

Rochester Institute of Technology

## RIT Digital Institutional Repository

---

Theses

---

5-8-1992

### Sex, death, and the landscape

Bernard Gross

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.rit.edu/theses>

---

#### Recommended Citation

Gross, Bernard, "Sex, death, and the landscape" (1992). Thesis. Rochester Institute of Technology.  
Accessed from

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the RIT Libraries. For more information, please contact [repository@rit.edu](mailto:repository@rit.edu).

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

SEX, DEATH, AND THE LANDSCAPE

By

Bernard O Gross

May 8, 1992

Advisor: Judd Williams \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 20 May 1992

Associate Advisor: Phil Bornarth \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 5/21/92

Associate Advisor: Mike Taylor \_\_\_\_\_

Date: May 19, 1992

Special Assistant to the Dean for Graduate Affairs:

Phil Bornarth \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 5/21/92

Dean, College of Fine and Applied Arts:

Dr. Peter Giopulos \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 5/21/92

I, \_\_\_\_\_, prefer to be contacted  
each time a request for reproduction is made. I can be  
reached at the following address.

RD 5 Box 238 Brass Castle Road

Washington, NJ 07882

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I dedicate this work to Roaring Rock Brook  
and my hope that it will outlive all of us.



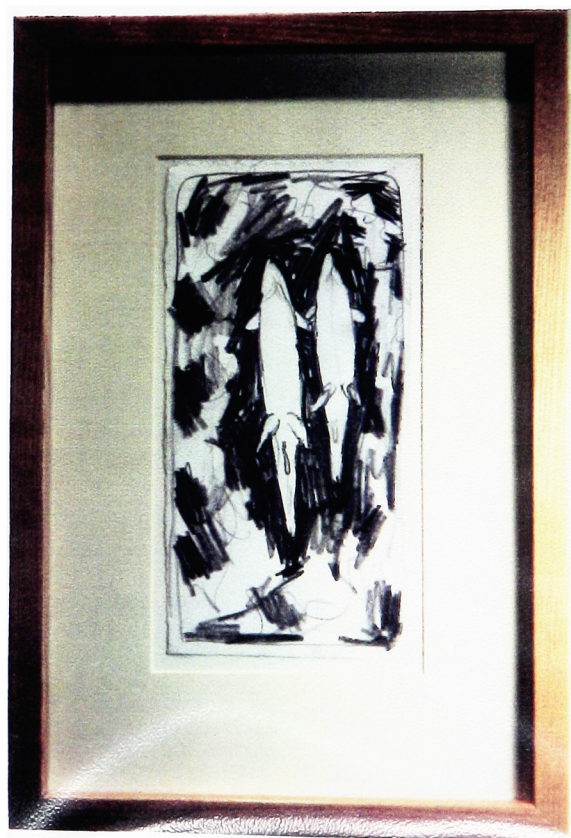
It is now spring and perhaps the most appropriate time of year to be writing this particular document. The rapid changes make spring my favorite season. Everywhere I find the unexpected is commonplace and nature reveals herself in the cycle of rebirth. This is how I see my world, as one continuous cycle composed of many inter-related workings. Sex and death are only two moments in the drama of the circle of my landscape, but they are none the less of great significance. Man can not stop nature's cycles, however he can alter their content. The "Hindentrout" series is an exposure of mans custom alterations of his environment which began with the first tools and will continue indefinitely.



1. "Trout in Hangar"



