Landscape as Geographical Double

M.F.A. Thesis Artist Statement

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We are born into circumstances—family, gender, race, time, and place—without volition. Those factors contribute to who we are and who we become. My master thesis work represents one of those circumstances—place. My body of work investigates West Michigan; first, with an intuitive affinity; second, as an artist through the vehicle of visual exploration; and third, with an interest in the natural environment that makes this place distinct. I paint the landscape as a visual expression, like a portrait, reflecting “my geographical double” (Tuan, 19).

Can the place in which one is born and raised be imprinted upon one’s psyche, ingrained unconsciously becoming essential in one’s life, to which one identifies and relates other surroundings? To be born and raised in West Michigan was determined by circumstances outside of my control. For as long as I remember, living in a rural community west of greater Grand Rapids required our family to travel long bus rides to school and commutes. The farmland surrounding our home slowly transitioned from rural to suburbia and city—both in miles traversed and over time. Undeveloped land and farms represents my natural sense of place as if it’s a part of me, similar to how we acquire characteristics from our parents.

Visceral responses to surroundings are not peculiar to any particular culture. It is evidenced by the sacred spaces discovered, created, enshrined, memorialized, preserved, and re-enacted within all cultures. Healing natural springs, battlegrounds and cemeteries, cathedrals and shrines—we proclaim these spaces of personal and communal experiences as places of nurturing, healing, inspiration, spirituality, and revelatory.

Relationship we have with spaces and places occur from our need to describe our experience to others, to share the experience. It is through this act of observation, painting, and naming that the artist makes landscape a place of memory, a place that commemorates time passed in that place. “Paintings…serve as virtual places, surrogate places…that become a stable place for one to dwell in and return to should one so wish” (Tuan, 19-23). Returning to paint a place of
remembrance goes beyond creating an emblem; perhaps it becomes a *memento mori* [reminder of mortality].

Memory is a construction of stored experiences formed by using our senses. When a place, activity, or person is removed from daily life, memories fade. Faded memories manifest themselves as undefined voids or longing for that which is missing. To venerate places with special meaning beyond what is inherent in the physical space, individuals create symbols and markers as commemoration. There is the heart carved into the tree surrounding initials of people declaring their love; there is the cross, plastic flowers, and wreath alongside the road, marking the place where someone tragically and unexpectedly died; there are the pictures of people we frame and display as reminders of where we come from or of who we understand ourselves to be; there are the favorite chairs and corners, the favorite books and music we revisit; there are the rituals of daily life we repeat with familiar comfort. All imbue our lives with moments of the sacred experience. None of these objects, places, or rituals possess the capacity to change the world or to change our lives, and yet we project onto them power that influences our perception. Creating sacred places may not be a rational response to experiences in our lives, but it is the way we make sense of what is unknowable in them. This bridges that intellectual and emotional divide by recognizing what we value.

The multi-sensorial experience one has with a place is a distinctly different than the strictly visual experience one has with art. Paintings fix the images of the land in time. Tuan expresses the integration between self, place, and art by elevating the role art plays in our understanding of place—as a virtual place derived from a virtual experience (Tuan, 26). Art can evoke memories of the senses and intellect, serving as a collective touchstone of the outdoors. Both place and art prompt one to pause for personal appeal in a momentary interruption. Art, like a photograph,
freezes a moment as “…an interruption in the flow of time, [becoming] a stable place for one to dwell in and return to should one so wish” (Tuan, 26).

Our perception of how we experience our surroundings is dependent on what is important to us. We interpret our activity through our personal filter of interests. I began drawing and painting the landscape in response to my continual exposure to it growing up, traveling through it, and separation from it. It becomes a place to revisit, a memory to contemplate, unchanged, with the ability to evoke.

“The traditional definition of a landscape always implies that there is someone looking at it, his or her very gaze giving it form. According to Robert’s dictionary, landscape is ‘part of a country presented by nature for the eye to look at’. For Littré, it is a ‘stretch of a country seen from just one angle’. The landscape is therefore what takes shape in the eye of an individual from the position he or she occupies, extending as far as the horizon. Hence, the landscape is only ever one part, one fragment of the world, shaped for and by a subject hic et nunc [here and now]” (Comment, 99).

