

The background of the cover is a complex, abstract pattern. It features a dense arrangement of wavy, organic lines in shades of grey and white, overlaid with various geometric shapes such as rectangles, triangles, and circles. Some of these shapes are outlined in black, while others are filled with a light grey or white color. The overall effect is a textured, almost topographical map-like appearance.

RETURN TO THE VIEWER

**SELECTED
ART REVIEWS**

**BY
MATTHEW
KANGAS**

CHAPTER 81
JEFFREY BISHOP
(B. 1948)

SEATTLE:
CRAIG LANGAGER, NORIE SATO,
KEITH BECKLEY, JEFFREY BISHOP

Craig Langager's 1977 solo show of abstract paintings consisted primarily of constructions of handcast cotton pulp paper, Rhoplex and pigment in which the most recognizable image was that of an aerial landscape view. Rectangles with deckled edges, they also revolved around what Langager calls "atmospheric" color: sky blue, honey yellow, hazy pink. His new work shows a radical shift in color and scale. The dour, earthy palette is reminiscent of Brice Marden and certain paintings of Clyfford Still. The enlarged size sets in motion the underlying theme in Langager's art: the relationship between geographical environment and contemporary art.

Not strictly paintings per se (the pigment is mixed into the material) nor sculptures in a traditional freestanding sense, the new pieces fall into two other categories. Most of the exhibition space is filled with large (5-foot square) slabs hung on the wall. Two smaller pieces consist of five "planks" each; they jut out from the wall six inches, and extend horizontally six or seven feet. Both types are fabricated from similar material, however; the former is colored Portland cement poured over rigid urethane planes and the latter is cement over absorbent honeycombed fiberglass.

The urethane-based pieces vacillate between a straightforward depiction of geodetic survey or topographical maps (such as those issued by the U. S. Government) and a more painterly attempt to control color and surface. This dichotomy leads to a richly connotative art. Viewers are torn between accepting them as unusual cartoon versions of "strategic" sites, records of the aftermath of man's intrusion on the natural environment or, more simply, as large geometrically marked-off blocks of one color with the same minute and chromatically varied surface activity present in the earlier "Aeroscapes."

Rangefinder, *Tangent* and *Zoned* record satellitelike views of architectural interventions upon the land. (Langager's art has always been connected to the idea of shifting land masses but his current work as coordinator of the King County Arts Commission's forthcoming international symposium on land reclamation art projects may have had an even greater impact on these tendencies.) He has gone a long way toward exploring multi-value potentials of gray, that familiar hue in Seattle's rainy skies. Drab mustard covers the whole of *Rangefinder* but beneath that wash, violet, blue, green, red and ochre emerge when viewed close up. The bellying surface of these five-, seven- and nine-sided and faceted wall sculptures is wrinkled in the

ing the exultant chromaticism of Shigeo Kubota, Sato's colors are expressed in long, thin lines or shapes (*Farewell to Triangle*) and are always representational. She shares a penchant for a geometric formal vocabulary with certain other Seattle abstractionists (sculptor Robert Maki, painters Mary Ann Peters, John Edwards-Rajananen, Francis Celentano) who believe in the possibility of deeply personal statements coming from a use of carefully handled, simple shapes; like her colleagues, Sato's development continues with cautious but sure-footed confidence.

Keith Beckley and Jeffrey Bishop go Sato one better and completely dismiss color. Not content with Langager's switch to earth tones, Beckley eschews applied coloration altogether and sticks with materials picked up at the corner hardware store: brass and copper wire, string, thread, fake marble, glass (shattered) and Plexiglas.

His *Three-Dimensional Installation* articulates some anger nonetheless, so defiant is it in not offering viewers "material" comfort present even in Judd or Andre. These thin-lined wall/floor constructions are skeletal in character and bear strong resemblance to some other recent floor-to-wall art, specifically Robert Rauschenberg's "Jammers" series. Beckley has ripped away the floridly colored fabrics but kept the bamboo-stick lean-to extending at an angle from the wall. Discarding the spacious quality in "Jammers" lent by the textiles, Beckley's installations might better fall into the category of drawing anyway, I think, and what he does call drawings (also on display) are englassed assemblages of brass and copper wire, striated palm sticks, lichen-covered alder twigs beside small pages of musical scorepaper and Mexican schoolchildren's notebooks. *Objets trouvés* one may concede, but I'm still asking for either more information on which to base appreciation or a more creatively satisfying alteration of the existing data.

