

Communion with the Spirit of Landscape

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The Council on the Arts for Clinton County located at 60 Bridge Street, Plattsburgh, presented an art exhibit entitled Inside Rock and Water, which ran October 5 through November 5, 1992. The exhibit was Pamela Morgan's, a self-taught photographer, photographic debut. Her photographs include metaphysical landscapes of both the Southwest and the Adirondacks. Her subjects present visual images which call to mind past and present American nature writers such as Thoreau and Annie Dillard who find spiritual alignment by describing the minute characteristics of the land.

Morgan's brief description of her photographs illustrates that her vision is still primitive and mishapened; however, a few of the photographs predict the eventual maturation of her idea which she calls "spiritual landscape," an act of "making prayer."

All of Morgan's photographs with the exception of two are essentially untitled giving only a definition of subject and place. This allows for the art to stand on its own, unencumbered by the artist's preconceptions. Yet, I feel the strongest statements are made by the two photographs which are given a personal title by the artist because they unite the vision and the image into a more poignant representation of the "communion" of land and humanity which the artist mentions in her brief autobiography.

In "Hope, Canyonlands, Utah," a leafy branch juts out of the shadowed crevice of a stone. The offshoots of the branch expose tawny,

dry roots; however, the sunlight highlights the green leaves which have miraculously grown from this barren rock. This manifestation of hopefulness seems to name itself, and inspires a belief in miracles to be a common theme for both nature and humanity.

"Jackie's Place, Adirondacks" is a photograph which is titled; however, the title does not take away from the effect of the reflective qualities of this Adirondack scene at dusk. The mountains are set against a pinkish-flesh toned sunset as mist rises above the shadowed evergreens. These trees frame the lake which is in the foreground. One can see what seems to be a road in the distance; yet, the main focus is the contrasts within the lake itself. The lake reflects the sky, the mountains, and the trees. In the middle of the lake there appears to be a large shadow, a mass of unreflective ice fragments which disrupt rather than accentuate the serenity of the winter landscape. The artist's choice of time, place and focus sustains a reflective memory and leaves the memory behind in its truthful totality.

"Rock and Sky, Navaho Reservation" contrasts the blues and beiges of sky and rock, and the geometric juxtaposition of rock against rock. The azure sky seems to slice into the rock. The sky's flawless smoothness juxtaposed with the rippling effect present on the rock in the foreground symbolizes the paradox of stationary movement. There are two separate rocks: one stretched upward toward the sky, as if it was a sturdy shoulder or the base of a cathedral, and the other reclining, in a descending line from left to right, in an almost seductive or contemplative position. The watermarks or ripples on the reclining rock imply movement and creates the illusion or the memory of

wind and change. It is almost as if we are given a cross-section of the rock sliced by the sky; we are inside the rock's inner consciousness and memory of flowing rivers.

"Rock and Water II, Adirondacks" recalls the title of the art show, and perhaps invites us to participate in seeing the possibilities and the limits of the artist's medium. In the upper right hand corner an algae-covered rock is glossed with water. The motion of the water leads the eye from right to left as it bubbles between the rocks and shadows. The light highlights the froth and produces a window-effect--which allows us to see the shallowness of the stream; however, the use of shadow masks the vitality of the water and expresses a secrecy or deepness of the subject. The contrast of light and shadow is an analogy, perhaps, of the difference between appearance and reality.

In her photographic debut, Pamela Morgan's theme of communion along with her beautiful, introspective images of the Adirondacks and the Southwest create a spiritual/religious understanding of landscape. By working close with the land, Morgan has conjured the wise voice of the spirit of the landscape. The voices of the artist, her subject and her vision are united in these four photographs predicting a strong future for the artist.