



THE TROUT GALLERY
THE ART MUSEUM OF DICKINSON COLLEGE

NOISE WARD DAVENNY

N O I S E

W A R D D A V E N N Y



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October 28, 2022 – April 15, 2023 / **THE TROUT GALLERY** / The Art Museum of Dickinson College

Foreword

“Stop. Yeah, I think it’s coming right at us.”

For close to three decades, Ward Davenny taught Dickinson students how to make art through an approach that encouraged a mediation of direct observation and lived experience. Art professors are known to often repeat their favorite mantras, and Ward liked to stress that art had a better chance at success if started with a specific source—visual information that could provide specificity, nuance, and something with which to grapple. Time and again he proved an uncanny ability to help students develop the kind of heightened perceptual awareness that is an essential foundation towards being a successful artist or excelling in any visual field.

This exhibition offers an opportunity to experience how these sensibilities have shaped his own studio practice and incredibly rich visual language. It is also a chance to celebrate someone who had an impact on our department and studio art program that will be lasting. Just today, I was referencing Ward in my drawing class and explaining the painstaking lengths he goes through to experience the moments we see depicted in his work. The humanizing aspect of experience is essential because his work is more than simple verisimilitude, its ability to convey sensation can be spiritual and otherworldly. While the photographic documentations of these experiences might represent choice visual moments, they are also an embodiment of the unseen—the larger search and struggle to find something worth relating.

It is from a video during a storm-chasing expedition in 2004 that Ward exclaims, “Stop. Yeah, I think it’s coming right at us.” This statement, said in a collected, yet slightly nervous tone, takes place in the middle of a frantic sequence in which he is attempting to outrun a storm. As it turns out, the running is not going so well. He and a fellow chaser are in what seems like an endless cycle of turning the car around and changing direction because every way seems to be the wrong way. The moment does well to show that the emotion and intensity experienced during this process of searching is integral to the final form of the completed piece. It also exemplifies something else that Ward liked to impress on students, which has to do with the give-and-take of the process and non-linear discovery—or maybe here, more adequately, is that at times the artistic process finds you chasing something with confidence, while other moments find you retreating in uncertainty. Though as Ward likes to stress, that dichotomy brings a necessary tension to the work.

The Department of Art & Art History wants to offer Ward our deepest gratitude for everything he has contributed towards the betterment of our program. We have been fortunate to be in the company of an artist in the truest and most committed manner whose work has gratified and challenged us over the years. And, especially, for being such an incredibly thoughtful and insightful colleague and friend all these years.

Todd Arsenault '99 (student of Ward Davenny)

Associate Professor of Art, Art & Art History Chair 2022-23





Does Music Exist in Space?

YEHUDI WYNER

It has been said that music can define the inner psychological and emotional sensations that words and visual images are unable to reach, and that it can do so with incomparable precision. Perhaps perceiving music as a spatial phenomenon can produce a similar effect. It is extraordinary to think that music, like light, an immaterial substance, can have such power and can exert its power instantaneously. The fact that music is a temporal medium distinguishes it from most other artistic practices. In mysterious ways it allies itself with the rapidly shifting thoughts and shadows of the brain and appears to do so with no reliance on translation. The precision I alluded to above cannot be accurately described in words. It exists in another realm, a realm in which multiple streams of nonverbal information can be transmitted simultaneously.

Ward said to me recently after hearing a concert of orchestral compositions conducted by his sister, Susan Davenny Wyner, “I hear music spatially.” The comment stimulated a good deal of reflection on my part. It led me to analyze and define my own way of hearing music, a way that is certainly not spatial. (As reference, I have spent my life as a musician, playing, conducting, composing.) I process music in terms of time, rhythm, pitch, register, dynamics and the connecting of tones in close or remote relationships. But in space?

I confess that I’ve reached no conclusion about the process of making sense of the onslaught of aural phenomena. But the point I want to make returns to Ward’s statement: “I hear music spatially.” This struck me as interesting, provocative, unusual. I return to it because it projects a rich resonance, a thoughtful, personal perception. As such it typifies the intensity of Ward’s consciousness and intelligence as well as the originality of his awareness of life around him, regardless of the form it takes. It was through his statement that I came to recognize that music can be perceived and processed in manners and paths unimaginable to me.

