

2008

Flow

Sharon L. Kennedy

Curator at Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, University of Nebraska- Lincoln

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flow



2007-2008

21st Annual Sheldon Statewide Exhibition
Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

flow

Symbolizing purity, sustenance, tranquility, power, movement, and continuity, water is a source of life as well as destruction and death. Its surface serves as a metaphor for self-reflection and contemplation. It flows over cultural and physical boundaries. Water is indispensable to human survival, yet many take it for granted. We pollute it, misuse it, and fight over it. It is easily accessible to some while nearly out of reach to others. *Flow* explores the theme of water as subject and symbol, natural wonder, recreational resource, and environmental concern.

Artists with an affinity toward nature, especially landscape painters, chose water as a primary subject because of its reflective beauty and emotive qualities. Those close to the land also wish to protect it, and to do so some have turned to documentary imagery. Water was a central theme of the Provincetown, Massachusetts, painters and the San Francisco Bay Area figurative artists. American Impressionists gravitated toward water's abstract, absorbing quality.

Water and exceptional light drew artist and art teacher Charles Hawthorne to Cape Cod, where he helped establish an artist colony and persuaded Ross Moffett to join their circle. Although Moffett studied in Chicago and New York, he was born on an Iowa farm, and could identify with the Portuguese fishermen in the west end of Provincetown. "I regarded this group as proletarian," he wrote, "at least as a working class, and...I thought, not too difficult to connect them with farmers..."¹ *Red Dory* exemplifies Moffett's attempt to depict the fishermen and their environment as inseparable, organic elements. His use of patterning, negative space, color, and form reflects his interest in modernist ideas as well as life on the water.

In 1947 Paul Reiska moved to Provincetown to study with Abstract Expressionist Hans Hofmann. He compares his process of art making to that of jazz. Like jazz musicians who become masters at improvisation by playing over and over again, losing themselves in their playing, he felt painters must continuously paint to achieve a similar spontaneity. "For five years, I was out there painting every day," Reiska states, "but I never got bored because I was in a trance."



Ross E. Moffett, *The Red Dory*, 1928, oil on canvas, 20 x 30 3/8"
NAA Collection



Paul Resika, *Horseleech Pond*, 1968, oil on canvas, 24 x 3"
NAA-Nelle Cochrane Woods Memorial

You have got to be in a trance to make artwork.”² Water is the subject of Resika’s *Horseleech Pond*, which displays his fluid technique and freedom of gesture, his dramatic use of color, and the image’s sense of luminosity and atmosphere.

Some of Joel Meyerowitz’s most significant photographs were made during summer visits to Cape Cod. He had formerly worked as a New York City street photographer, using black-and-white film. Beginning in 1976 he experimented with a vintage 8 x 10” Deardorff field view camera and found the Cape’s flat, vast seascape and intense sunlight the setting he needed to alter the way he saw. Changing light, simplicity, color, the merging of sea and sky are qualities that drew Meyerowitz to the Cape. According to Meyerowitz, color film offered “more things to look at, new subjects for me. Color suggests that light itself is a subject.”³ About his photography and his environment he observes, “Cape Cod is a one-story place. Everything sits against the horizon. Everything is in human scale,”⁴ while going on to stress that “What you feel in that instant, that glimpse of something just out of reach, is what tells you to make a photograph. It is a feeling.”⁵

Bror Julius Olsson (B.J.O.) Nordfeldt, who spent time on the Northern coast of California and many summer months in Provincetown, claimed a close connection to water as a driving force in his stylistic development. In *Sea, Rock and Fish* Nordfeldt distorts the size of the fish, reduces the forms to elemental shapes, and thus creates an image of solidity. The horizontal motion of the fish and verticality of the rocks combine with the water's motion to generate tension. About his sea images Nordfeldt explained, "I am interested in the nature of water, its fluidity, its weight and strength. I try to achieve these things through a use of lines and colors, shapes and forms which are interdependent," adding that "I have always been interested in the sea and the loneliness of the sea—thus I try to create the feeling of loneliness, of depth, of weight, volume and force."⁶

