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ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
The College of Fine and Applied Arts
in Candidacy for the Degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

CLOUDS

by

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May, 1981

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Date: May, 1981

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CHAPTER I

CLOUDS

In my years of painting the landscape, I have become increasingly interested in cloud forms. Over the past summer, I began to notice that the clouds of Rochester are especially spectacular. When one looks up at the sky, there is a variety of things to see and every time one looks up, there is something new and different to see. On a stormy day, the sky might be filled with grey threatening or angry forms, while on sunny days, one sees colorful animated forms.

Over the course of history, clouds have been the subject in the work of many prominent writers. Shelley writes of the cloud:

I bring fresh showers for the thirsting flowers,
From the seas and the streams;
I bear light shade for the leaves when laid
In their noonday dreams,
From my wings are shaken the dews that waken
The sweet buds every one.
P. B. Shelley, "The Cloud"

Emerson writes in one of his essays, "I have seen the softness and beauty of the summer clouds floating feathery overhead, enjoying....their height and privilege of motion."¹

The Japanese and Chinese, who worship all of nature, have written a great deal on the subject of the cloud:

Clouds shaped like leaves of rice—all these
To watchful eyes foretell the evening storm.
Japanese poem

And in Oriental art the artist takes on the feeling of nature as his

own. "...The winds of the air have become his desires and the clouds his wandering thoughts..."²

The dictionary defines a cloud as:

A visible mass of water or ice particles in the air above the earth's surface, a visible mass of particles in the air, something having a dark or threatening look. ³

Though I have studied scientific information about clouds in depth and found it very interesting, here, I prefer to deal with the philosophical. Though clouds are essentially particles in the air, there is so much more to see in them. They have some very interesting characteristics. The one thing that intrigues me most is that they have so many lifelike qualities. So lifelike and animated, that at times, they seem to jump out and speak. They also move in the most animated ways. I have seen clouds which seem to dance across the sky, rolling, tumbling and swirling along their way.

Clouds have a variety of sizes, shapes and colors. The traditional view of a cloud is a white fluffy form in a blue sky. But the sky is so much more than blue and white, it includes hues of red, orange, yellow, and violet. Cloud forms, at times, look cottony, but they can also be mountainous, feathery, layered, rounded and linear.

Another interesting feature is their movement patterns. Even when they look tranquil and still, as they often are, clouds are always in motion and constantly changing shape. They offer no resistance. With the guidance of the wind, they dance across the sky, bouncing, swirling,

"Like mankind, who comes from nowhere
and returns to somewhere, clouds briefly
frequent the consciousness of life and
parade across a timeless panorama."

Eric Sloane

CHAPTER II

PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHT AND CLOUDS

Philosophy of the cloud

Clouds simply exist in space. They offer no resistance to the winds, which takes them on brief journeys across the sky. In their course of movement, they break down, disintegrate and reform, existing in a given form for only a brief moment. They have lifelike qualities, which exist because of atmospheric conditions around them and the pattern of the winds movement.

Taoist thought

Through my study of philosophy, I have come across a number of ancient Oriental religious philosophies which relate to these qualities, found in clouds, which I find most intriguing and interesting. Oriental cultures and philosophies have a strong emphasis on nature. To the people of China and Japan, the voice of nature calls forth a response from their hearts. Natural beauty is constantly on their minds. The relation of man to nature shows up in their art and literature. "Intelligence consists in acting according to nature."⁴

Buddhists feel that the self is merely "a process in time," not a single fact or thing⁵ and life is "nothing but a series of manifestations of becomings and extinctions."⁶ Zen, a form of Buddhism, stresses

simplicity, naturalness, tranquility and stillness,⁷ qualities which are often found in the sky. But of all the Oriental religious philosophies that I have studied, the one most related to my philosophy of clouds and the one I chose to study in depth is Taoism.

