



Montana industrial landscapes : reflections on place  
by Nolan G Salix

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts  
Montana State University  
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Abstract:

As a painter I am intrigued with large scale industrial sites that have transformed or are transforming the Montana landscape. I am drawn to their monumental scale as well as the visible alteration of earth that occurs at such sites. Montana's industrial history is easily visible in the presence of both working and abandoned old structures as well as in the physical alterations left by various extraction industries. The superfund site in Butte and the controversial tire-burning plant in Trident are both examples of natural places transformed into industrial landscapes. After observing these sites for hours or days, I begin to look past the negative content traditionally associated with such sites.

My impressions instead become more deeply realized as I recognize the formal beauty inherent in the site itself.

Many of these sites may be sources of harm or death to various life forms, yet they are also exquisite in color and captivating in design. My use of non-traditional media and technique is inspired by the industrial materials and processes used by the industries at the sites. I use these materials and techniques in order to simulate the history of the site. For example in the Berkley Pit an image of a large copper mine, the site is represented by panels of copper that cover the entire painting surface. I mimic the historical practice of mining by chemically altering the copper with various patinas and violating the integrity of the surface by physically removing part of the copper. In the painting, Phillips/Exxon, motor oil and roofing tar give the artwork the aroma and texture representative of an actual oil refinery. My work demands that the viewer contemplates the Montana industrial landscape in a manner previously inexperienced.

The scale of my paintings is large in order to present the materials in a manner that expresses the immensity of the place. Working on such large panels, often six by eight feet in size, demands a large amount of physical effort and skill when working outside in the harsh winter climate of Montana. Often, a natural weather pattern, such as wind, rain and snow, creates an effect on my paintings by physically altering my applications during the paintings development. Working in plein air has pushed my painting style to become more experimental and physically engaging which has resulted in a deeper understanding of the landscape.

Both my chosen materials and my naturalistic approach to painting help to represent the physical essence of the Montana industrial landscape. Though these sites may be seen as dirty, and even ugly to some, there is an aesthetic beauty inherent in these landscapes that compels me to look deeper. The authenticity of the sites, as well as their present structures and forms, attract my attention and has inspired this current body of work. I hope these paintings help to empower the viewer to see such industrial lands with a more raw realization of what they encompass: the materials, aspects of violence, and inherent beauty.

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by

Nolan G. Salix

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree

of

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MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY  
Bozeman, Montana

APRIL 2004

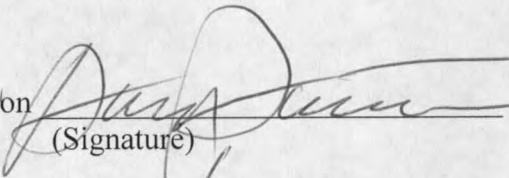
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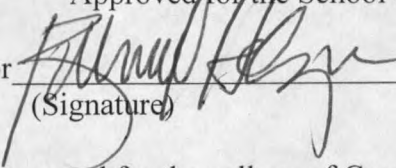
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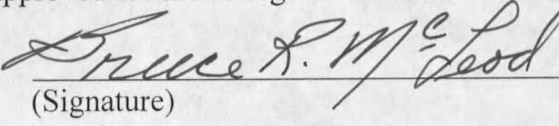
This thesis has been read by each member of the thesis committee and has been found to be satisfactory regarding content, English usage, format, citations, bibliographic style, and consistency, and is ready for submission to the College of Graduate Studies.

Harold Schlotzhauer, Chairperson  4-15-04  
(Signature) Date

Approved for the School of Art

Richard Helzer, Director  4/15/04  
(Signature) Date

Approved for the college of Graduate Studies

Doctor Bruce McLeod  4-22-04  
(Signature) Date

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## Slide list

1. Installation view
2. Installation view
3. Installation view
4. Installation view
5. *Berkley Pit*, oil paint, patina, on copper, 43"x 62", 10/03
6. *Abandoned Oil Fields*, oil paint on copper, 32"x 36", 10/03
7. *Colstrip*, oil on copper, 8 ½" x 10 ½", 08/03
8. *East Helena*, wax, gold leaf, tar, oil paint on canvas, 6'x 8', 03/04
9. *Metals Bank*, sharpie, patina on copper sheets, 50"x 67", 02/04
10. *Montana Industries*, sharpie, oil paint, patina on copper, 6'x 8', 03/04
11. *Golden Suplight*, wax, gold leaf, tar, oil paint on canvas, 5'x 8', 03/04
12. *Trident*, oil on canvas, 6'x 9', 10/03
13. *Cennex*, fibered aluminum, tar and motor oil on canvas, 5'x 8', 01/04
14. *Holcim*, oils on canvas, 6'x 9', 12/03
15. *Phillips/Exxon*, white oil paint, motor oil and tar on canvas, 6'x 9', 11/03

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