Jeffrey Bishop is represented by two installations (also floor-to-wall), *Debris/Distraktion* and *Equator*, and a series of compressed charcoal drawings, "Drift." The cement hunks, string, styrofoam and scrap angle iron come straight from Boeing Aviation Surplus Co. but their placement on and off the wall is light years away from Kurt Schwitters or John Chamberlain's sculptural manipulation of objects once found. Deferring rather to a "phenomenology of materials," letting them make their own statements of "essence" through a meticulously controlled placing, Bishop adopts Minimalist rhetoric on behalf of the materials, industrial integrity but reserves the designer's right to position according to taste.

More successfully reductive than Beckley, Bishop's newer work rejects the sensuous watercolor wash over green engineering graph paper in his "Prairie Schooner" series. Now, the installations and drawings are vehemently antipainterly and one wonders how much has been lost in the search for crystalline composition.

Equator falters somewhat as a wall/floor encounter and actually works better for me as a three-dimensional "sketch" for a two-dimensional drawing. The farther away one stands in the gallery, the flatter the whole conglomeration appears and the more forceful its message. This is why the Drift series ("drifting" positions of four irregular polygons) is the most successful in expressing Bishop's overriding concern

with order, schema and a subtly emerging pattern based on information removal. The rubbings and blottings beside each dense wedge-shape create a poetic halo effect, rendering the drawings thus more pleasingly complex and less harshly austere than the installations.

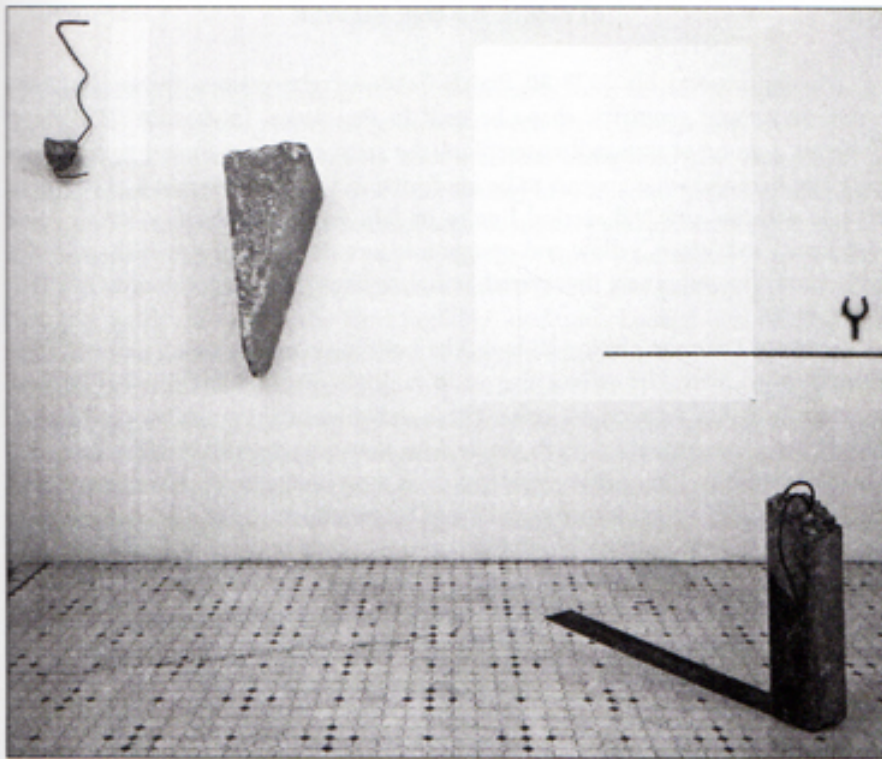
Artforum, May, 1979

SEATTLE JEFFREY BISHOP AT LINDA FARRIS

My reservations about the art of Jeffrey Bishop has exhibited since his 1977 graduation from the University of Washington have concerned the impasse at which the artist had seemed to arrive. His formally reiterative, bleached-out, late-Minimal style and his attempt to use personal symbols were at odds. The work seemed uncomfortably rooted in a too familiar, formalist vein. But Bishop's first full-scale solo exhibition indicates that he has resolved that difficulty for the time being. He has emerged as a leading light among younger Pacific Northwest artists seeking a rapprochement between a pristine clarity of shape and a personally expressive, even emotional, content (others are Richard Rezac, Lisa Zingarelli, Claudia Hollander and Steven D. Thompson). In Bishop's case, the reintroduction of color in his recent work has been one key; so has a marked softening of hard edges and an increasingly complicated composition. Bishop still works from the concept of a rigorously ordered personal universe, but now topographical patterns, grids and diagonal lines have been joined by watercolor blurs, chalk smudges and wavy curves.