To understand the Taoist philosophy, one must know a little of its background and history. Taoism is one of the earliest developed philosophies in Chinese history and, along with Confucism, was foundational to all later Chinese philosophical thought. How the movement came to be strong and unique is surrounded by mystery, for there are a number of questions about its historical origin, its founder and the book in which its basic doctrines are set forth. It is unknown whether Lao Tzu, the so-called founder of the movement, lived in the fourth or sixth century B.C. and whether the Tao Te Ching, the book of basic doctrines, was produced in the Spring and Autumn period (722-481 B.C.) or the time of the Warring States (403-222 B.C.). Though the name "Taoist school" was not mentioned until the first century B.C., the movement was going on for centuries before then. Traditionally ancient philosophical schools emerged from government offices and, Taoism in particular, from that of the historian. They arose in response to actual historical situations and grew as a result of deplorable conditions of the time. Therefore, Taoism arose in opposition to existing practices and systems to offer a challenging new way of life.⁸

At this time, the house of Chou had been in power for more than half a millennium and was on a shaky foundation. Feudal lords were

beginning to overuse their power, creating independent states and war. Autocratic rulers tried to outdo each other by indulging in extravagant feasts, displaying fine weapons and enforcing laws and punishment on the restless people. At the same time, Chinese society was entering a new age. Bronze was replaced by iron as the chief metal for production. Agriculture and handicraft became separated. Trade and business grew, developing cities and towns. Feudalism was on the decline, while the common man was on the rise. It was a time to destroy the old and construct the new. This is what Lao Tzu did.⁹

In his writing, Lao Tzu launched many attacks on the political institutions and social mores, but the most important element of his teachings was his formulation of the philosophy of Tao. This concept evolved into a standard for all things to follow.

The Tao is the most basic concept in practically all ancient Chinese philosophies. It consists of a concept of ultimate reality "prior to all beginnings and endings, which unmoved and unmanifest, itself neither begins nor ends, all pervasive and inexhaustible, perpetual source of everything else."¹⁰ The word "tao" has many different translations, none of which are completely adequate, since each translator looks for that in his culture which best expresses his idea of ultimate reality. The two most common translations of the word are "path" or "way" and "nature" or "existence."

The three basic virtues of the Tao are deep love, frugality and simplicity.¹¹ Other important characteristics are vacuity,

humility, subtlety, tranquility and impartiality. The main and most important goal of the Tao, besides peace of mind and purity of heart, is the full realization of all things.

Taoism, like the culture of the Chinese, stresses the beauty and importance of nature. "Nature is the source of all else."¹² "...Nature procreates all things and then devotes itself to caring for them....It provides a pattern to follow, without requiring anyone to follow it."¹³ "Nature is...the formless source of all forms,"¹⁴ just like the Tao.

Besides nature, Taoism is concerned with a spiritual level of being. The natural law of the Tao is to "simply be." A follower of this philosophy must accept what is in front of him and see the simplicity in everything. He must avoid extremes, excesses and complacency,¹⁵ for in the clarity of a still and open mind truth will be reflected. "Stillness and tranquility set things in order in the universe."¹⁶

One of the major concepts of Taoism is the concept of non-action or non-involvement, which triumphs over one's ego, letting things "happen" in accordance with their own innate laws, instead of trying to impose one's wishes as if they were the laws of life. In Lao Tzu's words:

Less and less is done
Until non-action is achieved.
When nothing is done, nothing is left undone.

The world is ruled by letting things take their course.
It cannot be ruled by interfering.

Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, #48

Lao Tzu also believes one must overcome the spirit of competition, through

non-striving. He feels that if people stop "trying," stop putting in so much extra effort and stop looking for final results, work will proceed more quickly.

Other concepts of the Tao include, the concept of opposites, the weak versus strong, and the concept of profound identification. The theory of opposites states that everything has an opposite and these opposites are mutual causations of each other. They are complements of each other, which should be synthesized and harmonized. Lao Tzu feels that the weak can overcome the strong, through humility. The weak must sit back and let nature take its course.

A man is borne gentle and weak
At his death he is hard and stiff.
Green plants are tender and filled with sap
At their death they are withered and dry.

Therefore the stiff and unbending is the disciple of death
The gentle and yielding is the disciple of life.

Thus an army without flexibility never wins a battle
A tree that is unbending is easily broken.

