PATTERN AND SPACIAL CONSIDERATIONS IN THE ORGANIZATION OF LANDSCAPE MATERIAL IN PAINTING

By John G. Koehler

A project report presented to the School of Architecture and Allied Arts and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Master of Fine Arts Degree

APPROVED

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Pattern and Space Organization of Landscape Material
In Painting

It was Aristotle who first expressed the idea that an artist should be more than just an "Imitater of Nature" as Plato had stated. It was Aristotle's belief that an artist should concern himself with what he calls the "Essence of Nature". He sees the artist as an organizer of human experience. As such the artist does not copy nature literally and indiscriminately but rather selectively and creatively. Aristotle states that the purpose of the artist is to express the "truth" or the "universal" in life or rather to discover those things which are meaningful and significant and present these in a discriminating, discerning, and effective way.

In order to produce or express what is the "Universal" the artist must produce a work which Aristotle said was to have "Internal Unity". A painting which has this unity is one in which all of the parts are so interrelated "if any of them is displaced or removed the whole would be disjointed and disturbed." As Aristotle reasoned "a thing whose presence or absence makes no visible difference is not an organic part of the whole." (1)

To sum up this philosophy in contemporary terms would be

⁽¹⁾ Jerome Stolnitz, Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art Criticism, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1960, pp. 117-128.

to state that an artist should try to be selective in his choice of subject matter, be creative in the use of materials and media, be discriminating in the presenting of meaningful and significant discoveries and observations, and be able to present the whole in an effective way.

It was not the intention of the writer to bring Aristotle into this paper to lend an aura of respectability. Ever since reading this work already cited it has been felt that this idea of Aristotle's would be a fairly good "rule of thumb" by which to gage one's painting efforts, and also be a good point of departure or a framework for a contemporary approach to painting. It lends itself well to the subject of this paper.

The choice of landscape for this purpose is again somewhat attributed to Aristotle. Two elements that Aristotle felt that the artist should concern himself with are "nature" and "human experience". Perhaps the reason that landscape as subject matter for painting has for so long been a fascination to artists is because that in the landscape the artist can express so many things that are evident at the point where "human experience" and "nature" meet. Many of the paintings that have been selected, therefore, contain objects or elements in which man has related himself to his environment by things he has built, constructed, or made. There are also paintings which contain only natural forms for the reason that one of the joys of human experience is the appreciation of nature. The pattern and spacial considerations are, however, common to both.

The pattern and spacial organization of the landscape material is arbitrary. It is based on several types of observations that have been made. One such observation is that on every hand there is abundant evidence that there is order. This order exists even in what may appear to be disorder. Each living thing reproduces itself and in many cases in a very lush and profuse ecology. This order continues even though in everything there is constant change. Mountains that are the symbol of the unmovable are the results of thermal or pressure upheavals and are subject to erosion which is similar almost anywhere on earth. This points up the fact that change may be rapid and observable or of such a magnitude as to be only understood historically, but the change does occur and seems to follow very definite patterns. Tides ebb and flow and are quite predictable. Seasons follow one another in such order that Rose Festivals, Rhododendron Festivals, and Lilac Festivals can be dated years in advance.

Because of this order I have structured the paintings as far as organization of the subject material is concerned in such a way as to call to the attention of the observer that this is not mere illustration but that there is significance in the fact that in nature there is order. To do this I first consider the empty canvas as a whole and a completeness that I wish to maintain. Usually the first step is to divide the canvas into two or three and sometimes more dissimilar spaces. The subject matter is then considered in relation to these original divisions. In many instances the subject material

itself suggests what these main areas of division are to be. These areas are then divided and subdivided as the material seems to suggest until the smallest subdivision may be only a brush stroke. The result as has been states is arbitrary and deliberately chosen for the purposes already stressed.

Perhaps the most fascinating thing about landscape is the fact though each representational shape has its own identity its completeness is not realized without other associated identities. These entities combine then to form a larger whole or unit. The paradox is that a shape may read as one thing but at the same time in combination may read as a different structure. This apparent paradox, however, is the direct result of observations of natural landscape.