The act of looking at and exploring the landscape uses the senses in the present. The act of studying and painting the landscape captures the sensory experience, but reduces them down to sight and perhaps touch, in the texture of the painted surface.

Colors, values, and temperature expressed with strokes of paint, direction, speed, and weight all contain energy representing the hand and mind of the painter. The texture, abstract patterns, and colors on the surface, when viewed closely, present a different experience for the viewer, than when the paintings are viewed farther away. I am interested in the surface quality of the painting and application of paint. The surface of the support, whether it is paper primed with gesso, panel, or linen/cotton-covered panel also contributes to vary the surface and application of the paint. This conveys the interpretation of the painted image. Conditions when painting landscapes are temporal. What is captured is a fleeting moment, a glimpse of something that, within minutes, is gone or becomes something else. Gail Levin in Hopper’s Places describes Edward Hopper’s plein air painting activity as:
“The artist/observer looks at the site and frames the composition gradually as he works, looking again and again at the view in the process. Light and shadows change with the sun’s movement. Clouds may further affect the perception of the scene. In painting or drawing on location, the artist’s eyes shift, taking in different angles of vision and creating different perspectives, even though no conscious attempt to change position has occurred. Thus, Hopper’s pictures synthesize myriad observations in a way that eludes the single photograph.”

To experience rapid change in situ (on site), one cannot respond quickly enough.

Changes that occur, either through natural or human interaction, are in constant flux. Geographical places as land are material environments that lose integrity over time. The connection between place and art is that both invite pause and contemplation. “Isn’t it true,” Tuan asks, “that we pause before them, rest in them, and are in one sense or another, nurtured by them, as we rest and are nurtured by the towns and cities and landscapes we live in or visit?” (Tuan, 3).

We continually experience our surroundings with increasingly detached participation. In 2010, 82.3 percent of the total United States population and 50.8 percent of the world population lived in urban and rural areas (United Nations). This phenomenon began over 200 years ago during the Industrial Revolution and profoundly changed Europe and North America. Following the Spanish Inquisition and French Revolution, people in the late sixteenth century experienced a disconnection from the land as they fled from rural areas to the cities in search of work and food. Cities expanded rapidly with minimal planning, spreading both horizontally and vertically in proportions never yet experienced to accommodate the emerging centralized population. London, one of the world’s first metropolises, was described by Friedrich Engels as a city “…where you can walk for hours without even reaching the beginning of the end, without ever coming across the smallest sign to indicate that you might be approaching the countryside…” (Comment, 134-5). As a result, the public, overwhelmed by the rapid change and scale of their cities, became alienated from their surroundings.
Plato, in his ‘Great Chain of Being’ theory, outlines a hierarchy that influenced the way in which we think about our relationship to nature, beginning with:

“God as spirit, spiritual being(s), human beings, the animal kingdom, the plant kingdom, and the material (inert) world. Humanity lies midway in the hierarchy and participates in both the knowledge of God and knowledge of the physical world. The knowledge of God we share is knowledge of abstract ideas and ideals, knowledge of categories. Knowledge of the physical world we gain through our senses” (Grimes).

It’s not surprising then that landscape was the last of the painting genre to emerge from a tradition where, in the hierarchy of painting, it was in low regard. It was not until painters in France (the Barbizon School) and the Netherlands (the Hague School), that landscape rose as a respected genre. As with the established and esteemed subjects of historical, mythological, and religious paintings, an ideal was established for landscape painting. William Gilpin said, “…nature rarely presents us with perfect compositions. Her ideas are too broad to be used by the picturesque eye, and need to be restrained by the laws of art” (Comment, 79).