The hard and strong will fall.
The soft and weak will overcome.

Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, #76

The concept of profound identification is the state one enters when he becomes merged with Tao or nature in a harmonious state, removing all distinctions and differentiations.

One must let nature take its course, as the clouds do, and follow the natural order of things. According to Lao Tzu, there are two types of laws - the laws of nature and the artificial or man-made laws. The

laws of nature, or Tao, do not have to be known to be followed and when violated they bring their own punishment. Whereas man-made laws have to be enforced with a great deal of effort.

In summary, the concepts of Lao Tzu and Taoism relate to my philosophy of cloud forms in many ways. Like the cloud forms that I have observed and painted, which simply exist in space, Lao Tzu stresses one's ability to "simply be." Cloud forms sit in the sky and let the wind take them on journeys through the atmosphere. Everything about a cloud, its rate of movement, where it goes, its shape, texture and color, depends upon the natural atmospheric conditions around it, as in the concept of non-action. This concept stresses the ability to sit back and let things happen naturally, to follow the natural order of things.

Western thought

Oriental philosophers are not alone in their thinking. There are a number of Western philosophers who have come to similar conclusions. Among them are Havelock Ellis and the transcendentalists, Emerson and Thoreau.

Havelock Ellis defines mysticism as "the relationship of the Self to the Not-Self, of the individual to a whole, when, going beyond his own personal ends, he discovers his adjustment to larger ends, in harmony or devotion or love."¹⁷

Ellis was brought up to believe that religion is a vital and personal matter, which had nothing to do with the world. But after

reading a number of books, he found that he no longer possessed any religious faith. All the Christian dogmas which he was brought up to accept, had slipped away and they took with them all his experiences of religion. He later came to realize that there was a benefit in this clearing away of traditional and non-vital beliefs. Anyone who has never questioned the faith that he was brought up with, has "missed a training in criticism, in analysis, in open-mindedness, in the resolutely impersonal treatment of personal problems, which no other training can compensate."¹⁸

Ellis read James Hinton's, Life in Nature, and his whole life was changed. "My self was one with the Not-Self, my will one with the universal will. I seemed to walk in light; my feet scarcely touched the ground; I had entered a new world."¹⁹

Hinton viewed the world as an orderly mechanism, which was "vital, with all the glow and warmth and beauty of life,"²⁰ something which could be accepted by the intellect, as well as clung to by the heart.

Ellis was able to face life with confidence and joy, "for my heart was at one with the world and whatever might prove to be in harmony with the world could not be out of harmony with me."²¹

A conversion, as often assumed, is not a turning towards a belief, it is a turning round, a revolution. It has no reference to any external object. The change is fundamentally a readjustment of psychic elements to each other, enabling the whole machine to work harmoniously. Instead of an introduction to new ideas, there is a casting out of dead

ideas which have clogged the vital process. This process is a natural process, it lies in human nature and is still open to all experience.

Like the Chinese and Japanese, Emerson and Thoreau had strong feelings for nature and wrote often on the subject. In Emerson's essay, "Nature," he writes about nature and how everything is related to nature in some way, an opinion which brings to mind the Taoist way of thinking. He also considers the love of beauty, the delight in perceiving natural forms, the spiritual element in nature, found in man's virtuous actions and the intellectual element that finds expression in a work of art, the expression of nature. He envisions nature as discipline for it exerts a moral influence on every individual. Emerson states that:

nature is the organ through which the universal spirit speaks to the individual and strives to lead back the individual to it. Spirit is the supreme being which creates and is present throughout nature. To know God, one must first feel at one with nature.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature"

Only through intuitive wisdom is man able to achieve the sense of unity that lies at the core of the universe and to become what he has created to be: lord of the world, "because he is its head and heart and finds something of himself in every great and small thing..."²²

Thoreau knew only one religion which was "the perfect correspondence of Nature to man, so that he is at home to her."²³ All he asked was to do what he wanted, without wasting valuable time and energy in making money. In other words, he wanted to escape from the race to keep up with the Joneses, and yet, have enough to eat and wear.

