

## Women Artists at Cornwall: Nature as Culture Shock

Encountering the exceptional recent exhibition "American Women Artists at Cape Cornwall 1992-2002: The Brisons Veor Residency," at The Painting Center, 52 Greene Street, one was put in mind of Jon Schueler's poetic memoir "The Sound of Sleat."

A slightly younger colleague of Kline and de Kooning in the 1950s, Schueler left the comfort and camaraderie of the New York School to face isolation and hardship in a remote area of the Scottish highlands. Although its rugged landscape and dramatic skies inspired Schueler's best work, many considered his relocation a disastrous career move at a time when all eyes were focused on America.

Without making that ultimate sacrifice,

impression on her. Streaking linear forms resembling lightning bolts often enliven Edelman's darkly dramatic mixed media works, which are imposing in scale and were among the most abstract works in the show. Also influenced by the dolmens, burial mounds, and stone circles left behind by Neolithic peoples, Edelman's dynamic compositions capture a sense of the metaphysical forces underlying nature.

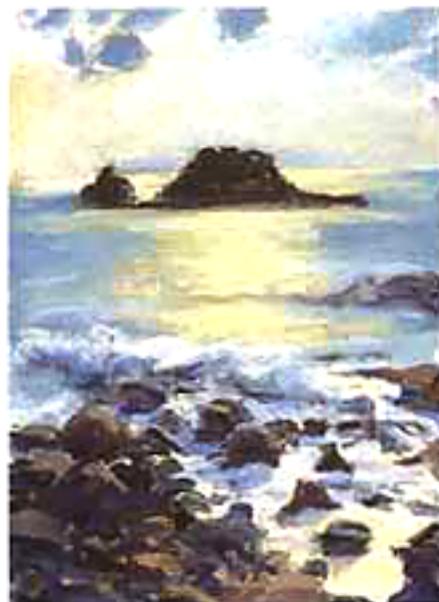
Possessed of all the power and presence of oils, the large watercolors of Stephanie Rauschenbusch, such as "Vertiginous and Stormy View from Cape Cornwall," seem simultaneously akin to the drawings of van Gogh and the paintings of Charles Burchfield, for their transcription of the landscape into rhythmically jotted forms

heroic in spirit, particularly her series depicting the distinctive Brisons rocks—craggy black mineral formations that rise monolithically out of the ocean—at different times of day and engulfed in fog. Finnegan's painting of the granite residence itself, nestled on the cliff side with the chimney of one of the area's now-abandoned tin mines rising skyward in the distance, gives a vivid sense of the locale's isolated majesty.

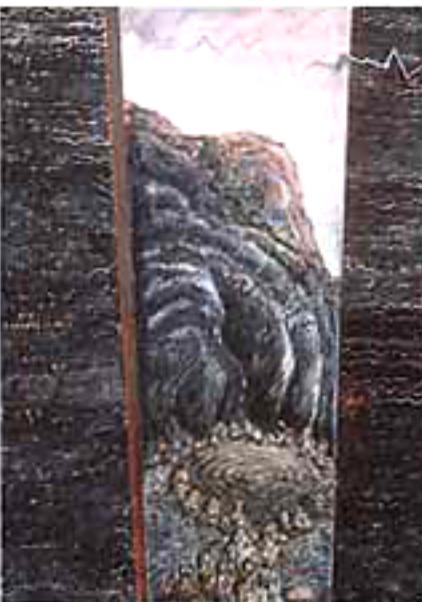
In her juicily painted bravura oils, Lynne Friedman was particularly taken with the interaction of the rugged rock-croppings and the sea, as seen in the series "Land's End: Cornwall," as well as in "Sunset," where a sloping hill appears illuminated from within, as foamy waves flow below. By



Nancy Beal



Judy Zeichner



Gail Cohen Edelman

the nine New York artists at The Painting Center found their own inspiration during briefer stays in a similarly remote region of southwest England called Cape Cornwall, known for its copper and tin mines and its picturesque Neolithic ruins. Here, each of them lived and worked at different times over a decade in a granite house provided for writers and poets in the winter and for visual artists in the summer.