Denis Diderot’s new aesthetic of the Picturesque “…was based on the recording of the unexpected, of the imperfect, of variety—very different from the refinement that had been the accepted aesthetic norm….The Picturesque offered itself in all its variety and unpredictability, which had to be captured at the right, the significant, moment” (Comment, 79), giving rise to the Sublime in landscape painting. However, the panoramic signaled a transition in principle, departing from the classical tradition of painting established during the Renaissance, from the rational and ideal to the emotive.

Americans make associations about the city as corrupt and about the countryside as virtuous. These notions arose out of the Industrial Revolution exploding and fragmentation of rural and agrarian life. Thomas Jefferson, in promoting Western expansion, “[propagated] what Leo Marx calls the “pastoral ideal” (Tuan, 108). Painters, in service of those constructing the transatlantic railroad, politicized the migration west with idealized and romantic images of its vast land and
opportunities. Expansive wild land drew travelers to see spectacles of nature. As a result, rapid disappearance of the wilderness spurred reactions of doom, but also of preservation. Our conception of the wilderness and landscapes were shaped by early promotions of spectacular views and places, especially in the development of the panorama.

As modern manufacturing in the seventeenth century infiltrated the fabric of life, it became an “accumulation of spectacles” (Comment, 132). Along with those spectacles came the panorama. To the urban dweller, images of the cities in which they lived became an escape in that “…it was at the very moment when individuals seemed to want to escape from mass culture and loss of identity that they became party to the primary alienation of the image. They returned to the imaginary situation that reality was preventing them from living” (Comment, 8). Strong association with the panoramic view differs from landscape paintings by three distinguishing features: the subject is central, in an elevated, isolated position from the landscape, and it has a 180-360º visual range (Comment, 144).

The deceptive nature of the panorama was contrary to accepted views of landscape painting. It challenged the role of truth in painting, poetic license, and the symbolic role of the frame. As a simulation, its producers took measures to construct illusions so real that for some, viewing a panorama caused nausea, vertigo, and euphoria. “Panoramas had to be so true to life that they could be confused with reality” (Comment, 7). The hand of the artists and the people constructing the panorama were purposefully hidden. To heighten the illusion, the public viewed the scene from a distance in the round, and from decks that mimicked the position of the artist—the best view in town. The circular gaze, with the viewer in the center of a rotunda surrounded by a representation, reinforced the circle, a symbol of control and power. While at the center, the spectator could survey all and maintain distance that supported the illusion. Reality (the present) was replaced by representation (illusion); simulation replaced experience. For the viewer, it was a virtual experience
replacing a real one. This varies from Tuan’s reference to paintings as “…surrogate places… to dwell”.

The panorama, described as a “continuous circular representation” (Comment, 7) was installed in specially built rotundas, under carefully constructed conditions in which the viewer gazed upon the whole of their city. These were deliberately staged from a vantage point that blended symbols “of urban industrialization…with a band of countryside which reinstated a balance with nature” (Comment, 137). Painters carefully chose positions from which to execute their views of which the viewer could verify. The camera obscura and photography aided in capturing the meticulous details established to heighten the illusion. The panorama “replaces reality, does away with the need for practical experience, and soon deprives observers of personal experiences that help them see and acquire knowledge” (Comment, 19).

The first images on display were the very cities in which the spectators lived. These fragmented views, which left them separated from nature, could be surveyed as a whole from an optimal vantage point. This deliberately-created image and space provided the spectator with the illusion of the real. The fragmented view at ground level was transformed for spectators into a commanding position of control and mastery over an environment that, in reality, they had no control over. A sense of control and of power was restored by panoramas.