His apparently off-the-cuff remark was yet another exposure of the essence of Ward’s psyche. He is an artist to the core, and an artist in myriad realms. His drawings, paintings, prints and photographs reveal a significant view of the natural world, as well as a profound revelation of how we are affected by it, by its

design, its mystery, its eloquence. And Ward’s sensibility permeates all other activities of his life, how he builds, collects, designs, arranges and displays things with beauty, brilliance and wit.

I love this man, not only because of all these admirable qualities, but because kindness and humanity pervade his life and prevailingly affect the lives of those around him.



Draw Onward for piano (2022) by Yehudi Wyner
is dedicated to Ward Davenny.

It was commissioned by the Trout Gallery at Dickinson College to celebrate his years of teaching at the college and to honor him in his retirement.

Opposite: ***Mammatus*** (detail), 2017, archival pigment print, 18 x 24 inches

The Random Walk

WARD DAVENNY

The “random walk” refers to a mathematical equation describing the process of molecular movement in liquids. ‘Brownian motion’ (pedesis) describes the same actions in air and vapors. There are myriad formulae that are inherent in and apply to all matter, all involving particle collisions and dispersion; eddy diffusion, molecular diffusion, turbulent diffusion, heat diffusion, surface, gaseous, electronic, and rotational diffusion, etc. There is trans-cultural diffusion, which lays out a methodology for studying the spread of cultural ideas. These processes (almost) never stop.

Definitions and formulas may not capture how we perceive and deal with all the assaultive literal and metaphorical movements around and through us. I think of this underlying structural motion as a kind of noise. These insistently mobile particles define transient states both visible and unseen that the world provides, with its beauty and sensations and poisons and irritations; light and color, smoke, heat, sound, flavors, odd and wonderful smells, and weather. They also echo through society and collective and individual personal interactions. Media and other forms of communication can mimic these processes, as can my own varied reactions and interpretations.

I can ignore much of this “noise” on some level, though it can be efficient at obscuring events and reasoning, visual and otherwise. Despite projecting how things came to be, and expectations of what is to come, narratives are often overridden by surprising and sometimes unpleasant turns. We don’t always get to set the terms. One thing *might* lead to the next.

I look for these noisy and suggestive colliding movements, and find beauty in not knowing, in danger, in safety and comfort, action and rest, in the dynamics of conflict and resolve, and in creation and destruction. There is beauty in waiting. Churning beauty and ugliness.

The confrontation between past and future is constant and chaotic and for me the visual arts are the only means capable of presenting a temporary freeze and respite. A place that is arresting to me is one where I recognize the potential to create an indeterminate pause (though not a calm one), in which I gravitate toward an open-ended narrative that anticipates something unknown, but still somehow inevitable.

My manipulations of the tools of image-making- the pointillist *Gaussian* and *noise* modes of Photoshop, the spreading of paint or powdery charcoal, the acid bath for a metal plate—help me literally and figuratively depict and freeze this open partialization, visually akin to corralling swarms of insects. There is wonder for me in how these bits and pieces of things settle into such peculiarly organized events and assemblages.

There are endless visual fictions, dreams of glory, fear, interfering memories and insistent gestural habits for me to try to amplify and hide—to anticipate, surprise, to ignore, pretend, hallucinate, believe, feel simultaneously comfort and unease, motion and stillness, distance and proximity. Humor. Dissonance. To make one thing follow another or not. Noise and silence.





