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A SENSE OF PLACE

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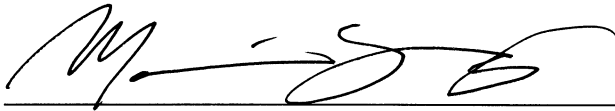
A SENSE OF PLACE

Thesis approved:


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“All you’re really trying to do is figure out the exact color of the sky, or count the whitecaps risen in a certain square of the sea, or make sense of the almost infinite distance between yourself and the person driving his car on the lonely dead-straight road below, you don’t want to engage in familiar lingering intimations, allusions, all that compacted striated terra-firma consideration, but instead simply stir with this special velocity that is in itself worth the whole of any voyage, this alternating tug and weightlessness of your constant departure.”

This passage is from *Aloft*, by Chang-Rae Lee, a novel about a man approaching old age and realizing he hasn’t accomplished what he wanted to because life blazes by so quickly.

I’ve always been attracted to the big skies, the precise colors and the unique quality of light of my native state, particularly of West Texas. Visually, this landscape grabs me with its powerful, wind-swept energy. And there’s a strange beauty in that energy that often goes unnoticed and unappreciated. It feels like home, and yet it can’t be, not now anyway, and some of my work reflects this sense of loss. The road trip *velocity* of being pulled weightlessly through this region has to be enough for now. And making these paintings has become a way of occupying these places in a way that works for me. (*plate 1, Candelaria*)

My work is about communicating a sense of place.

Much of West Texas appears to be caught in a time warp, and I try to capture its timeless quality by observing the ordinary, the overlooked, the unassuming and the isolated. (*plate 2, Pecos DQ*) In the temporal quality of the man-made, I try to find moments that suggest a just finished or impending narrative. (*plate 3, Ojinaga*)

I want my work to evoke emotion and create a sense of longing and desire -- to be pulled by the force of the land; to be there in that quiet emptiness and simply experience it, see it, hear it, feel it and capture the duality of absence and presence with a vague sense of something eternal -- often shown by the rapid decay of the man-made in contrast with the primal force of the land. (*plate 4, 114 West*)

My primary visual influence has not so much been other artists as it has been the movies. Especially movies where the setting is key to the story, such as, *Giant, Lonesome Dove, The Big Country, Hud, The Last Picture Show, Lone Star, Places in the Heart, Comes a Horseman, The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada, A Trip to Bountiful, Off the Map* and *Paris, Texas*; not all shot in Texas, but mostly. While on the road, the windshield becomes my letterbox movie screen and editing equipment. And I look not so much for a place but for the conditions of a situation, like the light and the air and the feeling of movement, the feeling of time at a location. (*plate 5, Patricia*) It's these situations I happen upon that grab me, and the cinematic, panoramic format of much of my work is the way I see and think of West Texas and parts of New Mexico. The painting is a movie, and

the location is the main character. I love the wide vistas of road trips, and in transferring this “sense” to painting, a panoramic format engages a viewer’s peripheral vision and sense of space. (*plate 6, South of Lamesa*)

Many of these paintings are based on cinematic camera moves, most often panning left to right. These panning shots place the key element of a scene, like a building, a road or a mountain, in its environment and keeps the painting from simply becoming a portrait of that subject, but rather, putting it in a context, so it’s not an anecdote but a piece of a bigger story. (*plate 13, Old Henry’s House*). *Comfort* is actually a full circle from a low shot, with the viewer / camera in one spot turning completely around. (*plate 15, Comfort*) *Waxahachie #1* was shot from a bridge to simulate the feel of a boom shot. (*plate 10, Waxahachie #1*)

I often work from reference snap shots chained together side-by-side, like the succession of images in a strip of movie film. Low-angle shots, high-angle shots, dolly and zoom shots are all simulated to help achieve the desired mood, eye movement and point of entry into a painting. This is my way of presenting and intensifying the atmospheric qualities and colors that characterize my impression of a specific place, while steering the viewer through these scenes as I see them.