Increased use of the camera, with a fixed vantage point, reduced poetic license and led to greater attention to minute detail in painting. This is reminiscent of the classical ideal, where the details themselves are seen as perfect. Stringent rules defined how a panorama could be produced, as the claim to be accurate itself was idealized by optimal vantage point and by “…highlighting the green spaces intra muros [within the walls of the city] and giving the surrounding countryside an importance and proximity that it lacked in the daily life of the citizen” (Comment, 137).
Like panoramas, the camera becomes a barrier to and substitute for activities and memories and detaches one from engagement of the senses. We can manipulate the field of vision by adjusting the camera lens to zoom in or pan out. Sequential shots can be merged using software that simulates a panoramic. of which “…[the] very dimension of some paintings made them look like panoramas, either because of their horizontal stretch or because of their great size” (Comment, 143). But such a view is impossible for one to see as a whole. The camera allows us to deceptively see more than our average range of vision. What you see by stretching your thumb and pinky finger at arms length contains the extent of your field of vision.

The camera has a long tradition of use as reference to painting. Like painters in the late eighteenth century, who first used the camera obscura to document detail to paint panoramas, I use photos and field studies done in situ as reference for studio paintings. These are the artifacts from my expeditions. I retain the camera format as a fundamental framing device, simulating my vantage point for the viewer. I create artificial limits constructing a view using the limits of the camera frame and the edges of a painting. The frame defines the representation, breaks the view, and prevents illusion, but invites contemplation. “From Alberti’s time on, the role of the frame would be to designate the representation, for it was seen as a symbolic agent that defined the area of the image. Pierre-Henri Valenciennes…described “the canvas as being the aspect of nature that is circumscribed by the frame, always creating the effect of a window” (Comment, 99). Much as windowpanes define a view, automobile windows define the passing terrain, movies and television frame the view in motion; paintings become the “stills” I capture. All of these devices that focus our attention also simultaneously limit what and how much we see. Boundaries exist as limits, as barriers between us and something else.

Contrasting the expansive nature of the panoramic where the whole is visible, the painting tradition composed landscapes by a set of rules.
“The tradition of the ideal landscape in fact was based on an art of composition which involved rediscovering a perfection of balance, rhythm and selection thought to be absent from real nature. The elements of a painting had to be organized into a hierarchy, give a function, a structure, in order, no doubt, to elicit what Baudelaire was to call ‘the chaos of details’” (Comment, 84).

Graphic codes of natural and human-made features and/or artifacts, the context in which they are placed, and the cultural systems in which we are introduced to them, determine how we interpret what we see. Frames and aesthetic principles provide a basis with which we can understand pictures and “…images are built to represent the world in certain ways” (Elkins, 35).

Place, Tuan says, is where humans are born into and, knowing it as home, experience it multi-sensorially. One must, however, discover art by using one or two senses and the intellect to appeal to our emotions. It is a dynamic process, nurtured by what came before (Tuan, 21-22). If, however, one studies land and its vocabulary and understands its language, hasn’t the intellect been engaged as much as the senses? When one pauses before a scene, studies its color, light, and form as in a painting, and then studies the individual parts, i.e. what creates those forms, identifying the flora within a habitat, its relationship and function, and understanding these forms in the context of an ecosystem, etc.—is that not equal to the accumulated knowledge required to appreciate art over time?

Deliberate marks and features, as modes of expression, are organized and arranged using culturally constructed rules. As we move through natural spaces, natural features merge and emerge to define our experience of places. Land, formed from forces of wind, water, pressure, and climate, leave distinguished and readable marks. To look is to see the whole, or view; to read, is to analyze parts contributing to our understanding of the whole. To look and read is to see the forms and features as integrated parts of a larger system. The view (taken in as a whole) of the landscape, its natural features and as a constructed picture can be read using graphic codes unique to each.
Reading the landscape as a visual language is not unlike reading art; both require a basic set of principles from which to build and require observation and the ability to analyze relationships and interconnectedness of parts with the whole.

“Any act of reading relies on a finite number of customs and strategies, and they are often at work in looking. The converse is also true: We look at images in various ways, at various offers, and at different speeds, and those ways of looking often come into play when we read. There are protocols of reading and looking, meaning signs by which we might recognize that we are reading or looking. any visual artifact mingles the two, and so there is “reading” in every image and “looking: in every text” (Elkins, 84).

