



"HABITATIONS P. 15"
2008
Ian Boyden
HANDGROUND INKS ON PAPER, 31" x 22"
PHOTO: COURTESY OF AUGEN GALLERY

PORTLAND Ian Boyden: "Let The Stones Tell It" at Augen Gallery

There is a deeply meditative poeticism to Ian Boyden's paintings on paper, which makes his collaboration with renowned poet Sam Hamill a natural and thoroughly simpatico affair. "Let The Stones Tell It," Hamill's spare but evocative hymn to nature and humanity's place within it, finds in Boyden's imagery a complement with the simplicity and power of a pagan rite. Much of this power comes from the exotic media the painter concocts: cuttlefish ink and pigments made from ground-up whale bones, petrified wood, opal, freshwater pearls, lapis lazuli, malachite, and the teeth of fossilized sharks, bears, and mastodons. It is a credit not only to the sincerity of his intent—to forge a more authentic connection between his work and the earth it celebrates—but also to his pictorial sophistication that his deployment of these materials does not smack in even the slightest degree of gimmickry or New Age ham-handedness.

The 18 paintings that make up "Let The Stones Tell It," encompassing the 11 stanzas of Hamill's poem, "Habitations," are presented both as stand-alone, framed works and as a large-scale, limited-edition book published by Crab Quill Press. Both versions were included in the exhibition. The book, with its exaggeratedly vertical orientation (31" x 11") and silver maple-wood cover, is as elegant in presentation as it is extravagant in dimension. While the poem's text remains identical across the edition, the accompanying paintings are unique, although they share the same general composition. With their commingling of gestural abstraction and verse, the works recall painter/poet collaborations such as Sam Francis' folios with Walasse Ting.

Boyden's visual vocabulary abounds with feathered wisps and shapes that suggest raindrops, waves, mountains, planets, comets, and the moon. Within their predominantly grayscale palette, specks of color and dramatic gradations of contrast enliven the works, as do occasional bursts of searing white that flare out like exclamation points. Intuitive and well-balanced, the compositions are forceful but not showy. Just as Hamill's words evoke but do not overstate the inscrutable wonders of the natural world, so Boyden suggests natural referents without overt quotation. Working in concert, both artists allow their subject matter to communicate nonverbally, in ways that invite the viewer to, as Hamill's poem puts it, "listen to a language not our own."

—RICHARD SPEER