Yellow Plumes, 2019, oil and lampblack on canvas, 72 x 96 inches



Intersecting Plumes, 2019, oil and lampblack on linen, 56 x 42 inches



Hovering Cloud, 2019, oil and aluminum paint on canvas, 24 x 20 inches



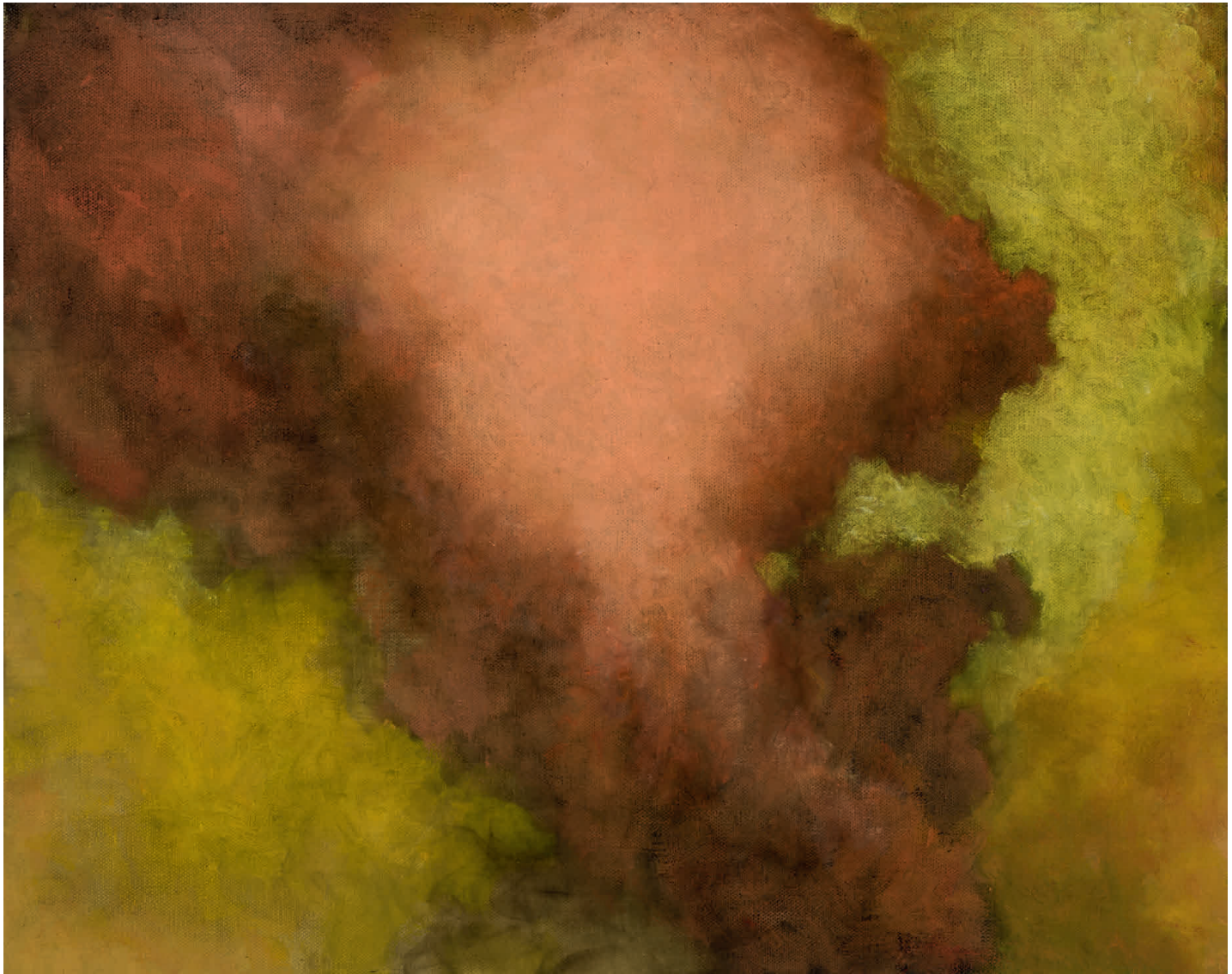
Untitled, 2019, Oil and lampblack on canvas, 26 x 20 inches



Smoke Plume Study #2, 2019, oil and lampblack on canvas, 8 x 10 inches



Smoke Plume Study #5, 2018, oil and lampblack on canvas, 12 x 10 inches



Peach Smoke, 2022, oil and lampblack on canvas, 14 x 18 inches



Alter Series #2, 2017–22, oil on lenticular photograph, 16 x 11 ½ inches



Alter Series #4, 2019, oil on lenticular photograph, 13 ½ x 9 inches



May 20, 2022, archival pigment print, 24 x 19 inches



Cupola, 2022, archival pigment print, 19 x 15 inches



Skewed Grain, Kansas, 2012, archival pigment print, 19 x 30 inches



Gathering Series #6, 2010, archival pigment print, 13x24in



Accumulating Storm, 2020, archival pigment print, 24 x 18 inches



Drawn Clouds, 2022, archival pigment print, 24 x 18 inches



Field Fire, 2000, archival pigment print, 39 x 84 inches



Museum Storage #5, (The Tower Museum), 2010, archival pigment print, 8 x 12 inches