The artist becomes mediator between the real and imaginary. Their experiences in the field are direct. Their interpretation and representation are not, and become the imaginary upon which the viewer gazes. They locate positions of optimal views, but only fragments are captured within the confines of the canvas, panel, or frame.

To reference language of the landscape suggests a relationship to it—as an interaction between humans and environment. Tuan describes the complexity with which we bond to our surroundings, not as incidentally, but as profoundly integral to whom we are (Tuan, 43). Naturalists use the language of ecosystems to read and understand the land visually. Vernacular generally refers to regional language spoken by inhabitants. John Brinckerhoff Jackson, in Discovering the Vernacular Landscape, defines language of the land as “one where evidences of a political organization of space are largely or entirely absent” (Jackson, 149). By identifying and studying relationships, a complex network of systems becomes comprehensible.

Close-ups or slices of larger views provoke intimacy unlike landscapes from a male perspective that have reflected it as sublime—“wild, grand, and even terrifying” (Kramer, 48). Boundaries restrict access to private land resulting views that are limited and obstructed. As I commute through the city and outlying rural areas, images along public roadways become like movie stills, framed by my car windows and mirrors. Employing and appropriating the wide,
narrow format of the panoramic for close-up views of confined spaces exaggerates a space much larger than it is. Expanding a condensed view accentuates and elevates its appearance.

Painting ordinary views of the landscape is an antithesis to painting the landscape as sublime. This reflects a feminine approach. Lucy Lippard states in *The Lure of the Local*, that the reason there is a lack of female photographers, “…is that women’s frequently calmer and more intimate approach to landscape is not exciting enough to appeal to a public taste formed by the dramatic (and possessive) spectacles of the BLM (Boys’ Landscape Movement)” (58). During the nineteenth century western expansion of the United States, women “disappeared” in its vast isolation, in an era in which “…femininity…carried with it the injunction to spatial constraint. Women are not supposed to take up much room, or go very far from home, or to stay away for long.” Their paintings often reflected their limited time, space, and resources and focused on their immediate activities and surroundings. Here too, transforming the mundane reinforces a sense of power and control.

Some artists are drawn to quiet, “…apparently innocuous sites” (Lippard, 38) and want to draw the viewer’s attention to them. Edges describe where city meets countryside, and represent how these artist’s paintings fit into a cultural and historical context through the exploration the regional landscape. These are the spaces between one’s origins and one’s destinations. By focusing on them, these spaces become something worth recording and reflecting upon. Seemingly “empty” places are perhaps places returning to a “natural” landscape.

The natural environment that surrounds us becomes the “Other” (something set apart from ourselves)—easily dismissed and idealized through generalized motifs. Direct experience engages perception towards understanding underlying structures and relationship. Relationships involve interaction with others. The level of that exchange depends on familiarity, knowledge, interdependence, respect, and trust. The range and depth of factors determine the intimacy of the
relationship. A similar correlation occurs between humans and the land. Understood superficially, it is stereotyped, marginalized, politicized, and treated as the “Other” romanticized or made a commodity.

We easily dismiss familiar with items and experiences. Our identities, geologist Yi-Fu Tuan states, are “…anchored in common objects and experiences to a degree we seldom acknowledge” (12). We have a tendency to focus on the exceptional places with special designation, overlooking the ordinary. These exceptional places could be defined as our national parks, historical landmarks, or elaborate and exotic gardens, landscaped to perfection. However, these are places we often visit as “must-see” locations, checked off a list before we move on to the next.

Peter Mark Roget, an English scholar, physician, and the compiler of *Roget's Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases* (1852), from an early age compiled lists—lists of people who died, lists of words, etc. Traveling as a guide with two boys across the European continent, he directed them to record what they saw in lists and numbers rather than experiences derived from the senses. Letters the boys wrote home included the number of steps in a tower, the height of a mountain climbed in feet, the keys on an organ and the number of people required to play it, the number of people at an event, etc. Quantifying and organizing details became a way to understand an otherwise chaotic city, but perhaps they became a substitution for the experience itself (Kendall).

