppositions or hypotheses of a working order which could lead to further inquiries. Ultimately, perhaps elegantly in some instances, I strong-armed nature a fitted light and subsequent images to an impersonal stylistic manner which emerged from I don't know where. There is more to it than this but as an over all characterization this was the direction of my summer's work and I feel good about a few of them.

The characterizing aspect of my work in general, especially the oils, is color. Many other aspects have infringed on my consciousness and in some instances have become the intent of various works, but most often it is the color which is foremost in my interest. Usually my palatte does not represent light; perhaps I have begun many painting with this linkage but inevitably I choose to investigate other relationships. For me an attempt to imitate vision is incomprehensible--to paint about vision and what vision may be is understandable.

Certain of my oil paintings are exemplifications of the process of developing some aspect of an idea. The work "A Building" is a consequence of a deliberate limitation of the palatte. I used the palatte as an instrument to which I translated the color sensations I was receiving from observation. The intention was to determine if the palatte

had the intrinsic potential for characterizing the essential aspects of color experience and is as follows:

Light (sky)

Y-b zinc ~~and~~ cerulean
 Y-r cadmium yellow medium + alizeran crimson
 R-y cadmium red light + cadmium yellow medium
 R-b alizeran crimson + cerulean
 B-r ultramarine + cerulean
 B-y cerulean + cadmium yellow medium

Dark (earth)

Y-b cadmium yellow medium + ultramarine
 Y-r zinc + cadmium red light
 R-y alizeran crimson + zinc
 R-b cadmium red light + ultramarine
 B-r cerulean + cadmium red light
 B-y ultramarine + zinc

A palette of twelve colors was generated from six tube colors. At the time I found it extremely difficult to adhere to this limitation which I thought was a lack of directional discipline on my part; now I realize that my dissatisfaction with the result was because I did not carry it beyond the observation phase. The idea was constructive and I am still working with it.

The paintings I did with colored gelatins are exemplifications of my working toward awareness of light events. The idea of tonality as being an activity whereby a little of one color is put in all mixed colors had always bewildered me. My idea of tonality was to paint relationships on the canvas of an order similar to what was seen. The idea occurred to me to use colored gelatins and see tonalities, predicated on the idea that we normally see in tonalities, the characterization of which depends on the nature of the illuminant or combinations of illuminants; the sun and sky being the essential illuminants of the landscape and this plus, perhaps, artificial illumination for the studio. One can introduce into the studio much of the same tonalities of sunrise and sun-set with blue and orange gelatins. With each gelatin the palette became a new instrument.

The painting "Still-life with Fruit" was painted looking through a red-towards-yellow gelatin. The intent was to paint chroma change only, keeping the value the same throughout. Without using a gelatin mask, I had just painted "Street and Houses" with the same injunction. Looking at the paintings through various gelatins I was somewhat startled by the marked shifts in value appearance. The exploration brought to vivid awareness that to the eye darkness and lightness are as relative to spectral distribution as to energy distribution. Hue, value and intensity characteristics of color are working principles to the

painter and are constructive when he "sees" these aspects to be relative to the source illuminant. An understanding of these and of others such as surface quality (reflection, absorption and transmission) assists the painter to objectify the behavior of light; his use of them as expressive or organizational principles can take diverse characterizations.

I have worked with the relationship of color area to color environment in many of my paintings; "Three Lemons" probably being the first of this conscious exploration. I discovered that the use of pigment on a canvas was of a visual order different from what we might predict from principles of light behavior. If we know two areas on the canvas are the same, yet they appear differently, then visually they are different; and it follows that if we wanted these areas to appear the same we would have to paint them differently. The color appearance of an object is not only a function of the illuminant and surface but is also relevant to the color impacts around it which simultaneously impinge on the retina. This led to other investigations, such as after image, simultaneous contrasts and various aspects of cone fatigue and activation. I am aware of the psychological, attention and symbolical aspects of color in so far as they have played a more or less natural role in my work. Such acquired aspects of color as color temperature, distance, weight, etc. I find more useful toward architecture than painting.