Each of these urban painters reacted differently to the untamed landscape, unearthly light, and occasionally threatening weather conditions at Cape Cornwall, where high winds and hurricane gales frequently batter the shore. All, however, produced works with an edgy beauty suggesting a kind of natural culture shock.

Reportedly, the late Gail Cohen Edelman, who was the first American painter to take up residency there in 1992, experienced one of the violent storms common to the region and it made a deep

that fairly writhed with energy. In light-filled strokes and luminous washes, Rauschenbusch delineates the shapes, colors, and textures of tall grasses, rolling cloud formations, and the piled stones of a prehistoric barrow, or burial mound, depicting each in considerable detail without sacrificing the bold masses that lend her compositions their strong formal thrust.

Working in oil on linen, masonite, and aluminum, Marcia Clark, best known for her large, panoramic New York City views, brings her expansive vision to bear on the landscape in a gestural yet descriptive style. Clark's fluid brushwork ranges over three joined swatches of linen, staggered to enhance the sense of steepness, in one especially hilly vista called "Climb to the Tower," which demonstrates this artist's ability to evoke a sense of sweeping grandeur on any scale.

Some of Sharyn Finnegan's meticulous realist oils are almost miniature in scale yet

contrast, Friedman's pen and ink triptych "Waves and Tides" charts sinuous abstract patterns in the movement of water.

"Alice's House," a vigorous acrylic painting by Nancy Beal evokes the pastoral serenity of a small dwelling nestled among verdant hills. In another canvas, Beal sets a vase of bright red flowers and other homey still life objects before a window, as though in a poignant effort to domesticate the wild landscape outside.

By contrast, along with a group of pastels, Fran Hodes showed an intricately composed oil on canvas called "A Window in Cornwall," in which a large stuffed bird, a butterfly in a glass dome, various fruits, and all manner of other objects are crowded onto a table. Here, the antic profusion of the still life rivals the wildness of the window-view of crashing surf and the Brisons rocks, rendered by Hodes with hyper-real exactitude.

Pattern painter Arni Schaumburger's for-

onal approach made her something of an anomaly in this show. Working in gouache and acrylic on paper, she took as her sole subject the horses that graze the fields of Cape Cornwall, schematizing their simplified outlines in optically dazzling abstract compositions. However, Schaumburger also incorporated other aspects of her surroundings, such as the designs in the tiles in the bathroom of the granite house, into her compositions, thereby investing them with personal resonance even while retaining their formal purity.

Then there was Judy Zeichner, who captured transcendent qualities of light in oils such as "End of Storm," where dramatic clouds hover over the craggy shapes of the Beisons rocks, rising out of shimmering waters that culminate in foamy curls along the rocky shoreline. Contrastingly down to earth, although equally striking for the deft beauty of its composition, was Zeichner's painting of an artist standing at an easel facing out to sea, not far from a parked car. Come to think of it, the automobile, only partially visible in the boldly cropped composition, was among the few images in the entire show signifying the world beyond this remote, ancient place where nine gifted women



*Lynne Friedman*

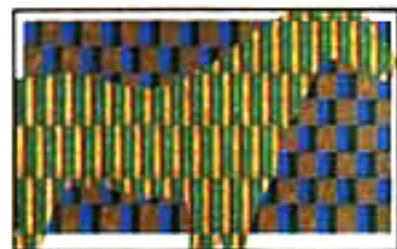
painters discovered unexpected epiphanies.

How each artist responded in her own unique manner to the same natural stimuli, creating a unique statement, says something profound about the mysteries of human perception and creative vision. And how this splendid group effort escaped the attention of so-called Major Media is something of a mystery in itself, since "American Women Artists at Cornwall" was one of the most enjoyable and important theme shows to come along in quite some time.

—Ed McCormack



*Fran Hodes*



*Ann Schaumburger*



*Sharyn Finnegan*



*Stephanie Rauschenbusch*



*Marcia Clark*