



ARRESTED RIVERS

Paintings by
CHUCK FORSMAN

Essays and Poems by
HELEN MAYER HARRISON and NEWTON HARRISON
PATRICIA NELSON LIMERICK
ROGER C. ECHO-HAWK
GARY HOLTHAUS
and CHARLES WILKINSON

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Foreword

Commencing January 14 and running through March 4, 1994, the first exhibition of "Arrested Rivers: Paintings by Chuck Forsman" was hosted by the CU Art Galleries of the University of Colorado at Boulder. On a national tour through the end of 1995, the works in the show are illustrated in this book. These works provided the inspiration for the writers featured here. The dozen paintings of dams and reservoirs are part of a larger landscape tradition yet are directly concerned with issues of today. Starting with the notion that water is the most precious and fragile natural resource in the West, Forsman and the writers have embarked on the task of capturing and focusing your attention. Their quest is pragmatic, they seek to change how we see and what we think about water in the West, and by inference what we do to the land everywhere. Their means are images and words.

All of us at the CU Art Galleries are pleased to be part of this exceptional project, which furthers our involvement in current aesthetic research, especially issues related to the environment. It is always a pleasure to work with a talented and sincere artist such as Chuck Forsman. As well, it is a rare and treasured opportunity to work with the Center of the American West and the scholars associated with the center, including Patricia Limerick, Charles Wilkinson, Gary Holthaus, and Roger Echo-Hawk. In previous exhibits with environmental artists Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison, we gained insights to the questionable wisdom of attempting to control the flow of waters. This assembled cast of thinkers sheds further light on the futility, costs, and effects of such controls and

underscores the value of multidisciplinary investigation and programming in the museum setting. It is hoped that the viewers and readers of this project will benefit from these efforts.

MICHAEL CRANE
DIRECTOR, CU ART GALLERIES

Preface

Most of my life has been spent in the American West near streams at the base of mountains. This is dry country and I am drawn to water. At age eight I was baptized in the Deschutes River in central Oregon by the Cascade Mountains. My family often picnicked by a stream in a canyon near there at a park called The Cove. I loved it there. It was sheltered and cool and beautiful. A perfect place.

Later, it was to be covered by a reservoir.

My family moved on to the northern Sacramento Valley in California, where I fished and hiked in the Sierra foothills. I sought out-of-the-way and unnoticed places. In the scalding summers those places tended to be sheltered and cool. A favorite was at a place called Nelson's Bar. There a stream meandered through boulders before entering the Feather River. I remember it in a hot-blooded adolescent way, the sweet ache felt in the orifice of stone and the deep flow and stillness. Another perfect place.

It, too, was covered by a reservoir.

Like many, I still find special places as do my children. My young daughters, Chloe and Shannon, enjoy walking into Boulder Canyon near our home in Colorado. At age three, Shannon picked a spot that she has ever since called her "special place." Claiming sites as special or even sacred is instinctual for some of us. We also recognize it as a heritage passed on to us by Native Americans.

But we share other instincts as well, the result of which dominate our landscape. We own, extract, develop, and profit. To an extent this benefits us all. We like it and we don't. I didn't like it when, still in my teens, The Cove and Nelson's

Bar, two of the places that I held most sacred, were submerged by reservoirs. It hurt. Yet, I was told that these engineering marvels were for the common good, that to feel otherwise was shortsighted and selfish. My wound festered in guilt.

I survived college and Vietnam in the late sixties to become a painter and art teacher. A decade later I began painting landscapes of the West. It happened naturally, possibly inevitably, but those were uneasy paintings, full of conflicting impulses, and they continue to be so to this day. I have come to believe that the long tradition of celebration and optimism in landscape painting is on shaky ground. To look honestly at the world around us is a sobering activity. Escapism may be possible, but escape is not.

Like most artists, I indulge a presumed right to ignore objectivity. Even in professional matters my heart may overrule my head. It is a privilege that few others enjoy. Those who favor exploitation of natural resources such as wild rivers, as well as those who favor preservation, are skilled persuaders. Proponents of dams and large water projects tout jobs, flood control, cheap power, recreation, and sufficient water for development and agriculture. Preservationists warn us of costs, evaporation, silting, salination, chemical contamination, loss of habitat, extinction, human displacement, and other inexorable woes that water projects, like other kinds of development, create. We are befuddled. We begrudge what we tolerate in order to live the way we do. Yet, my heart insists, and I want very much for these paintings to convey, that the real crime, the one for which we all have hell to pay, is that we have destroyed so many beautiful, magical, even perfect, places. Arrested rivers are lifeless. Liked clogged arteries, they hasten our mortality.

