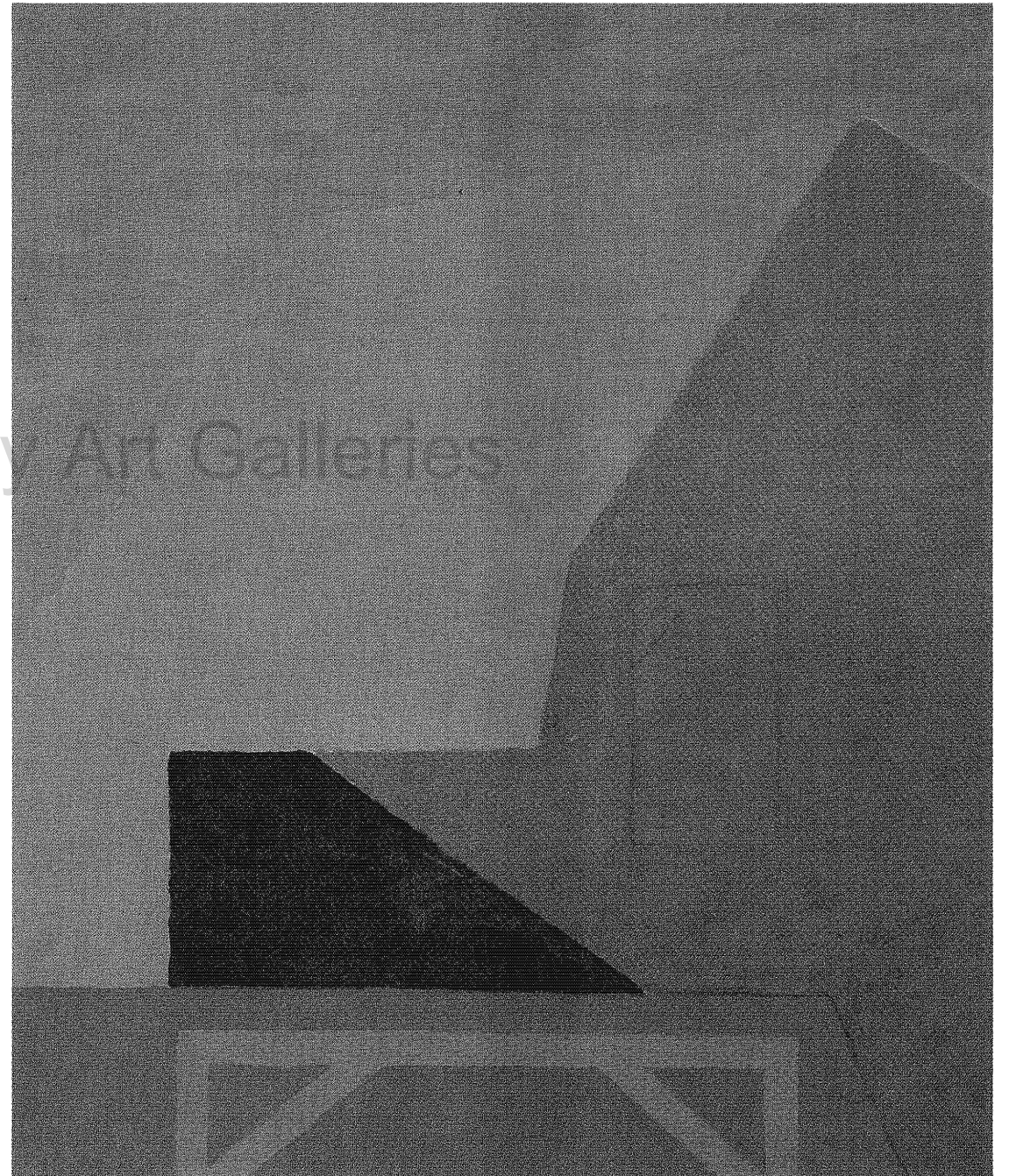

GEORGE VANDER SLUIS

HOMAGE TO THE BARN

Syracuse University Art Galleries



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January 24-February 21, 1982

Joe and Emily Lowe Art Gallery

School of Art

College of Visual and Performing Arts

Syracuse University

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Joe and Emily Lowe Art Gallery is honored to present the exhibition George Vander Sluis: Homage to the Barn in dedication to the long and distinguished career of George Vander Sluis at Syracuse University. On behalf of the Lowe Art Gallery I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Professor Vander Sluis for his cooperation.