I’m also intrigued with the whole concept of time, and how to me it feels cyclical, not linear. Some of these scenes could be in the 1920’s or some other decade, but closer inspection reveals some detail, like a late model vehicle, traffic light or

microwave tower, letting you know that the time is now. The scenes in the paintings are not romanticized or heroic. I know most of these locations like the back of my hand, and although all of these paintings are from scenes I've witnessed during the last two years, most of them are places I've visited many times. Along these roads, past, present and future are blurred, and memory and reality connect. In some ways it's an exploration of my own past. (*plate 7, Ballinger*)

In many of the worn and weathered homes and buildings depicted, I want to suggest a richness of history not readily apparent to a passerby. I paint these sites with a reverence, with a sincere devotion to unlocking secrets and mysteries hidden beneath the aged and tattered surfaces. Rather than serving as an open invitation, the paintings encourage us to complete the story, to imagine a past, a present, a future and all the rituals along the way. (*plate 8, Waxahachie #2*)

We can imagine what may have just happened, or is about to happen, beyond the boundaries of the frame and the remoteness of the environment. Even when people are not present, I encourage you to imagine them into being. And when figures are present, they often appear isolated in their activities.

There's a sense of *velocity* in that as many of these places are quietly crumbling, the land reclaims itself offering up signs that as humans we are simply passing through, and many of our endeavors are folly. (*plate 9, Ruidosa, Texas*)

In another sense, the intermediary points along a journey, that most people sweep past without noticing, become symbols that the journey is more important, and often more intriguing than the destination, and that the road becomes a metaphor for living -- for life. I'm drawn to crossroads and train tracks and highways as symbols of life choices. We are always at one crossroad or another. (*plate 10, Waxahachie #1*)

Some of my paintings communicate themes of isolation, yet with a hopeful sense of appreciation for these sites. Remote parts of Texas still feel like a pristine wilderness filled with promise and as yet unspoiled by the corrupting influences of human aspirations. As global warming and air pollution in the Fort Worth, Dallas area worsen, some of these places feel like they might make a comeback and be viable choices for the future. (*plate 11, North of Balmorhea*)

Some locations feel sacred, because they radiate a mysterious, powerful energy or vibe. To me, they literally vibrate. New Mexico and Far West Texas are powerful places; I can feel it. (*plate 12, Chinati Hot Springs*)

When I stop at a site and I'm still long enough to see fully, to see well, to see light and shadow, to feel air movement, I get some sense of the spirit of the people who settled and built these places. Was it a pragmatic tenacity that initially led people to these spots? Were they pulled by the spirits of the people who inhabited the land before them? Did they sense previous energy, or did they create it? Was it a lack of imagination or weariness that they rooted there instead

of pushing on in search of a better place? Were they settling for less to settle there? (*plate 13, Old Henry's House*)

I'm fascinated with people's relationship with the land, by what and how they choose to build. The best architecture of a place is usually created by the earliest settlers, because they had to use the materials at hand, and thus their structures fit the land. (*plate 14, Pinto Canyon Road #1*)

To me, the ideal scene is a sweeping vista. And to heighten this sensation, sometimes I like to warp the space to represent the time warp. (*plate 15, Comfort*)
And sometimes, if the moment is just right, it is simply enough, and no manipulation of the space is needed. (*plate 16, Texas Theater, Marfa*)

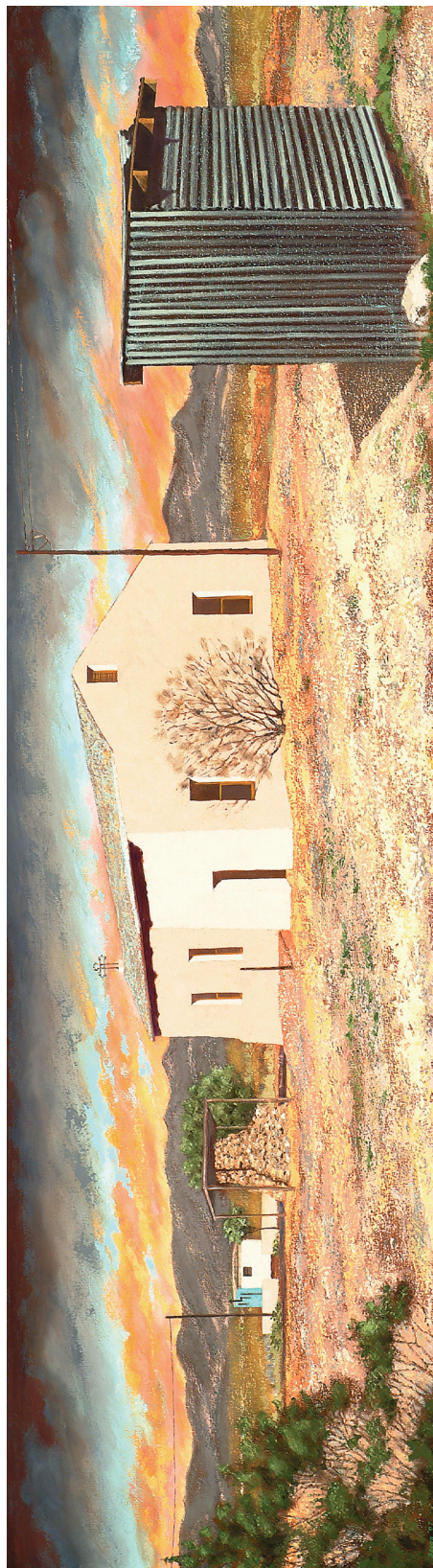
Many small West Texas towns are in a stage of economic decline, so they radiate other kinds of loss. I've witnessed, just during my life time, some small towns die and disappear. The climate can be so severe that once windows are broken and roofs start leaking and the elements manage to get indoors, homes and buildings compost themselves, melt-down and literally disappear. Dust in the wind. (*plate 17, Clairemont*)

