

**MERRILL WAGNER****Statement**

The first twenty years of my life were spent in the Pacific Northwest between the cities of Olympia and Tacoma, Washington. I was very moved by the landscape there. One could waken in the morning and if it were a clear day a huge snowcapped mountain could be seen from the windows of the house that was at sea level. The days are not always clear in the Pacific Northwest. This amazing sight cannot be seen every day. It is often cloudy, foggy or raining, so the beauty of the mountain is never taken for granted. When it appears it is a gift to lift one's spirit.

Many people in the Northwest grow to know the mountain well. As you become familiar with higher terrain and elevations you realize the power of events such as landslides and sudden changes in weather. Anyone living in the area would experience a few earthquakes during their lifetime.

The Northwest is very beautiful. Many of us who want to make art are drawn to that activity because we also want to create beauty. We may go to metropolitan areas with museums full of objects that will nourish and help us grow as artists. After attending a liberal arts college I simply stayed in New York City with its myriad of opportunities for cultural exchange and artist friends.

Visually New York City is full of straight lines, rectangles and gray colors. Some of my first large scale canvas paintings were full of straight lines and remembered West Coast landscape images that I could not help continuing to think about.

My recent steel paintings have aspects of landscape memories. The latest slate paintings also recall nature. Slate blackboard fragments to me are reminiscent of mountain ranges. I use short linear oil pastel strokes that make me think of grasses or rain.

Often I feel the need to order both the steel and the slate paintings through a simple geometry such as finding a square or other shape in the surface I am working on. I look for individual marks, blemishes and colors in these materials that can be part of the work.

There are other procedures that compose the stone and steel paintings. They function for me almost as scales would in practicing music. For instance, when I go to an art supply store and ask to buy Windsor Newton cobalt blue oil paint I may be told that they do not have Windsor Newton but they do have Block cobalt blue oil paint. I buy this and find the colors are not the same. I may buy other brands of the same color and they will all be different. I thought it would be interesting to use all these different colors which are the same color in name, but made by different companies, in the same painting. The areas of different colors placed next to each other could suggest space, even landscape space!

The steel paintings are made with rust preventative paints in colors such as shiny or matte black, gray and re primers, produced by DeRusto, Rustoleum, Rust Tough, XO Rust, and several European brands.

The slate pieces are painted with many bands of acrylic, casien, water color and oil pastel colors. Some of these paintings have been placed out of doors for long periods of time. They have been photographed at intervals. The photographs show first the original state of the painting with its various colors which are the same in name but made by different brands. Subsequent pictures show that the composition changes as fade and weather in different ways, so that certain parts grow lighter or darker as time passes. The painting is constantly changing over the years. Some paints fade slowly to white before disappearing. Others vanish without fading.

Two books that I have made, Notes on Paint and Time and Materials measure the ability of paint to withstand weather changes over the years. Later books, Painted Sun Trails and Oil and Water record shadows that I painted as I observed them moving across boulders or stones during the course of days in each of the four seasons.

I buy sheets of hot rolled steel from metal shops and also use scraps of metal that I find there, but I do not have the steel cut to order. I buy school blackboards and slate or marble fragments from paint them as they are.

I also look for interesting stone and metal pieces on the city streets or in country hillsides or fields where I may live or travel to. Stones are sometimes combined, arranged or stacked to make work for the floor. Often these are ordered by geometric shapes that are painted or drawn on them.

When I first lived in New York I studied figure, still-life and the landscape. Off and on since then I have continue to paint what I see, and for the last seven years have worked regularly outdoors from the Pennsylvania countryside. This does not seem the same as recollection of a more rugged and abstract landscape, but it nourishes that work giving information about color and contour of the land from a gentler terrain.

As a child I would often become preoccupied with drawing contours of the land from memory. The sight of rolling hills on the East coast or foothills on the Northwest is very absorbing to me still. The sight of a dancer moving across a floor or stage, an expert skier running a downhill or slalom course, and the sound contours of music by Brahms and Schubert also bring joy for me. I think it is really a lucky thing for our civilization that human beings can find aesthetic experience to be so profoundly satisfying.