

*Midwestern
Romanticism*

Midwestern Romanticism

an exhibition of contemporary landscape painting

essay by John Arthur

*James Winn
Keith Jacobshagen
Donald K. Lake
Richard Boschulte*

*James D. Butler
Michael Dubina
Gary Bowling
Brett Angell*

Acknowledgements:

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Richard Boschulte, Curator

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Introduction

Landscape painting has long been one of America's strongest artistic traditions and again flourished in recent years, particularly in the midwest. For many reasons, artists of various orientations have responded to the beauty of the scenery, finding subjects and styles that engage and sustain them. Within the entirety, midwestern landscape painting presents a diverse range of styles, from the traditional painting of the landscape, from the Impressionist to photographic realism. With this exhibition, we hope to focus on a distinctly midwestern landscape painting within the larger context of the history of western landscape painting. This exhibition features the work of these eight artists: James Butler, Keith Jacobshagen, M. Donald K. Lake, Gary Bowl, Richard Boschulte and Brett Angell.

Quickly apparent in this exhibition are the obvious stylistic similarities among these artists: a dominant horizontal orientation, concerns for light and atmosphere, and an Impressionistic approach to painting landscape. Additionally, perhaps even more striking are the characteristics shared by the artists: a sense of romanticism, the essence of romanticism, the reading of various statements about the world by and about these artists, I hope to the extent to which these artists' views and outlooks about the world inspire it. These painters are inspired in their desire to share the story

Introduction

Landscape painting has long been one of America's strongest artistic traditions and has again flourished in recent years, particularly in the midwest. For many reasons, painters of all orientations have responded to midwestern scenery, finding subjects and themes that engage and sustain them. When taken in its entirety, midwestern landscape painting presents a diverse range of stylistic approaches to painting the landscape, from pure abstraction to photographic realism. With this exhibition, I hope to focus on a distinctly romantic trend within the larger context of contemporary midwestern landscape painting through the work of these eight artists: James Winn, James D. Butler, Keith Jacobshagen, Michael Dubina, Donald K. Lake, Gary Bowling, Richard Boschulte and Brett Angell.

Quickly apparent in this exhibition will be obvious stylistic similarities between the artists: a dominant horizontal format, painterly concerns for light and atmosphere, and a realistic approach to painting landscape subjects. Additionally, perhaps even foremost among the characteristics shared by these artists is emotionalism, the essence of romanticism. While reading various statements and articles written by and about these artists, I was astonished at the extent to which these artists shared kindred views and outlooks about their art and what inspires it. These painters are often passionate in their desire to share the sublime beauty of

their experiences, hopeful that their works will evoke similar emotional responses in their viewers. It is this emotionally evocative aspect that distinguishes this trend in midwestern landscape painting and sets these painters apart from their contemporaries.

Beyond the characteristics shared by these artists that suggest a cohesive trend, I also wanted to examine how stylistic subtleties distinguish the work of each artist and demonstrate diversity within the trend. Each artist, in his unique way, manipulates and orchestrates the formal elements of painting and drawing to produce works charged with poetic metaphor. Inspired by life as well as by art, these artists show us the beauty of our surroundings and more, through works ranging from the psychologically moody and foreboding to the spiritually transcendent and triumphant.

The artists in this exhibition are not isolated in their approach to painting the landscape. There are many more, too many to include in a single exhibition; however, I feel these eight are paradigm examples of a significant region-wide romantic trend in contemporary landscape painting. These eight artists, all born and still living in the midwest, find their subjects in the local landscape they love. Through their works, I hope that viewers of this exhibition will discover, as I have discovered, that beauty is still in fashion.