My appreciation is also extended to the individuals who participated in the formation of this exhibition and catalog: Professor Ruth Ann Appelhof, Curator; Professor Michael Recht, Assistant Dean, College of Visual and Performing Arts; Mr. Leonard Eichler, Preparator; and Ms. Patricia Tagg, graduate museology student.

A special thank you is extended to the Graduate School, Syracuse University; the Graduate Division, College of Visual and Performing Arts; and the Department of Studio Arts, School of Art for providing the funds to support the publication of this catalog.

In addition, I would like to thank Dr. August Freundlich, Dean of the College of Visual and Performing Arts; Professor Rodger Mack, Director of the School of Art; and the graduate museology students for their support and assistance.

Joseph A. Scala
Director

INTRODUCTION

George Vander Sluis began his career as an artist educator in the School of Art at Syracuse University in 1946. There were not many faculty members then, and not much space. A new building, the Lowe Art Center, was still several years in the future (and, as it turned out, was already too small the day it was dedicated).

Exciting things were about to happen in American painting and sculpture, and in the way we trained and educated our young artists. American art schools, following Syracuse University's example, were soon to assume the bulk of that responsibility.

George Vander Sluis' contributions during this period were outstanding as a painter, a teacher, and an educator. His reputation as a painter grew with the abstract movement as it exploded on the American scene, and served as a touchstone for generations of students during the next 35 years. His former students permeate every aspect of the art world. And his work as an educator has been a major factor in the creation of a substantial and coherent Master of Fine Arts program at Syracuse.

I think we often measure the sense and impact of the word "contribution" too lightly. This may be a necessary failing of institutional rhetoric. The history and future of our Art School cannot be adequately dealt with without an understanding of George Vander Sluis' efforts. Perhaps the next time we talk about "contribution" we had best measure it against his accomplishment.

Michael Recht

yellows dominating, suggests a feeling of "barnness" permeated by the bright glow of morning light.

In contrast to the jubilant mood of this work is Barn Window, where the rectangle seethes with low-value grays that evoke the spooky, low-keyed tones of twilight. The term "evoke" is important here, because Vander Sluis does not "picture" the subject matter so much as he involves the viewer in participating with him in an aesthetic experience.

Earlier in his career, upon receiving a Fulbright Grant to study in Italy, Vander Sluis became fascinated with Sieneese art. Siena, in the Middle Ages, had close ties with the mosaic tradition of Byzantine art, which was non-linear, discontinuous, and stressed the interval. Traditionally, Western art since the Renaissance has been sequential, connective, and narrative.

These are merely different attitudes toward space, but an understanding of Vander Sluis' paintings requires an accommodation with these con-

trasting views. As in a mosaic, his paintings never lose the basic flatness of the picture plane and, therefore, they are highly participatory: that is, the beholder must "fill in" much of the pictorial information.

Although the subject of the barn is a leitmotif running through these paintings, the resonance between forms is the key to understanding the work. The interval—the interstice—is the thing.

In Barn Structure No. 1, for example, the space between the columns takes on a concrete form. In other paintings a variety of intervening shapes are emphasized, and most paintings have multiple spatial tensions created by a complexity of forms.

A few references will single out specific intervals: in Barn Structure No. 2, for example, it is between wooden beams; in

Big Barn, between window and wall; in Barn with Gambrel Roof, between peaks of a roof coming together; and in Tall Barns, between guide posts. Georges Braque called such areas "tactile space," and Vander Sluis orchestrates it to great effect.

When Vander Sluis gives us a relatively straightforward interpretation of a section of a barn, we may be sure there are other nuances lurking below the threshold of immediate perception. Consider Red Barn Painted White; it is a fragment of the facade of a white barn. At first glance, it also appears to be a subtle interaction of warm and cool whites; but on closer inspection the whites on the surface of the side boards vibrate with an undertone of barely perceptible reds. We are drawn to explore the surface of the painting, and somehow there seems to be more here than meets the eye.

And there is, of course. Vander Sluis has discovered, on his extensive sketching trips throughout the eastern United States, that in some areas the red barn is disappearing, being covered over with white paint to "integrate" it with contemporary taste. The painting indicates this change.

