

# Documents Northwest:

The PONCHO Series

Jeffrey Bishop



Seattle Art Museum  
August 25-September 18, 1983

## Jeffrey Bishop

In a large, high-ceilinged space near Pioneer Square, maritime maps adorn the upper reaches of the white walls, and books on physics and aesthetics fill the shelves and tables. Jeffrey Bishop has worked for some seven years in this spare environment, one of two studio spaces between which he divides his time. The space is brightly illuminated by large, west-facing windows. One wall holds a series of temporary installations—ever changing assemblages of objects—that explore spatial and perceptual problems. Another wall is covered with long rolls of paper for experimenting with new images and materials that will become part of the next series of large paintings or drawings. The room's ongoing experimentation and exploration produce the works in watercolor, charcoal, and paint that have brought the artist critical attention on the West Coast.

The second studio, in the artist's home, is a small, compressed space, its walls lined with flat files and open drying racks for watercolors in progress. Stacks of watercolor boards with fresh paper taped in place further narrow the room as they wait to be picked up and worked on at the spacious table that is the heart of the space. This is an introspective and closely focused environment, in which Bishop creates the small watercolors that frequently signal a fresh direction for the larger works to come in the downtown studio. Just such a group of watercolors forms the basis of this exhibition and introduces a new complexity to the artist's work.

Like all Bishop's works, the watercolors are developed in a series, so that a set of concerns/problems can be explored and re-explored until the maximum number of solutions is found. Bishop uses the small-scale watercolors as points of departure, discovery grounds, for ideas that will later appear in the paintings, charcoals, and wall installations. The watercolors have previously focused on a central image floating in a deep, ambiguous space, freed from gravity, the forms slowly cleaving apart. These works have evolved into more and more complex compositions as Bishop has expanded the range of color and the use of transparent and opaque pigments, and as he has introduced the arcing line of a trajectory cutting across the figures and space. Bishop has defined these trajectory lines as the schematization of an event or memory; the work thus makes palpable the experience of reaching into the space of memory. With this device, the artist visualizes a constant continuum of molecule following molecule across time.

In the watercolor and acrylic paintings of 1982, Bishop introduced didactically paired words as part of his iconography. The pairs of words provide at best an oblique referent to the images in the paintings; they exist primarily within themselves, unlike those in Edward Ruscha's paintings, where the painting and the words are inseparable. In the current work the words are both more decorative and better integrated into the composition, rather than floating out on the frontal plane of the work. Bishop uses the words to provide an additional layer of clues for deciphering the associations within the watercolors. Selecting words with a range of allusions both inside and outside the work, he has moved from paired words to a single word or a composite in the latest paintings. He systematically arrays a single word across the top of the work, using the individual letters as additional compositional elements.

The newest watercolors display a much lighter, brighter palette, an almost Mediterranean range of hues. Bishop has also shifted the format to either an extended horizontal that plays with the peripheries of vision, or a squat T-shape. Both require the viewer to scan back and forth across the work to comprehend its totality. Dividing many of the works in this exhibition is a new, enigmatic image that emphasizes the format and introduces an almost emotional quality to the watercolors. Bishop has expanded on the dense trajectories of the acrylic paintings to create a flamelike flow of pigment up through the center of the composition—a purely physical rush of paint splitting through the rationality of the space.

Like the watercolors, Bishop's wall-sited works play with the viewer's perceptions of space and have increasingly used symbolic, even iconic, images. Created to occupy a specific wall surface, the works employ spatial concepts developed in the ongoing experimentation in the studio. They use a wide range of materials and objects—from paint and charcoal to lengths of string and chunks of concrete. Bishop eloquently orchestrates these diverse materials to chart a place or the course of an event across the wall's surface.