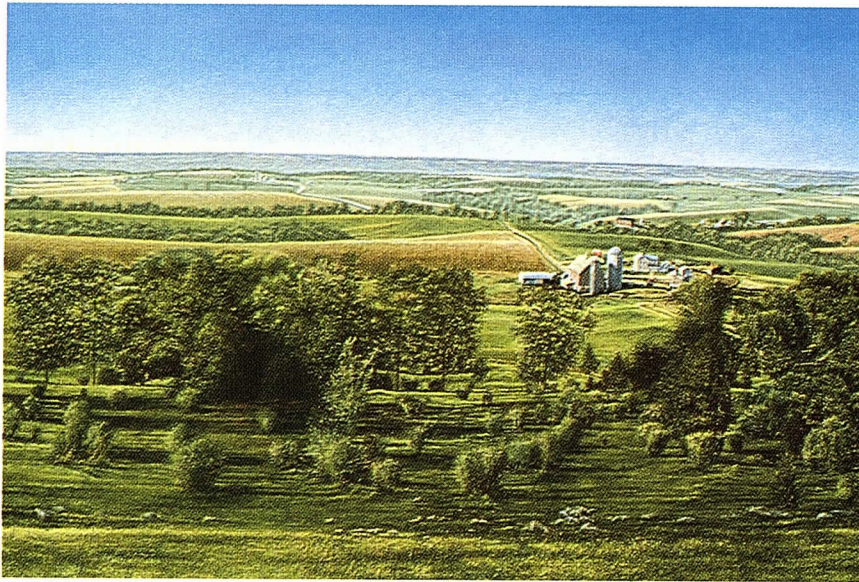
Richard Boschulte

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James Butler *Shaded Meadow* 1992

In Texas, David Bates has produced an impressive body of work centered on the primeval forests, wildlife, hunting dogs, and old guides of the Grassy Lake Swamp, while Peter Poskas has recorded the seasonal shifts and acts of light on Connecticut's farmlands and Linden Frederick has uncannily captured the nuance and moods of Maine's roads and scruffy small towns.

Porter, Welliver and the perceptual realists-- Philip Pearlstein, Diebenkorn, Alfred Leslie, Jack Beal, and others--emerged from the broad mantle of abstract expressionism in the late fifties and sixties, as did their pop, Duchampian, and formalist contemporaries.

In the late sixties, a younger generation of photorealists fused the figurative tradition, the specificity of photojournalism and commonplace subjects with the cool detachment of pop art. At that time it was startling to see such imagery rendered with the impeccable skills of the French academicians.

Equally important, but less widely acknowledged, was the inventive figuration of James McGarrell, Robert Barnes, and Ellen Lanyon in the Midwest, the improvisations of Bay Area painters such as Paul Wonner, Elmer Bischoff, Joan Brown, and Wayne Thiebaud in California, and the elaborately constructed etchings by New England printmaker Peter Milton.



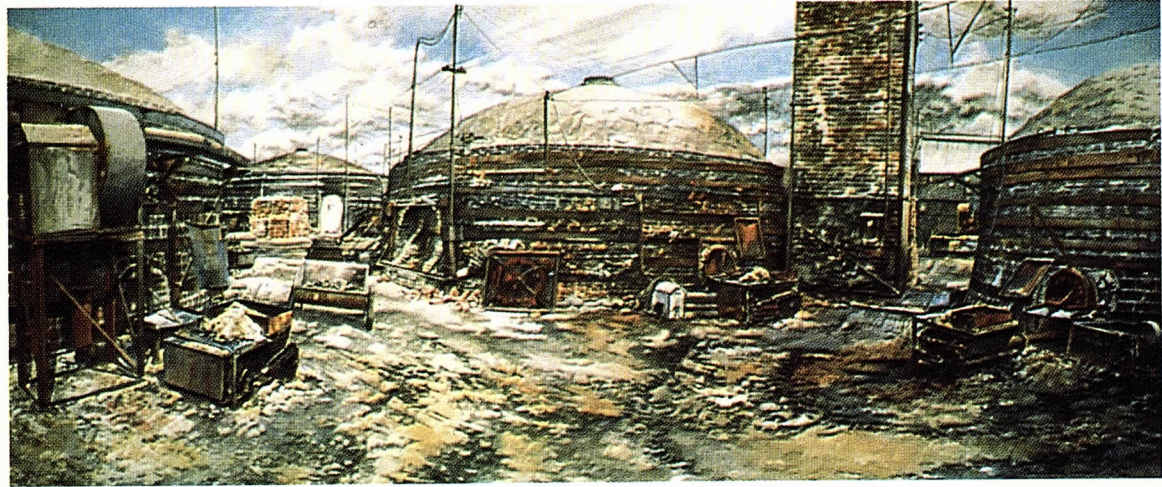
Also, by the mid-seventies, there was a reemergence of regional painting that was not as apparent. However, the color palette did not carry the excessive baroque of the abstraction precedents, and the style was none of the earlier regionalist rhetoric, banal homilies, and chauvinistic posturing.