The color red and the barn are interwoven in our culture. Even the city child makes the connection, if only because of the fast-food outlet that has

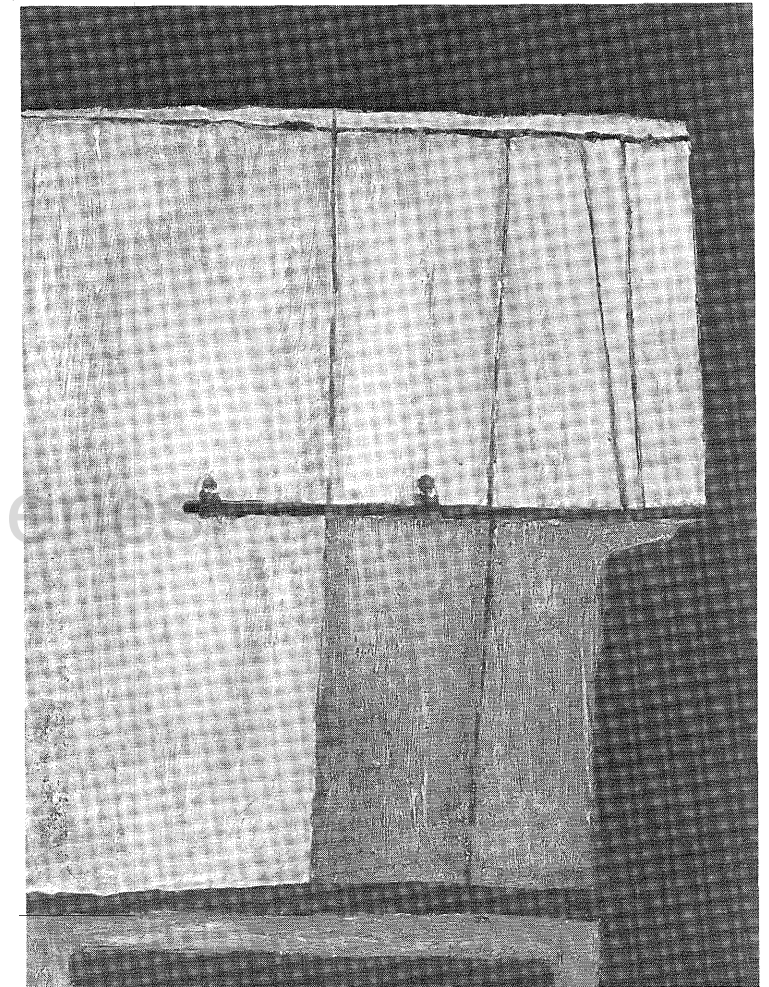
adopted the name. Such commercial use of the "red barn" remains in our national psyche. Nevertheless, the archetypal form may soon vanish, and one more part of Americana will have faded away.

George Vander Sluis, as a painter, will continue to provoke and stimulate us to be aware that our culture will dispose of some of its greatest assets unless the artistic sensibility serves as a warning of the impending loss.

Larry Bakke
Professor of Art

SECTION OF A BARN

1962 Oil on board, 23¾ x 17¾ inches



CATALOG OF THE EXHIBITION

All works are on paper unless otherwise indicated. Measurements are in inches, height preceding width.

