

DISRUPTIVE TOPOGRAPHIES

The Utah Paintings of Hooper, Sjovold and Smith

Humboldt State University
First Street Gallery

October 2 - November 3, 2001



Erling Sjovold
Precipitation, 2001
oil on canvas

Humboldt State University First Street Gallery is pleased to present ***Disruptive Topographies: The Utah Paintings of Hooper, Sjovold, and Smith***. This exhibit continues the ***Art & Environment*** series that is the focus of First Street Gallery's programs during this autumn season. Featured in the exhibit are landscape paintings by three artists: Cynthia Hooper, Erling Sjovold and Jerry Smith. This exhibition brings together works by the three painters that depict the distressed landscapes of the abandoned Wendover military bombing range in the Utah desert.

Hooper, Sjovold and Smith lived and painted together during the summers of 2000 and 2001, sponsored by an artist-in-residency program managed by the Los Angeles-based Center for Land Use Interpretation (CLUI). The center is an interdisciplinary, non-profit artists' group that is dedicated to the examination of the world's lands with a special emphasis on how those lands are appropriated, utilized and perceived.

During their residency, CLUI housed the three artists in trailer homes and refurbished barracks at the historic Wendover military base in Utah. The base, situated on the edge of Utah's Great Salt Desert, has been partially abandoned for years. Its land is saturated with the leftovers of decades of environmental degradation, including abandoned bombing ranges, munitions bunkers, mining operations, and scrap and chemical disposal areas. Although the site appears to be a barren wasteland, it is

rich with opportunities for CLUI artists to uncover the inherent historical, cultural, and aesthetic interest that such an environmentally damaged area has to offer.

Cynthia Hooper's small, five by seven-inch paintings portray landscapes that examine places and sites generally thought of as utilitarian, industrial, and degraded. Hooper focuses her work on the tension between the natural and the artificial within a landscape. She emphasizes the dual character of vacated, human-made structures situated within the landscape. The monumental architectural and industrial structures that her paintings depict were once dedicated to practical purposes. They claim the landscape, seeming fixed and static, yet paradoxically impart an anxious, sometimes threatening impression. Her small-scale paintings draws one in, inviting the viewer to closely inspect her subjects - to reexamine one's definition of a landscape and perhaps to give form to our collective environmental anxieties.

Erling Sjovold's small and medium scale paintings reflect a personal relationship - intellectual and artistic - with the landscape of the desert wasteland. Sjovold describes his experience of painting the sites as one that draws him into a profoundly complex dialectic between aesthetics and politics. In doing so, he employs the poetic power of art to redeem that which has been judged "useless" by our society. Invented light and



Cynthia Hooper
Iconic Obsolescence, 2001
5 in. x 7 in., oil on panel

drawing play crucial roles in Sjovold's work. Of his work, Sjovold writes, "I paint light variously as something seen, remembered and invented. I pursue a coherent quality of light that suggests a rational space only to contradict matters with subtly irrational uses of planes, scale and perspective." His paintings combine spectral effects and pictorial tensions to emphasize the various collisions in shape, form and color resulting from the interaction between humans and the landscape. For Sjovold the degraded environmental sites offer visual interest while providing an opportunity to reflect on societal and personal values.

Jerry Smith's small and medium scale paintings reflect his experience over the past two years in Utah and, like Hooper and Sjovold, his paintings emphasize the uneasy coexistence of the natural and artificial. Smith utilizes the dramatic topography of the Utah desert as a backdrop for his scenes of abandoned trailer homes, debris, and signs of encroaching urban sprawl. Smith is also interested in the activities of the local residents. Spent tires pile up in great mounds while vehicles of every description are torched, blown up, or used for target practice.

Smith's pictures call attention to our culture's obsession with dubious and occasionally perilous forms of recreation.

Rather than curse the darkness, these artists light a candle with their wit, irony and sense of beauty. Hooper, Sjovold and Smith's group venture is an exciting example of artists working with local communities to promote an understanding of the relationship between our physical surroundings and societal values. The enterprise of this group of artists reminds us that art can be relevant, beautiful and that the arts can guide and inform our democracy.

Jack Bentley
Christie Cook
Jocelyn Moriarty



Jerry Smith
Dump Study with Car Door, 2001
oil on canvas



Top left: Jerry Smith
Detroit,
 2001, oil on canvas



Top right: Cynthia Hooper,
Indecorous Accumulations
 2001
 5 in. x 7 in.
 oil on panel



Right: Erling Sjovold
Fall Elsewhere
 2001, oil on canvas

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The works in this exhibition have come to us from the collections of Cynthia Hooper, Erling Sjovold, and Jerry Smith. The production of this exhibition was a joint effort of Cynthia Hooper, First Street Gallery student assistants Jocelyn Moriarty and Christie Cook, student interns Emily Blaskovich, Chris Anderson, Jennifer Keller, Megan Brady, and Jack Bentley, Director at Humboldt State University First Street Gallery. Additional program support has been provided by the Art Department and Community Relations at Humboldt State University. Special thanks are given to Elizabeth Hans- McCrone, Sheila Ross, James Crawford, Martin Morgan, Gwen Robertson, and Keith Schneider. Thanks to all.

Jack Bentley, Director, First Street Gallery