In Illinois, Harold Greer was the first painter to render the midwestern landscape with the sharp resolution of photorealism. To the north, the mysterious woods and waterfalls of the Cambrian Shield were studied and depicted. These were derived from experiential details and twists and turns of memory, which were transliterated into mythic



a younger generation of figurative tradition, the journalism and commonplace detachment of pop art. It is startling to see such imagery in the capable skills of the French

but less widely acknowledged figurative of James Barnes, and Ellen Lanyon. Improvisations of Bay Area by Wonner, Elmer Bischoff, and the Thiebaud in California, and constructed etchings by New Peter Milton.



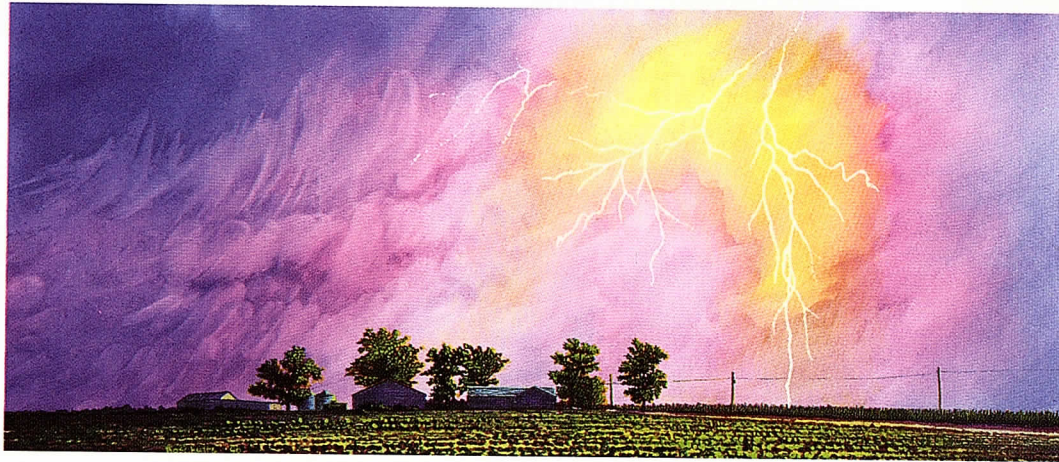
Donald Lake *Industry: Brickyard* 1994

Also, by the mid-seventies a widespread reemergence of regional painting was becoming apparent. However, the contemporary artists did not carry the excessive baggage of their pre-abstract precedents, and fortunately, there was none of the earlier regionalists' inflamed rhetoric, banal homilies, reactionary bombast, and chauvinistic posturing.

In Illinois, Harold Gregor was the first painter to render the midwestern agrarian landscape with the sharp resolution and high finish of photorealism. To the north, Tom Uttech's mysterious woods and waters of the Pre-Cambrian Shield were studio inventions. They were derived from experience, reshaped by the twists and turns of memory, and ultimately transliterated into mythic landscapes.

Differing from both Gregor and Uttech, Keith Jacobshagen's small panels of rural Nebraska with their anecdotal notes on the weather and other particulars are plein air, premier coup paintings--a practice that is as old as tubed paint. Even though these roadside studies are fully realized independent works, they often serve as source material for Jacobshagen's large studio constructions.