In earlier installations, Bishop has used the painted planes of geometric figures to break into the wall surface in an illusionary way, shifting the wall perceptually from a vertical plane to a horizontal one. The installation in this exhibition is the first in which Bishop has broken into the plane of the wall by constructing a second wall some three feet in front of the gallery wall and creating the sensation, in the artist's words, of the "wall imploding." This is also the first time the



artist has incorporated light sources within the work, rather than relying on a painted illusion to highlight and shift the form. In addition, color plays a new role in this work. Bishop's palette has expanded considerably beyond the black and white of previous wall-sited works, bringing a new set of concerns to bear in constructing the piece. Where once Bishop was content to balance a few spare elements—a trajectory line, a block of concrete, an oarlock, a black-and-white checkered rhomboid—he now layers enigmatic, archetypal motifs to create a surprisingly baroque reality. His inspiration here comes from the more complex, highly referential watercolors of recent months.

The large charcoal drawings in the exhibition share with the watercolors a new density of incident and lyricism. Moreover, they are the latest in an ongoing body of work in which the structure and nature of Bishop's spatial concerns are made evident.

Early charcoals were centrally organized around a monumental form that was fragmented and displaced in space. Subsequent series of drawings have dealt with more and more complex problems of perspective and with architecturally inspired forms that extend beyond the paper's edge. Meticulously manipulating the forms so that the viewer cannot be sure if he is seeing the black edge of a form or the shadows of a larger white shape, these drawings make visible the disintegration of a complex form in space.

The current drawings continue to use a geometry that is inspired by construction zones and architecture but contain more curvilinear shapes. The taut spareness of form has given way to a more sensuous and perhaps more broadly romantic quality. The earlier linear and planar structures have somewhat softened, becoming more lyrical in their effect. Laying out on stretched paper the geometric diagrams and forms that constitute the subject matter of this work, Bishop secures segments of the image with fixative and tapes selected edges before brushing the drawing's surface with water. The water drags a granular wash of charcoal out from the black images, creating a shading that accentuates the fragmentation of the architectonic form and intensifies the drawing's play with perspective.

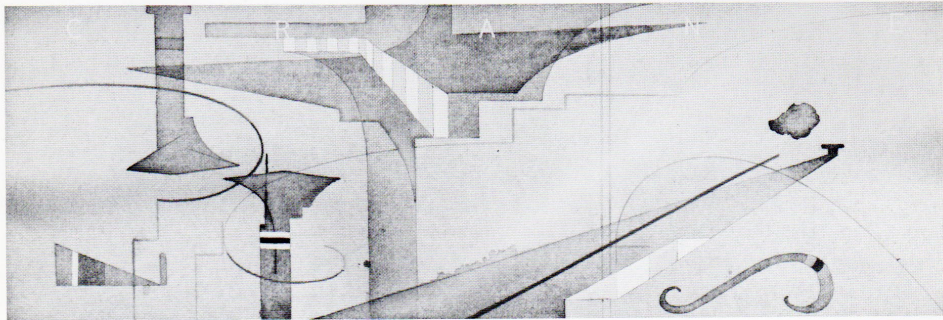
Jeffrey Bishop was the recipient of the 1982 Betty Bowen Memorial Award for emerging artists. His sprightly intelligence and technical skill hold great promise for the future. Bishop's eclectic formalism continues to develop a strong, individualized vision from a wide range of sources—phenomenology to postmodern architectural idioms, Russian constructivism to the works of Robert Smithson. Bishop's archetypal motifs present the viewer with an intellectualization of experience; they are metaphoric forays poised between suspension and evolution.

Bruce Guenther  
Curator of Contemporary Art

Prepared in conjunction with the exhibition *Jeffrey Bishop*, this is the first brochure in volume 1 of *Documents Northwest: The PONCHO Series*.

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CRANE, cat. no. 2.

## Biography

Born in 1949 in Berkeley, California

## Education

Boston University

Tufts University, B.F.A. 1973

Boston Museum School, Diploma 1973

University of Washington, M.F.A. 1977

## Awards

1982 Seattle Art Museum, Betty Bowen Memorial Award

1974 Boston Museum School, James William Paige Traveling Fellowship

## One-Person Exhibitions

1982, 1980 Linda Farris Gallery, Seattle, Washington.