In spite of its new content, "Trajectories" (the title of Bishop's show) dealt primarily with a line's contradictory ability to refer both to the flat surface of a painting and to its illusory depths. The exhibition contained two suites of watercolors, four large charcoal drawings and a wall-size installation, *Debris/Distraktion: Adriatic 2*. These works indicated Bishop's considerable advance at making the most of a willfully narrow vocabulary of images, which he has now expanded by means of design, by his variety of materials, and by his recent recourse to sensory effects.

Of all the pieces in the exhibition, the installation was the most directly related to Bishop's older work in its severity of presentation and strict avoidance of emotional ramifications. Its basic form, a large irregular polygon painted on the wall, was criss-crossed by slightly arcing metal rods and by two thick, black-painted bands. A white upright wooden rectangle attached to the work's base near the gallery floor was topped by a painted concrete form with two protruding steel reinforcement bars. A small, black-banded quadrangle was also painted at the right side of the polygon. Even in this impersonal work, the rather horn-like bars seemed to function as a personal symbol of the artist, since they have appeared so frequently elsewhere in his work.



Above, Jeffrey Bishop: *Equator*, 1979, concrete, paint, steel and string, 102 x 162 x 70". Photo: Richard Lewison

Below, Jeffrey Bishop: *Panop Anik*, 1993, oil on canvas, 72 x 96". Private collection. Photo: Mark Van S.



Moving beyond his 1978-80 Prairie Schooner watercolors, Bishop has now varied the central geometric shape he used in that series. In *Assassin (William of Ockham)*, a group of six small watercolors, the artist combines lines, graphs, color-spectrum bars and what appears to be another stab at personal symbology—a right triangle with an attached vertical line to its left. In these paintings, subtly hued triangles of red, green, yellow and orange mitigate the bluntness of Bishop's black shapes and also accentuate the layered, template-like appearance common to much of his work.

Untitled D/D, the charcoals, look like building plans or aerial views of fragmented ruins. Here, the artist's interest in multiple directions of line has become more explicit. Uncluttered by color, these drawings suggest the process Bishop might have gone through to reach the decisive shapes of the wall installation.

Backward, the other suite of watercolors, is most indicative of the artist's change to a more visually varied layout as well as of his new openness to references beyond the drawing board. Spotty with graphite smudges over broad, horizontal bands of blue, green or red, these works continue to use sparse, diagonal lines but also begin to evoke maritime or meteorological associations. It is this shift, not the artist's consistent formal properties, that provides the exhibition's major curiosity and hope for future developments.

Art in America, Summer 1981

SEATTLE JEFFREY BISHOP AT LINDA FARRIS

Jeffrey Bishop's paintings and watercolors have always set geometric shapes in a liquid atmosphere. This ambitious survey of 30 works created in 1993 that brought his endeavors to a new level of achievement. The strict linear forms are now joined by both organic shapes and arabesque elements, all of which combine in paintings that are more complicated, more spatially complex and more colorful than before. The large oils underscore the artist's growing command of the shallow picture plane of much modernist art. A lateral (often left-to-right) movement of dark to light captures a sense of passing time or changing weather. By slightly modeled and shading some of the elements, Bishop plays with the illusion of things floating on a flat surface yet sidesteps the cartoon quality of such treatments in the works of, for example, Peter Schuyff. Filmy fading light suggests an underground or underwater setting with indeterminate light source and sites the work on an intellectual rather than emotional or humorous plane.

Smaller, nearly square paintings like *Persephone Non Plussed*, *In Intimty Pressed*, and *Od Duncie Cirqueling* show light-colored barrierlike patterns that bleed through to a brighter "sky" or "water" behind. Over and over, the viewer is caught off guard

by the fence effect of the configuration of elements, only to realize that the paintings' power lies in the perpetual tension between active foreground and a deeper background. Simpler compositions with a central black hole (*Ou Trou L'oeil*) or floating black balls (*Swallowing and Fountaining*) have a certain power of their own, however. Thus it seems that the sense of organic mystery and painterly effect can still be intriguing even when Bishop goes no further. Three watercolors (9 by 7 inches each) hard back to the "Prairie Schooner" series (1980) and confirm that his most intimate touch emerges in the most liquid of mediums. Looked into deeply, these works show a limitless space absent in the larger works.

The most successful of the 6-by-8-foot canvases retain the refreshingly tentative qualities of the watercolors. Of these, *Panop Anik* best captures the interplay of foreground and back, emerging and decaying forms, static and passing time. With dirty acid greens mitigated by red, brown, and black, it also contains a black "ghost" column on its left-hand side. Here the dynamism is best balanced between horizontal and vertical movement.

Art in America, July, 1994