A seemingly isolated group of buildings, docks, and boats at the water's edge are there only because the sea is there. The sea that provides food and occupation is as necessary to the buildings as is the proximity of the buildings to the sea that provides man with a basis of operation for his activities in earning a living from the sea. These buildings, docks, and boats are always fascinating because of their seeming haphazardness. They are where they are, however, because man needs them there. Again, waves break against rock and sand in particular patterns that are consistent enough and spectacular enough to become roadside attractions. Sea an entity and rock an entity but together at a particular place producing a sight-seeing wonder because of their mutual co-existence as a part of nature. A derelict barn and a broken fence exist because

at a particular time there was a proximity to a pasture which became the foraging place for cattle. The fence was needed to control the cattle and the barn to store food. Barn, fence, and pasture are bound together because again of man's need.

The combining of shapes to produce more significant forms of a different magnitude are in a sense an attempt to show that seemingly nothing exists as an isolated entity. Even to have a visual report it is necessary to have a figure-field relationship. As has already been stated the selection of the landscape material has been arbitrary and the pattern and space organization is structured to emphasize certain aspects of subject matter which I believe to be important.

Beyond the mnemonic or philosophical approach to painting there is, of course, the actual problem of the organization of the landscape in such a way as to produce an effective visual image. That is the actual painting of the landscape and the organization of line, form, and shape and the use of color and value to produce the painting. Some of these aspects have already been described. The dividing of the entire picture area into a few large areas which are the "backbone" of the structuring process is first; then the organization of the subject matter material around this backbone. The combining process of subject matter forms has already been stated. This combining of shapes to more significant shapes requires careful study and involves certain visual problems as well.

In the combining of shapes consideration must be given to the edges of these shapes if combining is to take place effectively. Usually in a graphic representation the edge of a shape represents a change of plane, or it is sometimes referred to as a discontinuing surface. The obvious way is to rely on a change in value. However, just as there are other indications of this edge in nature so in painting there are various ways in which this change can be represented. Overlapping of forms produces one type of relationship, change of color but not of value is another indication, a cast shadow forming patterns on a surface may indicate a change of plane. I have indicated several of these possibilities and organized the landscape materials in several of the paintings to emphasize this particular phase of picture making.

Color is a very important part of the pattern and space organization in the landscape. Since the luminous qualities of pigment and light are so different it is necessary many times to adjust the pigmentation in order to take full advantage of the potential of color as well as to proximate the observed color in the landscape if that is desirable. Color selection again as in the organization of other elements in the painting has been arbitrary. To gain luminosity in a painting it is necessary to force the colors to a higher intensity than would be prevalent in nature in order to gain a similar effect on canvas. Value changes as well as color changes may have to be overdone to gain luminosity. The opposite may also be necessary for certain effects. This color adjusting of the painting can only take place when the

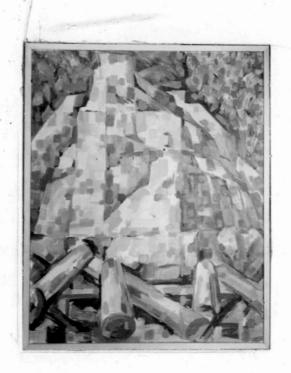
painting is well on its way to being completed. It is obvious that colors modify each other when placed in a close relationship to each other on the canvas. In the experimenting with color I have organized some of the landscapes so that there is an emphasis of a particular color. In others I have experimented with the elimination of one part of the spectrum for certain effects. Still another technique employed is to use one color, say a blue, and use it either direct with value and intensity changes or in a mixture with every other color used throughout the painting. The purpose is to try to achieve a synthesis of color so that there appears to be a single tonal quality throughout.