While there is a certain amount of overlapping in the studio procedures of these major midwestern painters, they none-the-less serve to clearly illustrate the basic approaches to imagistic art: direct observation, invention and transformation, and photo-derivation.



Richard Boschulte *Nocturne: Lightning Strike (XII)* 1996

Harold Gregor, Keith Jacobshagen, and Tom Uttech are widely regarded as distinguished painters and highly influential teachers. Their work is grounded in a strong sense of Western art history and America's visual tradition. While Uttech and Gregor are not in this exhibition, their presence and influence is apparent.

The paintings by James Winn, one of our best known contemporary American landscape painters, clearly reflects the influence of Harold Gregor. Like John Stuart Ingle, Stone Roberts, and the late Juan Gonzalez, he is one of the most meticulous craftsmen in contemporary realism. More significantly, his beautiful panoramas were among the first works to clearly indicate a renewed interest in Frederic Church and the luminists and to mark the move toward a more spiritual basis and an unabashedly romantic interpretation of the American scene. Less obvious (because of our lack

of familiarity with them) is the influence of nineteenth century Scandinavian painting on his work.

Like Winn, James Butler is an impeccable image maker. Beyond his affection for the enigmatic premier coup landscapes of Edwin Dickinson, Butler readily acknowledges an affinity for Albert Bierstadt's half-fictive, monumental studio constructions and the atmospheric vistas of Yellowstone and the Grand Canyon by Thomas Moran. In spite of their sense of specificity, Butler's aerial views of the expansive Illinois landscape are composites rather than literal depictions of specific views.

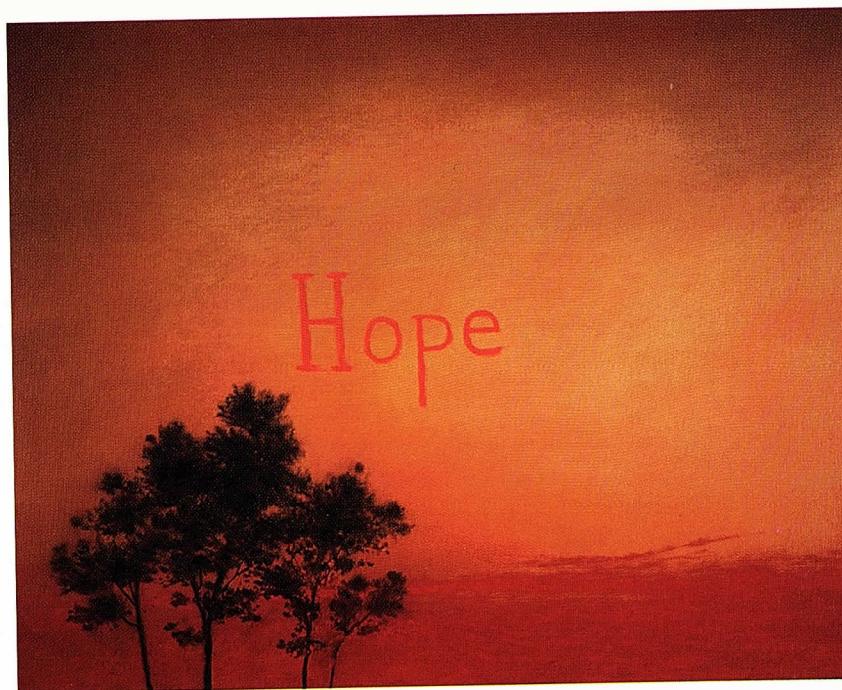
Faced with the vast plains and immense, dramatic skies, it is no wonder that the panoramic format is highly favored by midwestern landscape painters. Both Donald Lake and Richard Boschulte adhere to an emphatic horizontality in their watercolors and oils and both use the distant horizon as a compositional device for sharply dividing the

recessional expanse of land from the sky. Their works are more painterly than those of Lake and Butler's pastels and oils. How the factor of the agrarian's constant preoccupation with the weather and the seasons is reflected in their horizons and careful attention to the details of the landscape.