What he wanted was a complete and sympathetic intimacy with his environment. He hoped to extend his own vitality to trees, rivers, mountains, flowers, etc., until he knew them. He passionately loved nature and regarded man as only an extension into the intellectual consciousness. Nature was, to him, the worthiest study and the least known and most neglected factor of daily life.

His main purpose was to first make himself an intimate of nature, then to set forth in words "the perfect correspondence of Nature to man."²⁴

We have not made shoes that fit like sand
Nor clothes that fit like water
Nor thoughts that fit like air,
There is much to be done—
Works of nature are abstract,
They do not lean on other things for meaning
The sea-gull is not like the sea
Nor the sun like the moon.
The sun draws water from the sea
The clouds are not like either one—
They do not keep one form forever.
That the mountainside looks like a face is accidental.

Arthur Dove, "A Way to Look At Things,"
Statement in exhibition catalogue,
Seven Americans, Anderson Galleries, 1925

CHAPTER III

INFLUENCES

Besides the philosophies which have influenced my work, a number of artists have influenced my style of painting. Among them are Arthur Dove, John Marin, Marsden Hartley, Georgia O'Keefe and Milton Avery. All of these artists have dealt mainly with the landscape as a subject matter, are strong in the areas of color and form, and all strive to paint the spirit or feeling of their subject matter, areas which are important to me.

In his paintings, Arthur Dove attempted to extract from a situation or object its essential spirit. He painted ideas which could express a quality apart from objects.

Anybody should be able to feel a certain state and express it in terms of paint or music. I do not mean feeling a certain way about something, that is taking an object or subject and liking certain things about it and setting down those things.

But for instance, to feel the power of the ground or sea, and to paint it with that in mind letting spirit hold what you do together...

To create a feeling for the idea rather than to go back to the 'nest' each time to find whether or not the wings were sufficient.

Arthur Dove, statement in an exhibition
catalogue, The Intimate Gallery, 1929

The dominant element in his compositions was color and he believed that all things had a color condition or a "condition of light." It was through this color condition that one could express the essence or inner character of an object, rather than through surface detail.

Dove also believed that this same principle of color applied to forms. Each object had a certain form that captured its spirit, but this form did not necessarily conform to its perceived shape.

He felt that works of art consisted of two elements, the inner and the outer. The outer was the world that the artist experienced, while the inner was the emotion in the mind of the artist. The inner element was the determining and vital one.

Dove had a feeling of oneness with nature and communicated this in all of his paintings. Nature provided the spiritual laws and compositional principles upon which all his work was based, as well as his source of forms. He devised his principles simply by observing nature.

Dove also felt that every individual must understand his innermost spirit and find a means of expression that is in harmony with that spirit. "We certainly seem to set down a self portrait of our own inner feelings with everything that we do and how much finer to have the means of expression in harmony with these feelings..."²⁵

John Marin dealt mainly with the landscape and cityscape as subject matter, yet his intent was not to render the outer structure of reality, but to use the real world as a vehicle to express his inner feelings.

You cannot create a work of art unless the things you behold respond to something within you. Therefore if these buildings move me they too must have life...If it is this 'moving of me' that I try to express, so that I may recall the spell I have been under and behold the expression of²⁶ the different emotions that have been called into being.

It was his belief that the artist should arrange the elements of

nature in a way so that "each takes its place and part in the rhythmic whole — that balanced whole — to sing its music with color, line and spacing upon its keyboard."²⁷

Marsden Hartley was more interested in the problem of painting than the personal introversions and extroversions of specific individuals. He felt one should turn away from the imaginative life and turn to the intellectual.

I have greater faith that intellectual clarity is better and more entertaining than imaginative wisdom or emotional richness. I believe in the theoretical aspects of painting because I believe it produces better painting...

...I have made the complete return to nature, and nature is, as we all know, primarily an intellectual idea. I am satisfied that painting also is like nature, an intellectual idea, and that the laws of nature as presented to the mind through the eye — and the eye is the painter's first and last vehicle — are the means of transport to the real mode of thought: the only legitimate source of esthetic experience for the intelligent painter.