Eco-psychology emerged in the 1990s to combine the study of ecology with psychology, recognizing the relationship between land and people. The land on which we live, travel over, and work shapes how we do things and how we think about ourselves. Acquiring and collecting objects, and measuring and recording data does not implicate understanding. As humans, we produce meaning of our experiences through relational connections, reciprocal interaction, and contemplation. How we experience and interact with our environment forms our understanding of it. We do this by telling stories that integrate our experiences into our lives in a way that
informs us as to who we are and how we are to behave and live. The compression of activities filling our lives only serves to disconnect us further from the environment. It is not uncommon to know more about a place halfway around the world than our own neighborhoods.

Inspired by naturalist adventures and studies, what was first a hunch became an investigation. It was my intentional desire to know why I responded to Michigan, particularly West Michigan, in the way that I do. Why does this landscape seem similar to the fatherland (or Vaterland—meaning heaven or “home of our Father” later to become understood as the country of one’s birth” (Adams, 44) and familiar to early settlers who emigrated from the Netherlands? How does the geographical description of this place coincide with shaping its inhabitants—particularly myself?

Humans evolve and culture expands through the exploration of our world. During the Renaissance, Galileo used the telescope to observe the surface of the moon, clusters in the Milky Way, and movement of the planets around the sun. What he described changed the meaning of how people viewed themselves and their world. Scientists like Charles Darwin, explorers like Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, and naturalists like Luke Howard and Aldo Leopold wrote journals documenting their observations. They identified specific and defining features of the land, flora, fauna, and sky. Years after Darwin returned from his five-year voyage on the Beagle, he reviewed his notes and journals to write *Origins of Species*. Louis and Clark kept extensive journals of their expedition that become benchmarks to which we compare the wilderness then and now. They accumulated samples and specimens of flora and fauna that were sent back East to catalog and display in natural history museums. Luke Howard, a pharmaceutical businessman and a natural philosopher with an interest in meteorology, classified named cloud formations, and compiled and published the *Essay on the Modification of Clouds*, which established the conventional terms that we continue to use.

In *A Sand County Almanac*, Leopold wrote, “Conservation is a state of harmony between
men and land” (189). Strongly influenced by Leopold, John Tallmadge incorporated reading of the land into his writing as a participant (activity on the land), observer (scientific inquiry), and philosopher (storyteller and meaning-maker) in regards to his relationship with the natural environment. He says, “Nature reflects the affects of climate and weather. Nature can’t lie. It expresses its history; it embodies history” (Tallmadge, 4/14/09).

Unlike Lewis and Clark or Charles Darwin, who were financially funded, prepared with the knowledge and skills necessary for the exploration and study of faraway, exotic places they embarked upon, I explored in a nearby farm surrounded by the city. My project of personal inquiry encompassed writing and research, naturalist studies including interacting with the natural environment, and plein air (out-of-doors) and studio painting. I defined the project criteria based on my personal aesthetics comprising five principles:

1) It must be practical (close to home and easily accessible);
2) It must be educational (learn about the environment and exercise my sense of curiosity);
3) I must be able to make meaning of what I am doing (develop relationships and apply what I learn);
4) I must feel comfortable and confident with the work I produce and the activity I engage in (develop my skill as a painter and have fun doing it); and
5) I must find the object of my study visually interesting to sustain my attention for the duration of my project.

In January of 2009, I identified private land within a mile of where I live, a farm with land in succession (natural transition from cultivation to natural state). After securing permission from the property owner to access the land, I began walking the perimeter and the interior of the property. I began walking during the winter. In spring, I observed wildflowers and grasses. In summer, I saw an increase of bushes leafing and blossoming, some fruiting, and summer wildflowers, fruits, and berries going to seed. A variety of landforms—rolling fields, woods, tree lines, drainage ditches, creeks, and wetlands—remain within an urban setting that has developed around it. My lack of awareness of what I saw resulted in a sense of happiness to
find this undeveloped parcel within the city—a place of seemingly peaceful refuge and idyllic wandering.