The landscapes by Lake and Butler are marked by tilled fields, crops, roads, houses and other signs of the presence of human life. This is in fact characteristic of almost all American landscapes. Beyond the evidence of local wires, and distant urban lights, the scruffy industrial scenes. Boschulte's works show characteristic traits of watercolor and oil and



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Michael Dubina *Fiery Hope* 1996

recessional expanse of land from the sky above. Their works are more painterly than Winn's acrylics and Butler's pastels and oils. However, the consistent factor of the agrarian's constant preoccupation with the weather and the seasons is reflected in their low horizons and careful attention to the skies.

The landscapes by Lake and Boschulte are marked by tilled fields, crops, roads, distant farmhouses and other signs of the presence of man, and this is in fact characteristic of almost all midwestern landscapes. Beyond the evidence of bridges, electrical wires, and distant urban lights, Lake also paints scruffy industrial scenes. Boschulte relies on the viscous traits of watercolor and oil and the use of

intense, saturated color to heighten the edgy expressive character and emotional content of his paintings, whereas Lake remains within the parameters of naturalism and chooses to focus on the inherent moods of the landscape.

Conversely, Michael Dubina's tonal renderings of pastures and fields are more sultry and emotionally evocative. Pictorially, his watercolors and oils recall those brooding dusks by Martin Heade and George Inness while symbolically reflecting (as does the work of James Winn) the pantheism of American luminism and the subtle religious iconography of Northern European landscape painting.

List of Works in the Exhibition (dimensions in inches) * indicates works reproduced in catalog

James Winn	Keith Jacobshagen	Michael Dubina	Richard Boschulte	Brett Angell
North of Town Acrylic on Paper 9 x 18 1992	Rain in June 1993-95* Oil on Canvas 14 x 34 1993-95	Witness Oil on Canvas 16 x 20 1996	Early Snow: November Oil on Canvas 28 x 70 1996	Recovering* Acrylic on Canvas 12 x 15 1995
Cloudscape: No. 7 Acrylic on Paper 14 x 28 1993	Bennet from the SW Side 1993 Oil on Paper 8 x 24 1993	Rising Above Oil on Canvas 16 x 20 1996	Four Seasons Suite: Winter: Creek Bed in February (II) Watercolor 10 x 20 1996	Repulsion Acrylic on Canvas 14 x 14 1995
Sketch for Grain Bins* Acrylic on Paper 12 x 28 1992	Cut Brush Fires, Platte Valley 1993 Oil on Paper 8 x 28 1993	September Hope Oil on Canvas 16 x 20 1996	Spring: Windmill at Dusk, May Watercolor 10 x 20 1996	Leaden Sky Acrylic on Canvas 10 x 12 1994
May Corn: No. 14 Acrylic on Paper 18 x 48 1994	From Lincoln's North Side 1995 Oil on Paper 5 x 24 1995	Fiery Hope* Oil on Canvas 16 x 20 1996	Summer: Nocturne, Lightning Strike (XII)* Watercolor 10 x 20 1996	Irritation Acrylic on Canvas 11 x 9 1994
May Corn: No. 15 Acrylic on Paper 24 x 48 1995	Waverly Road to Ashland 1996 Oil on Paper 5 x 24 1996	Hope Oil on Canvas 16 x 20 1996	Fall: Combine at Harvest, Dusk Watercolor 10 x 20 1996	Alterations Acrylic on Canvas 20 x 22 1995
James D. Butler	Gary Bowling	Donald K. Lake		
Shaded Meadow* Pastel on Paper 38 x 57 1/2 1992	Trees on Shriners' Lake* Oil on Canvas 50 x 50 1992	Industry: Brickyard* Transparent Watercolor 16 x 40 1994		
Icy Winter Morning Pastel on Paper 40 x 60 1989	Late Afternoon Tee Oil on Canvas 39 x 52 1993	Industry: Genesis Transparent Watercolor 27 x 40 1994		
	Sunset on Houses Oil on Canvas 36 x 48 1994	Prairie Sky #8 Watercolor and Gouache 25 x 52 1991		

**Exhibition
Itinerary**

March 16- April 27, 1996: Exhibition opens,
Springfield Art Association, Springfield, IL.