1961

Barn Section with Windows

Pastel and ink, 17 x 23

Double Arched Doors

Pastel and ink, 17 x 24½

Barn Side with Sliding Doors

Pastel and ink, 18½ x 28

1962

Barn Door Symbol

Acrylic on board, 18 x 23½

Painted Arched Doors

Oil on canvas, 54 x 74

Section of a Barn

Oil on board, 23¾ x 17¾

1966

Barn Door No. 5

Acrylic on board, 15¾ x 10½

Barn Door No. 10

Acrylic on board, 16 x 10

Barn Door No. 21

Acrylic on board, 15 x 10

Barn Door No. 24

Acrylic on board, 15¾ x 11¾

Barn Door No. 25

Acrylic on board, 16 x 11¼

Barn Door No. 27

Acrylic on board, 15 x 10

1981

Barn Side

Aqua-tec on canvas, 28 x 24

Big Barn

Aqua-tec on canvas, 24 x 29

Barn Window

Aqua-tec on canvas, 29 x 24

Barn at Night

Aqua-tec on canvas, 25 x 22

Early Morning Sun

Aqua-tec on canvas, 26 x 22

Barn in Shadow

Aqua-tec on canvas, 28 x 24

Red Barn Painted White

Aqua-tec on canvas, 22 x 22

Barn with Gambrel Roof

Aqua-tec on canvas, 28 x 24

Barn Side with Loft

Aqua-tec on canvas, 28 x 24

Large Barn No. 1

Aqua-tec on canvas, 29 x 24

Large Barn No. 2

Aqua-tec on canvas, 28½ x 24

Tall Barns

Aqua-tec on canvas, 28 x 24

Barn Structures No. 1

Aqua-tec on canvas, 30 x 24

Two Barns

Aqua-tec on canvas,
19¾ x 16½

1982

Barn Structures No. 2

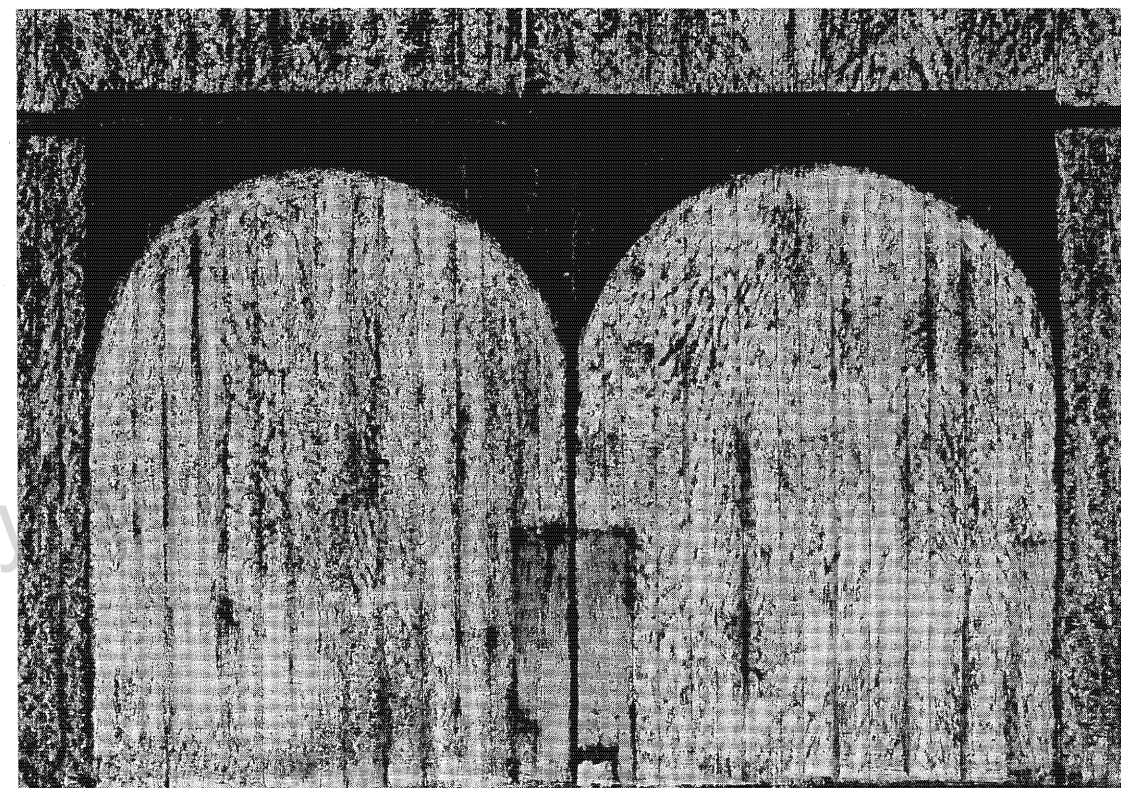
Aqua-tec on canvas, 30 x 24

Barn Structures No. 3

Oil and wax on board, 18 x 18

DOUBLE ARCHED DOORS

1961 Pastel and ink, 17 x 24½ inches



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CREDITS

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Ruth Ann Appelhof, Curator

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Front Cover

Large Barn No. 1

Aqua-tec on canvas,
29 x 24 inches

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