



Portrait of a city  
by Raymond W Campeau

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
MASTER OF APPLIED ARTS  
Montana State University  
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**Abstract:**

My interest in the city of Butte and my desire to create an image of the city via the medium of watercolor were the main reasons for the development of this thesis. I have used thirteen paintings to illustrate this thesis, listed the materials, and explained the techniques used.

The title, "Portrait of a City," makes the analogy that painting a city and painting a portrait have similarities. In order to paint more than a superficial likeness of a person an artist must become familiar with the characteristics and habits of his model. In this thesis Butte is my model. I studied those facets of her background that have left the most visible changes in her features. Some of these facets have been: religion, as witnessed in the church buildings—wealth, in the mansions--prestige, in the monuments—occupation, in the gallows frames and open pit (symbols of mining).

Throughout the thesis I have tried to make it evident that mining, the very thing that breathes life into all these features, has been also the prime factor in their destruction.

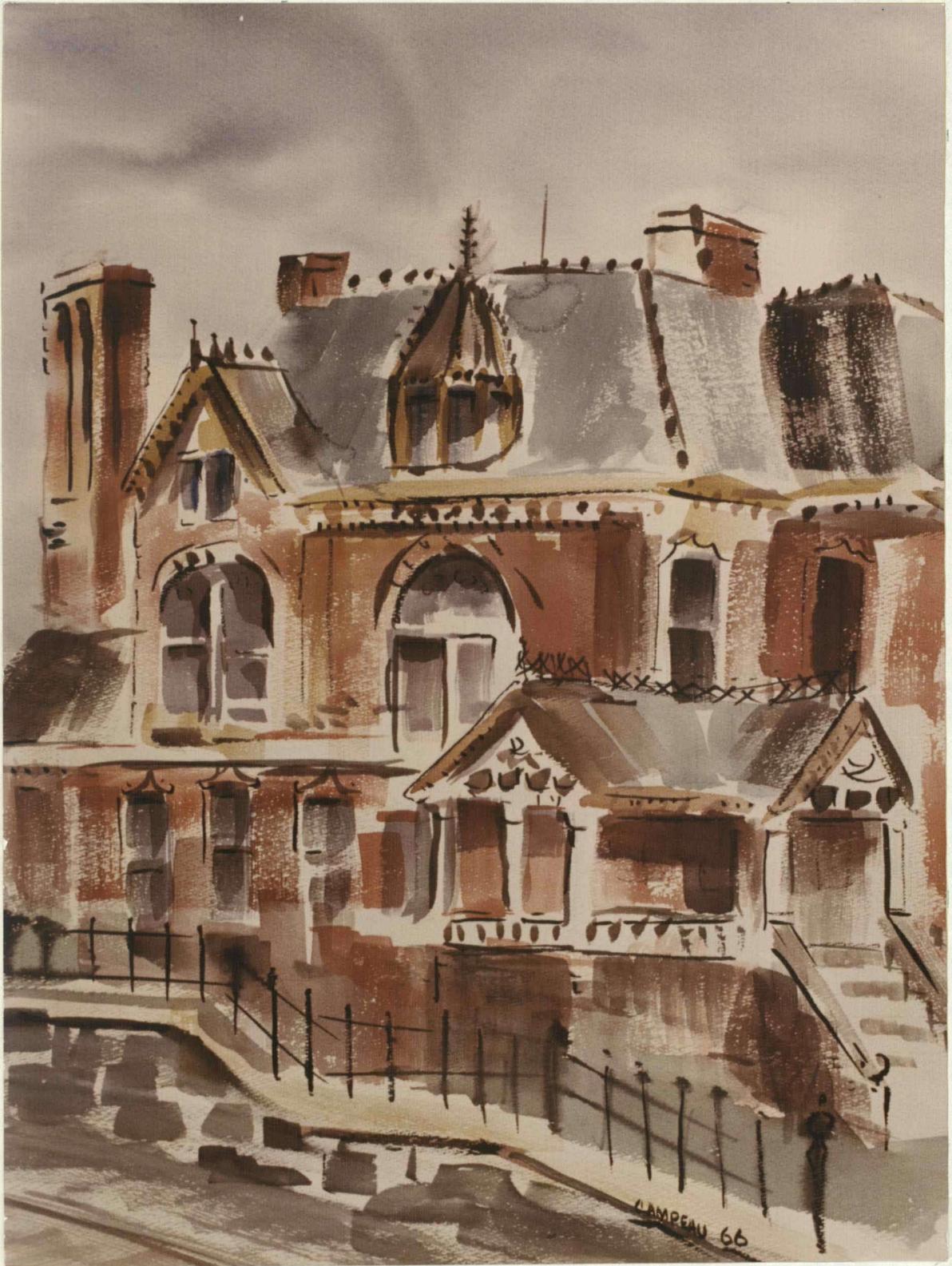


FIGURE 1 "Relic"

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## ABSTRACT

My interest in the city of Butte and my desire to create an image of the city via the medium of watercolor were the main reasons for the development of this thesis. I have used thirteen paintings to illustrate this thesis, listed the materials, and explained the techniques used.

