

# CAROLINE DUKES

## A TEN YEAR SURVEY

GALLERY 1.1.1.

SCHOOL OF ART  
UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA  
NOVEMBER 22 TO DECEMBER 17, 1983

OPENING RECEPTION, NOVEMBER 22, 8:00 P.M.









FIG. 1 : LANDSCAPE #32, 1983

PHOTO : SHEILA SPENCE



# CAROLINE DUKES:

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### INTRODUCTION

Caroline Dukes' paintings and drawings appear at first glance to locate themselves squarely in the tradition of Manitoba figurative and landscape painting. Ivan Eyre, Don Proch, Esther Warkov, and many others have explored the genre, each in his or her own unique way. Caroline Dukes brings to it her own blend of philosophies based upon a personal struggle which shapes her vision.

Unlike the artists mentioned above, Dukes' approach to this subject does not spring from a prairie background. Although she admits to being influenced by Ivan Eyre, the concepts and philosophies which form the basis of her work derive more from her European background than from her current environment. Growing up as part of the Jewish minority in Hungary during the Second World War, followed by years of living under the postwar Communist regime in that country, studying at the Academy of Fine Art in Budapest and finally emigrating to Austria and ultimately to Canada, Dukes draws from a background unlike that of any other Manitoba artist working with the elements of figure and landscape. She writes of the influence of her background on her early work:

I studied in the studio of a sculptor in Hungary during the hey-day of social realism. Sculpture meant then the repetitive depiction of smiling, happy soldiers, peasants, and workers with or without flags in their hands. This represented a heritage I rebelled against once I graduated from art school in Winnipeg and started to work on my own. Dreary or emotionless expressions seemed reality to me as I found the smiles phoney through those experiences. . . . I was troubled by the subjection of the individual to society's forces and to the

limitations imposed by the universal order, both chipping away from man's freedom.

It is this background that provides the primary motivation of Dukes' early work, as well as strongly influencing the later landscapes and colour paintings.

### THE WORKS

Caroline Dukes' drawings of nudes and torsos of 1973-75 possess many of the attributes of traditional figure studies. There are, however, even in these early works, evidences of formal and conceptual concerns which are simultaneously being developed in the more narrative paintings of 1973-76. A comparison of *TORSO* (fig. 4) and *NUDE SERIES #4* (fig. 6), both of 1973, illustrates the development. The space in both drawings is shallow and confined; the figure an anonymous form held rigidly in the space by being anchored to both sides of the paper. The figure in *TORSO* is sculptural, recalling her cast stone sculpture of the same name of that year. In *NUDE SERIES #4*, however, the figure has become almost flat, existing as a low relief on the surface. The strong *chiaroscuro* within the form has been replaced by delicate hints of volume and gentle linear divisions between planes. The edge modeling which, in *TORSO* suggests the existence of non-visible side and back surfaces, has disappeared, and the softened edges have given way to a distinct break between figure and ground.

*INTERIOR #1, 1973* indicates that Dukes was simultaneously developing these qualities in her paintings, here with strong narrative and surrealist overtones. A dominant formal structure

and strong contrasts of light-dark and complementary colours, together with the undulating contour of the edge of the figure and curtain create an agitated quality that is supplemented by the near suspension of the figure in space, bound as it is by the connection of the feet to the red rug and imprisoned by the geometry of the interior. *INTERIOR #1, 1973* goes farther into the area of personal psychological trauma than any of the interior series in spite of, or perhaps because of, its unsettling formal qualities.

*UNVEILING* (fig. 2), completed in the same year, is much more refined compositionally in its use of colour and form. The contrast between the organic forms of the figures and the simplified geometric forms of the interior is more pronounced, and the colour has moved toward the colder, more neutralized colours of the later paintings of this series, but without the strong feeling of alienation brought on by the subdued colour and the isolation of the figures characteristic of the later works. The quality of detachment, strengthened by the formal elements so clearly seen in *NUDE SERIES #4* creates an environment in which the figures possess strong visual ties to one another and to their surroundings without emotional bonds between each other or between themselves and their environment. The unveiling is happening not on the wall but within each individual, a product of each individual's unique perception.

*INTERIOR #11, UTOPIA* (fig. 9) goes even farther toward the isolation of the individual. Dukes describes the painting as representing a society in which cloning is accepted as a part of



being. In this painting, the viewer can never identify in a direct personal and emotional way with the figures. They are always removed; impersonal symbols of human condition; expressions of humanity rather than of individual psychological trauma. They live in a haunting world of half life, possessing form but not substance, human attributes without human emotion, formal relationships without personal interaction. Suspended in time and locked into an unreal space, their timelessness and unreality render them impotent, incapable of any action on their own behalf and without the ability to engender emotion of a human kind in those who would try to enter the shallow stage upon which they play their parts. They are two-dimensional beings of three-dimensional persuasion, lacking in the essential human qualities that make control over their own destiny possible. Herein lies the power of the Interior Series. The figures are compelling expressions of the dilemma of humanity today, of social control and personal isolation. *INTERIOR #11* is the most profound expression of this viewpoint.

In 1976, two developments occur in Dukes' work. In one series, the figure is moved into the landscape. In a parallel series, geometric abstractions related to this figure-landscape appear. Both can be traced to the drawing *LANDSCAPE #2, 1974* (fig. 3), where the simplified organic forms of hills and trees take on a biomorphic quality suggestive of figure forms.

From this beginning, paintings like *LANDSCAPE #10, 1977* develop the landscape-figure, merging the two in a way that suspends and imprisons the fragments of figure in an unyielding formal structure which is a direct descendent of the 1973 drawings. Other drawings such as *LANDSCAPE #12, 1976*, place figures in this ambiguous space, culminating with the painting *LANDSCAPE #15* of 1979 (fig. 14), where faint suggestions of massed figures become the foreground surface, and a threatening barrier of barbed forest separates them from the space beyond; a space that is

made enchantingly seductive yet subtly threatening by the half hidden globe of the sun, a space that perhaps suggests some degree of hope for the future.

The geometric abstractions of this period, such as the drawing *COMPOSITION #4, 1976*, can be seen as a natural development of Dukes' concern for the formal problems of two-dimensional space and three-dimensional illusion. As an exploration, they were perhaps a means of loosening the grip of the specific narrative content of the Interior Series. They are, however, lacking in the psychological connections to the human condition that is the backbone of her other work. The most successful are those which retain some connection to the figure-landscape ambiguity.

Out of the exploratory transitional period of 1976-77, another series emerges which leads directly to the colour paintings of today. The slight breaking down of edges and the strengthening of the texture in the primarily geometric drawing *LANDSCAPE #5, 1977*, becomes the eerie amorphous ambiguity of figure-landscape suggestion in the drawing *LANDSCAPE #15, 1978*, and the haunting envelopment of the drawing *LANDSCAPE #24, 1981* (fig. 8), the most powerful of this group.