These explorations with visual material have done much to extend my understanding of light as an event in nature and in freeing me to develop personal ideas of my own about vision; suggesting to me that perhaps there is an order to vision which is more constructive than the order to which I have been accustomed.

TULE LAKE HILLS .

Oil

1954

AMERICAN INVESTMENT

Company



ALLEY

011

1954

Permanised
ARTESIAN BOND
F&G CONTENT
U.S.A.



VALLEY FLOOR

011

1954

Perminized
ARTESIAN BOND
PAG. COVER
U.S. PATENT



SEA AND ROCKS

Water Color

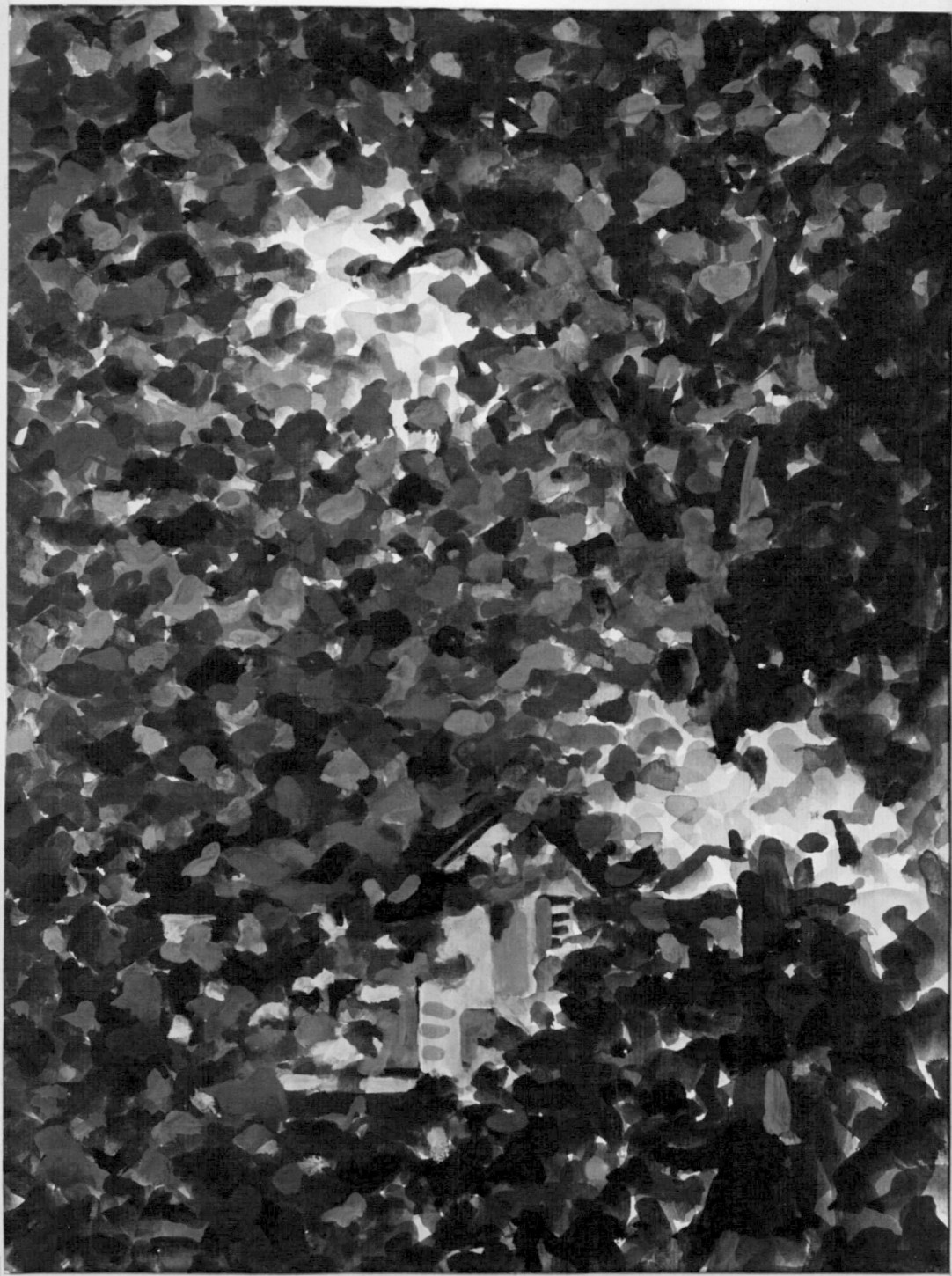
1952



TREE LIGHT

Water Color

1952



FLOWERS

Water Color

1952

W. S. T.
L. S. T.
L. S. T.
L. S. T.
L. S. T.
L. S. T.

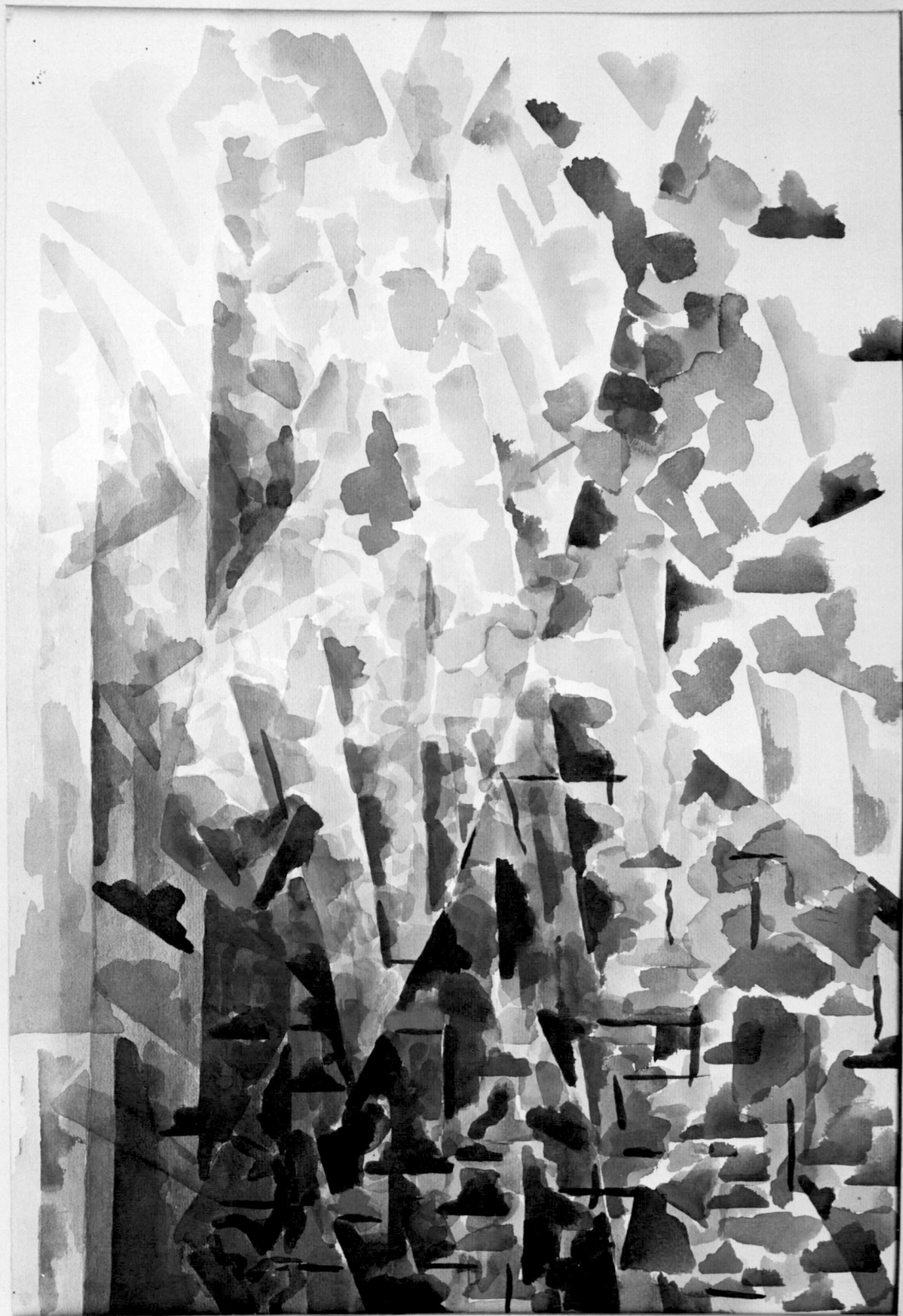


THE COBERGS

Water Color

1953

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
WATER RESOURCES DIVISION
FEBRUARY 1953