My work is not about nostalgia or any desire to turn back time, it's about an internal hunt for intuitive simplicity and a search for quiet, unspoiled places with clean air to breathe. It is the basic human need and desire to find a spiritual and

emotional connection with the physical environment that connects me to these places. (*plate 18, Pinto Canyon Road #2*)

Ken Marvel, co-owner of the LewAllen Contemporary in Santa Fe writes, "Nature's cycle of decay strips away the arrogance of man's monuments and in the return to nature there is rebirth, the possibility to restore the land. And similarly in man himself there is the opportunity to return to the memory of the sublime and natural grace, free from the corrosive effects of denial, guilt and fear. Throughout history, mankind has sought an intimacy with the world that surrounds him ... In the first half of the 21st century, man has created the capacity to measure the earth and its forces with previously unthought of scientific accuracy. Modern technology and nature co-exist in our present day landscape ... and the modern landscape painters' retreat to nature is accompanied by concerns of industrial encroachment, pollution and global warming. Yet, the impulse for the landscape as subject for psychic and spiritual renewal is just as strong as it has been in previous centuries."

Plate 1



Candelaria
oil on canvas
20 x 72"
2007

Plate 2



Pecos DQ
oil on canvas
24 x 36"
2006

Plate 3



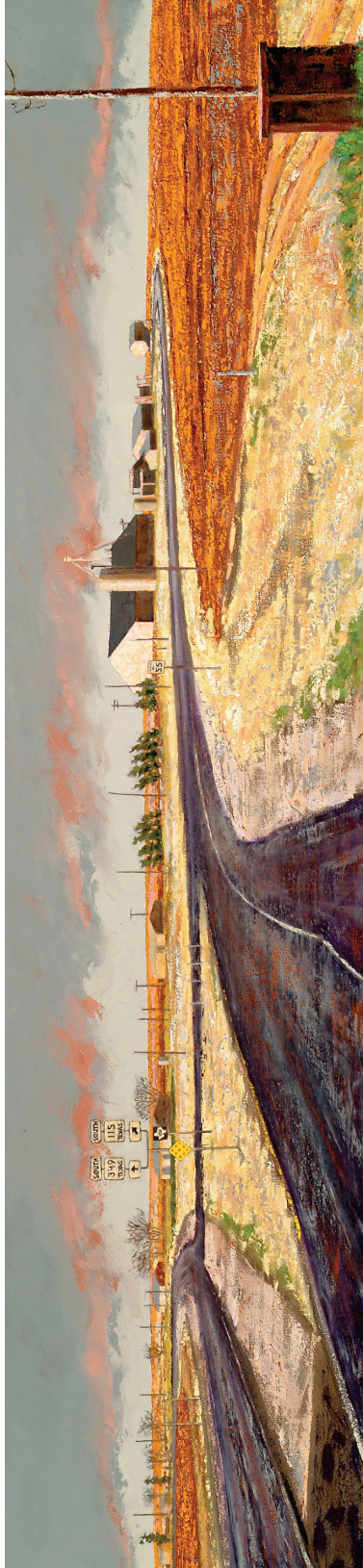
Ojinaga
oil on canvas
20 x 24"
2006

Plate 4



114 West
oil on canvas
13 x 100"
2007

Plate 5



Patricia
oil on canvas
19 x 80"
2007

Plate 6



South of Lamesa
oil on canvas
22 x 72"
2006

Plate 7



Ballinger
oil on canvas
14 x 72"
2005

Plate 8



Waxahachie #2
oil on canvas
12 x 44"
2006

Plate 9



Ruidosa, Texas
oil on canvas
13 x 100"
2006

Plate 10



Waxahachie #1
oil on canvas
24 x 48"
2006

Plate 11



North of Balmorhea
oil on canvas
18 x 72"
2006

Plate 12



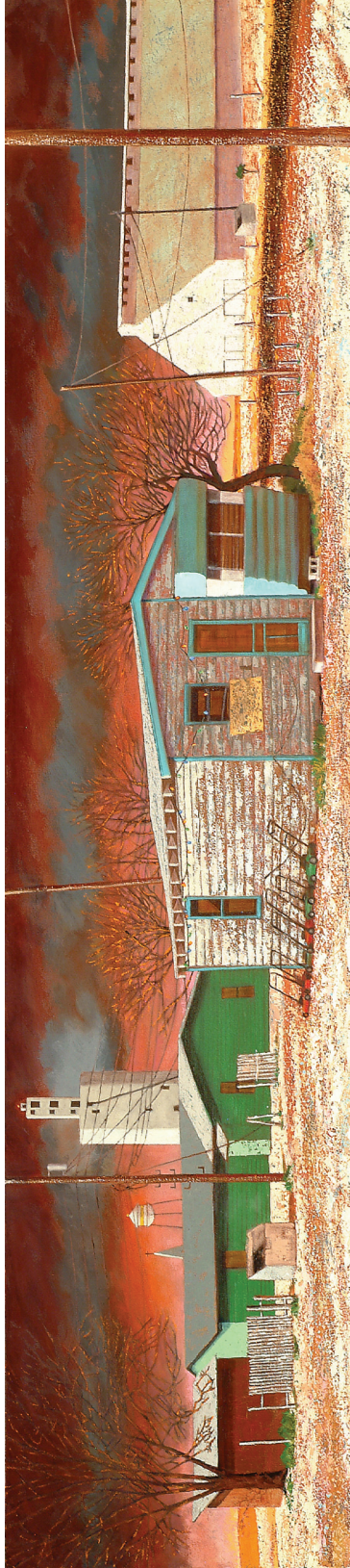
Chinati Hot Springs

oil on canvas

48 x 30"

2006

Plate 13