1981 Mirage Gallery, Santa Monica, California.

## Selected Group Exhibitions

1982 San Francisco Museum of Modern Art Rental Gallery, San Francisco, California. *Seattle Artists*.

Westminster School, Simsbury, Connecticut. *Five Alumni*.

Blackfish Gallery, Portland, Oregon.

Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington. *The Collectors: An American Tradition: Abstraction*.

1981 Eastern Washington University, Cheney, Washington. *Washington Drawings* (traveling exhibition).

Mississippi Museum of Art, Jackson, Mississippi. *Collage and Assemblage* (traveling exhibition).

Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington. *The Washington Year/Shapes as Idea: Abstraction*.

Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, Washington. *Selections from the Modern Collection*.

1980 Cranberry Gallery, Ocean Spray, Inc. Plymouth, Massachusetts. *Contemporary Washington State Artists*.

Vladivostok, U.S.S.R. *Cornish Faculty*.

Eastern Washington University, Cheney, Washington. *Eight Seattle Artists*.

Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, California. *Eight Seattle Artists*.

Seattle Pacific University, Seattle, Washington. *Seattle Drawing Invitational*.

1979 Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, Washington. *Washington Open*. Western Washington University.

Bellingham, Washington. *Three Person Show*.

and/or Gallery, Seattle, Washington. *Some Seattle Drawing*.

1979, 1978 Linda Farris Gallery, Seattle, Washington.

1977

1978 The City of Seattle, Seattle, Washington. *Selects*.

Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, Washington. *New Ideas*.

1977 Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts. Traveling Fellowship Show.

## Collections

Hillis, Phillips, Cairncross, and Martin, Seattle, Washington.

Park Hilton Hotel, Seattle, Washington.

Physio-Control Corporation, Redmond, Washington.

Portable Works Collection, City of Seattle, Seattle, Washington.

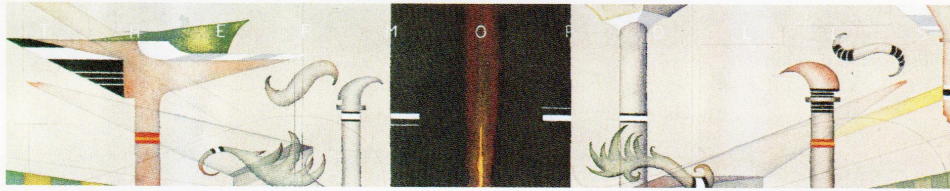
Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, Washington.

Security Pacific Bank, Seattle, Washington.

Sheraton Hotel, Seattle, Washington.

Southeast Banking Corporation, Miami, Florida.





THERMOPOLIS, cat. no. 14.  
Cover: WAKESBRIDGE, cat. no. 21.

## Checklist of the Exhibition

All works courtesy of the artist and the Linda Farris Gallery, Seattle.  
Height precedes width.