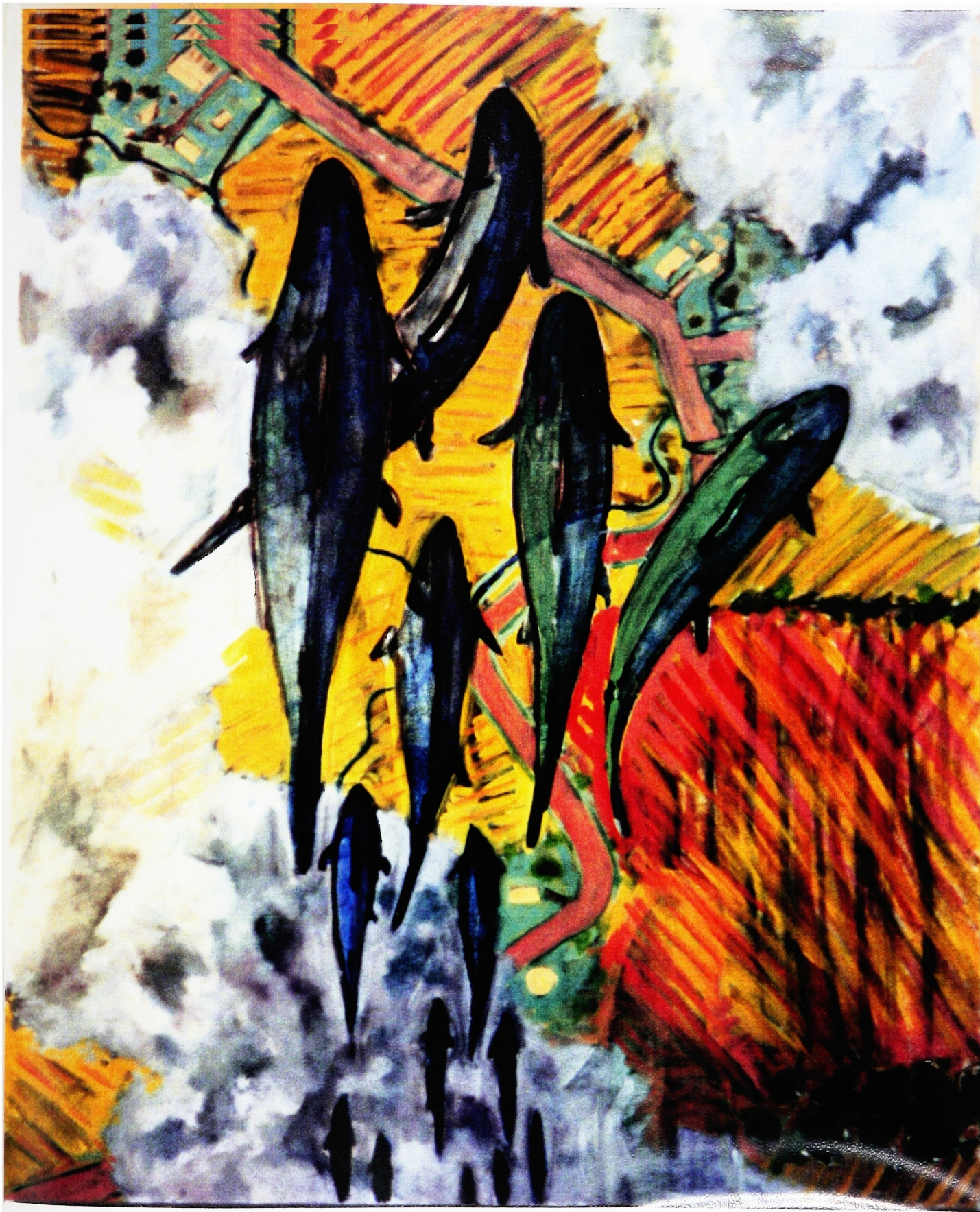
2. "Spawning Colors"



3. "Spawning Trout"

My work is essentially landscape painting. I admire and try to learn from the great landscape tradition. Turner, Constable, VanGogh, The Hudson River School, and Canada's Group of Seven are the most important, and the ones that I have been paying a good deal of attention to in the past two years. At the beginning of my graduate study, I joined in a trip to Toronto where I "discovered" the Group of Seven. I was completely turned on and coerced a group of other students into trekking up to see the McMichael collection north of the city. The thing that really impressed me about these painters was their common goal of creating a uniquely Canadian landscape statement. The Hudson River school is another group that followed the European tradition and added to it the North American language. I see myself as a part of the continuance of that same tradition. My painting is a deep personal involvement with the landscape and trout are an important part of that landscape.