The title, "Portrait of a City," makes the analogy that painting a city and painting a portrait have similarities. In order to paint more than a superficial likeness of a person an artist must become familiar with the characteristics and habits of his model. In this thesis Butte is my model. I studied those facets of her background that have left the most visible changes in her features. Some of these facets have been: religion, as witnessed in the church buildings--wealth, in the mansions--prestige, in the monuments--occupation, in the gallows frames and open pit (symbols of mining).

Throughout the thesis I have tried to make it evident that mining, the very thing that breathes life into all these features, has been also the prime factor in their destruction.

## INTRODUCTION

As a youth in the city of Butte I was neither aware of nor interested in the turbulent history of the city or its legacy of architectural and engineering projects that displayed evidence of the way of life and type of men who modeled its profile. Now this profile is being ravaged by new mining methods, a new social structure and by nature itself. Entire regions of the city have been absorbed by the open pit mining operation. Buildings, once landmarks and centers of community life, are being abandoned and destroyed. The churches have been caught up in this change. As the congregation is relocated by the advancing mining operation the churches follow, therefore, many of the old familiar churches are no longer to be seen and many others have been marked for razing. "The Greeks, Turks, Austrians and those of many other nationalities have clubs and in these meeting-places the native tongue is spoken, and they have literature from the Fatherland." <sup>1/</sup> These unique meeting-halls of the many ethnic groups described above are being deserted and are falling into disrepair. The heirs of the founders have inter-married, speak English, and no longer need the type of security offered by these halls. Many mansions of the Butte industrial giants have been abandoned due to tax structures and the high cost of domestic help.

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<sup>1/</sup> George Wesley Davis, Sketches of Butte from Vigilante Days to Prohibition, p. 65.

Even the gallows frames that punctured the Butte skyline are open prey to the pit.

John Marin once said, "If you have an intense love and feeling toward these things, you'll try your damndest (sic) to put on paper or canvas, that thing. You can transpose, you can play with and on your material, but when you are finished that's got to have the roots of that thing in it and no other thing." 2/ My interest in Butte has grown in the past years as I have been made aware of its proper stature through reading and studying its history. I decided, therefore, to capture if possible the flavor of this vanishing image, and to interpret it in a medium that is as spontaneous as the mining activity that constantly changes the face of Butte. Watercolor was my choice.

"Watercolor lends the same distinction to painting that poetry brings to literature. Each, by the nature of its directness and warmth of expression, develops an intimacy between the artist and audience that is subtly defined in sensitive, economical language." 3/ No limitations to the material used were given as this might hamper the effect desired in a given painting. An architectural rendering technique was used in the first few paintings and this proved to be unsatisfactory because of the lifelessness this technique imparted. Accurate detailed rendering

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2/ William Carlos Williams, Duncan Phillips, Dorothy Norman, MacKinley Helm, Frederick S. White, John Marin, p. 34.

3/ George Dibble, Watercolor Materials and Techniques, p. 8.

can sometimes stifle the effect desired. In order that I might better respond to the subjects I began to research their historical background. As Marin said of his paintings of the buildings in New York, "You cannot create a work of art unless the things you behold respond to something within you. Therefore, if those buildings move me they must have life."

4/ For me, the historical background of the subjects gives them that life. "Eventually, however, it should be realized that understatement and effective design are often more important than achieving verisimilitude and that the artist meets his challenge when he is concerned with vitally significant statements about visual experience--whether he renders them realistically or abstractly." 5/ In painting "Portrait of a City" I did not express myself in the terms dictated by any ism. Picasso once said, "Whenever I have had something to say I have said it in the manner in which I felt it ought to be said. Different motives inevitably require different methods of expression." 6/

I made many trips to Butte during the summers of 1966 and 1967 to paint buildings and mining projects that had come to my attention as being significant Butte landmarks. The painting of these landmarks became such an absorbing occupation I finally had to stop to make a

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4/ William Carlos Williams, Duncan Phillips, Dorothy Norman, Mackinley Helm, Frederick S. White, John Marin, p. 41.

5/ George Dibble, Watercolor Materials and Techniques, p. 27.

6/ Robert Goldwater and Marco Treves, Artists on Art, p. 418.

statement about the paintings. A project of this nature could go on as long as there is a Butte and mining is its major industry.





















