If we, the viewers, are forbidden entry to the closed space of the interior paintings, we find the ethereal world of the landscape drawings no more accessible. The closed structure of the interior paintings excludes through barriers of space and surface which function as a membrane of resistance to human participation in the drama which will never unfold, a drama that is locked into the permanence of art. The landscape drawings and paintings exclude through other means. Their insubstantiality is compelling, drawing us into an attempt to focus and locate, but at the same time providing us with no means by which we can render concrete the space and locate ourselves in our projection of it. We are left to float suspended in a world that is at once familiar and foreign, trapped in the twilight zone of physical

insubstantiality, where everything is within our perceptual grasp yet nothing can be touched.

The sensuality that is so evidently absent in the interior series is the key to our undoing in the landscapes, for as the interiors are worlds of substance without emotion, the landscapes are emotion without apparent physical substance. They are worlds that can exist only in non-existence: dream states or fantasy, mirages which always fade before we reach them.

The last paintings go even farther. They entice with colour and space. The viewer is pulled into this intriguing world, then pushed to the surface again by the strength of the colour contrasts, the dynamics of the visual movement, and the texture of the brushwork. Dukes writes of these works:

... subconsciously I keep setting up situations of conflict between two elements in my work, as in *LANDSCAPE #12*, where matter/hill tries to reestablish the extension of its territory, while light is persistently invading it. Through this interaction they give form to one another, while keeping the tension as well. The conflict/tension present through my development could be the reason for the ambiguity, as well as the repetition of the same titles, which leaves the viewer to explain the intent.

... I try to project the invisible energy that connects earth, sky, water. My awe toward nature explains the spiritual quality of my later work.

My most recent work deals with forms in nature and my perception of their "becoming" by being exposed to forces acting within and without. The bulk of forms is replaced by density of colour. The static quality of earlier work is taken over by movement.

This process of "becoming" is the essence of these works. They are powerful expressions of the dynamics of formation, of the never ending process of change and growth in nature and life. They are not comfortable, but that is their strength, for we can never truly enter into the majesty of it all. We can only stand in awe of its overwhelming power and of the painting that expresses it.

