

JON SCHUELER: SELECTED PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, MA

Arkansas Arts Center, Little Rock, AR

Baltimore Museum of Art, MD

City Art Centre, Edinburgh, Scotland

Clan Donald Centre, Armadale, Skye, Scotland

Cleveland Museum of Art, OH

Colby College, Museum of Art, Waterville, ME

Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, MI

Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow, Scotland

Greenville County Museum of Arts, Greenville, SC

Harwood Museum of Art, Taos, NM

Highland Regional Council, Inverness, Scotland

H.F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University,
Ithaca, NY

Kirkcaldy Museum and Art Gallery,
Kirkcaldy, Scotland

Mallaig Heritage Centre, Mallaig, Scotland

The McManus: Dundee's Gallery and
Museum, Scotland

Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minneapolis, MN

Roy Neuberger Museum, Purchase, NY

National Academy of Design, New York, NY

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Redding Museum of Art, Redding, CA

Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art,
Edinburgh, Scotland

Springfield Art Museum, Springfield, MO

Sweet Briar College, Sweet aBriar, VA

Telfair Museum of Art, Savannah, GA

Union College, Schenectady, NY

University Museum, Southern Illinois University,
Edwardsville, IL

University of California at Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz, CA

University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA

University of Stirling, Stirling, Scotland

Frederick Weisman Art Museum, Minneapolis, MN

West Highland Museum, Fort William, Scotland

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY

*Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT

Yellowstone Art Museum, Billings, MT

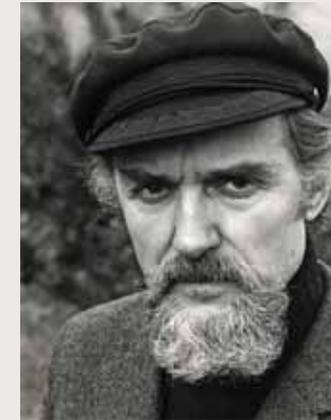
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Jon Schueler: Abstract Expressionist Romantic



Jon Schueler, 1976
Photo by Daniel Day

"I think the world needs its romanticism."¹

The Sound of Sleat is a channel of water on the northwest coast of Scotland. It is a deep blue go-between from the highlands to the rugged islands looming in the distance: Rhum, Eigg, and Muck. Artist Jon Schueler (1916-92), having settled into an old schoolhouse converted into a painting studio, absorbed the expanse of land, sea, and sky. It was a locus of mystery and power, sublimely mercurial skies and waves, but also at times soft, tender, and hallowed. This landscape was more than a subject in his paintings; it became a conduit through which the exhilaration, longing, and stillness of human experience could be manifest in oil paint.

¹ *Jon Schueler: An Artist and His Vision*. Dir. John Black. Films of Scotland, 1972. DVD.

The coastal highlands of Scotland in the 1970s were a long way from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where Schueler was born in 1916. His father was a successful businessman who ran a tire company. It was expected that young Jon would follow in his father's footsteps, taking on the company when he came of age. He prepared with a B.A. in Economics from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, but it was clear the world of business was not where his heart was. Rather, it was in the written word, and his bachelor's degree was followed by a master's degree in English literature in 1940.

Though his feet were newly set on the path of a writing career with a freshly-minted M.A. and a stint for the New Haven Evening Register in Connecticut, Schueler enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1941 to fight in World War II. As an Air Corps soldier he was stationed in England, assigned flying missions over Germany and France in a B-17 bomber. As navigator, he was seated in the transparent plastic nose of the plane. The masses of land and clouds, along with the death and destruction in the air during combat, played out before him like isolated witnesses.

The Sound of Sleat (1977). Oil on canvas,
12 by 14 inches. JS853



Light and Pale Shadow Over Sleat (1974).
Oil on canvas, 24 by 30 inches. JS523

The wartime experiences were profoundly formative. But the sky, and the thin horizon where it meets land and water, was already rooted deeply in his psyche. Reaching out from his childhood were memories of the mutability of Lake Michigan on Milwaukee's shore, with its sapphire colors of summer changing through the seasons to the icy tones of winter beneath the vastness of star-filled nights. These influences, which would become integral to his personal mythology and artistic iconography, had yet to be born on the canvas, though. Schueler still had not picked up a paintbrush.

After the war, his plan was to try to make a living as a writer. Having married in 1942, Jon and his wife Jane settled in Los Angeles. Jane decided to take a painting class with artist David Lax, and Jon spontaneously decided he would too. It was a turning point in his life and professional career, as one class led to another, and eventually to studies in San Francisco from 1949 to 1951 at the California School of Fine Arts. It was a fortuitous time to enroll, as Schueler studied painting with Richard Diebenkorn, David Park, and most influential of all to him, Clyfford Still.

