

Pieces of a Larger Picture



Paintings by Paul Hotvedt

**Metambesen
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*Pieces of a Larger Picture:
Paintings by Paul Hotvedt*

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Preface

In 1994 I moved to northeastern Kansas where I began painting landscapes in earnest. My method was to simply drive or bicycle to a location that caught my interest and paint for between 30 minutes to three hours. Most of the time I worked on masonite panels, always using oil paint, and made a habit of completing the work on the spot. I like to think whatever style I developed was demanded by the sky, wind, trees, and geometries of that region: those elements called to the paintings of northern Europe with which I was familiar and I borrowed from those traditions at will depending on the circumstances.

The paintings are windows into a world, records of a short span of time spent in very particular places scattered throughout Douglas and Jefferson Counties, an area that straddles glacial moraines and tall grass prairie. There is a long growing season and plenty of sun, water, and wind. The wind adds to the feeling of being there: the place is alive with movement.

Plenty of times I found opportunity to paint roads, buildings, things from imagination, and portraits but I found the way in which the earth would spring forth with these shapes and colors blowing in a warm wind up from the Gulf Mexico was an irresistible lure.

I continued working outdoors in Kansas for over 15 years, accumulating around 1100 panels and canvasses. The collection of 11 images here, is a fair representation, although there were several other periods within the larger group that come to mind: a series done at sunset and continuing into darkness of the edges of woods, short-grass prairie paintings done further west, early spring paintings of brambles, a series of works where red was substituted for green, and so forth.

Eventually, with the help of my son, each location was geotagged. A database was created that included the images, metadata such as size, viewshed, etc. Having encouraged several other artists to do the same, the resulting collection of images caught the attention of Sarah Thiel, a librarian with the University of Kansas Library who specializes in digital archives.

The collective project, titled From the Ground Up, is featured online at <http://luna.ku.edu:8180/luna/servlet/>

I shy away from saying anything about the meaning of individual works, although I remember doing each one and the circumstances that gave rise to them, but I can reflect on the benefits of immersion: it was through a continuous practice of my own that I began to read and study more regularly about other artists of all kinds and felt a greater kinship with them.

In 2013 I moved to southwestern New Mexico where I continue to work outdoors. At present, I am working on a series of larger canvasses of bodies of water: mountain streams of New Mexico, lakes in northern Wisconsin, and the Pacific coast of Oregon. The last two paintings in this group are taken from excursions to Oregon where my colleague and friend Erik Sandgren hosts a group of painters each July for two weeks of painting and discussion.

It is an honor to be included in the Metambesen collection. I have admired Charlotte Kelly's photographs here and knew from reading Robert Kelly's works that brevity is sometimes just what is called for in trying to convey a sense of place, but I can reflect on the benefits of immersion: it was through a continuous practice of my own that I began to read and study more regularly about other artists of all kinds and felt a greater kinship with them.

– Paul Hotvedt, June 2015



Island. 13x12" May 14, 2004



Cloud Building above Furrows. 12x9" May 24, 2004



Slope and Telephone Pole. 13x13" June 16, 2004



Edge of Field and Storm Sky. 8x12" June 16, 2004



Birthday Clouds. 13x13" September 3, 2004



Grand Sky. 13x13" September 11, 2004



Windblown Sunflowers. 13x13" September 17, 2004



Mounting Clouds above Ridge Line. 13x12" July 3, 2004



Seeing Trough Elms. 13x13" July 5, 2004



Sky South of Lawrence. 13x11" July, 2004



Colyer Prairie. 13x13" July, 2004



Rocks and Surf. Rocky Creek, Oregon. 14x15" July 2013



Tidal Rocks. 7.5x9.5" oil on paper. Oregon. July 2014

AN AFTERIMAGE TO HIS IMAGES

We first met Paul Hotvedt in Lawrence, Kansas, at a conference he had helped organize at the University on Landscape and the Imagination. Only after the sessions did I learn that he was a painter, and when we got to see his paintings, I was quietly, deeply stirred by his reverence for what he saw and the quiet skill with which he let us see them.

This was in 2001, a few weeks after 9/11, when our senses of place, space, vulnerability, openness all had to be renewed, refined. Paul's paintings of prairie and shrubs and sky had a power of urgent insistence on the fragility – which in a way is the eternity – around us in a world they condescendingly call 'natural,' as if there were some other.

These landscapes of his. This is what they make me think, now, after a lifetime of dumb looking at pictures, at landscapes.

Landscape must once have meant something like *making the land*, making it by perceiving, transcribing it. Late in Western art did landscape come into its own—we are brought up to think that Petrarch was the first Westerner to see a mountain as something to look at, not just an obstacle to travel.

Be that as it may, painted landscapes were there a-plenty but as backgrounds only, from the quasi-realistic backdrop features of Roman frescoes to the haunted, almost frightening emblematic background vistas of the the Sieneese and Florentine masters.

Then suddenly the background becomes the foreground, the figures vanish (or dwindle to the enigmatic figures in Poussin, or the cows of Constable), and the shape of land tells us the whole story.

I think of three ways that landscape paintings work on the viewer. Turners and Van Goghs reach out of the canvas to grab the viewer, surround us with their colors and vortices – they are aggressive, colonizing our sensibilities.

Then there are the serene betweenish landscapes, those that are content to be themselves, content to let us watch—I think of the luminous Cézanne view of Mont Sainte Victoire that used to grace the smoking room (!) of the Met in the old days, or that tranquil, charged tiny Monet at the Clark, "Street in Fécamp," light of a rainy day but no rain. They are there for themselves.

Finally, the kind of landscape I find in Hotvedt's work – the image recedes, it draws us after it, invites us to attend it in its own space. Using the common materials and techniques of Western painting, without a hint of *orientalisme* or atmospherics, Hotvedt creates images as seductive as Song Dynasty pictures, drawing us, quietly, remorselessly, into the infinity of distance, into the infinity of a single place, reverently and attentively seen.

R.K.

Cuttyhunk Island, 2015