

WORKS IN THIS EXHIBITION

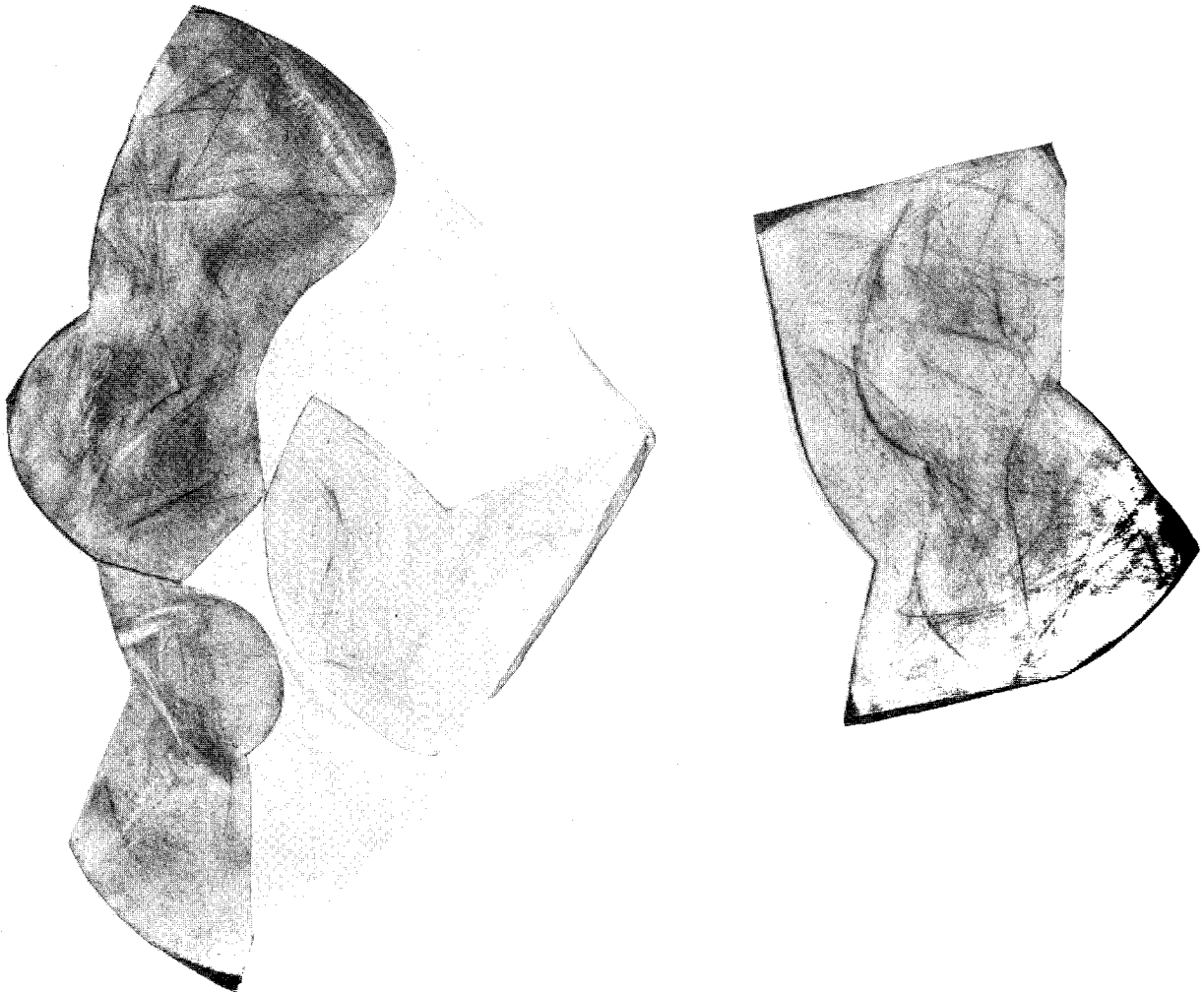
August 21 1979
acrylic and pastel on paper
mounted on canvas
10 x 50 feet
lent by the artist, courtesy of
Studio la Città

October 1979
acrylic and pastel on paper
mounted on canvas
10 x 10 feet
lent by the artist, courtesy of
Gallerie Chantal Crousel-Svennung

February 15 1980
acrylic and pastel on paper
mounted on canvas
77 x 83 inches
lent by Ronald Najar

July 22 1980
acrylic and pastel on paper
mounted on canvas
151 x 101 inches
lent by the artist

June 5 1980
acrylic and pastel on paper
mounted on canvas
108 x 112 inches
lent by the artist, courtesy of
Hal Bromm Gallery



ESSAY ON LYNN UMLAUF BY KLAUS KERTESS

Sitting on the sandy beach, in cross-legged concentration—her back turned to the incessantly foaming chant of the stormy ocean. Facing the grass-peppered dunes and scanning the sky as clouds race to veil, then unveil, the sun. Soon she will want to swim, but now she must draw.