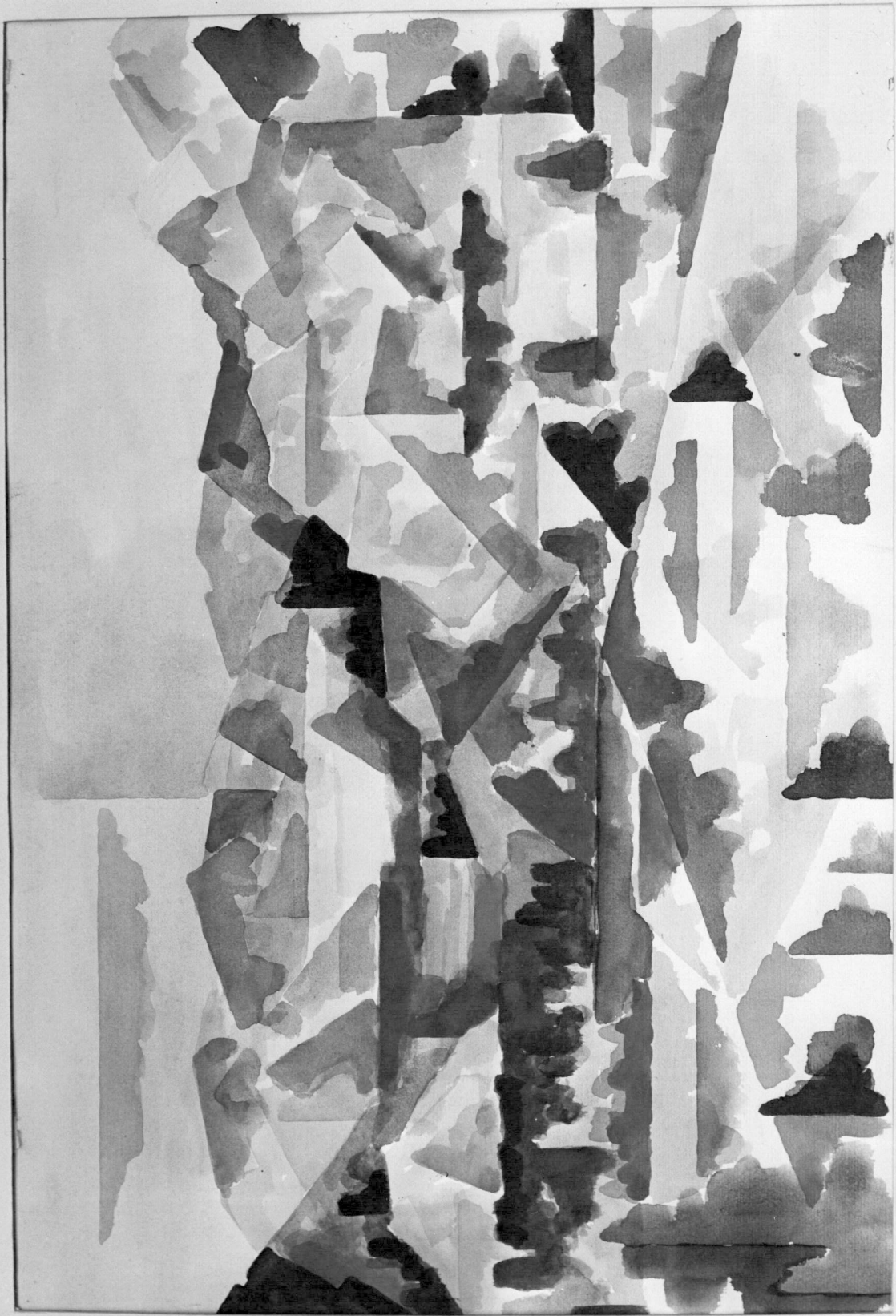


ROCKY MOUNTAINS

WaterColor

1953

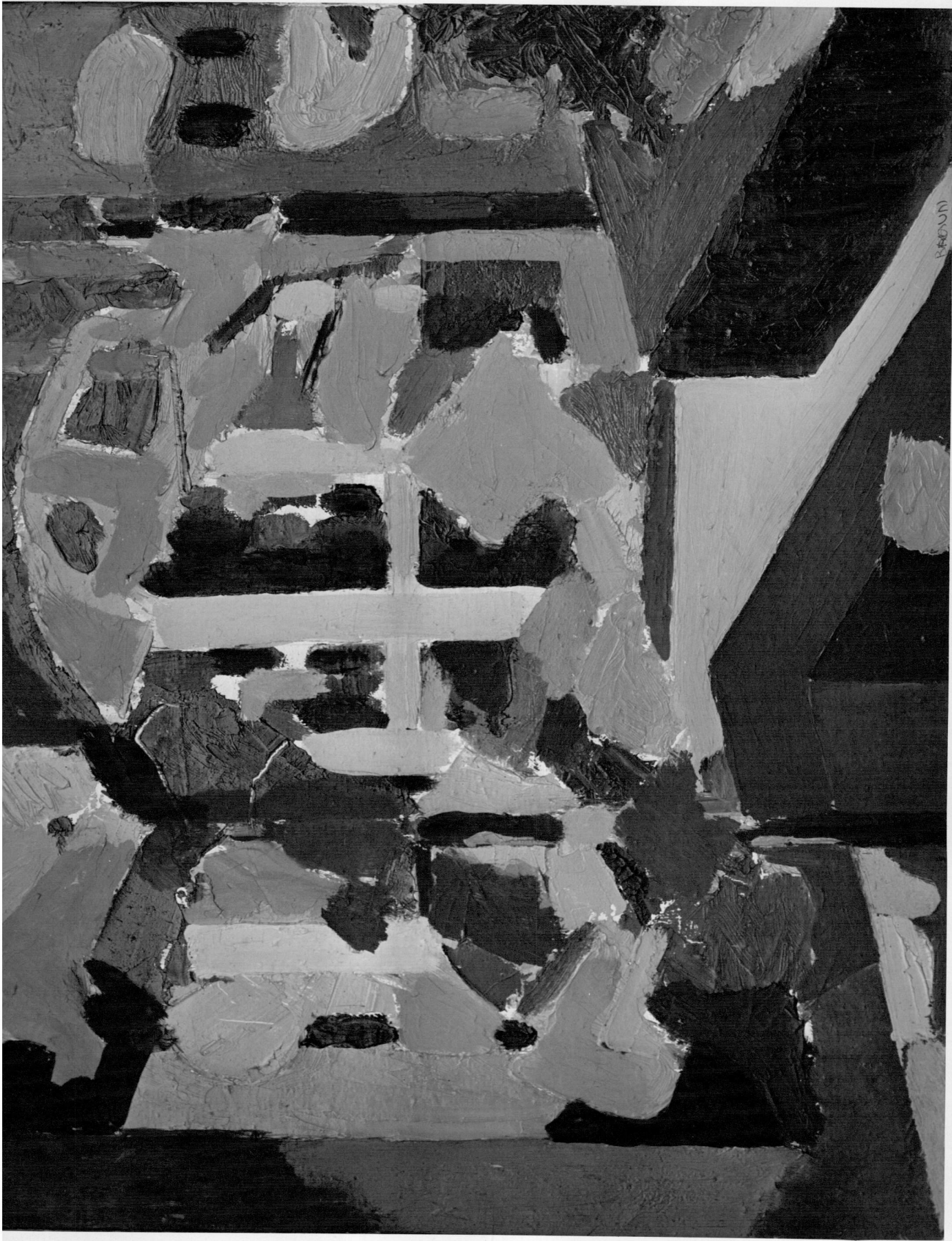
ROCKY MOUNTAINS
WATERCOLOR
1953



A BUILDING

011

1954



STILL LIFE WITH FRUIT

011

1954

WALTERS AND GALE

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION
WASHINGTON, D.C.