To go into detail of the infinite number of thought processes and manipulative processes required to bring a painting to a completion is not the intention of this paper. I have tried to lay down rather broad principles in the selection of subject matter for the landscape as well as the main problems involved in pattern and spacial considerations as they apply to landscape material. In brief I have tried to show that the arbitrary structuring of the paintings that are presented here are the result of observation and an attempt to call attention to the observer that in nature there is abundant evidence of order. I have explained why I have used in some cases an almost architectural approach to the organization of the material to again call attention to the fact that the subject matter especially in landscape can not be thought of as isolated entities but rather as mutually

existent with other entities. Again I have tried to establish rationale for the arbitrary use of color in many of the paintings. In all I have tried to establish that the material of landscape is given pattern and spacial considerations for the purpose of emphasizing to the viewer certain facts which are pertinent and which have meaning and significance over and above the mere representation of natural form.

I have tried to structure the paintings in such a way that they appear to be complete in themselves even though the material selected may come from a great many more entities that are immediate to those which were chosen for the particular painting. In this I have heeded Aristotle's admonition "a thing whose presence or absence makes no visible difference is not an organic part of the whole".

In this presentation I have included a few still life paintings and one figure study to show that the ideas that have been presented are not limited to just landscape but that pattern and spacial considerations can be the concern of all types of painting as far as subject matter goes.



AT BEN AND KAY DORIS STATE PARK 29" X 36"

As a contrast to the rather smooth technique that I had employed on a series of paintings I decided on a rather broad treatment of the subject matter in this painting. subject matter was close at hand and it was rugged so that I felt that this treatment was one way of showing this particular characteristic of the subject matter. Logs, trees, and rocks covered with moss and vines seemed to be united in one entity so much did they seem to belong together. Again I structured the canvas in order to try to demonstrate the differences and at the same time the togetherness of this sample of landscape ecology. While pattern and space seem to be the chief concern of this paper I feel that one of the uniting forces in any painting is color. Consequently I have tried to use colors which also seemed to be different and distinct yet could be used harmoniously together to emphasize the interrelation of separate entities.

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SOUTHERN PACIFIC DEPOT 36" X 48"

I set for myself as the problem in the construction of this painting of first painting the caboose red and almost in the center as the dominating feature of the painting and then trying to relate all of the other forms and colors to it. This was a mistake. The struggle to modify all of the colors to the bright red was impossible. It resulted in changing the red to make it fit all of the other colors. Actually this is usually the better approach. I visited this scene several times usually after dinner at night. It was on one of these trips past the depot that I saw the color development that eventually led to the completed painting. At sunset I noticed that due to diffusion usually through air containing a lot of moisture there was a great deal of red in the light. Consequently I developed the three main areas into an area that was dominated by yellow then the center area dominated by red and finally the third area dominated by blue. This indicated to me the progression of the color sequence from bright illumination through red to blue that occurs as the sun sets.

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CLAY TOWN 27" X 34"

One of the interesting small towns in Washington grew up around the manufacturing of brick and tile. Consequently nearly the whole town was built with the same shade of red brick. There were a few wooden structures added and one or two that were built of a different shade of brick. I felt at the time this might be interesting to try a painting of this scene. I again refer to the main part of this presentation as to the reasons for the spacial and pattern considerations in the organization of the subject matter material. I also experimented with the effect of continuous light on continuous and discontinuous surfaces as well as discontinuous or interrupted light on the same type of surfaces.

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SEAL ROCK 36" X 54"

As I mentioned in my introductry statement one of the joys of human experience is to be able to appreciate nature. I also brought out that there is a definite relationship between rock formations and sea and that because of their coexistence in a particular pattern many times they produce spectacular phenomena. Along the Oregon coast there are many such spectacular events taking place year in and year out with a great deal of order. I have tried to structure this painting to show that the relationship that produces the phenomenon is a relationship of two dissimilar entities that only produce the phenomenon because they are in this relationship. Each of these separately would probably never be given a second glance at least at this particular point.

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30" X 40"

There are two main concerns with this painting that I tried to deal with. The first consideration was the spacial organization of the material. I organized the spacial structure of the painting by dividing the entire picture area into four main areas across and three up and down and proceeded to arrange the elements in such a way as to take advantage of this arrangement.

The second consideration was color. I tried to set the tone or mood of this painting to be in character with the subject matter. Also I wanted to do a painting in which the entire source of illumination was within the picture itself.

