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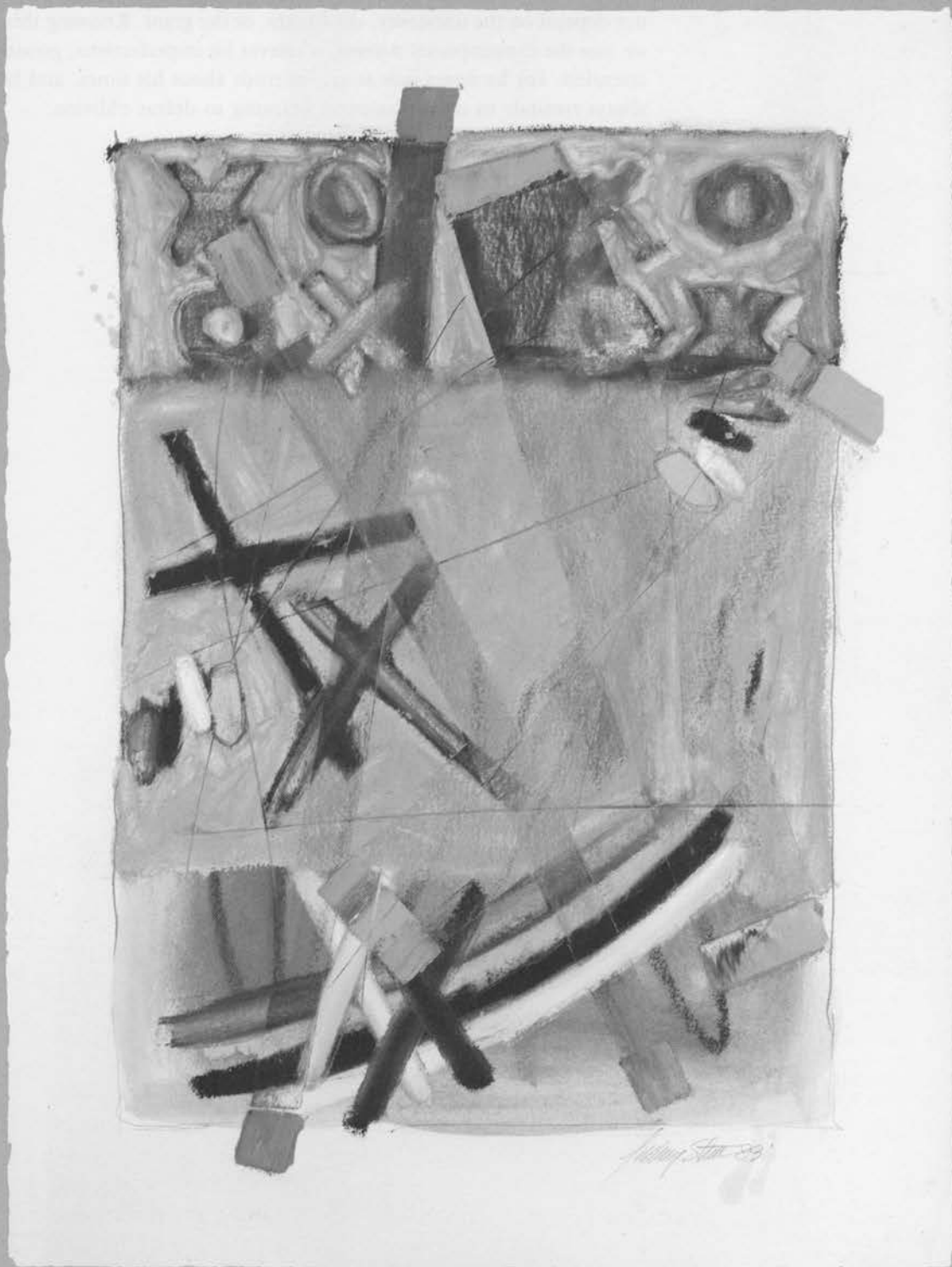
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Syracuse Video Games
Salt Mines
October 1983