Marsden Hartley, "Art—And The Personal Life," 1928

He was not interested in all the "isms" and art trends popular at the time. "The eye that turns towards nature today receives far finer and more significant reactions than previously when romanticism and the imaginative or poetic principles were the means and ways of expression."²⁸ Nor was he interested in following one style of painting or making money from his art. "...it is more significant to keep one's painting in a condition of severe experimentation than to become a quick success by means of cheap repetition."²⁹

Georgia O'Keefe painted out of a need to express herself in the language of color, not to show or sell her work. Her ability to paint

as she wanted to, without trying to please others, and still become successful, is most inspiring.

She does not try to paint a replica of nature, instead attempts to convey her feelings toward nature. If one wants a replica of nature, she states, that they should just take a photograph.

I know I cannot paint a flower, paint maybe in terms of paint color I can convey to you my experience of the flower or the experience that makes the flower of significance to me at that particular time.³⁰

Milton Avery was a very quiet man. He did not speak much and once remarked, "Why talk when you can paint?"³¹ He developed a style of his own, that is like no other. His strongest area is his use of color, creating color that seems to achieve a life of its own.

His aim was to present exact gesture and feeling within a strictly limited design. With color he added the emotion and often surprise. His use of color emphasizes the flatness of the paint surface and that his main concern is with the surface qualities of a subject. He looked at nature as a substance of surface alone, recording moments of deep perception on his canvases.

"It is the first vision that counts.
The artist has only to remain true to
this dream and it will possess his work
in such a manner that it will resemble
the work of no other man - for no two
visions are alike."

Albert Ryder

CHAPTER IV

TECHNIQUE

All of my paintings are in pastel or pastel and gouache on paper, rather than the traditional oil or acrylic on canvas. I chose this medium because its qualities lend themselves to my subject. Works on paper have a certain spontaneity and freshness that is almost impossible to achieve on canvas. The subtlety of pastel and the flat, chalky qualities of gouache combine to help me achieve exactly the effect that I want.

The use of gouache and pastel, as a painting medium, is not new. Over the course of time, many artists have used both mediums, either alone or in combination with others.

When discussing pastels, the work of the Impressionists come to mind, especially the work of Degas and Cassatt. For a while, in the late 1870's, Mary Cassatt worked directly with Degas, picking up and adopting many of his pastel techniques. He worked with steam over the pastels, to create a pastel paste which was worked with brushes of varying hardnesses. If the water vaporized on the surface of the pastel, a wash was obtained, which was spread out with a brush.³²

In the late 1890's, Degas began using a fixative, which he would spray on the pastel, then work over it. He would repeat this a number of times, building up layers of pastel. Degas also used pastel in combination with oil, distemper and gouache.³³

Marsden Hartley often complained of the fact that pastels are hard to care for and transport. Though many artists use fixatives to remedy this problem, I prefer not to use anything on my finished pastels. Fixatives tend to change the color of the pastels and if not sprayed carefully tend to leave spots or blotches on the work. I find that the best way to protect the pastel is by securing it under glass.

Other artists who worked with pastel include Whistler and Arthur Dove. Whistler did a number of pastels of Venice, as well as nude and portrait studies. His Venetian pastels were on brownish tone paper, outlined in black crayon and tinted with pastel, leaving much of the paper visible.

Arthur Dove turned to pastels in a number of paintings because the texture of pastels gave the painting a deeper, more velvety quality than was possible with oils. Their chalky quality and soft edges conveyed a sense of atmospheric depth, which took the viewer's attention into the pictorial space.

Gouache was employed by a number of artists. Leger used gouache to sketch out and plan larger scale paintings. Marc Chagall used gouache in combination with ink. Matisse used gouache in his late paintings and paper cut-outs. Miro used combinations of ink, gouache and pastel, in a number of his paintings.

FOOTNOTES

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33. Ibid.

THE PAINTINGS

The paintings here are arranged in two sections:

1. pastels
2. gouache and pastels

They are arranged in the order that they were executed and are in a variety of sizes from 18" x 23" to 47" x 58".