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STILL LIFE 30" X 36"

This still life is another example of the effects of spacial organization and the use of pattern similar to the problems that occur in landscape. While only indirectly related to the subject of the paper I felt that there were considerations here that justified its inclusion. It is true that the relationship of forms and their interrelationship as a group of forms is the first consideration. But certain problems in color were evident enough to warrant specific mention. The problem was to take all of the colors in the spectrum and organize the still life in such a way that they can be related harmoniously. By using color modulation from blue to yellow I tried to include the changes that were to be seen as the tonal quality changed from blue to yellow to green.

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MC KENZIE RIVER BRIDGE

AT JASPER

36" X 45"

I was fishing along this stretch of water when I was struck by the unusual organization of bridge structure and natural forms. I made the sketch first in pencil but as the afternoon light began to move through the trees and light and shadow began to become more intense, I had to go for my watercolors and get as much of the unusual color arrangement as I could get down. The modification that seemed to take place so that yellow, blue, green, and red which seemed to be almost evenly distributed made an interesting problem in color control. Almost every combination of color relationship was there; color against contrasting color, and color—no color combinations. Maximum as well as minimum value changes made for an interesting afternoon of painting.

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SUNSET

18" X 36"

Warm and cool colors are usually designated as such because they tend to be either toward yellow or blue. This warm and cool quality of color is a relative thing as I tried to demonstrate in this painting. Every color in the painting contains or is modified in varying degrees with blue. From observation I have discovered that many times when blue is forced into a slightly purplish hue with the adding of a very small amount of red it has a tendency to seem to be more distant than a blue which tends slightly towards yellow or seems to be greenish. I have tried to modify all the color in the painting to try to produce the effect of low intensity lighting and the resultant modification of color.

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MOHAWK RIVER FARM 36" X 45"

Summer afternoon sun on weathered buildings many times produces very beautiful color effects in rather subdued range. I was attracted to this particular group of buildings not only for the characteristics of the light behavior but also the effects of shadow. Changes of plane are easily demonstrated without use of other form creating devises. Noted also was the effect of blue light from the sky in most of the shadows. However, under the trees where the sky light could not reach, the shadows appeared to be warm instead of cool as might have been expected.

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BOUQUET

27" X 35"

Man often brings part of his landscape indoors when he cannot go out and enjoy it directly. Aside from the structuring which is arbitrary and the pattern made by the flower arrangement the intent was to see how saturated a color could be obtained and what methods would have to be employed to achieve outstanding color brilliance. I had discovered before that if a color is laid on it has tendency towards blue and then the same color with a tendency towards yellow is applied in a broken color technique that there seems to be added brilliance in both. In the case of the reds used here I employed this technique and then reversed it in another part and then used the same effect again in a lower value range. This together with a small amount of green of the leaves showing through did produce a strong color effect.

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BEACH HOUSES

36" X 48"

Walking along the beach near Waldport I noticed this particular group of cottages and beach homes against the bluff near the shore. At first glance my impression was of only one complicated building until further study revealed through the fog that there were really several buildings very closely related. When the sun came out in the afternoon I made a water color sketch and later did this painting to show the grouping of the buildings but more important all of the unusual geometric patterns that were evidence. Squares, triangles, diamond shapes, pyramids, and various rectangles were formed by the group of buildings. None of these interesting forms would have been evident in any single one, but together they produced an unusual variety of interesting forms.

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PROGRESS

40" X 48"

I was struck by the fact that man in his attempt to make his surroundings more attractive uses paint on and in his buildings to suit his own tastes. A building that is being razed bares to the world this variety of tastes. Each color as it was put on was selected with the idea that it was attractive to someone. I sat through two changes of light when I first saw this building coming down to make way for progress much to the disgust of the driver behind I drove around and parked to get a longer look and decided that an interesting problem would be to take all of these concepts of good taste and try to combine them with the rest of the landscape into a color experience that would be satisfying. The unusual patterns of color and shape that are made apparent when a building is torn down is the subject material I tried to organize into an effective setting for the comment on "Good Taste".