In class one day, Still brought in reproductions of late paintings by the renowned artist, Joseph Mallord William Turner (British, 1775-1851). The romantic sweep of paint firmly claimed Schueler's attention and stayed with him: "...it has seemed to me that he [Turner] went further into nature and further into the sensation of nature in paint than any other painter. He, the stylist of incredible facility, did most to break down style, to destroy it, to find the possibility of paint talking as paint, as an extension of the most immediate perception and sensibility, so that it became most like nature." ²

The sublime power of nature, the stylistic and philosophical underpinnings of Abstract Expressionist painting, and the sky as subject matter were informing Schueler's art, but did not find a full voice quite yet. Making a cross-county leap of faith in 1951, he quit San Francisco for New York. As he put it, "I had only my arrogance to sustain me." ³

Having already made connections with a number of Abstract Expressionists, Schueler quickly fell into

² Schueler, Jon. *The Sound of Sleat: A Painter's Life*. Eds. Magda Salvesen and Diane Cousineau. New York: Picador USA, 1999, p.223.

³ *Jon Schueler: A Life in Painting, 1916-1992*. Dir. Magda Salvesen. 1999. DVD.



The Sound of Sleat III (1970). Oil on canvas, 36 by 30 inches. JS33

circles that revolved around Still, Mark Rothko, Willem de Kooning, and others who were the pulsing drivers of action painting in the New York School. Galleries took an interest in Schueler's work. In 1954, the Stable Gallery gave him a solo exhibition, and others followed at Leo Castelli in 1957 and 1959. The 1960s brought a mix of group and solo shows, teaching, international travel, and, after his divorce from Jane in 1952, romantic relationships.

In 1957, Schueler visited the Scottish coastal village of Mallaig for the first time. His interest in the region was piqued during the war by descriptions from his friend, Bunty Challis, and in 1970, it became Schueler's home for the next five years. The old schoolhouse, which had been converted into a cottage known as Romasaig, became his studio, with the waters and rocky cliffs of the Sound of Sleat just beyond its gates.

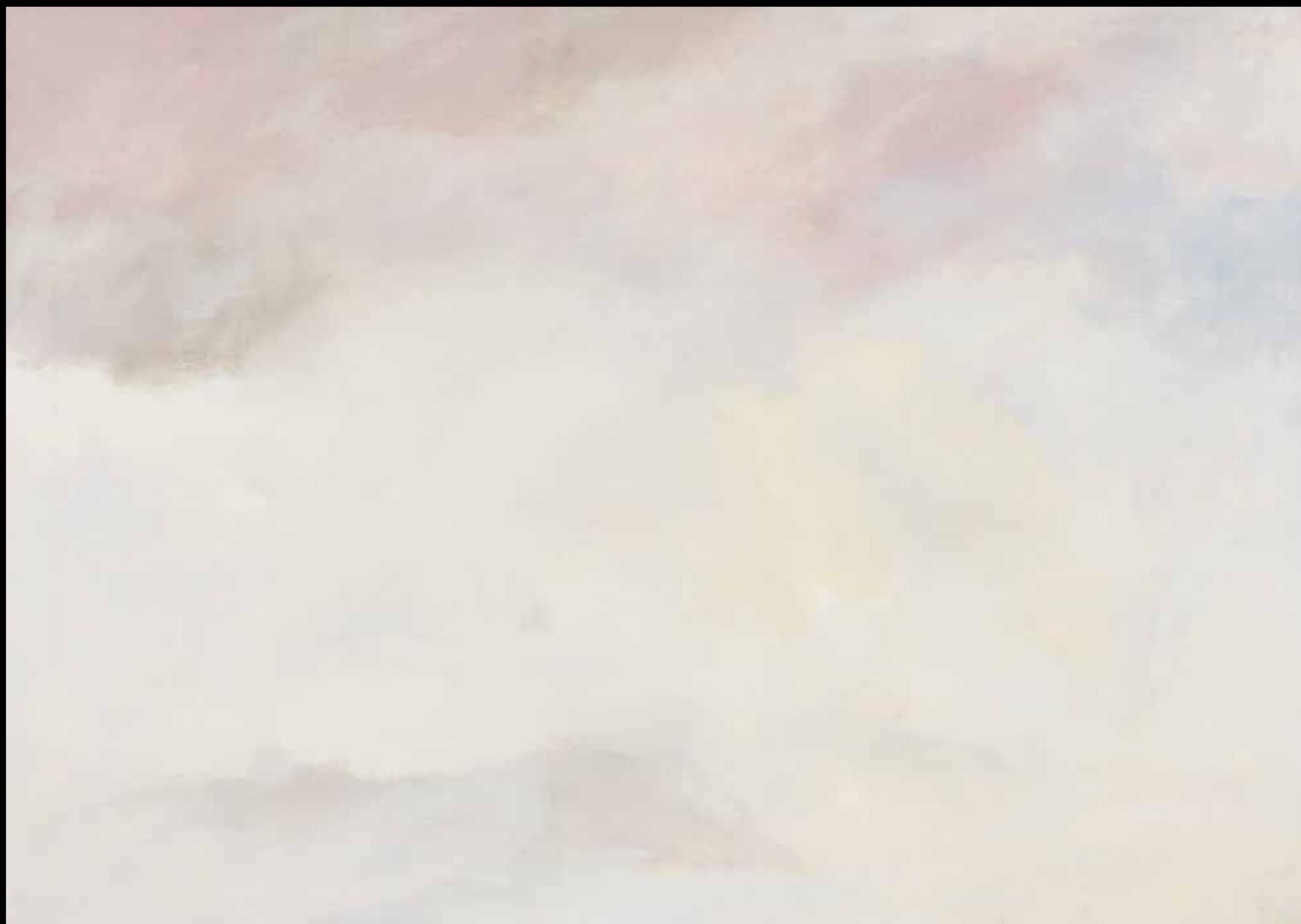
There on a memorable June night, the artist experienced the sky as an endless, indefinable depth of sublime vision and spirit, and recorded it thusly:

"The abstraction of the sea and the sky and Sleat -- I was possessed by it, wanted to walk into it, to disappear into it. I was exhausted afterward. There was no color I could define: The greys were not grey, the silver was not silver, the blacks were not black. It was all light and all darkness. Believe me, I have seen eternity, and it is frightening and it is most beautiful, more beautiful and more powerful than any man or any woman or the works of either. I wondered, afterward, how I'd ever have the arrogance to paint again; yet it is now even less possible to do other than paint." ⁴

⁴ Schueler 1999, p. 191. The passage referencing the experience of the June night is dated 13 November 1970.



Sound Lines (1979-81). Oil on canvas, 10 by 12 inches. JS1015



The Sound of Sleat III (1973) is one of the repositories of this vision. The sublime is rarely far from Schueler's works of these years, a feeling of the awesome power of nature and its lasting, eternal resonance, dwarfing and yet mirroring the human condition in all its beauty and desperation. The desolate ridge of land, with its steep rise, might call to mind aspects of Francisco de Goya (Spanish, 1746-1828) and his mysterious painting, **The Dog**, or the delicately monochromatic palette and ultimately subtle tonal strategies in the black paintings of Ad Reinhardt (American, 1913-1967).

The varying conditions of light and atmosphere permeate Schueler's oeuvre, each image of sky and land offering its own character. **October Gale: The Minch** (1978) recreates the glowering sky over the strait of water, north of the Isle of Skye, called the Minch. Schueler's dramatic shape-shifting atmosphere catches glimmers of warm light amidst the chilled clouds and heavy shadows. The wind blows the surfaces, and the traces of the paintbrush record the racing gale. His oil paints, usually thinned with a blend of linseed oil and turpentine, are laid down with large,

sweeping gestures, each touch raising the stakes of creation or destruction, building while maintaining balance in the picture.

While the Romantic propensity for drama and nature on a slightly violent order, à la Turner, may be seen at times, other works offer a more sedate meditation. The bands of color in **The Sound of Sleat** (1977) and **Sound Lines** (1981) suggest arrangements of pure abstraction at first glance. They follow restful horizontal lines, stacked tall on their diminutive, vertical canvases. Yet their horizons are low, creating a heavy ground with a grey ceiling stretched in all directions. The visible sky has gone pale, overcast as the light reflects a dense mist, or perhaps radiates pink, suggesting the closing of day over a glistening shore.

In 1975, Schueler returned to New York. He kept his studio in Mallaig and usually spent three months there each year. The paintings exhibited at the Dean Jensen Gallery represent a synthesis of location and connection. Images of Scotland abound in them, of course, but the works also maintain a kind of dual citizenship, one rooted not just in craggy Maillag, but also cosmopolitan New York. Likewise, Jon Schueler's place in the history of twentieth-century

October Gale: The Minch (1978). Oil on canvas, 36 by 51 inches. JS938



Sea Island Waiting (1978). Oil on canvas, 36 by 60 inches. JS894

American art displays the sophisticated manners of the Abstract Expressionist movement as a conveyance for the ruggedness of nature, the rawness of wind, the searching of the soul among multifaceted skies.

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Sun Leaving V (1972). Oil on canvas,
48 by 42 inches. JS295