Lynn Umlauf draws at the beach. Lynn Umlauf draws from the beach. Lynn Umlauf does not draw the beach.

What does she see? How does she see? The art writer thinks he knows. He must try to transplant the artist's eyes onto the page. A cruel operation, but sometimes it helps others to see themselves.

She writes of the work: "The distance the eye can travel between one color and another can be measured by the form and natural color of canvas or by the bare white wall which the forms are nailed to. Shadows make these distances pronounced and crisper the forms.

"The more space that a painting takes up the more I like to let my eyes travel around each configuration of colored paper, canvas, and shadowed distances between the walls, ceiling and floor of the room the painting is in. I think of the drawing with pastel on paper as an extension of the cut edges of paper and canvas and as a means of expanding and contracting the surface color."

The work engages. To engage (the dictionary states): "to bind by a promise; pledge . . . to interlock with; mesh together." Lynn Umlauf's paintings pledge themselves to the wall. Stretchers make paintings separate and aloof from the wall. Umlauf eschews stretchers. Pastels are applied to paper, which is cut into a shape (or shapes) and applied to the wall—nails make the point. Shadows give witness to the truth ("crisper the forms"). The relation of the painting to the wall is mirrored within the painting itself: the canvas adheres to and pulls from the wall; the paper adheres to and pulls from the canvas. The canvas gives a more physical edge to the paper; the shadowed wall gives a more physical edge to the canvas.

This relation between painting and wall has grown more complex since it began in 1970. The first paintings are single rectangles, usually vertical; these give way to works made up of closely spaced rectangles of like value but varying hues. The slightly irregular curl of the edges created by the pull of the paper glued to the canvas activates the spaces between the rectangles—pushing and pulling across the wall. Around 1974 this magnetic attraction is intensified and condensed to two forms pushing and pulling each other into and out of shapes. A slightly tapered vertical rectangle pulls its like-sized partner into a ziggurat shape. A square contracts its edges as it bounces from the rounded hypotenuse of a triangle. The wall is more intensely energized by the irregular negative space created by the paper and canvas shapes. The rationale for the shaping and placing is a purely visual one—optical logic not verbal logic.