4. "Aerial Stocking"



I feel that it is important to paint about what one knows best. Painting about painting alone holds little interest for me. The idea of painting about trout excited me greatly ; after all, painting aside, trout are what I know and pursue more than any other aspect of my life. Streams have always held a fascination for me. They are mysterious places where water flows swiftly both glittering with light and darkness simultaneously. The most rugged streams are the best for fishing and provide a most agreeable aesthetic experience. The trout represent a type of elemental purity and function as an environmental barometer. Trace amounts of pollution can devastate this fish. There is a lesson here somewhere about the nature of beauty and the delicacy of its condition.



5. "It's a Keeper"











6. "Coffee Fish"

The body of work displayed as my thesis exhibition is the documentation of the development of an idea and the subsequent ideas that action spawned. The initial painting titled "Its a Keeper" resulted from the desire to represent the ideal brook trout. I consider the brook trout to be the most beautiful of the species, but if the truth be told the fish is actually a char and not a true trout at all. I refuse to let this distinction sway my earlier assessment of his beauty. The initial underpainting of the background of my ideal trout suggested to me clouds more than the water usually associated with fish in general. I painted in the clouds. Suddenly my *salvelinus fontinalis* floated in a vast and active sky, more like an airship than a trout in a stream. It was at this moment that the process quickened pace and I started making connections and applying paint with a new directness. Immediately two more paintings were begun, one of a school of trout floating in clouds, as viewed from above, and the other a whimsical view of a cowboy astride a leaping trout. "Coffee Fish" was also begun at this time. My thoughts at this time were influenced by a poem of Richard Brautigan's titled All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace, in which he writes of a "cybernetic meadow" complete with computer terminals and the local fauna comingling in total, natural, harmony.



(Brautigan 1968, 1). I began to think of my flying trout as in some way being mechanical. The image of the Hindenberg as trout followed a logical extension of this train of thought and with it came all the implications that surround great disasters such as the sinking of the Titanic, the Challenger disaster, and for you late night T.V. buffs, the Posiedon Adventure. I didn't act on the idea immediately, as it occurred to me in the shower, but I waited a few days and turned the idea over in my mind. Then I could no longer wait.

It was a difficult decision to execute a body of work in which I would destroy something that I cherished. A certain amount of humor surrounded the idea; however, I seriously assessed the destructiveness that I would need to embrace. Trout are the archetype of beauty and perfection; my hesitation rested on emotional ground. Just a small drawing could do little harm. I drew the trout in the place of the burning Hindenburg revealing a structure of steel girders instead of bones. By that point it was too late to stop.

It was then that I began to see the progress of the series I wouldn't be destroying the image of a trout that I loved, but creating a new type of fish altogether, except that this trout had a man in its lineage, a man not unlike Henry Ford. The coffee fish was my model "T".



7. "Yellow Flames  
1st View"



8. "First Hindentrout"