Swamp Fire, 2022, archival pigment print, 10 x 15 inches



French Factory, 2018, archival pigment print, 13 x 24 inches



Rain, 2015, archival pigment print, 10 x 15 inches



Reformation, 2019, archival pigment print, 14 x 19 inches



Portrait by Fire, 2022, archival pigment print, 12 x 12 inches



Safety in Numbers, 2022, archival digital print, 10 x 15 inches



Systems of Belief #2, 2018, archival pigment print, 8 ½ x 15 inches



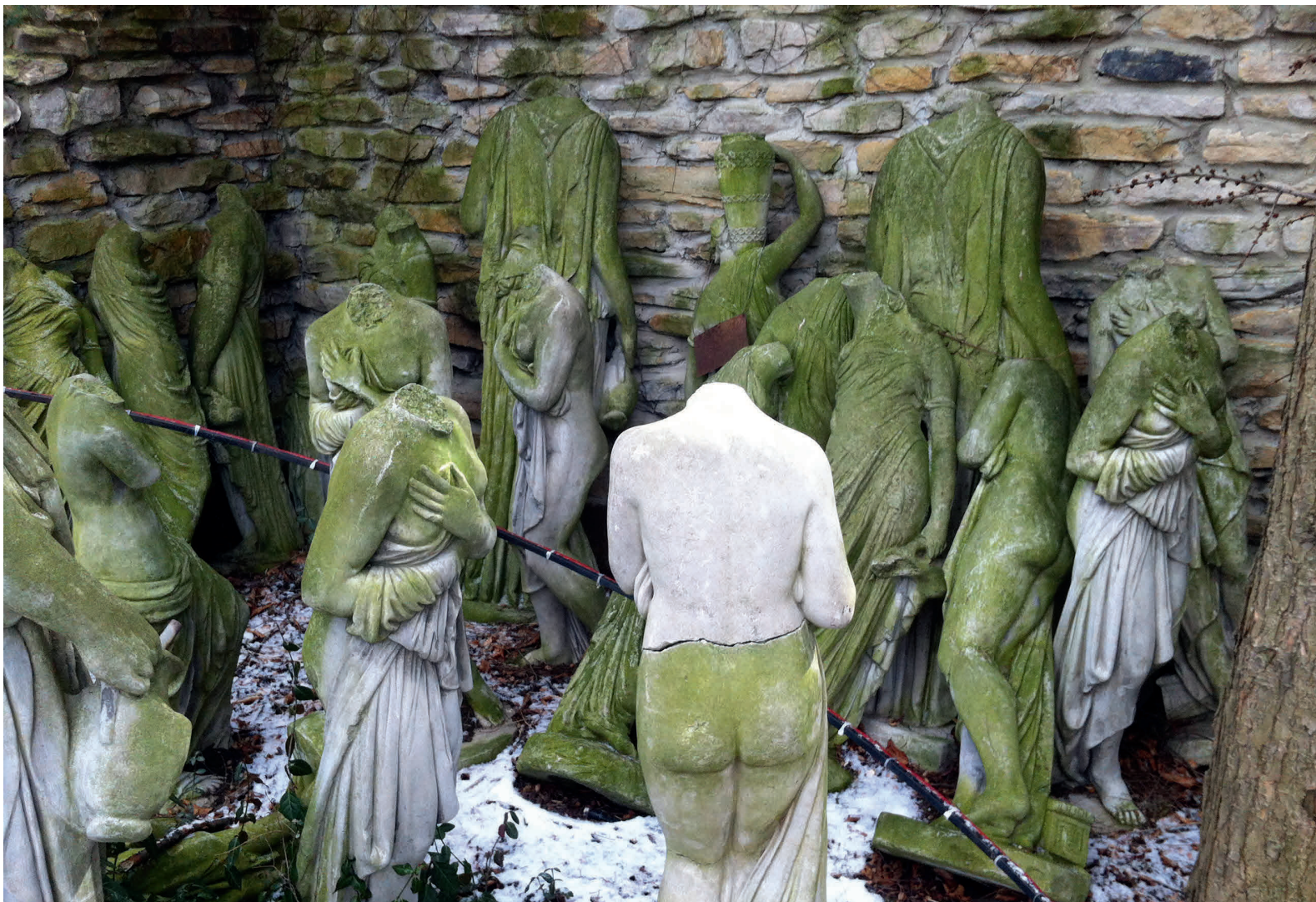
Exhibition Series #1, 2015, archival pigment print, 9 x 12 inches