CHUCK FORSMAN

Appreciation

My wife, Kristin Lewis, and my daughters, Chloe and Shannon, both six years old at the publication of this book, have my undying gratitude for enduring my long daily preoccupation with this project with patience, love, and constantly renewing spirits. Thanks, I love you.

I am privileged to count among my friends an artist and a poet who are also fine administrators with the clout and tenacity to help initiate and sustain projects such as this book. Jerry Kunkel, who chairs the Fine Arts Department at the University of Colorado in Boulder, set the wheels in motion for this book and its accompanying exhibition. For his generosity, influence, and sense of timing on my behalf, I am deeply indebted. Gary Holthaus is director of the Center of the American West. His sustaining assistance, counsel, and coordination of the creation of this book, not to mention his wonderful contribution to it, have been invaluable.

All of the writers share my heartfelt gratitude. Patty Limerick and Charles Wilkinson have been an inspiration to me for years for their contributions to our understanding of history and law in the West. Patty's stature as a writer/scholar and her willing enthusiasm for this project were major factors in bringing it about. If Patty Limerick has made us re-evaluate our collective history as a people here in the West, then Charles Wilkinson's knowledge, imagination, and relentless optimism have as surely aroused us with real solutions. For their examples of wit, grace under pressure, and tone of conciliation, we can all be grateful.

Roger Echo-Hawk is a Shawnee poet, musician, Native historian, and consultant in many areas of Indian affairs. It is no wonder that he became an invaluable help for me in approaching Native American themes in my paintings. His poem "The Water Monster" is haunting, menacing, and telling. I would also like to thank Melanie Yazzie and Laura Shurley from the Navajo nation and Kay Miller, who is part Comanche, all of whom are fine artists, for furthering my understanding of what it means to be a Native American living today. Where I have succeeded in approaching this subject, I owe them great thanks. Where I failed, I failed alone.

I am truly honored to have Helen and Newton Harrison participate in this project. They are two of the pre-eminent environmental artists of our day. In addition to being very accomplished and active exhibitors in galleries and museums, they create innovative, sensible, and sensitive water solutions that are enacted worldwide.

Mike Crane is director of the CU Art Galleries, which cosponsored this project with the Center of the American West. He has my deep gratitude for sharing in the conception of the project and for very actively and effectively organizing the traveling exhibition.

Tibor de Nagy has been my New York art dealer for most of the past twenty years. He has also been a friend and counselor from the beginning, and I owe him more than I can ever repay. He has supported me in this venture, as in many others. His director, Andrew Arnot, shares my gratitude for his generous help.

I am deeply grateful to a number of other friends for their help and inspiration, both direct and indirect, notably Howard Palmer, Jim Cursley, Ken Abbott, James Balog, Robert Adams, Joellyn Duesberry, Ira Cowalt, Jennifer and Jerry Carney, and my grandmother, Fanny DeBoard, who lives in Nampa, Idaho, the town where I was born near the Snake River.

Also, special thanks to The Sons of the Pioneers, Claude Monet, Norman Maclean, John Wesley Powell, William Mulholland, John the Baptist, and others who have had something to teach us about the power and poetry of water.

C. F

(Caption moved to next page)



Crow Country

56" x 56"

1993

Oil on Masonite

Courtesy: Tibor de Nagy Gallery, N.Y.C.

(Caption moved to next page)



Lizard

56" x 87"

1990

Oil on Masonite

Courtesy: Tibor de Nagy Gallery, N.Y.C.

(Caption moved to next page)



Park

54" x 88"

1992

Oil on Masonite

Courtesy: Tibor de Nagy Gallery, N.Y.C.

(Caption moved to next page)



Native Land

57" x 88"

1993

Oil on Masonite

Courtesy: Tibor de Nagy Gallery, N.Y.C.

(Caption moved to next page)