Old Henry's House
oil on canvas
16.5 x 72"
2007

Plate 14



Pinto Canyon Road #1
oil on canvas
24 x 17"
2006

Plate 15



Comfort
oil on canvas
14 x 172"
2007

Plate 16



Texas Theater, Marfa
oil on canvas
20 x 24"
2006

Plate 17



Clatremont
oil on canvas
20 x 60"
2007

Plate 18



Pinto Canyon Road # 2
oil on canvas
60 x 25"
2007

Vita

Randall Alan Bacon was born December 22, 1957, in Abilene, Texas. He is the son of Richard and Betty Bacon. A 1976 graduate of Cooper High School, Abilene, he attended the University of Texas at Austin, 1976-77, majoring in studio art, and he received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree with a major in journalism and a minor in art from Southern Methodist University, Dallas, in 1980.

Bacon worked for 22 years in advertising, the last 15 of those as president of Stuart Bacon Advertising and Public Relations in Fort Worth, a company he co-founded with Jim Stuart.

Enrolling in 2005 majoring in painting, Bacon held a graduate assistantship in the Master of Fine Arts program at Texas Christian University and graduated in May 2007. Bacon is represented by David Dike Fine Art, Dallas.

Abstract

I have always been attracted to the quality of light, precise colors and big skies of my native Texas and employ them to create a regional sense of place in my work. My representational landscapes often have a narrative, cinematic feel as if the landscape itself is a character in a story. The road trip velocity of being pulled weightlessly through this region raises themes of isolation, loss and of time and how quickly it passes. I want my work to evoke emotion and create a sense of longing and desire -- to be pulled by the force of the land, to be there in that quiet emptiness and simply experience it, see it, hear it, feel it and capture the duality of absence and presence with a vague sense of something eternal. These paintings often show the rapid decay of the man-made in contrast with the primal force of the land. I'm fascinated with people's relationship with the land by what and how they choose to build.