

fanfare

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—donald la badie—

The romanticism of a real landscape

Every city in the United States, outside major art centers like Manhattan, has its small group of contemporary artists who evidence talents that could make their work nationally known in the next decade. In Nashville, Charles Brindley is an artist whose works stand out above his peers. A show of his paintings and drawings opens this afternoon at the Alice Bingham Gallery with a reception between 4 and 6 p.m. It easy to see why he's built a reputation on his home grounds.

The 28-year-old Brindley, a precise, earnest young man, has already been the subject of a major show that opened in Louisville and was subsequently shown at the Cheekwood Fine Arts Center in his home city. Kevin Grogan, the director of the center, was one of the first to recognize and single out the artist as someone out of the ordinary.

Brindley's subject is landscape, and his landscapes are immediately recognizable. In that regard, he appears at first glance to be unlike most of his contemporaries whose primary emphasis is on pushing the boundaries of materials and creating new forms. However, Brindley is not that much different. He is absorbed in the varying nature of forms. He also went through a period of working in a nonobjective manner that positively influenced his development.

He has nothing in common with a large group of U.S. artists of all ages who are trapped in down-home vistas or in futile imitations of Andrew Wyeth in his various landscape phases. Brindley's most fully realized paintings are mysterious and individual.

THE ARTIST'S MAJOR inspiration—and it is a question of inspiration rather than slavish modeling—is unusual. He has been magnetically drawn to the works of the great German 19th-Century painter Caspar David Friedrich, an artist only marginally recognized in this country.

What Brindley reflects of Friedrich in the most evocatively beautiful of his large paintings—for example, "Rock Forms In Open Field," "Rocks on Small Rise In Bottomland, Winter," and "Harpeth Burial Mound, No. 21"—is the German's romanticism: a real landscape that suggests the dreamlike and other-worldly. Friedrich's use of color influenced the Impressionists, and Brindley's palette contains something of Impressionist mist, although he has nothing else in common with that group.

Brindley was trained in both painting and drawing and commercial design and illustration at Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, in the 70's. At that time, there was an influx of unusually talented teachers into the school. He stayed there for five years, a period he believes was necessary to bring these two different disciplines into harmony.

One sees the benefits of that training in illustration in the forms that emerge in the paintings as well as in a number of graphite drawings in the show. Drawings like "Study of Rock Forms With Copses" and "Study of Severed Trees Where Old Houses Used To Be" have an exactness of detail and are, at the same time, delicately suggestive.

WHILE BOTH OF these drawings are called "study," the latter, Brindley said, is the only work he has ever created as a study for a painting. The painting, which also is on view, presented him with particular difficulty. He spent a long period going from painting to drawing and back again. He

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Loosening up

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doesn't work from photographs.

Although the artist's works are figurative,

they will be seen equally easily by viewers with an experienced eye in terms of abstract areas of color and form. During an interview last weekend when Brindley was in town to deliver his works to the gallery, he spoke of the positive effects of painting nonobjectively when he was at the university.

"I used to have to get a piece worked out before I'd do it," he said. "I was too deliberate and it inhibited me. Then, I started working nonobjectively as an exercise and it loosened me up. I had to tear down a literal approach to subjects to become spontaneous.

"Now, I become interested in specific landscape forms and push them until I know what it is that fascinates me about them. But what I'm trying to understand is formal and compositional. In the big paintings, I begin with large fields of color and go over them again and again. If a mound is the subject, I may have some idea that it will be on the bottom or the top, but nothing more than that."

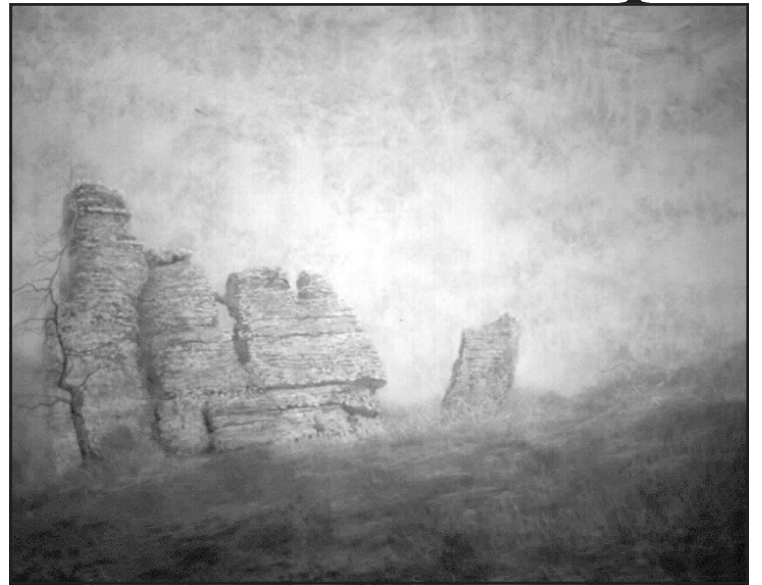
Brindley's interest in art started, as it seems to with most artists of talent, when he was young.