Peter de Lory grew up on Cape Cod where he began photographing at a young age. His hand-colored photograph *Arm in Water* serves as a metaphor for humanity's relationship with and dependence on water. Water makes up most of the human organism. It cools and cleanses body and



Bror Julius Olsson Nordfeldt, *Sea, Rocks and Fish*, 1950, oil on canvas, 37 x 48"
UNL-FM Hall Collection



Harry Callahan, *Eleanor, Chicago*, 1949, gelatin silver print, 9 5/8 x 9 1/2"
UNL-FM Hall Collection

spirit. The transparency made visible in the photograph implies purity, fluidity, and weightlessness, offering a sense of peace and tranquility.

Harry Callahan's famous photograph *Eleanor, Chicago* depicts his wife, one of his principal subjects from 1947 to 1960. "In each exploration or concern for the subject," he remarked, "I continue in the area for a great length of time, sometimes a couple of years."⁷ Emerging from water with eyes closed and hair flowing down her shoulders, Eleanor appears as a mysterious nymph. She dominates the landscape and we are drawn into her world. For Callahan, whose art was a personal response to his own life, the subject was the most important aspect of a photograph.

In the late 19th and early 20th century, Impressionism became popular in America, its style loosely characterized by fluidity of light and color. Water, supremely embodying this fluidity, became a matchless subject for artists. James McNeill Whistler's dawn and dusk harbor scenes inspired another American artist, Charles Vezin, much of whose work depicted lower Manhattan's harbor and



Alice Cumbow, *Autumn Reflections*, 1951, oil on canvas, 15 1/2 x 23 5/8
NAA-Gift of Mary D. Hillegas

skyline. In *New York Harbor* he focuses on the water and the heavy air rising above it. The skyline is hardly visible in the fog. With small brushstrokes in hues of blues, purples, greens, and pink, Vezin adeptly conveyed the water's movement and the light reflected upon it.

Given its relationship to the land, water is often a central focus in landscape painting. Three important landscapists included in the exhibition lived on the land they depicted. Alice Cumbow, a self-taught landscape artist, lived in the Nebraska Sandhills all her life. Her subject matter was the big sky, plentiful water, light, and atmosphere of her surroundings. Although there are primitive qualities to her work, there is also acute

attention to detail and sensitivity to the land. In *Autumn Reflections*, the focal point is the clear blue water and its reflective qualities. Brilliant colors radiate the warmth of the weather and the peak of fall.

Plains artist Robert Weaver's landscapes also reflect his surroundings. *Lancaster County Pond, No II*, located in Nebraska, exemplifies his tendency to use paint as a drawing tool. His bold use of form and color creates tension in the serene landscape one might expect. Although Weaver is best known for his figurative work, his landscapes also exhibit an expressionist style characterized by forceful brushwork, exaggerated line, thick surface texture, intense color, and deliberate execution.

Neil Welliver painted in nature, inhabiting a place until he had observed all its intricate details and felt a certain oneness with it. Despite their inaccessibility, Welliver sought out remote areas to paint, completing only large canvases in his studio and limiting his palette to eight colors. Like his other watercolors, *Cedar Pond* was influenced by Japanese prints. Instead of using calligraphy, however, he painted an area with watercolor



Neil Welliver, *Cedar Pond*, 1976, watercolor, 21 3/4 x 28 3/4"
NAA Collection



David Taverner Hanson, *Mine Spoil Piles and Waste Runoff Water*, not dated
chromogenic color print, 8 15/16 x 11"
UNI-EM: Hall Collection

and allowed it to run down the paper. In the early 60s Welliver purchased a farm in Maine, eventually expanding it to 1600 acres, where he lived as a recluse and an environmentalist.

Paul Caponigro's approach, like Welliver's, is patient and intuitive, enhancing his communion with nature. For over 50 years Caponigro has explored his world through the camera. "The flow of life in nature particularly attracts me," he declares. "Simply there I can record the subtle as well as the obvious results of the moving forces and principles which permeate my whole environment."⁸ *Tide Pool, Nahant, Massachusetts* embodies this purity in his personal search for beauty, truth, and meaning.