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KING FISHER WARF 30" X 40"

The interrelation of shapes and the patterns of color are used here to demonstrate the idea behind this presentation. The idea is that a form may read as one entity but in combination with other forms may form a larger entity. This paradox is developed here in connection with the philosophy for this approach which was covered in the main part of this paper. Perhaps this should be called the scene revisited since it is the same scene as was used for the landscape entitled "Sunrise and Fog". However, the two scenes were sketched six years apart and there have been a few changes. There is no change, however, on the interaction of the various entities in the subject matter and their mutual coexistence.

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STILL LIFE 24" X 30"

while the first consideration in this painting concerns itself with high key color and light value contrasts as well as concern with the use of color-no color modulation the use of pattern and the organization of the spacial qualities were evident enough that I felt it was justified to present it as an example of overlapping, transparency and similar form uniting and shape modulation to illustrate how a shape can be one thing as an entity. It may also contribute to the entire composition by combining with other forms through the use of the overlapping and transparency considerations.

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SUNRISE AND FOG

36" X 46"

Sunrise and sunset does produce unusual light effects. An early morning stroll around Yaquina Bay brought this to my attention. The sun was the illuminator of this scene but the fog acting as a diffusion agent made forms seem to appear and disappear and blend together in an unusual effect of buildings, boats, dock and water. At the suggestion of Professor Vincent I tried eliminating certain colors in my palette and did some paintings that were predominately one color. This scene lends itself to the use of yellow as the dominate color with only enough cool color for contrast and to intensify the effect of the yellow.

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DINTY'S PLACE 34" X 46"

I have stopped at Dinty's Place so often that the conglomeration of buildings that make up the service station, cafe, and rooms and motel of the familiar scene hardly ever makes an impression other than the whimsical thought "what an architectural mess". Functional no doubt but the additions onto the additions were the result of expediency rather than sound planning. I stopped for gas across from Dinty's and stared at it through the rain. There isn't much else to look at. I suddenly realized what an unusual combination of cool colors was there before my eyes. The whole place took on new significance and I reached for my sketch book. The unusual color and the reflection in the wet pavement that occurred at the time when the sun and rain were both competing for the view as is often the case in March could not be ignored. While again the structuring of the scene is arbitrary the pattern of light was developed to try to indicate that at the time the sun and the rain were both in evidence.

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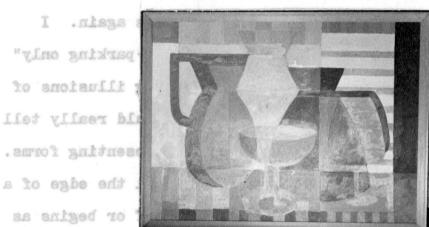
I first saw this part of the landscape at 70 miles an hour from the freeway. It was three miles ahead and six miles back before I could get back to see this again. I decided that this was justified for emergency parking only" since it presented one of the most interesting illusions of form and space. It was some time before I could really tell what was for real and what was shadow in representing forms. I discovered that there is another way to tell the edge of a shape and that is by the way a shadow cuts off or begins as it falls across some form. As the sun broke through the clouds intermittently the play of shadow from the trees across the trees themselves as well as the ancient barn created a remarkable pattern of light and dark.

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STILL LIFE

27" X 34"

There were several considerations that went into this particular still life study. From a discussion in Professor Wilkinson's class I attempted to incorporate certain ideas. One idea which I employed was that the space between two forms is many times as interesting as are the original forms. Therefore I developed this idea by creating a new form from the shape of the space between other forms. There was the problem of transparency as it is applied to color and certain visual effects that occurred when stripes were used in the structure which maintained their color throughout the painting but presented different effects when stronger or less intense colors were near. I used color-no color arrangements, maximum and minimum color relationships and maximum and minimum value changes.

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RETURN

36" X 52"

Aside from my own nostalgic affinity for the subject matter, the problem to solve was an interesting one. The sunset effect of the light I felt would also emphasize the subject matter. I wanted to get the effect of the light having left the sea behind the men and at the same time concentrate the light in a rather limited area in order to emphasize the finish of a day of activity. The use of color in the yellow and red areas was emphasized using definite blues in the shadows. This seems to be observable in nature and I wanted to point out this phenomena.