Systems of Belief #4, 2021, archival pigment print, 19 x 24 inches



Exhibition Series #4, 2018, archival pigment print, 10 x 17 inches



Museum Storage #2, 2022, archival pigment print, 12 x 16 inches



Museum Storage #3, 2022, archival pigment print, 10 x 17 inches



Ceremony Series #3, 2019, archival pigment print, 10 x 18 inches



Ceremony Series #1, 2019, archival pigment print, 10 x 18 inches



Waiting, 2019, archival pigment print, 14 x 10 inches



Yellow Horizon, 2011, archival pigment print, 11 x 16 inches



Led, 2022, charcoal on paper, 22 x 30 inches



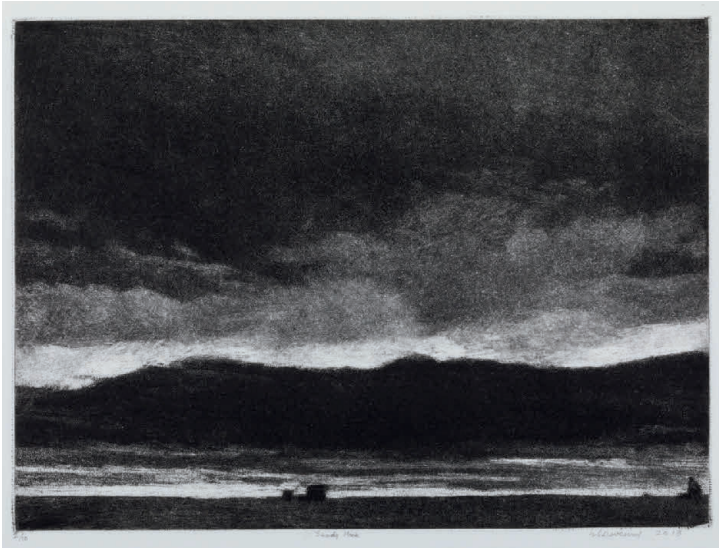
Sheltering, 2022, charcoal on paper, 25 x 37 inches



A Gesture, 1997-2022, charcoal on paper, 28 x 39 inches



Searching in Shallows, 2022, charcoal on paper, 11 x 16 inches



Sandy Hook, 2013, etching, 6 x 8 inches



Abandoned Field, 2014, etching, 7 x 10 inches



California Hill, 2014, etching, 8 ½ x 11 inches



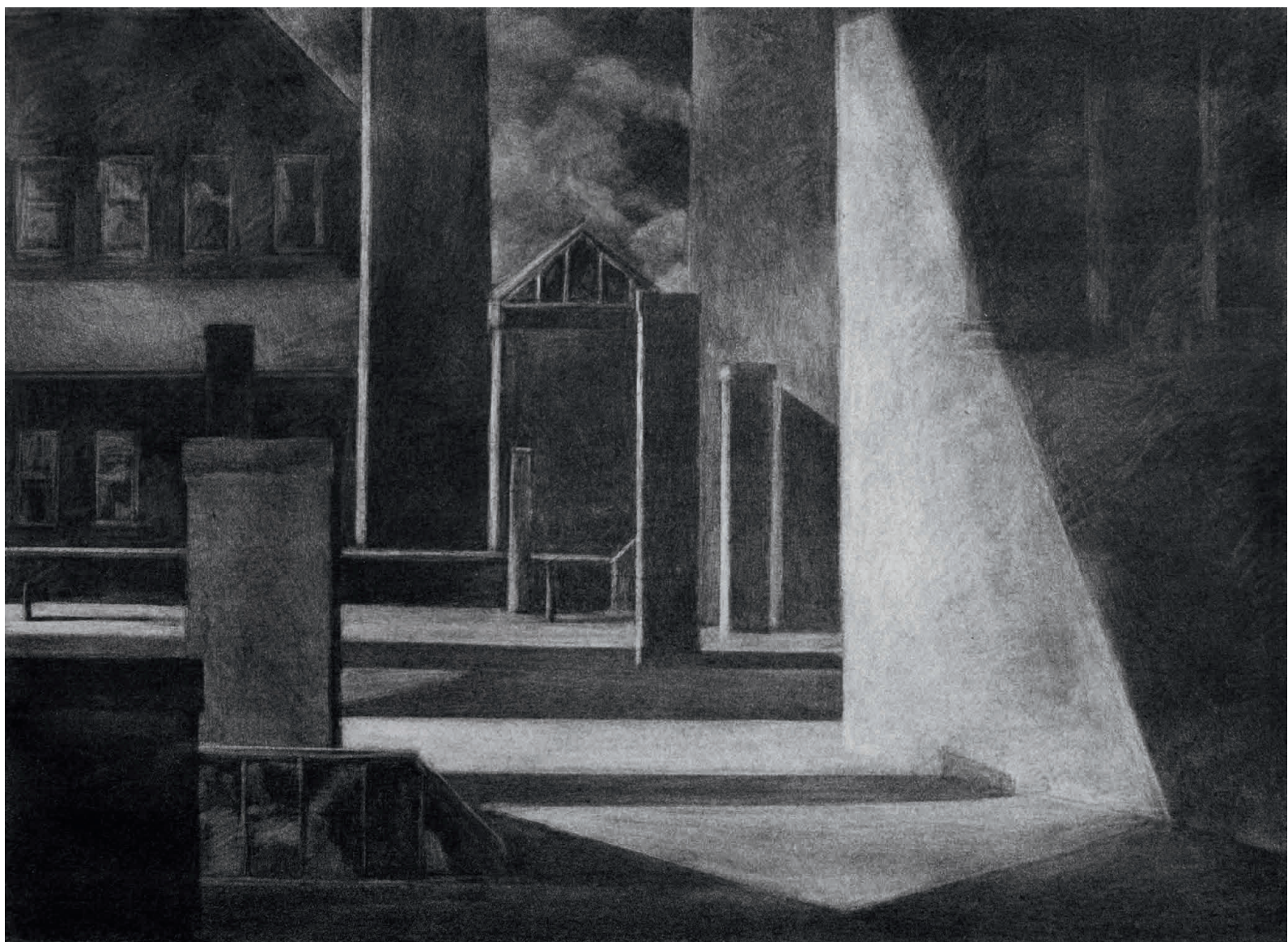
Procession, 2014, etching, 9½ x 7 inches