1. **AIR&NOWHERE**, 1983  
Painted construction  
11½' x 23' x 3'  
with assistance from  
Krakow Jennings Millett
2. **CRANE**, 1983  
Watercolor on paper  
5½" x 15"
3. **CRANE**, 1983  
Watercolor on paper  
5½" x 15"
4. **DELTA**, 1983  
Watercolor on paper  
5½" x 15"
5. **EROPHYSICS**, 1983  
Watercolor on paper  
5½" x 15"
6. **VULCAN**, 1983  
Watercolor on paper  
5½" x 15"
7. **EUCALYPTUS**, 1983  
Watercolor on paper  
5½" x 15"
8. **KNOTRIDGE**, 1983  
Watercolor on paper  
6½" x 18"
9. **WINGATE**, 1983  
Watercolor on paper  
6½" x 18"
10. **FULCRUM**, 1983  
Watercolor on paper  
7½" x 22"
11. **MANTA**, 1983  
Watercolor on paper  
7½" x 22"
12. **CRANE**, 1983  
Watercolor on paper  
7½" x 22"
13. **LILYIRON**, 1983  
Watercolor on paper  
5" x 22"
14. **THERMOPOLIS**, 1983  
Watercolor on paper  
5" x 22"
15. **ANVIL**, 1983  
Watercolor on paper  
5" x 22"
16. **OCKHAM**, 1983  
Watercolor on paper  
30" x 22"
17. **OCKHAM**, 1983  
Watercolor on paper  
30" x 22"
18. **BERKELEY**, 1983  
Watercolor on paper  
30" x 22"
19. **ERIEKNIGHTS**, 1983  
Watercolor on paper  
9" x 15"
20. **PELICAN**, 1983  
Watercolor on paper  
9" x 15"
21. **WAKESBRIDGE**, 1983  
Watercolor on paper  
9" x 15"
22. **MERRIMACK**, 1983  
Watercolor on paper  
9" x 15"
23. **TUSCALOOSA**, 1983  
Watercolor on paper  
9" x 15"
24. **GIDDING**, 1983  
Watercolor on paper  
9" x 15"
25. **BERKELEY**, 1983  
Watercolor on paper  
48" x 31"
26. **SPAREROS**, 1983  
Watercolor on paper  
3½" x 30"
27. **D/D**, 1983  
Charcoal on paper  
31" x 70"
28. **D/D**, 1983  
Charcoal on paper  
31" x 70"

## Bibliography

### Catalogues

- Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington. *The Washington Year: A Contemporary View, 1980-81*. Seattle: Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, 1982.
- Naumann, Francis. *Collage and Assemblage*. Jackson, Mississippi: Mississippi Museum of Art, 1981.
- Taylor, Barbara. *Eight Seattle Artists*. Los Angeles: Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, 1980.

### Periodicals

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- "Bishop Wins Bowen Art Award for 1982." *Seattle Times*, June 7, 1982.
- Campbell, R.M. "Three Young Artists at the Linda Farris Gallery." *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, March 2, 1979.
- . "Show Finds Artist in Transit." *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, November 11, 1982.
- . "Art Pavilion Show—Small is Beautiful." *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, March 15, 1979.
- . "Jeffrey Bishop Shows Potent Austerity." *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, December 27, 1980.
- Downey, Roger. "Jeffrey Bishop: A 'Painter' with String and Found Objects." *The Weekly*, December 17, 1980.
- Glowen, Ron. "Scientific Sources." *Artweek*, December 20, 1980.
- Hackett, Regina. "Jeffrey Bishop Wins Bowen Artist Award." *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, June 7, 1982.
- . "Hey You! Says the Art." *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, October 31, 1980.
- Kangas, Matthew. "Facets of Contemporary Drawing." *Artweek*, November 12, 1977.
- . "Part of the Way Up From Verbosity-As-Art." *Argus*, March 10, 1978.
- . "Sculpture in Seattle." *Northwest Arts*, May 26, 1978.
- . "Art for a 'New Austerity.'" *Artweek*, February 24, 1979.
- . "Seattle Review." *Artforum*, May 1979, pp. 71-72.
- . "Is the Art Museum's Open Really Closed." *Argus*, August 3, 1979.
- . "Art in the Eighties: New Wave of Regionalism." *Argus Openings*, Fall/Winter 1980.
- . "Disappearing Epicenter." *Insight*, Spring 1981.
- . "Seattle: Jeffrey Bishop at Linda Farris." *Art in America*, Summer 1981, p. 141.
- . "Seattle Drawing: Good's Still Not Good Enough." *Argus*, April 3, 1981.
- . "Abstraction as a Northwest Tradition." *Artweek*, January 9, 1982.
- Kendall, Sue Ann. "Bishop's Paintings Carry Clout." *Seattle Times*, November 19, 1982.
- Muchnic, Suzanne. "An Assault from Seattle." *Los Angeles Times*, July 6, 1980.
- . "Reviews." *Los Angeles Times*, October 2, 1981.
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