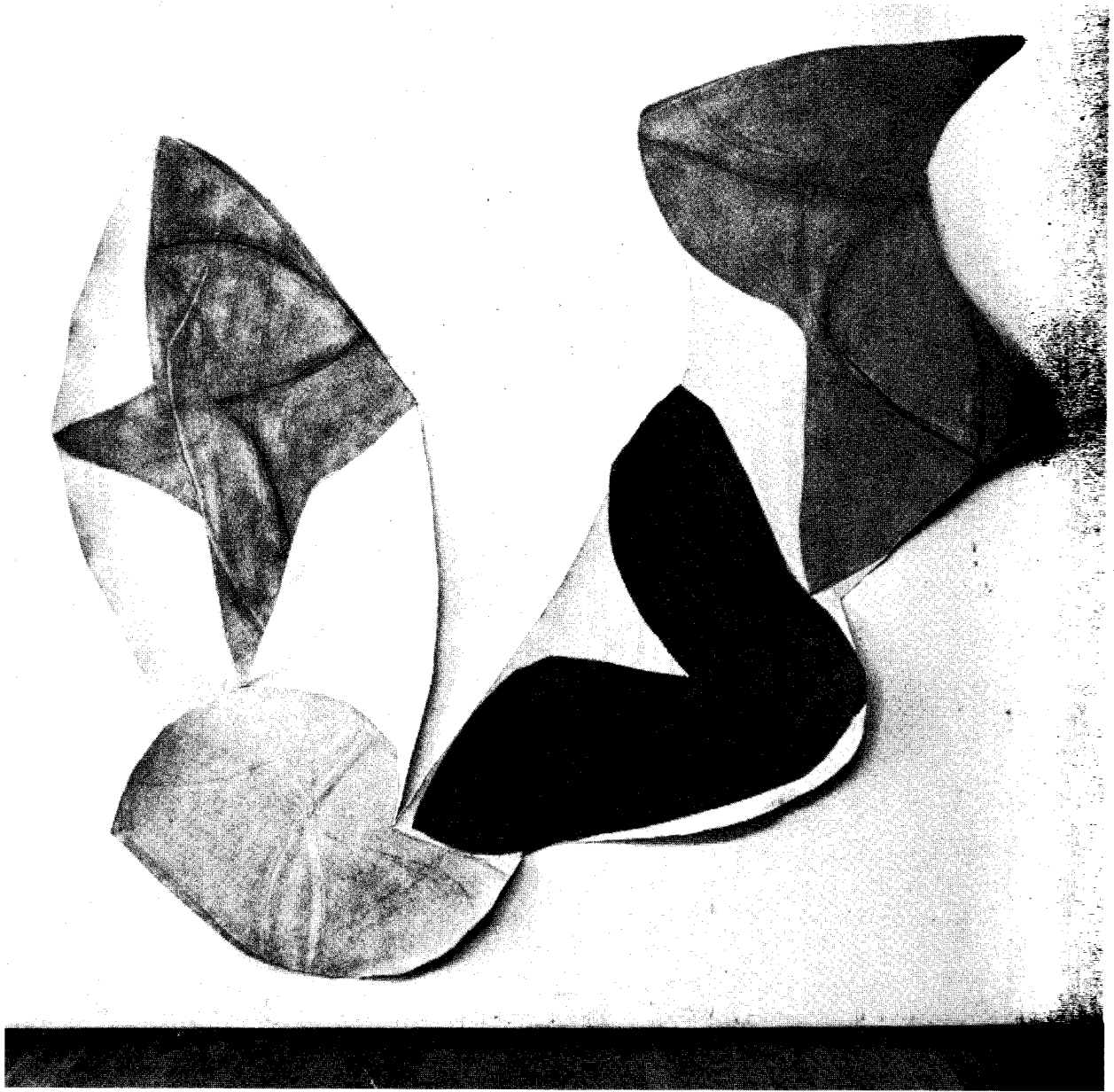
By 1978 the shapes have twisted and pulled each other into more evocative forms. They approach the organic, with their slow, irregular curves. They are not abstracted from nature but abstracted from experiences of nature. At the same time, they reflect the tension that holds together paper, glue, and canvas; the bending and curling seem to grow out of the materials themselves and, indeed, do, in part. The shapes are evocative not specific, not formed but in a state of formation. The point is not to arrest the eye in static contemplation of individual forms but to draw it into a dance across the wall.

As the shapes become more organic they tend to pull in on themselves with a centripetal force. One piece of canvas can now be host to two or three shapes of paper, creating a constant tension between the shape made by the exterior contour and the shapes within. Each interior shape is still cut from a separate piece of paper, asserting itself independently but reacting to its neighbors and the canvas. The canvas begins to act more as the wall did previously. Wall, canvas, and paper become multiple layers of skin, adhering to and peeling away from each other. They all constantly form and re-form each other.

As the paper adheres to the canvas, color adheres to the paper. The colors and shapes are made for each other; they are only separated by writing about them. Like the shapes, the colors are not specific; they are drawn from the well of ambiguity. Pale tones that can evoke the earth, the sky, and the sea but can almost never be connected to any one phenomenon. The colors can be identified but only with their shapes; one could say that the colors and the shapes mirror each other in suffusion. The color gives form to the shape as the shape gives form to the color.

The medium is pastel—rubbed on and rubbed down until it becomes part of the surface of the paper. Since the spring of 1979 there has been an increasing amount of drawing within the one color of each shape, so that now there are drawn shapes playing with and against the cut-out shapes, as though shadows have now come to play in the interior as well as on the wall. The drawn shapes are open and push to the edges of the cut-out paper shapes. The color of the cut-out paper shapes now bleeds onto the canvas shape. This layering and multiplicity of shapes and edges brings a new breadth and breath to the work, which are accompanied by a more generous scale. The eye moves more slowly and deeply as it arabesques across the wall. Without losing any of its initial clarity, the work has become less declarative and more mysterious. Now we must learn to measure illusion and ambiguity, not just fact. A rich bouquet of experience is spread before the eye.

And now we must permit Lynn Umlauf her swim.



46 Lynn Umlauf *June 5 1980* photo: Lynn Umlauf