Dale Amundson, 1983





FIG. 2 : UNVEILING, 1973

PHOTO : ERNEST P. MAYER



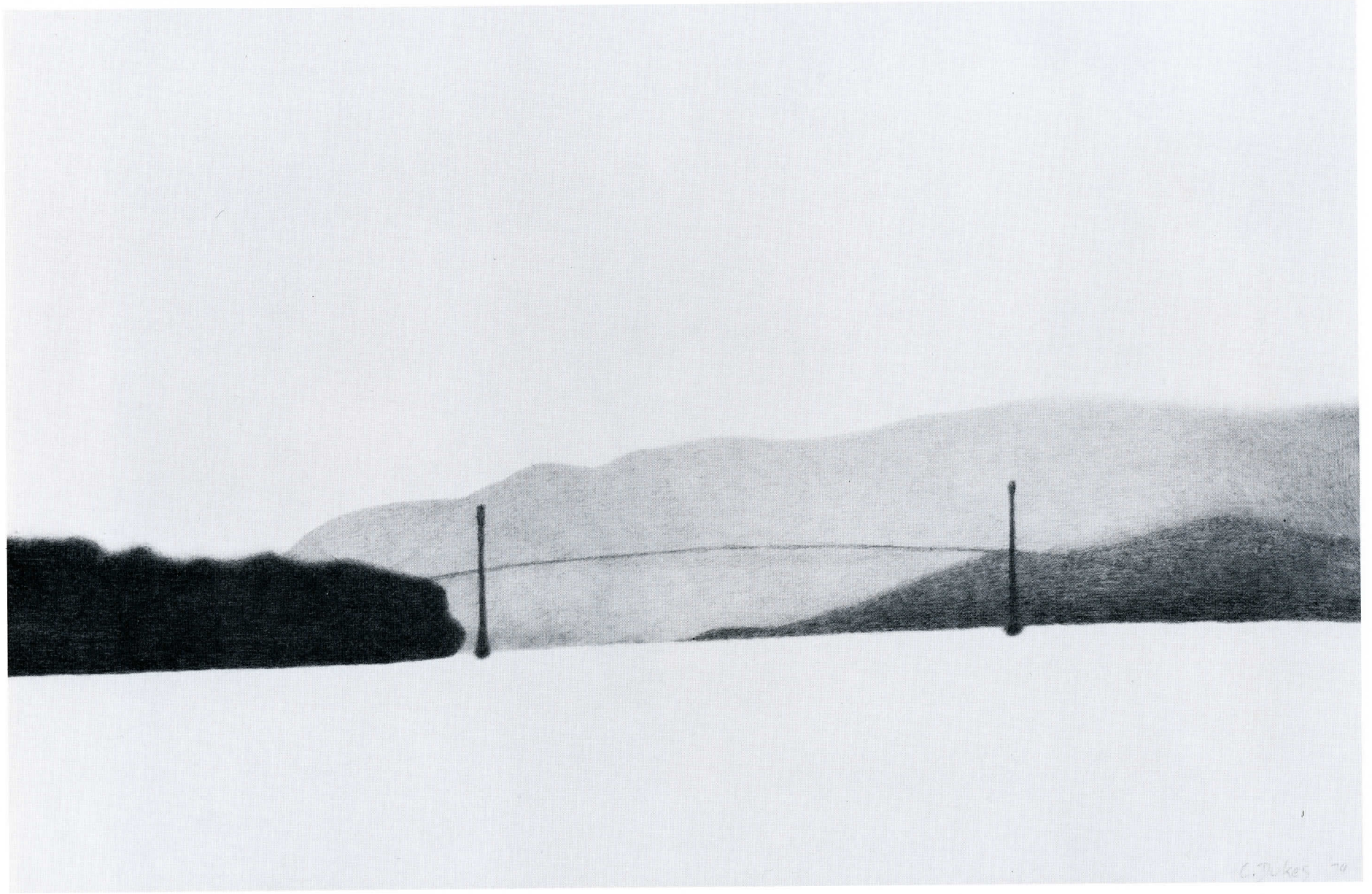


FIG. 3 : LANDSCAPE #2, 1974

PHOTO : ERNEST P. MAYER



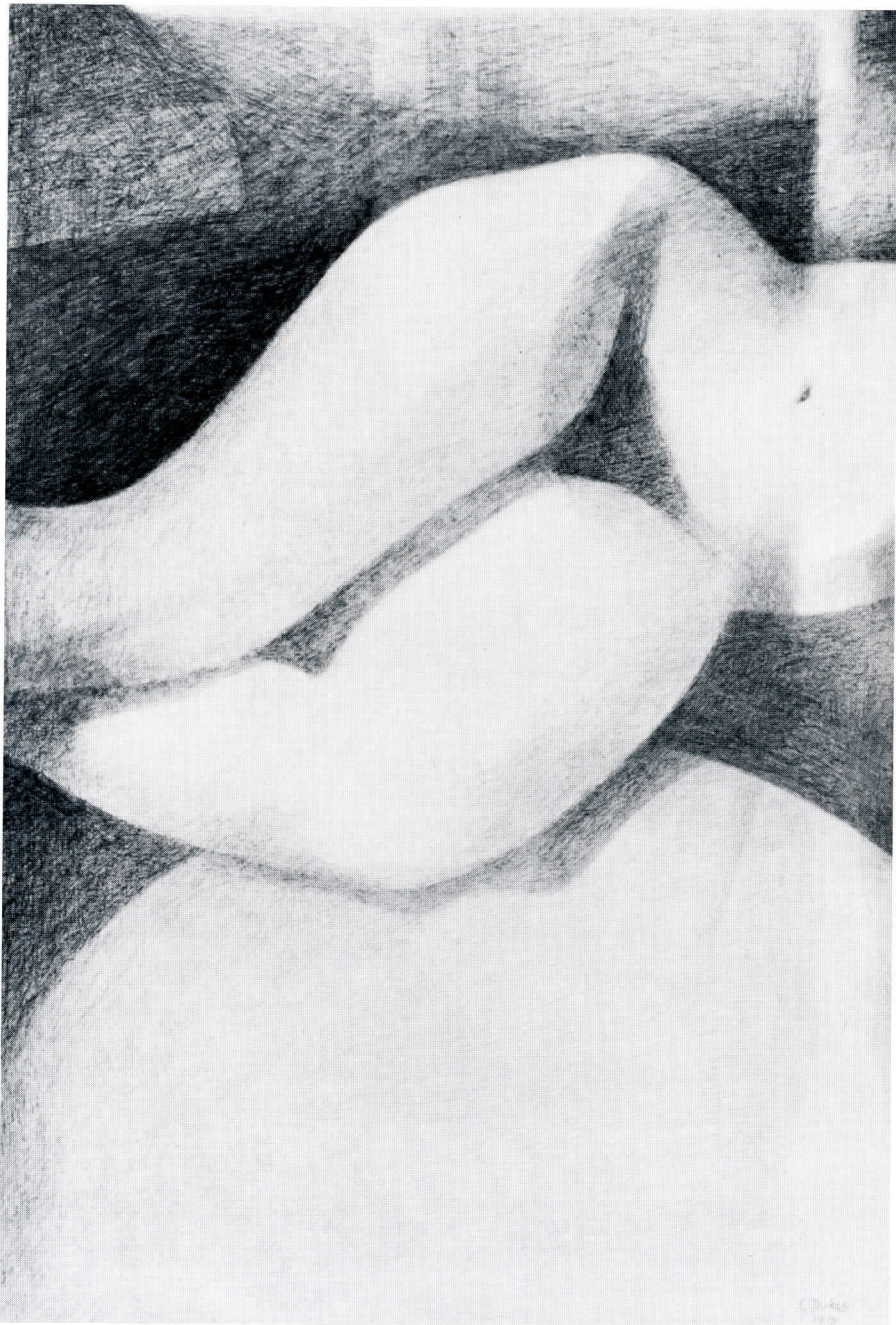


FIG. 4 : TORSO, 1973

PHOTO : THE ARTIST



FIG. 5 : TORSO, 1973

PHOTO : THE ARTIST



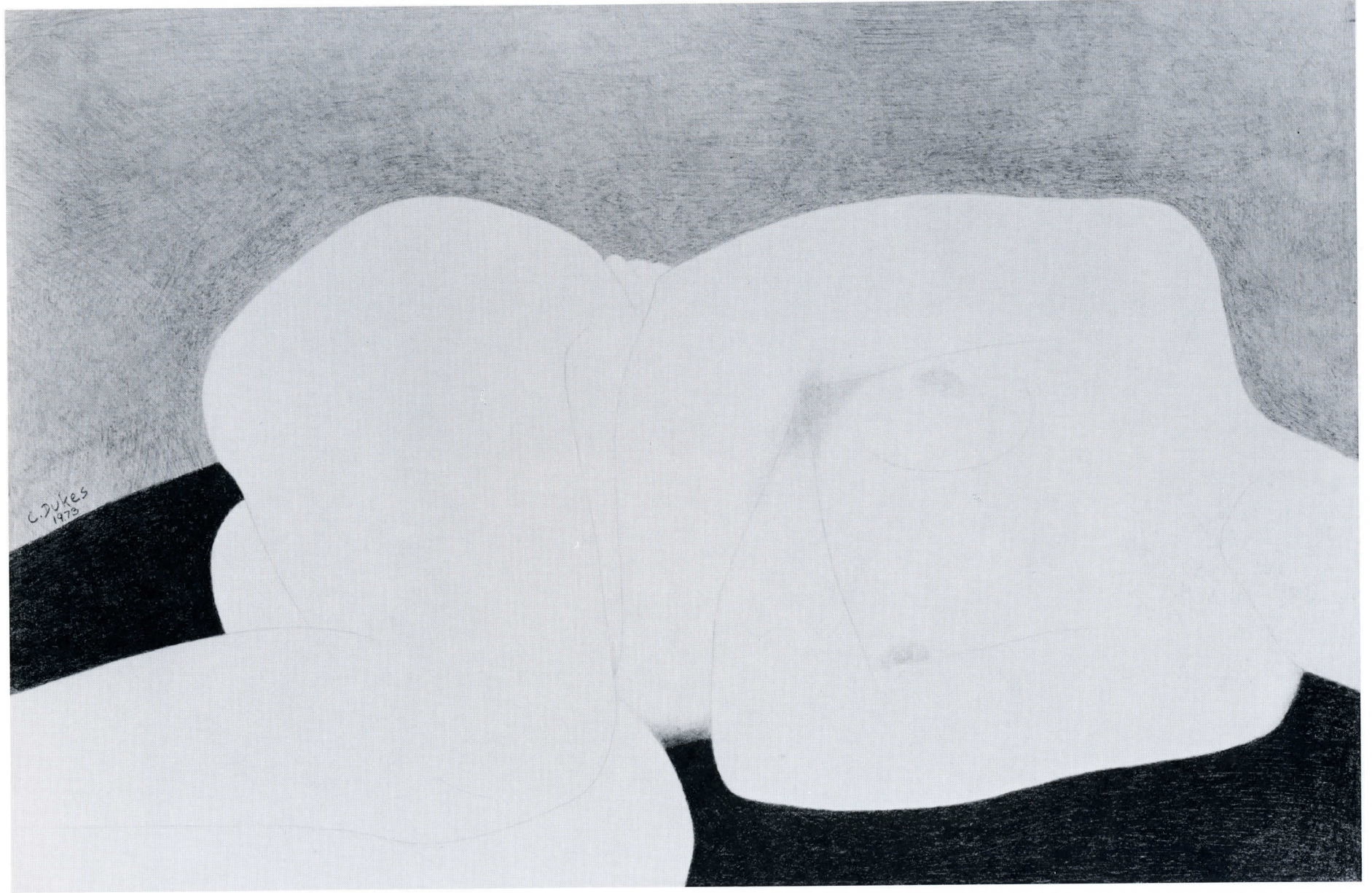


FIG. 6 : NUDE SERIES #4, 1973

PHOTO : ERNEST P. MAYER



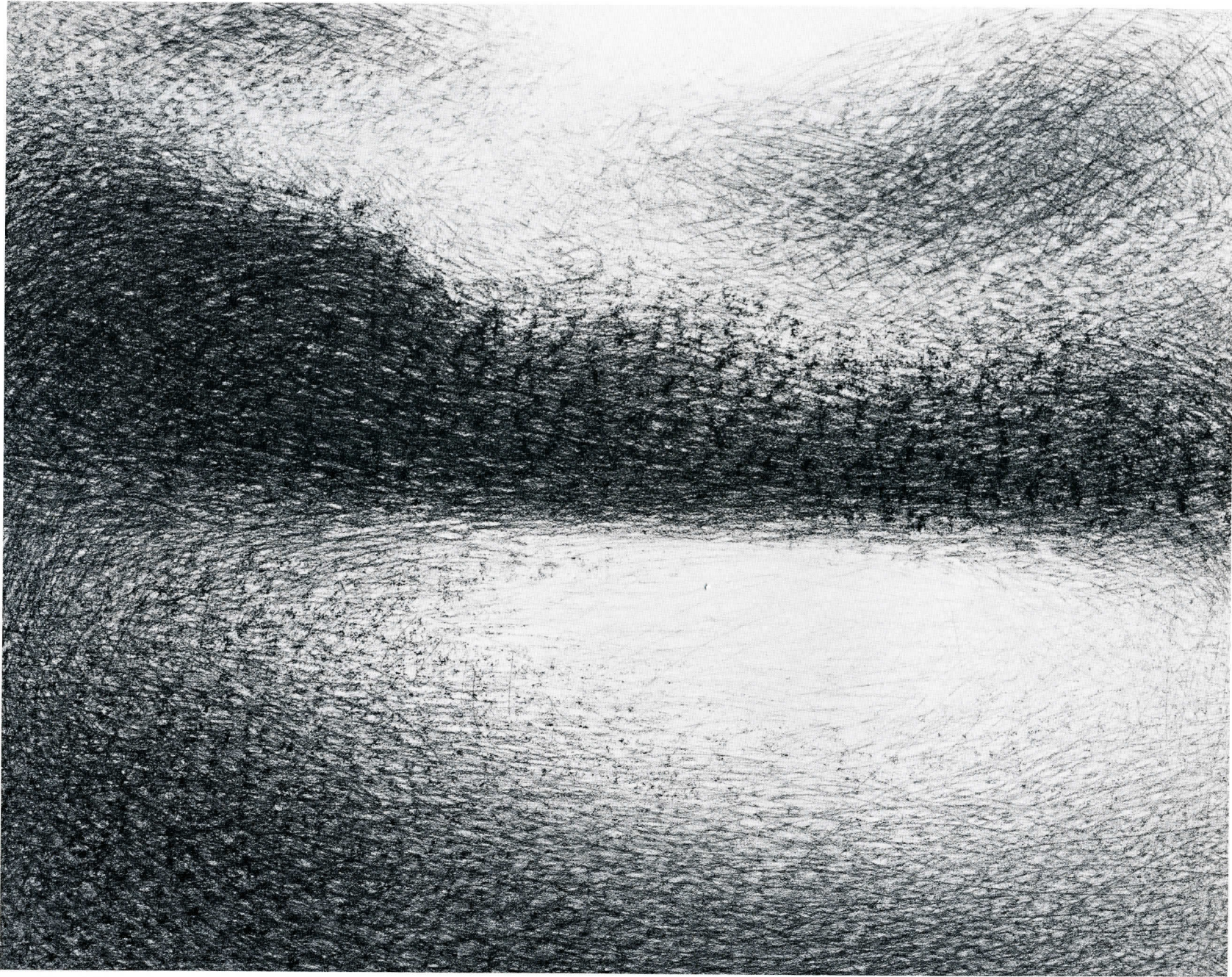


FIG. 7 : LANDSCAPE #35, 1983

PHOTO : SHEILA SPENCE



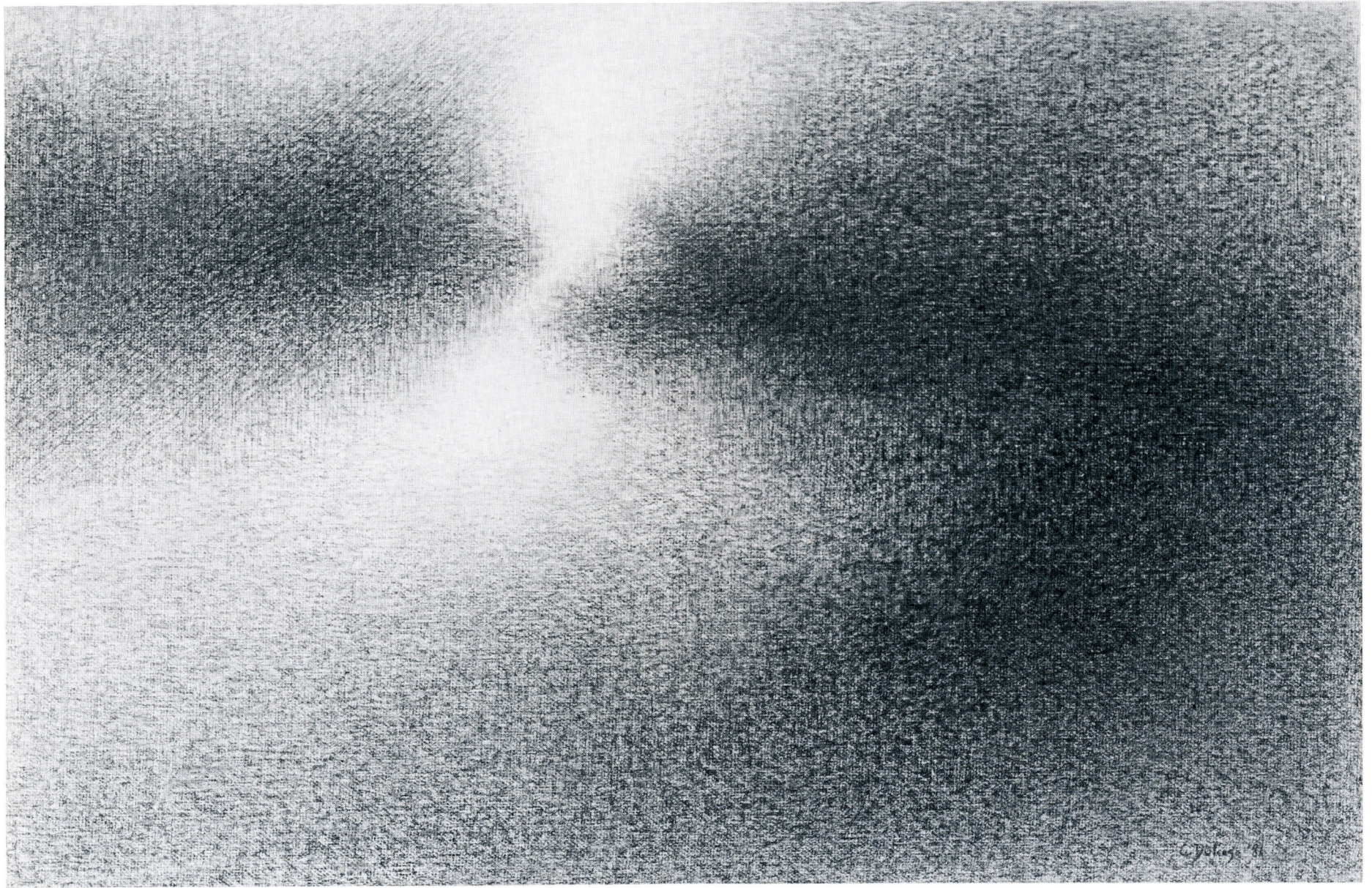


FIG. 8 : LANDSCAPE #24, 1981

PHOTO : SHEILA SPENCE



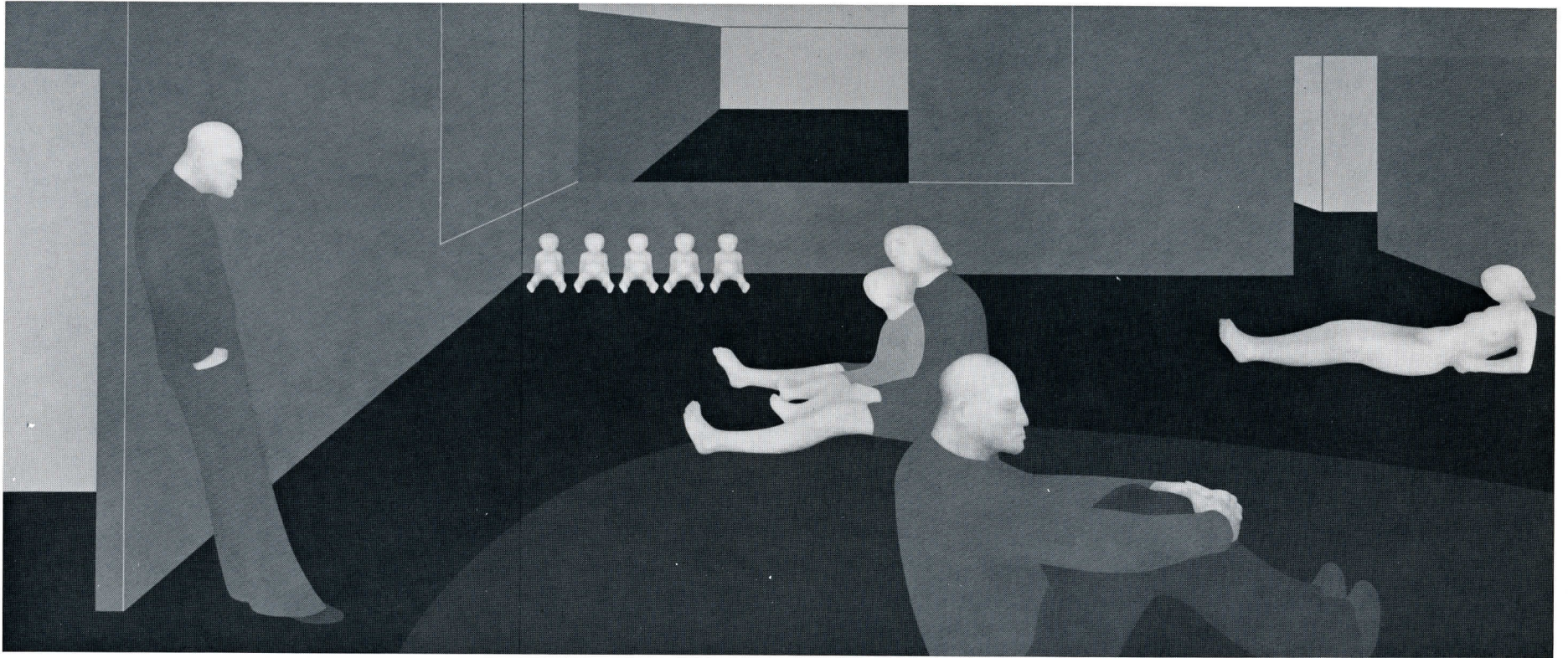


FIG. 9 : INTERIOR #11/UTOPIA, 1976

PHOTO : ERNEST P. MAYER



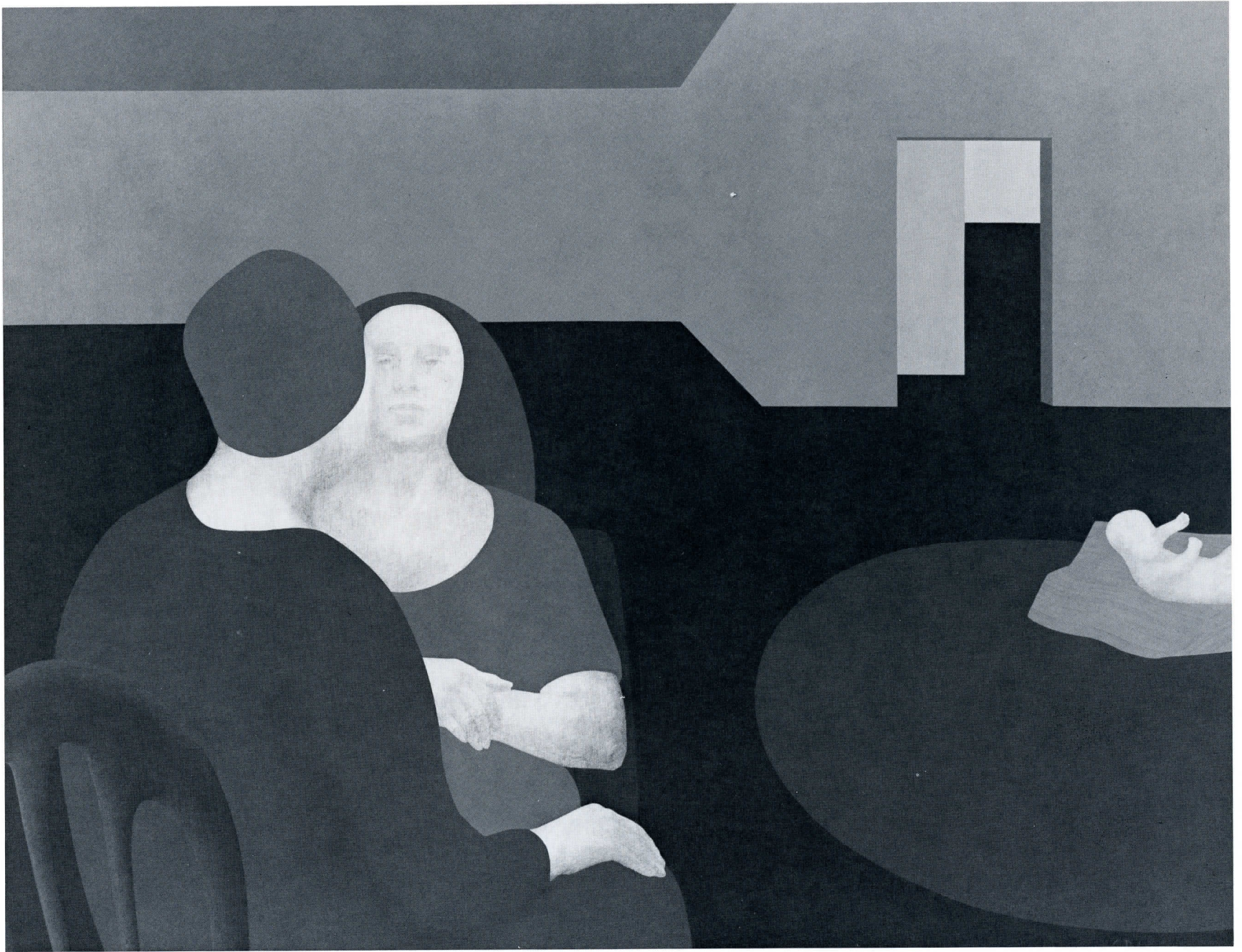


FIG. 10 : INTERIOR #6/VISIT, 1975

PHOTO : ERNEST P. MAYER