To support my thesis project, I participated in a Master Naturalist program through the Michigan State University Extension (MSUE), to gain “a greater understanding of the natural environment and conservation techniques while learning the flora native to West Michigan” (MSUE Master Naturalist program description). The on-site training discussed conservation theory and practice, woodland wildflowers, native trees and shrubs, wetlands, prairie, and invasive species, and included two supplemental classes about amphibians (frogs) and decomposers. Since I completed the Master Naturalist program, my view of this farm has changed; I can no longer claim ignorance. I know enough now to identify native from non-native species. Seeing with different eyes makes me uncomfortably complicit with an obligation to act. I learned that romanticizing the landscape is both ignorant and irresponsible.

To continue learning more about Michigan, I completed a course at the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Aquinas College on the *Natural Features of Michigan*. The geologist John McPhee said, “Remember about mountains: what they are made of is not what made them” (18); this is also true for Michigan. The unique land formations of Michigan are a result of deposits from both an inland sea and a continental glacier. Both left deposits that wind and water continue to shape and shift. Familiarity, experience, and knowledge not only contribute to de-romanticizing the landscape, but they also serve to re-establish a bond that is less superficial, and that restores a sense of curiosity and wonder.

There are numerous ways to see, experience, and portray the landscape. Viewing a vacant piece of land, a farmer will want to plant, a developer will want to build, a logger will want to harvest trees, a geologist will study formations, and a naturalist will study and preserve habitat, etc. The filters I see the landscape through are as a commuter and painter.
Painting the landscape is an outward expression of an inward exploration. Venturing out to explore various places inevitably reflects what I see and feel, my preferences, and my choices. When looking at a portrait, “…the spectator is made to feel that in looking at this mirror image he is intruding into the apparently reciprocal relation between the artist and the mirror…” (Grimes). It is a place to which I ritually return. Each time I select a place, pause to observe and then to paint it, I attribute something more than what is inherent in that place. It becomes an attempt to describe my experience and the painting becomes an emblem of that experience.

The painted landscape mirrors to me a cyclical reality in contrast to my complexly constructed life. Completing a master of fine arts program and choosing to paint the landscape integrate the challenges of venturing beyond work routines. Both are deliberate attempts to enter unknown territory and explore what lies within. Both are containers for networks of processes and challenges. Both embody a cyclical nature of growth. They serve as “debarkation points…[in] the process of working with the material, the work secures its own voice and helps set the direction” (Eisner, 7). Beginnings are overshadowed with the anticipated fantasies of arrivals, but there are no arrivals, only passages from one thing to another in a series of what is next and new. There is incremental deterioration and continual transition into the next cycle. That is the personal narrative I experience in the landscape.
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# Image List

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<td>grease pencil on paper</td>
<td>5.5 x 23.75”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td><em>Patterson Farm, Marsh Bowl</em></td>
<td>grease pencil on paper</td>
<td>11 x 40”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td><em>Patterson Farm, Winter Thaw-1</em></td>
<td>oil on paper</td>
<td>7 x 7”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td><em>Patterson Farm, Winter Thaw-2</em></td>
<td>oil on paper</td>
<td>7 x 7”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td><em>Patterson Farm, Winter Thaw-3</em></td>
<td>oil on paper</td>
<td>7 x 7”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td><em>Patterson Farm, Winter Thaw-4</em></td>
<td>oil on paper</td>
<td>7 x 7”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td><em>Cranberry Lake, View South</em></td>
<td>grease pencil on paper</td>
<td>6.5 x 26”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td><em>Baumhoff, Sparta</em></td>
<td>grease pencil on paper</td>
<td>6 x 27”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td><em>Shadow Cross</em></td>
<td>oil on panel</td>
<td>8.75 x 24”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td><em>Direct Route</em></td>
<td>oil on panel</td>
<td>8.75 x 24”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td><em>Side Road</em></td>
<td>oil on panel</td>
<td>8.75 x 24”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For inquiries about this work, please contact me at janensing@att.net

May 2011