May 3- July 13, 1996:

Freeport Art Museum and
Cultural Center, Freeport, IL.

August 10- October 6, 1996:

Lakeview Museum of Arts
and Sciences, Peoria, IL.

November 10, 1996- January 5, 1997:

Sioux City Art Center, Sioux City, IA.

January 25- April 6, 1997:

Beach Museum of Art, Kansas State
University, Manhattan, KS.

April 14- May 26, 1997: Exhibition closes,

Gahlberg Gallery, Arts Center, College of
DuPage, Glen Ellyn, IL.



Keith Jacobshagen *Rain in June* 1993-95

Between Mood and Fact

by John Arthur

Every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

I will always be an inlander in spirit. The ocean...does not lure my imagination. Without discounting its awe-inspiring grandeur, it is not for me, and surely it has a worthy rival in a hay or wheat field on a bright windy day.

Charles Burchfield

While a large number of American landscape painters have been inveterate voyagers--Frederic Church explored the jungles of South America and the arid ruins of Petra, Martin Johnson Heade wandered the marshes of Florida and mountains of Brazil, Winslow Homer traveled from the coast of Maine to the Bahamas, Thomas Moran accompanied Powell down the eroded chasms of the Colorado River, and the restless Marsden Hartley roamed New England, Germany, and the South West, for example--others have sought out the mysteries of the most commonplace and deeply familiar scenery. Charles Burchfield, that great pantheistic master, Zen-like mystic, and wallpaper designer never strayed far from his childhood home in Salem, Ohio, or in his maturity, the wooded outskirts of Buffalo, New York, and yet his watercolors rival the works of Hokusai, Samuel Palmer, and the fauves.



Maxfield Parrish, one twentieth century American, spent the last thirty years in a mythical New England never dropped their leaden snows. Andrew Wyeth spent half a century shifting from Maine with the seasons, painted the skyscrapers of the flora of Hawaii, our O'Keeffe will always be icons of parched bones of New Mexico.

The late Fairfield Porter, hampton neighborhood, rounding his Deer Isle season all. Inland and several his close friend Neil Welliver, dreds of small plein air



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James Winn *Sketch for Grain Bins* 1992

Maxfield Parrish, one of the unsung masters of twentieth century American landscape painting, spent the last thirty years of his life inventing a mythical New England where the great oaks never dropped their leaves on the idyllic winter snows. Andrew Wyeth has spent more than half a century shifting from rural Pennsylvania to Maine with the seasons and even though she painted the skyscrapers of New York and the flora of Hawaii, our idea of Georgia O'Keeffe will always be entwined with her icons of parched bones and the desert landscape of New Mexico.

The late Fairfield Porter made his Southampton neighborhood and the landscape surrounding his Deer Isle summer home familiar to all. Inland and several hours down east, Porter's close friend Neil Welliver has produced hundreds of small plein air canvases of the glaci-

ated mountains, dense woods, and shadowed streams of Maine. In turn, these works have served as studies for his monumental studio paintings. On the West Coast, Wayne Thiebaud has turned the hilly streets of San Francisco and the overlapping California freeways into a slightly surreal, fictive region that verges on an urban version of Crazy Kat's Coconino County.

For at least two decades Russell Chatham (best known from the covers of Jim Harrison's novels) has rendered the vast, somber toned mountains of Montana on canvas and in prints, Woody Gwenn has painted sharp focused, photo-derived roadside views of New Mexico, and Larry Cohen's painterly vistas of Los Angeles and San Francisco have wed the influence of Bay Area figuration to the plein air tradition.