

KAY RUANE

ROBERT PERKINS

TODD NORSTEN

STUART MEAD

THOMAS COWETTE



Fig 5

NEW WORK

MCAD/M^CKnight Artists

1998 . 1999

Kay RUANE

THE CONTEMPLATIVE SOUL and its relationship to nature represent core concerns of Romantic poetry and literature. A reaction to modern industrialism, 18th and 19th century Romanticism imagined the possibility of a complete empathy between the human subject and nature. Romantic poets and painters sacralized emotionality over the rationalized discourse of modern industrialism and its artistic counterparts—Neoclassical poetry and painting. The Romantic reaction to Neoclassicism manifested itself in two distinct forms: the pastoral and the sublime. The discourse of the pastoral emphasized a gentle nature—a place of retreat and rejuvenation. The discourse of the sublime, in contrast, imaged nature as awesome and terrifying—a maelstrom of emotion, anticipation, and fear.

Kay Ruane's figure and landscape drawings are rooted in both the Neoclassical and Romantic traditions. According to the artist, her work attempts to negotiate the spaces between Classicism and Romanticism and also the Romantic extremes of the pastoral and the sublime. The origins of her figures and landscapes are observed. These observations are recorded mechanically by the camera and then in the final drawings are re-imagined and fully articulated in Ruane's own Romantic pictorial language. Her figures are precisely rendered, exhibiting a classical sense of line and restraint. The anonymity and the loneliness of contemplative figures moving in and through a variety of landscapes, however, evoke a less rational and ordered universe.

The layers of negotiation at work in the drawings set in motion a vague but insistent sense of narrative, tying the individual works together as a series of sorts. Structural anthropologist, Claude Levi-Strauss posited that myth was necessarily repetitive—across time, cultures, and even individual stories themselves. In other words, according to Levi-Strauss, the structure of the mythic narrative, not its particular elements, speak to essential values and organizational necessities in human society. Therefore, though any given culture has many myths, each one tells the same story per se, repeating over and over again what is needed by that culture, and by extension humanity itself. Ruane's drawings contain at least the suggestion of individual narrative. In *Forest*, a classicized nude confronts the immensity of the landscape, clutching a microcosm of that vista in her hands. The echoing of the forms of the body and natural world tie the two together in a Romantic sympathy, offering both the moment of sympathetic identification and that just prior—the moment of confrontation, which is necessarily saturated with alienation and terror. When viewing Ruane's drawings together, a larger narrative constructed by their relations begins to emerge. We recognize the figure across drawings. The landscapes, though particular reveal an individual sensibility as the artist's own crafting becomes increasingly visible. Like Levi-Strauss's myths, the drawings tell different stories but articulate the same truths—over and over again. In this way, Ruane's drawings in all their mystery seem to arouse the urgency argued for by Levi-Strauss. As we follow the interior paths of her landscapes, we, like the figure itself, confront issues of time, space, movement, and place.

Desert

- graphite
- 1999
- 29" x 36"