Paintings on Paper

Ludwig K. Stein



Ludwig K. Stein is a Professor in the College of Visual and Performing Arts at Syracuse University. He received a B.F.A. at Kutztown State College and an M.F.A. at the Tyler School of Art. Currently exhibiting in the Paris Biennale and the International Basel Art Fair, he has recently exhibited at the Schoeneck Gallery, Basel; Marion Locks Gallery, Philadelphia; John Christian Gallery, New York City; Adelle M. Gallery, Dallas; and the University of London. Professor Stein maintains a professional studio in Philadelphia.

It is important to speak about the influence of drawing in my work. The mark-making activity in my current painting grew directly out of the strong graphic background I received as a graduate student at the Tyler School of Art. My sensitivity to the mark's line quality and edge comes from that time. My new pictures are concerned with the process of layering, and how one achieves a specific spatial system within the context of the painting itself. I am alluding to Hans Hoffman's concept of pictorial space whereby the layers are brought forward and pushed back on the surface of the canvas. This activity creates a kind of ambiguity and ambivalence to depth.

I think that as a painter you often stumble into decisions because of technical experiences you have along the way. In the past year I have shifted my medium from acrylic to oil. The only way to achieve the kind of richness and wetness that I wanted on the surface was to change to oil paint. In my early acrylic paintings squeegees were used to pull color across the surface and fix it to the ground. During the 1950s, artists like Morris Louis and Helen Frankenthaler began to work in this way, but I think they didn't take the color beyond but allowed it to sit on the surface of the canvas. With the squeegees, my work began to have a "look" similar to that of the surface on a serigraph. This disturbed me, so I played around with drawing on top of stained paper pieces.

I always work my problems out by drawing. For me the best studio experience is doing a number of drawings on paper until I feel comfortable with the results. At this point I stop drawing and begin to paint independently of the drawings.

The change to oil paint caused me to use oil sticks as a new drawing tool. The sticks are particularly disagreeable. They are big, greasy, crayon-like, and clumsy; and their use for the most part seemed trendy. I wanted to move beyond those feelings and through experiment

and play generate something new and exciting for myself.

The new pictures are about the activity of mark making that is unique to my own personal calligraphy. I've used the *X* so often that I sometimes feel I invented it. As the new marks increase in number and variety so does the surface activity. Another concern is the edge, both the edge of the drawing or painting and the edge of the paper or canvas. I also have a need for activity on the surface that becomes energetic and electric. Finally, there is the layering process, crucial to the building of the paintings. By that I mean the way in which the paint is laid down, scraped off, put back, scraped off again, built up, and redefined so that what eventually develops on the surface of an abstract painting is a skin—the most important element in my pictures.

Without wishing to demystify totally my painting and drawing, it is necessary to talk a bit about where ideas come from. In my case, this has a lot to do with my childhood, Indians, water, music, landscape, synthetic and natural color, and other, less tangible resources. Equally important are artists whom I have a great deal of respect for, notably the teachers I learned and stole from as a graduate student. In particular are Charles Schmidt, David Pease, and Stephen Greene. Other painters who have been of immediate influence for me are Jackson Pollock for his gift of process and freedom, Mark Rothko for his mysticism, Willem de Kooning for his excessiveness, and Philip Guston for always being able to see around the corner before anyone else.

To sum up my thoughts about my work, I hope that little miracles occur in my studio every day. I am not yet at the point where I expect the big miracles, but when the little ones happen, I am extremely pleased.

On the wall of my studio are a number of quotes. One by David Smith is my favorite: "Drawing is the most direct, closest to the true self, the most natural celebration of man—and if I may guess, back to the action of early man, it may have been the first celebration of man with his secret self—even before song."¹

1. David Smith, *David Smith*, ed. Cleve Gray (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1968), p. 84.



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October 1983*



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