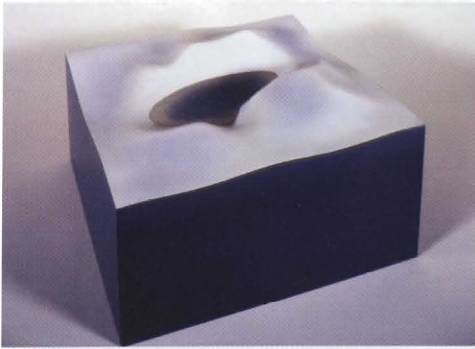
In the 1950s William Theo Brown and other San Francisco Bay Area artists turned away from Abstract Expressionism and focused on the figure. Living on the California coast, they made it the backdrop for much of their work. In Brown's *Girls Swimming*, the faceless, naked figures are reduced to free-flowing shapes in harmony with their watery surroundings. The girls radiate a spirit of playfulness and



Paul Caponigro, *Tide Pool, Nahant, Massachusetts*, 1962, gelatin silver print, 9 3/8 x 7 3/8
UNI-EM Hall Collection

innocence. Through color variation and textural expression, Brown's painterly style asserts a lively, motion-filled space, giving personality to the ocean.

Budapest-born Gabor Peterdi's *Wave* provides another interpretation of ocean swell. For Peterdi, who moved to the United States in 1939 as the threat of war grew imminent;



Sam Richardson, *Lake in the Mountains is Frozen After the Snow*, 1968
 fiberglass, plastic, lacquer, 12 x 13 x 13"
 NAA-Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Louis Seiland



Wayne Thiebaud, *Silver Landscape*, 1971, color serigraph, 21 5/8 x 21"
 UNL-EM Hall Collection

Silver Landscape is a continuation of Wayne Thiebaud's exploration of shape in the stylized form of a central pond in a rural setting. Best known for his cafeteria production line of pies and cakes, his concentration on form and simple shapes with well-defined shadows is central to his work. In *Silver Landscape* Thiebaud achieves strong definition by varying light and dark tones. To create spatial dimension, he places a lone cow in the foreground and scatters nondescript forms indicating brush, animals, or humans in the distance. Thiebaud's scene, unlike most landscapes, consists of little sky and no strong horizon line, thereby emphasizing form.

Karla Lauden is also interested in space and form in her exploration of nature as narrative. Working in high contrast allows her to "focus on the manipulation and altering of form without the emotive baggage of color." In *Two Rivers Meeting* she uses a familiar subject to challenge our concept of "what is a river?"¹⁰ Changing and forming into an emotional and physical space that is personal and private, Lauden's river is no longer just a river.

Providing a place to gather and socialize while cooling off in warm weather, water is

the locus of many Americans' leisure time. In O. Winston Link's photograph *Swimming Pool at Welch, West Virginia*, friends relax and enjoy conversation on the edge of a pool. Link photographed at night using a large flash, composing his scene like a theatre set and waiting for the train to arrive. While his images focus on trains, he often placed them in the background saving the foreground for human activity.

Barbara Frets Simmons shares Link's interest in portraying water as a site of recreation. In *Jacksonville #2*, revealing the expansiveness of the ocean and the beach bathed in light, Frets Simmons applies multiple layers of acrylic paint, working the whole canvas at once while keeping it constantly wet. Despite the activity occurring on the beach, the muted colors and atmospheric air offer a sense of peaceful relaxation.

Born in Baku, Azerbaijan, on the Caspian Sea, Nahum Tschachbasov moved with his family to Chicago at age eight. Between 1940 and 1960 he painted a series called "Maritime Visions," which includes *Isle of Birth*. In a cubist-surreal style the canvas is composed of woody figures and masks in the shape of boats floating in



