

ALBERT KRESCH HAS BEEN DEALING WITH the same motifs for at least 40 years. The earlier paintings that I have seen, not unlike the best work of Derain and Marquet, show him reacting not only to the largest forming and emotion issues in the landscape, but also to very small and intimate ones, without, nevertheless, losing a certain broad, grand sweep. Kresch has always seen that grand sweep, no matter the level of abstraction in his work.

Now, looking at the mastery in his recent work, it is clear that while he learned a great deal from his many years of close study, he is most taken with the broad sweep—the gesture of the landscape in its enormous space, out of scale to the ordinary person, with his viewpoint on the ground at a distance.

As the landscape century, the 19th century offers us many examples of artists who responded to Burke’s notion of nature as sublime. The greatest of them, and the most consistently sublime in his landscapes, was Courbet.

Albert Kresch’s new paintings reveal a very strong sense of Courbet’s feeling for landscape. Courbet did not try to depict nature’s minutia, but rather captured its broad sweep and grand rhythms, as does Kresch.

In the 20th century before him, the artist who reflected this the most was Georges Rouault. I think Kresch gets to Rouault as an influence because of how he sees the motif with Courbet. Rouault is not his master, but a comrade on the way to intensifying and purifying his view of that overwhelming landscape out there, the one that makes us feel our own size, and eventually reverses the size so that we can see ourselves as larger than, rather smaller than the motif.

As a result of his openness to models from earlier generations, he becomes a more radical and original artist himself. Originality, especially originality that has meaning for us, is not found in ignorance of past examples, or ignorance of the motif, but in using as much knowledge from many sources available to us to arrive at our notions of the motif. Too many times we say to ourselves, I am just



Summer, 2004, oil on canvas, 9" x 18 7/8"

a painter, I cannot use all of that knowledge in making the picture. Kresch does not do that. Whatever he knows and feels is an important part of what he has to say to us about the motif. This makes him an important landscape painter for our time, since what he feels during the experience of painting becomes a source of new knowledge for anyone experiencing his new painting.

It may seem harder now to see an artist shaping the thoughts and feelings of his contemporaries in their social

and political stances, but insofar as any observer must feel the strength of Kresch’s emotion and forming of the motif, he is changed. This change, which exhilarates and lifts up every viewer, also has a political dimension as well. We begin to believe in the goodness and fullness of man through experiencing the goodness and fullness of each painting, and in this way we become better citizens.

GABRIEL LADERMAN

WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY

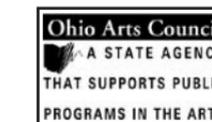
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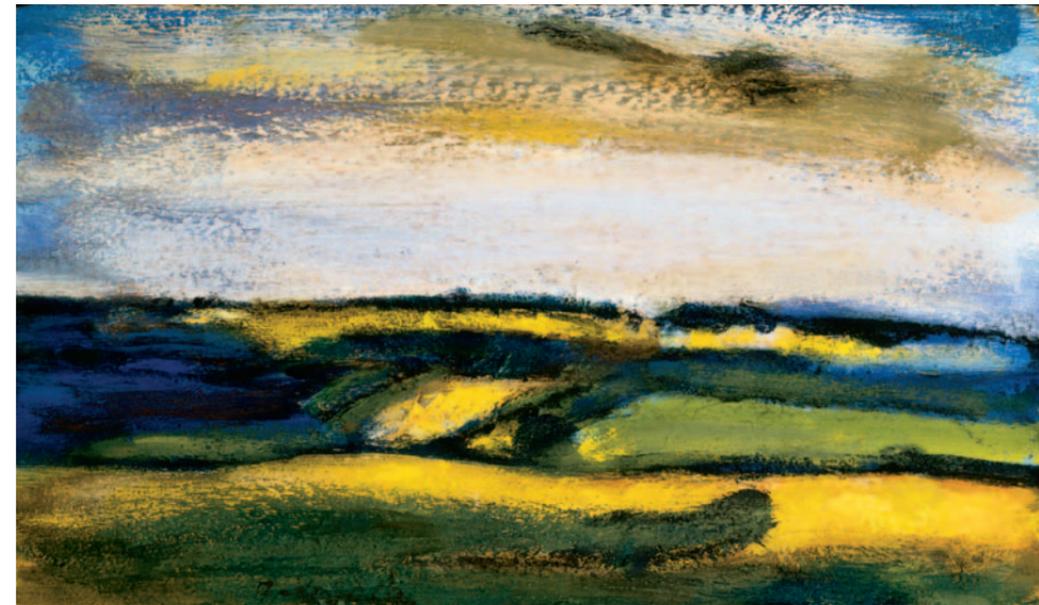
Cover image: *Catskills Landscape, 1998,*
Oil on panel, 10" x 14"



ALBERT KRESCH PAINTINGS

November 5, 2006–January 7, 2007
Wright State University Art Galleries

ARTIST LECTURE Sunday, November 5, 2006
2:30 P.M., M252 Creative Arts Center
Followed by a reception in the Galleries
4:00–5:30 P.M.



Tidal Basin, Maine, 2003, oil on canvasboard, 6 3/8" x 11"

AN EARLY INFATUATION WITH Mondrian led Albert Kresch into abstraction which in turn led him to the Hofmann School in 1942 and to a friendship with a group of like-minded young painters who became the nucleus of the Jane Street Gallery, the earliest of the artists' cooperatives. The paintings he exhibited in his two solo exhibitions at Jane Street were abstract, but in 1948 when he was running a summer art school in Rockport, Massachusetts, he began to paint outdoors and produced *The Sea Wall*, a dark canvas traversed by a broad streak of brilliant cadmium in a manner prophetic of his recent landscapes. From that turning point he gradually became a painter of landscape and still life, distilling his painterly knowledge in compact paintings whose impact is much more intense than one would expect from their generally modest size. "I want to hurl the viewer off the surface," he says, rejecting the Hofmann push and pull principle. Indeed

these small landscapes have the power to do just that with their decisive sweeps of strong color, brusquely stroked paint, and the refusal to make concessions to detail.