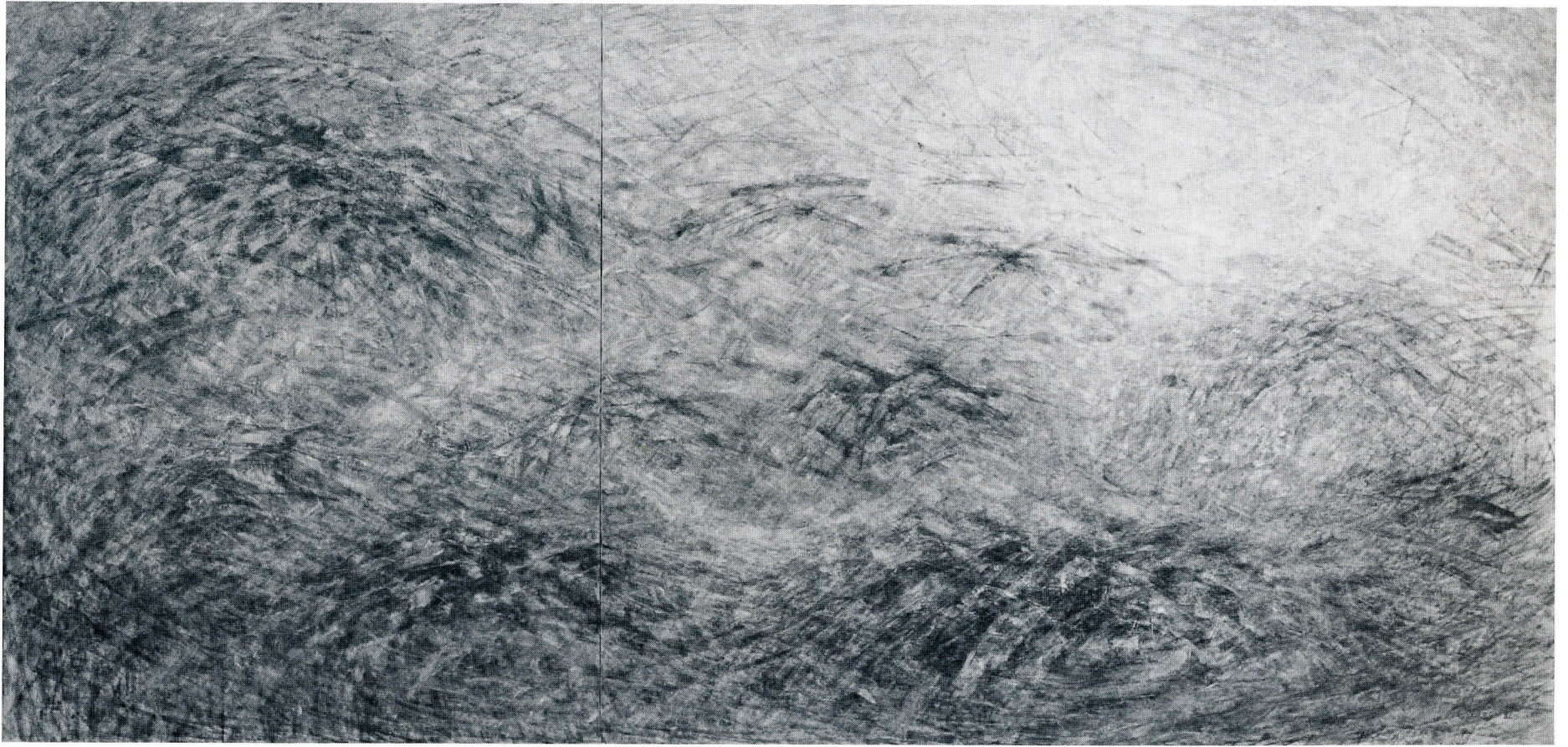


FIG. 11 : LANDSCAPE #30, 1982

PHOTO : ERNEST P. MAYER



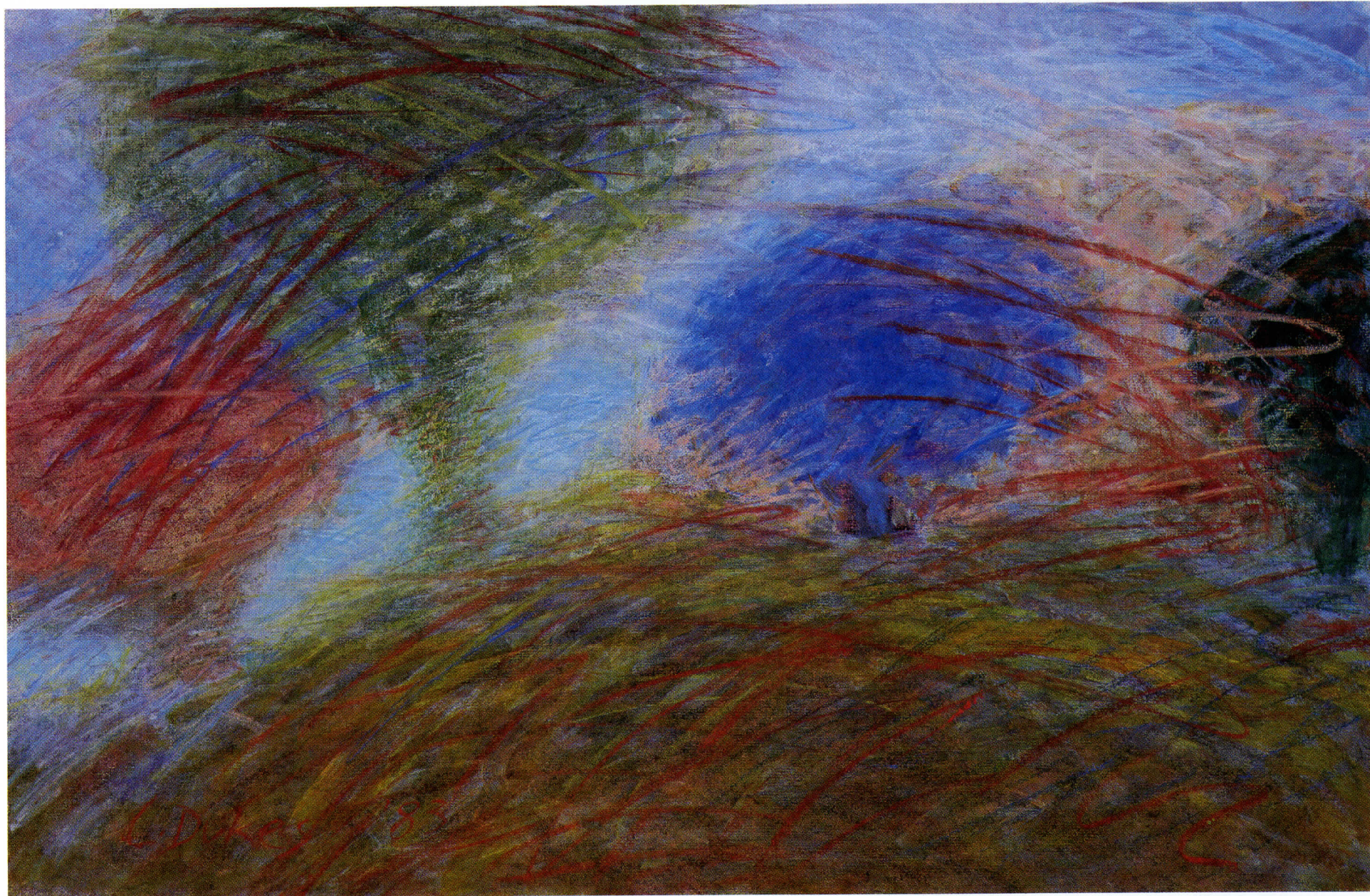


FIG. 12 : LANDSCAPE #37, 1983

PHOTO : SHEILA SPENCE



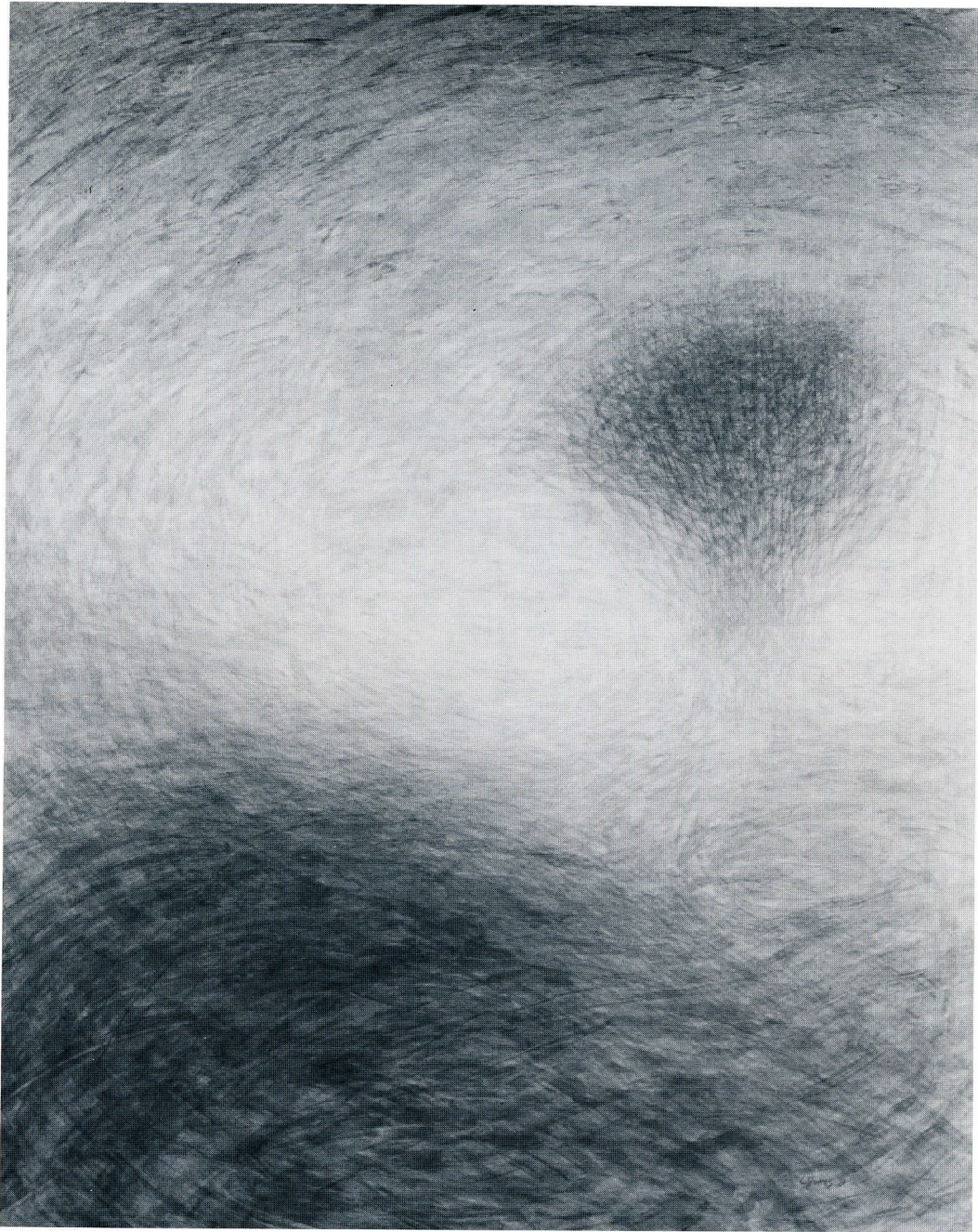


FIG. 13 : LANDSCAPE #27, 1981

PHOTO : ERNEST P. MAYER



## BIOGRAPHY

Born in Hungary  
Immigrated to Canada in 1958

### STUDIES

Studio of Sigiesmund de Strobl, Hungary  
Academy of Fine Arts, Budapest, Hungary  
School of Art, University of Manitoba

### SOLO EXHIBITIONS

1981 Fleet Gallery, Winnipeg  
1980 Pollock Gallery, Toronto  
1978 Fleet Gallery, Winnipeg  
1976 Gilman Gallery, Chicago  
1974 Fleet Gallery, Winnipeg

### GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1983 • Thomas Gallery, Winnipeg  
• *The Colour Connection*,  
Winnipeg Art Gallery