O. Winston Link, *Swimming Pool at Welch, West Virginia*, 1958, gelatin silver print, 16 x 20"
UNL-EM: Hall Collection



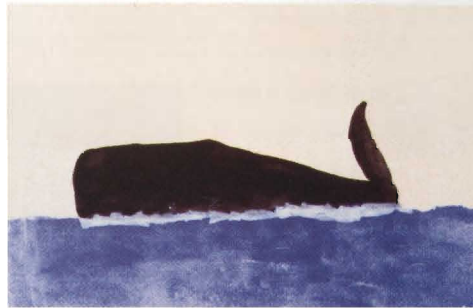
Nahum Tschachbasov, *Isle of Birth*, 1951, oil on canvas, 57 x 54"
UNL-Gift of Samuel B. Cohn

water. A fish with a body resembling a reed basket holds a mother and child. Tschacbasov incorporated Jungian iconography in his work, suggesting the psyche's inner workings through myth and metaphor.

Tschacbasov's surreal image of a fish contrasts sharply to the image of a whale taken from a 19th-century whaling log painted by an unknown artist. The whale's features are simplified, straightforward, and recognizable. Whether designed as documentation or for pleasure, the work is an austere rendition of the ocean's largest mammal.

Water is fundamental to human existence, desired for enjoyment as well as essential for survival. Because most of our world, like the human body itself, is made up of water, we yearn to know, understand, and appreciate this life-giving source. As *Flow* exhibits, artists render water through unique and varying approaches. From traditional landscape to simplified forms, abstraction, and metaphor, artists have and will continue to explore water's wonder and mystery.

Sharon L. Kennedy
Curator



Unknown, *Whale* (from a whaling log book), 19th century, watercolor, 5 3/8 x 8"
UNL-Gift of John Davis Hatch, Jr.

Endnotes

- ¹ Josephine Couch Del Deo, *Ross Moffett 1888-1971*, exhibition brochure May 1975, p. 2.
- ² Berta Walker Gallery, *Paul Resika*, <http://www.bertawalker.com/artists/resika-p/index.html> (November 16, 2006).
- ³ Joel Meyerowitz *Cape Light, Color Photographs*, Foreword by Clifford S. Ackley; Interview by Bruce K. MacDonald (Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, c. 1978), p. 9.
- ⁴ Meyerowitz, p. 13.
- ⁵ Meyerowitz, p. 14.
- ⁶ Van Deren Coke, *Nordfeldt The Painter* (Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1972), p.129-130.
- ⁷ Harry Callahan, *Photographs*, (Santa Barbara, Van Riper & Thompson, Inc., 1964), p. 42.
- ⁸ Paul Caponigro, *Photography: 25 years* (Philadelphia, Photography Gallery, 1981), p. 5.
- ⁹ David T. Hanson, *Late Twentieth-Century Landscapes*, 1997, <http://www.davidthanson.net/writings.html> (February 22, 2007).
- ¹⁰ Karla Lauden, *Your artwork: Two Rivers Meeting*, Email to Kimberly Golden, April 2, 2007.

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- ⁶ Van Deren Coke, *Nordfeldt The Painter* (Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1972), p.129-130.
- ⁷ Harry Callahan, *Photographs*, (Santa Barbara, Van Riper & Thompson, Inc., 1964), p. 42.
- ⁸ Paul Caponigro, *Photography: 25 years* (Philadelphia, Photography Gallery, 1981), p. 5.
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- ¹⁰ Karla Laudén, *Your artwork: Two Rivers Meeting*, Email to Kimberly Golden, April 2, 2007.

flow Exhibition Checklist

William Theo Brown
Girls Swimming, 1964
 oil on canvas
 31 x 38 1/4"

UNL-Howard S. Wilson Memorial



Harry Callahan
Eleanor, Chicago, 1949
 gelatin silver print
 9 5/8 x 9 1/2"

UNL-F.M. Hall Collection



Paul Caponigro
Tide Pool, Nahant, Massachusetts, 1965
 gelatin silver print
 9 3/8 x 7 3/8"

UNL-F.M. Hall Collection



Alice Cumbow
Autumn Reflections, 1951
 oil on canvas
 15 1/2 x 23 5/8"

NAA-Gift of Mary D. Hillegass



Peter De Lory
Arm in the Water, 1976
 gelatin silver print with hand coloring
 18 x 12"