None of my paintings have titles. I feel that paintings do not need titles, for titles put the work into a specific framework. As Arthur Dove stated at an exhibit in Chicago, "I don't like titles for these pictures, because they should tell their own story."

1. PASTELS



#1 19" x 24"



#2 19" x 24"



#3 19" x 24"



#4

19" x 24"



#5

19" x 24"



#6 20" x 26"



#7 19" x 24"



#8 19" x 24"



#9

19" x 24"



#10

19" x 24"



#11 19" x 24"



#12 20" x 26"



#13 19" x 24"



#14 16" x 24"
handmade paper



#15 19" x 24"



#16 19" x 24"



#17 18" x 23"



#18 18" x 23"



#19 19" x 24"



#20 19" x 24"



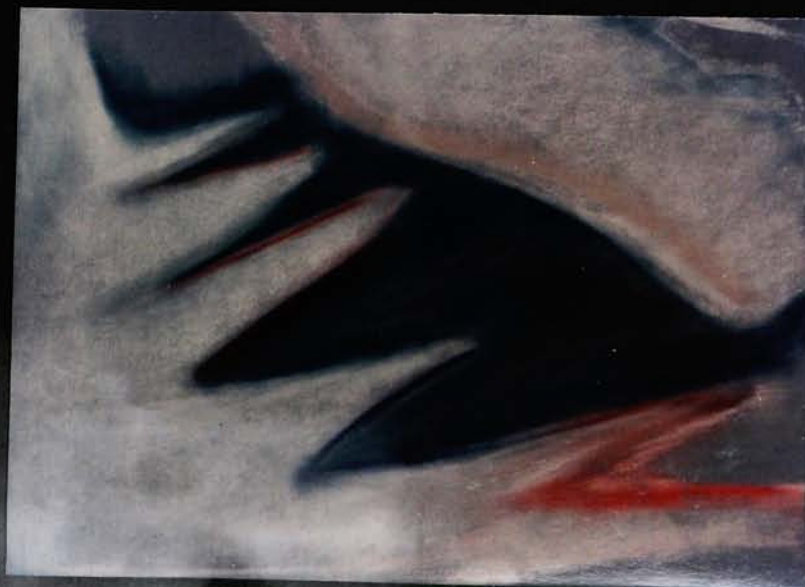
#21 19" x 24"



#22 19" x 24"



#23 19" x 25"



#24 19" x 24"



#28 19" x 24"



#29 19" x 24"



#30 19" x 24"



#31 19" x 24"



#32 19" x 24"



#33 19" x 24"



#34 19" x 24"



#35 19" x 24"



#36

19" x 24"



#37

19" x 24"



#38

19" x 24"



#39 22" x 30"



#40 20" x 26"



#41 47" x 58"



#42 47" x 58"



#43 28" x 39"



#44 20" x 26"



#45 20" x 26"



#46 28" x 39"



#47 22" x 30"



#48 21" x 28"

2. GOUACHE AND PASTELS



#1 20" x 26"



#2 18" x 23"



#3 19" x 24"



#4

19" x 24"



#5

20" x 27"



#6

20" x 27"



#7 22" x 30"



#8 22" x 30"



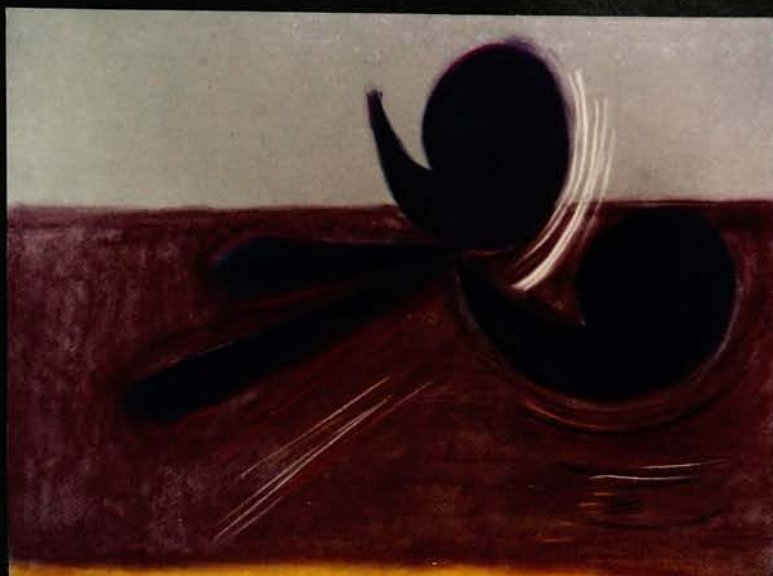
#9 22" x 30"