Systems of Belief, 2016, etching, 5 ½ x 10 inches



Backyard in a Suburb, 2017, etching, 4 ½ x 6 inches



New Haven Rooftop, 1991, lithograph with powdered pigment, 12 x 16 inches



Biographies

WARD DAVENNY (BORN 1951)

Ward Davenney is Professor Emeritus at Dickinson College, where he taught from 1992 through 2020. He previously held teaching positions at the University of Hawaii at Manoa and the University of Connecticut at Storrs, among other institutions. He obtained his B.F.A. from the San Francisco Art Institute in 1977, and his M.F.A. in printmaking/painting from Yale University in 1982. He has had numerous solo exhibitions in university, museum and commercial gallery settings including The Contemporary Museum of Hawaii in Honolulu, Virginia Tech University, Connecticut College, Dominican University, the University of Long Island, Dickinson College and the University of East Anglia in Norwich, England. His solo gallery exhibitions have included shows at the Seraphin Gallery in Philadelphia and six solo exhibitions at the Mary Ryan Gallery in New York City. The recipient of many juried exhibition awards, Davenney has also received numerous grants, including a Mid-Atlantic Council for the Arts Fellowship Grant, and two National Endowment for the Arts Individual Fellowship grants. His work is held in permanent collections that include The British Museum in London, the National Gallery in Washington, D.C., the Fogg Museum in Boston, the Minneapolis Institute of Art, the The Honolulu Museum of Art, the Hawaii State Foundation for the Arts, the Yale University Art Gallery, the U.S. Department of State, and the curated collection of the Cleveland Clinic, among many others.

YEHUDI WYNER (BORN 1929)

Pulitzer Prize-winning composer and pianist Yehudi Wyner has created more than 100 works for orchestra, chamber ensemble, solo performers, theater music and liturgical services. In addition to composing, teaching and performing, he has directed two opera companies and conducted a wide range of ensemble repertory. He has taught at Yale, Harvard, Brandeis, Cornell and SUNY Purchase; served as president of the American Academy of Arts and Letters; and has received commissions from Carnegie Hall, the Boston Symphony, BBC Philharmonic, the Library of Congress, the Koussevitzky Foundation, and National Endowment for the Arts. His 2005 Naxos recording "The Mirror" won a Grammy Award.

Acknowledgments

I want to offer profound thanks to my wife, Kate Stewart, and my entire family (past and present), my colleagues in the Department of Art, Neil Weisman, James Bowman, and all but a few of my former students.

Noise: *Ward Davenny*

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The Trout Gallery, The Art Museum of Dickinson College

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Cover

Intersecting Plumes (detail), 2019, oil and lampblack on linen, 56 x 42 inches

Inside front and back cover

Backyard Smoke (detail), 2022, archival digital print, 20 x 13 inches

Back Cover

Smoke Projection, 2012, video still