UNL-F.M. Hall Collection



Barbara Frets Simmons
Jacksonville #2, 1982
 acrylic on canvas
 44 x 48 1/4"

NAA Collection



David Taverner Hanson
Mine Spoil Piles and Waste Runoff Water, not dated
 chromogenic color print
 8 15/16 x 11"

UNL-F.M. Hall Collection



Karla Laudén
Two Rivers Meeting, 1994
 intaglio
 35 7/8 x 23 7/8"

UNL-Thomas P. Coleman Memorial



O. Winston Link
*Swimming Pool at Welch,
West Virginia*, 1958
gelatin silver print
16 x 20"
UNL-F.M. Hall Collection



Joel Meyerowitz
Bay/Sky, Provincetown, 1979
chromogenic color print
8 x 10"
UNL-F.M. Hall Collection



Ross E. Moffett
The Red Dory, 1928
oil on canvas
20 x 30 3/8"
NAA Collection



Bror Julius Olsson Nordfeldt
Sea, Rocks and Fish, 1950
oil on canvas
37 x 48"
UNL-F.M. Hall Collection



Gabor F. Peterdi
Wave, 1955
etching and engraving
7 7/8 x 9 3/4"
UNL-F.M. Hall Collection



Paul Resika
Horseleech Pond, 1968
oil on canvas
24 x 36"
NAA-Nelle Cochrane Woods Memorial



Sam Richardson
*Lake in the Mountains is Frozen
After the Snow*, 1968
fiberglass, plastic, lacquer,
12 x 13 x 13"
NAA-Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Louis Sosland



Wayne Thiebaud
Silver Landscape, 1971
color serigraph
21 5/8 x 21"
UNL-F.M. Hall Collection



Nahum Tschacbasov

Isle of Birth, 1951

oil on canvas

37 x 54"

UNL—Gift of Samuel B. Cohn



Neil Welliver

Cedar Pond, 1976

watercolor

21 1/4 x 28 3/4"

NAA Collection



Unknown

Whale (from a whaling log book)

19th century

watercolor

5 3/8 x 8"

UNL—Gift of John Davis Hatch, Jr.



Charles Vezin

New York Harbor, not dated

oil on canvas

12 x 16"

UNL—F.M. Hall Collection



Robert Weaver

Lancaster County Pond No. II, 1997

oil on canvas

40 x 51 3/4"

UNL—Gift of Jane and Carl Rohman and

Karen and Robert Duncan



flow 2007–2008 Exhibition Schedule

August 27–September 28, 2007

Concordia University, Seward, NE

Sponsor: Concordia University

March 7–April 9 2008

Norfolk Arts Center, Norfolk, NE

Sponsor: Karla Huse Visual Arts Endowment

October 17–November 14, 2007

McKinley Center, North Platte, NE

Sponsor: Nebraskaland National Bank, Art
Study League of North Platte

April 11–May 18, 2008

Hastings Museum, Hastings, NE

Sponsor: Hastings College Art Department

November 16–December 16, 2007

High Plains Museum, McCook, NE

Sponsor: McCook Arts Council

May 20–June 29, 2008

Gallery 92 West, Fremont, NE

Sponsor: Fremont Area Art Association,
First State Bank and Trust

January 4–February 3, 2008

Cornerstone Bank, York, NE

Sponsor: Cornerstone Bank

October 3–November 2, 2008

Morton James Public Library, Nebraska City, NE

Sponsor: Morton James Public Library

February 5–March 5, 2008

Columbus Art Gallery, Columbus, NE

Sponsor: Robert C. and Linda Labenz,
Columbus Bank and Trust Co.

Dates are subject to slight modifications

Flow is organized by Sheldon Statewide, an outreach program of the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, Nebraska Art Association and the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. This exhibition is made possible by the generous support of the Nebraska Arts Council, James and Rhonda Seacrest, Lonnie Pierson Dunbier, Farmers Mutual Insurance Company of Nebraska and the Groundwater Foundation.

Front: Joel Meyerowitz, *Bay/Sky, Provincetown*, 1979, chromogenic color print, 8 x 10"
UNL-EM Hall Collection