"There was one year that I remember that seemed to have affected me very much," he recalls. "I was in the fifth grade and the teacher encouraged me to create things for the bulletin board. That really pushed me along. I was the youngest of four boys. There wasn't a lot of art in my background. My father was a gambler who fought game roosters. My mother, however, was well-educated and played the piano very well. She was extremely helpful.

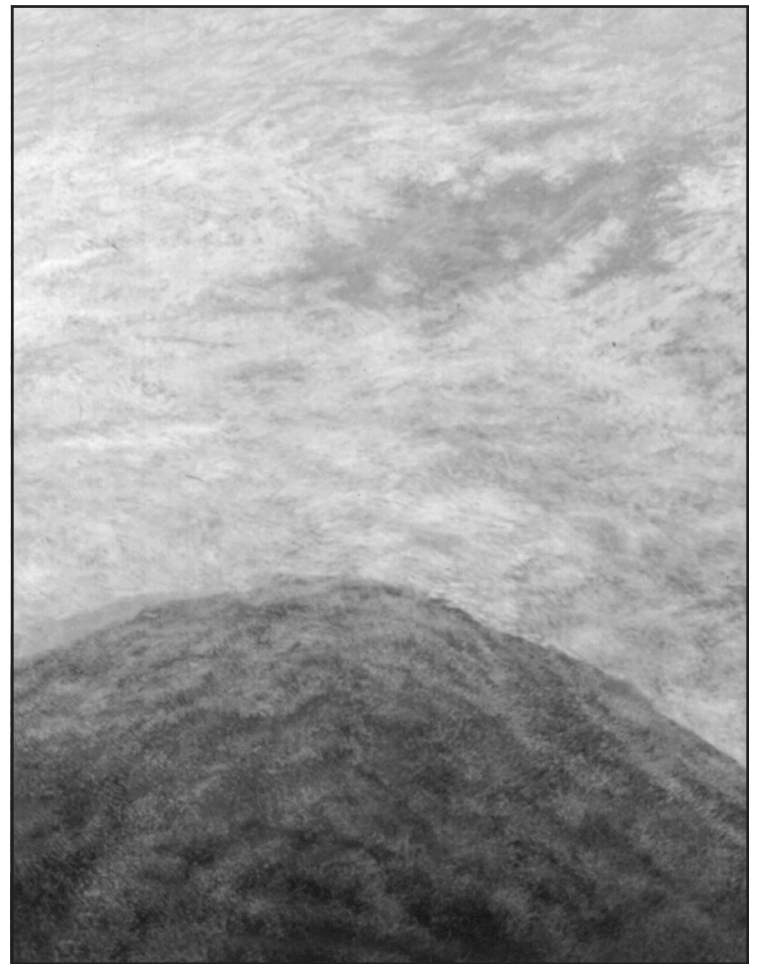
"I took commercial design as security. I never had any desire to earn my living over the long term through commercial art. I spend about 30 hours a week designing for WPLN, the local National Public Radio station, and I do a certain amount of free-lance as well. But I'm now also earning about 25 percent of my income through my paintings and drawings."

Brindley is fascinated by archeology and remains, the Virginia chimneys and Indian burial grounds in middle Tennessee and Arkansas. He lives and has his studio on the second floor of a farmhouse in Nashville.

"It's an old place," he said. "The trees around it are falling down and rotting. I seem to find something positive and fruitful in images of decay. It stimulates me to be immersed in things that are disappearing, in a South that found in traces."



Brindley's "Rock Forms In Open Field"



"Harpeth Burial Mound, No. 21"



"Study of Severed Trees Where Old Houses Used to Be"