- 1982 • *Collectors Cabinet*, Winnipeg Art Gallery  
• *Perspectives on Women in the '80s*,  
Janet Ian Cameron Gallery, Winnipeg
- 1981 • *Occurences: Four Manitoba Painters*,  
Winnipeg Art Gallery  
• Walleck Gallery, Ottawa
- 1980 • Gallery 1667, Halifax
- 1979 • *Aspects of Realism*,  
Pollock Gallery, Toronto
- 1978 • *Graphex 6*, Art Gallery of Brant,  
Brantford
- 1977 • *Aspects of Manitoba Art*,  
Winnipeg Art Gallery
- 1976 • *The Mid-Western 1976*, juried travelling  
exhibition  
• Manitoba Exhibition, XXI Olympiad,  
Montreal  
• *Spectrum Canada*, Montreal
- 1975 • *Images of Women*, Winnipeg Art Gallery  
• *Changes: 11 Artists Working on The  
Prairies*, Norman Mackenzie  
Art Gallery, Regina, travelling exhibition  
• *Graphex 3*, Art Gallery of Brant,  
Brantford
- 1974 • *SCAN*, Vancouver Art Gallery  
• *SCA Exhibition*, Shaw-Rimington  
Gallery, Toronto  
• Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver

## WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

1. *THREE WOMEN*, 1972  
oil on canvas  
61.0 x 61.0
2. *UNVEILING*, 1973\*  
acrylic on canvas  
127.0 x 174.0  
private collection
3. *INTERIOR #6/VISIT*, 1975\*  
acrylic on canvas  
124.5 x 157.5  
Province of Manitoba Collection
4. *INTERIOR #11/Utopia*, 1976\*  
acrylic on canvas  
182.9 x 434.3
5. *LANDSCAPE #12*, 1978  
acrylic and oil on canvas  
40.6 x 55.9  
collection of Mr. and Mrs. R.  
Falby
6. *LANDSCAPE #15*, 1979\*  
acrylic on canvas  
203.2 x 320.0
7. *LANDSCAPE #30*, 1982\*  
acrylic on canvas  
160.0 x 330.2
8. *LANDSCAPE #32*, 1983\*  
acrylic and oil on canvas  
167.0 x 198.1
9. *TORSO*, 1973\*  