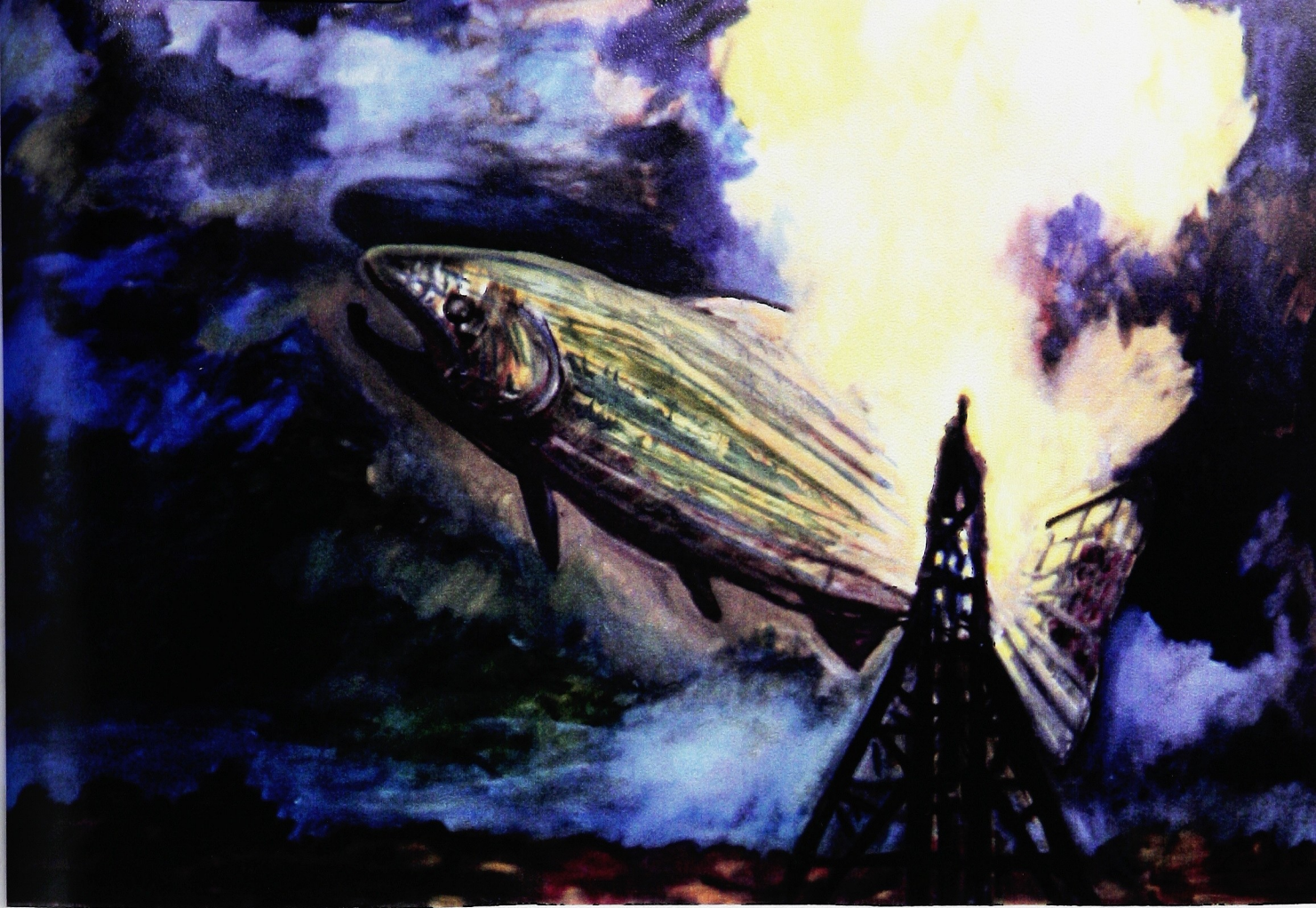


9. "Yellow Flames  
2nd View"



10. "Charcoal  
Burning Trout"





11. "Hindentrout"

Now, let me mention a little bit about materials. I generally work with whatever is in arms reach. #2 pencils are a fine drawing tool when sharp. When dull; perhaps it is best to use colored pencils. It's natural to do a painting in coffee which is, after all no different from watercolor, with the possible exception of the fact that I don't drink a cup of watercolor light and sweet every morning. Gesso and compressed charcoal together? why not! It provides great greys. Oil paint and charcoal? Again, nice greys and I get to keep my cartoon as part of the final painting, a real bonus to be sure. Materials should suit the specific needs of each artist and each individual work. If a particular type of material or mark or paint quality seems appropriate to the idea that I am interested in expressing then that is what I choose. My selections are as intuitive as the ideas I am approaching.





12. "Progressive  
Trout Ranching"



The influences on my life are not so hard to trace. My mother paints and draws; my father is a fisherman. It would seem that I have struck a kind of balance between the interests that they each hold dear.

I have always known art. My recollections of childhood are filled with plays and symphonies and of course museums. My mother loved art and she always encouraged me to be creative. Her influence was to be positive and supportive toward my interest in becoming an artist. I think that she felt that the artist has a gift that needs to be shared to be of any value. It is inevitable that her tastes in art formed the basis of my own.