#10 22" x 29"
handmade paper



#11 22" x 30"



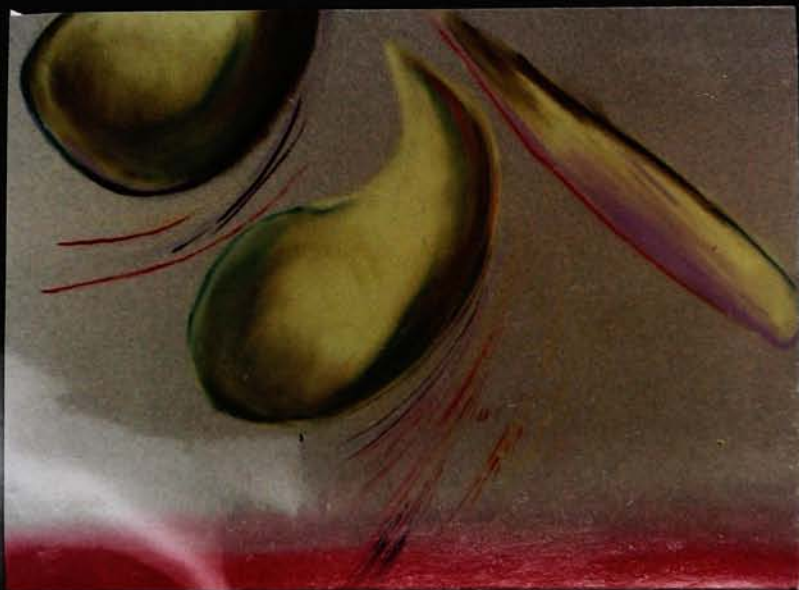
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20" x 26"



#13

20" x 26"

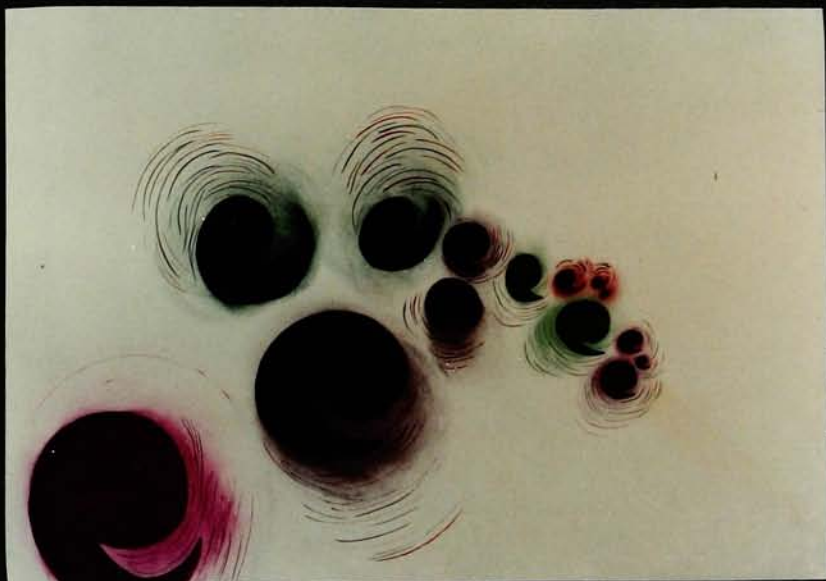


#14

21" x 28"



#15 22" x 30"



#16 21" x 29"



#17 22" x 30"



#18 20' x 26"



#19 20" x 27"



#20 21" x 28"

I. ART

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