cast stone  
44.9 x 22.2 x 21.1  
Collection of the Winnipeg Art  
Gallery  
Acquired with the National Trust  
Fund No. 1
10. *TORSO*, 1973\*  
pencil on paper  
57.2 x 38.1  
collection of Mr. and Mrs. Kaplan
11. *LANDSCAPE #2*, 1975\*  
pencil on paper  
31.8 x 48.3
12. *LANDSCAPE #12*, 1977  
pencil and prismacolor on  
paper  
36.8 x 53.3
13. *LANDSCAPE #20*, 1980  
graphite on paper  
66.0 x 50.8  
Canada Council Art Bank  
Collection
14. *LANDSCAPE #24*, 1981\*  
charcoal on paper  
63.5 x 93.5
15. *LANDSCAPE #26/MASADA*,  
1981  
charcoal on paper  
96.5 x 63.5
16. *LANDSCAPE #32*, 1982  
prismacolor on paper  
58.4 x 44.5
17. *LANDSCAPE #34*, 1983  
prismacolor on paper  
50.8 x 66.0
18. *LANDSCAPE #35*, 1983\*  
graphite on paper  
58.4 x 73.7
19. *LANDSCAPE #37*, 1983\*  
mixed media on paper  
63.5 x 96.5  
\*Reproduced in this catalogue

## WORKS REPRODUCED IN THIS CATALOGUE NOT IN EXHIBITION

*NUDE SERIES #4*, 1973  
pencil on paper  
31.8 x 47.0  
Bronfman Collection, Montreal  
Museum of Fine Arts

*LANDSCAPE #27*, 1981  
acrylic on canvas  
182.9 x 144.8

## ACKNOWLEDGE- MENTS

The generous assistance of all those who loaned works to this exhibition is greatly appreciated, as is the assistance of the Manitoba Arts Council in providing support funding for the exhibition and catalogue.

## CREDITS

Exhibition Curator:  
Dale Amundson  
Assistant Curator:  
Grace Thomson  
Exhibition Technician:  
Zared Mann  
Catalogue Designer:  
Linda Mullin  
Catalogue Printing:  
Kromar Printing Limited  
Cover:  
Detail Landscape #35, 1983





FIG. 14 : LANDSCAPE #15, 1979

PHOTO : ERNEST P. MAYER