Kresch likes to start with a dark foreground, introduce a patch of light and let it echo at intervals across the landscape. He is a master of the luminous blue sky and often sets up a reverberation between it and bright patches of orange in the landscape; sometimes he will do the reverse and paint a vivid pink or yellow sky over a darkened earth. One of his principal concerns is that a painting should create its own light, rather than imitate observed light. Taking his cue from medieval stained glass, Georges Rouault achieved sonorous effects by juxtaposing his colors with black. In much the same way Kresch succeeds in creating an internal glow through the contrast between dark surroundings and undiluted color. He also intensifies

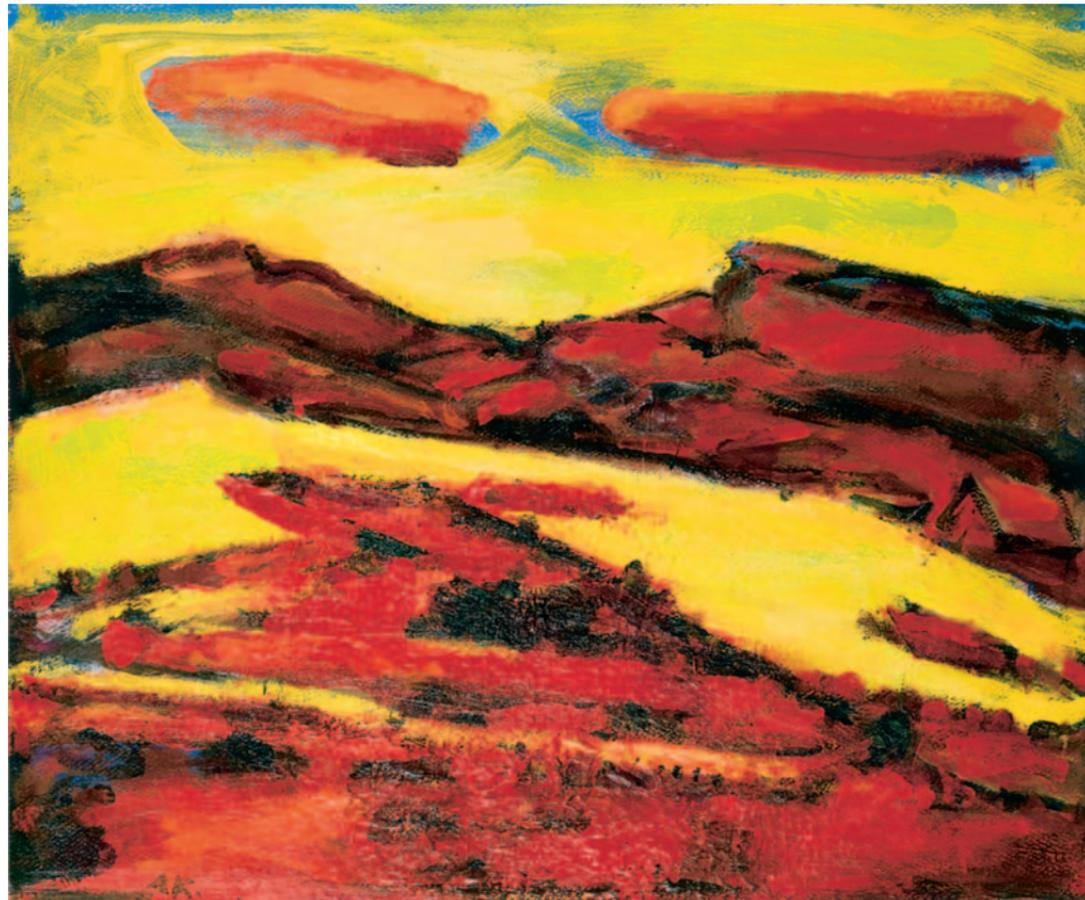
his color by building up layer upon layer of paint to produce a light refracting texture.

Often Kresch's sweeping views are anchored with a small building that establishes volume and serves as what painters of the picturesque around 1800 called an "offskip," a form that pushes back the distance. In his coastal views similar focal points are provided by the white crescents denoting sails skimming over brilliant blue water. These are works that benefit from the compression the small format imposes; the vigorous paint handling gains force by virtue of its emanating from a confined space; the great distances the eye traverses toward the low-lying mountains seem magnified because the focus is restricted. On the other hand Kresch can stretch a horizontal format almost indefinitely and still make it work. Through slow building up and thoughtful adjustments of planes and color relationships the

painting reaches a point of stasis where nothing needs to be added or subtracted, a near flawless state that satisfies through its completeness.

The landscapes are so strong, simple and unassuming that the bold, densely packed still life paintings come as a shock with their bright secondary colors—orange, violet, green—and curvilinear rhythms reinforced by heavy black outlines. Almost baroque in their interplay of straight edge and curve, these exuberantly colorful works show the artist giving vent to a zest for painting that has seemed more undaunted as the years go by. They offer a foil for the subtleties of the more condensed landscapes as well as another reason to be grateful for the independence and perseverance of this tried and true painter.

MARTICA SAWIN



Sangre de Cristo Mountains, N.M., 1997, mixed media on paper, 13" x 16"