My fascination with angling I owe to my father. To hear him talk of trout streams and fishing trips into the Adirondacks was to hear rushing water and see brilliant fish come into hand. I imagined that he knew all the secrets of the trout and I asked about them at every opportunity. He taught me the basics and sent me out to experience the rest on my own; he knew that trout fishing is a contemplative sport best learned and enjoyed with the solitude of one's own thoughts. A stream has secrets only the patient angler can learn; much like painting the



13. "Burning Ruins"



first step is observation, then practice too much.

Literature has also played an important role in the forming of my painting ideas. The greatest influence by far is the work, both poetry and novels, of Richard Brautigan. I have found a kinship in his sense of humor, use of metaphor, and as expected, his love of trout fishing. I learned a great deal from observing his juxtaposition of ideas and the shapes it formed in my imagination. I have provided here as an example a chapter from Trout Fishing in America in the hope that it may both enlighten and entertain. It is as follows:

#### A HALF-SUNDAY HOMAGE TO A WHOLE LEONARDO DA VINCI

On this funky winter day in rainy San Francisco I've had a vision of Leonardo da Vinci. My woman's out slaving away, no day off, working on Sunday. She left here at eight o'clock this morning for Powell and California. I've been sitting here ever since like a toad on a log dreaming about Leonardo da Vinci.

I dreamt he was on the South Bend Tackle Company payroll, but of course, he was wearing different clothes and speaking with a different accent and possessor of a different childhood, perhaps an American childhood spent in a town like Lordsburg, New Mexico, or Winchester, Virginia.

I saw him inventing a new spinning lure for trout fishing in America. I saw him first of all working with his imagination, then with metal and color and hooks, trying a little of this and a little of that, and then adding motion and then taking it away and then coming back again with a different motion, and in the end the lure was invented.

He called his bosses in. They looked at the lure and all fainted. Alone, standing over their bodies, he held the lure in his hand and gave it a name. He called it "The Last Supper." Then he went about waking up his bosses.

In a matter of months that trout fishing lure was the sensation of the twentieth century, far outstripping such shallow accomplishments as Hiroshima or Mahatma Gandhi. Millions of "The Last Supper" were sold in America. The Vatican ordered ten thousand and they didn't even have any trout there.

Testimonials poured in. Thirty-four ex-presidents of the United States all said, "I caught my limit on 'The Last Supper.'"

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Brautigan, Richard. 1968. The Pill Verses the Spring-hill Mine Disaster. New York: Dell Publishing Co.

Braugtigan, Richard. 1967. Trout Fishing in America. New York: Dell Publishing Co.

Campbell, Joseph. 1959. Primitive Mythology: The Masks of God. New York: Viking Penquin Inc.

Mumford, Lewis. 1952. Art and Technics. New York: Columbia University Press.

Shahn, Ben. 1957. The Shape of Content. New York: Vintage Books.

## LIST OF COLOR COPIES

1. "Trout in Hangar" Graphite on Paper 22x28.
2. "Spawning Colors" Graphite & Colored Pencil on  
Paper 9x11.
3. "Spawning Trout" Graphite on Paper 11x17.
4. "Aerial Stocking" Oil on Canvas 3'x4'.
5. "It's a Keeper" Oil on Canvas 4'x12'.
6. "Coffee Fish" Coffee on Paper 22x28.
7. "Yellow Flames 1st View" Graphite & Colored Pencil  
on Paper 21x29.
8. "First Hindentrout" Graphite & Colored Pencil on  
Paper 13x21.
9. "Yellow Flames 2nd View" Graphite & Colored Pencil  
on Paper 22x28.

10. "Charcoal Burning Trout" Charcoal & Gesso on  
paper 22x30.

11. "Hindentrout" Oil on Canvas 3'x5'.

12. "Progressive Trout Ranching" Oil on Canvas  
3'6"x4'6".

13. "Burning Ruins" Oil on Canvas 3'x2'6",