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SEA CLIFFS 29" X 35"

To emphasize the verticalness of the cliffs at Devil's Elbow State Park I divided the picture area into three vertical dissimilar areas. In the matter of comprehension and understanding it is possible to know one thing only because of knowledge of that which it is not or in many cases by that which is its opposite or counterpart. Thus to understand what vertical is it is necessary to define it as opposed to horizontal. You cannot know one without the other. To point this up I decided that I would include the beach and some of the stream that runs into the sea at this point as a definite horizontal spacial consideration as opposed to the verticalness of the cliffs.

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LOW TIDE 39" X 47"

It was while sketching this particular scene that the idea of the interrelationship of apparently unrelated shapes and forms led to the idea behind the whole set of paintings in this presentation. The idea has been covered in the main part of the presentation and does not need to be repeated here. To sum up the idea would be to state that docks, buildings, boats, and water are mutually indispensible as to their function with each other. The pattern formed by the different shapes and the spacial organization of the materials were definitely arranged so that the interrelation and interdependence could be illustrated. Again to show the interrelation I have used a single color to modify all of the colors. In this case there is the same blue used directly or in mixture with all of the colors used in this painting.

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RIVER LOOP ROAD 38" X 46"

The pattern and spacial considerations here were aimed at concentrating the attention of the viewer on the bridge. While indications of perspective were used to develop this primarily it is the concentration of color and value contrasts that are put to work to accomplish this. I placed the strongest color contrast in the red willows behind the bridge and at this point also I developed the strongest light and dark contrast. The somewhat arbitrary arrangement of the other forms are to produce the same effect.

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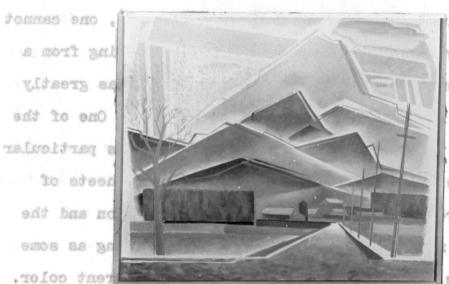
THE MILL

36" X 45"

Since there are over 200 lumber mills in Lane County. the largest lumber producing county in the world, one cannot ignore them even as a subject for painting. Coming from a community where such mills are the exception I was greatly impressed by them when I first moved to Eugene. One of the first things that one sees is the consumer. This particular consumer like most of them was made up of many sheets of metal. Apparently this was a fairly new operation and the consumer had not been exposed to oxidation as long as some of the others. Every sheet of metal was a different color. Some were rusty, some were not. I tried to record this amazing (amazing to me) display of color. Red predominates as can be expected. But by using no color situation with the variety of reds I was able to create the effect of all of the sheets of metal being different. I used variations of these colors then as a key to the whole picture. The arbitrary structuring has already been explained.

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SPENCER BUTTE

40" X 48"

This familiar landmark around Eugene seems to appear differently with each change in the weather. I exhibited this one in Spokane under the title "March in Central Oregon". March was the time I made the original sketch and subsequent painting. The willows were just turning red with the first flow of sap. Clouds were moving with the wind dumping rain in squalls along with intermittent sunshine. I deliberately organized the clouds and rain into patterns somewhat abstractly to call attention to the weather at this time of year. I wanted to do something with the edge of the mountain and hill forms to point out the fact that the actual edge is an elusive thing. Where is the edge of the hill as it interrupts the field or the sky? Is it the ground and rocks from which the trees grow, or is it the tops of the trees that define the shape exactly of the mountain?

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TANK TOWN 36" X 48"

I love these little communities scattered throughout the West. Everything seems to be in about the same stage of delapidation. One could pause and wonder what on earth caused this town to happen here. There they are. Hot in the summer sun with no one in sight. There seems to be a mutuality of these buildings that cannot be denied. They exist together and are bound up with human hope and frustrations. Yet each has its purpose to the community and would be very much missed if it were removed. This "togetherness" that makes up a whole is the idea I hoped to convey. Each building a distinct entity of its own but together making a town, a town where people live and neighbors come to shop and swap talk.