Jon Schueler

Skyscapes
All works may be viewed online at www.waterhousedodd.com/jon-schueler and are available for purchase on receipt of this catalogue.

We are grateful to Diana Ewer of Diana Ewer Art Advisory for her assistance in facilitating this exhibition.

Front cover (detail):
Storm, 1962
Oil on canvas
54 x 72 in / 137 x 183 cm
Estate ref: o/c 62-14

JON SCHUELER (1916-1992)
Skyscapes
Paintings and works on paper from the estate of the artist

18th June - 12th July 2019

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For Jon Schueler, the sky was a conveyor of all things from life and death to love and fear. Schueler’s intense focus on the sky began as a boy in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where he was born in 1916. This fascination deepened during his time in active service and ultimately led him to the Highlands of Scotland where he discovered the perfect landscape to inspire his pursuit of the Sublime. His skyscapes exist on the border between figuration and abstraction, being at once wholly recognisable as the skies above the Sound of Sleat, yet at the same time expressing an emotional and psychological gravity. This careful balance gave him a unique position within the Abstract Expressionist milieu with which he was so closely associated.

Early memories of the horizon meeting the waters of Lake Michigan and of witnessing the storms rolling across the panorama were formative influences. The notion, espoused by Schueler in later years, of the night sky with its “all-encompassing void of darkness” can be traced back to the loss of the artist’s mother when he was only 6 months old. It is an early example of the artist searching for meaning by looking beyond what is purely evident.

Schueler’s captivation with the sky was heightened during the Second World War when he was a navigator in the US Army Air Force. From his exposed position in the plexiglass nose of a B-17 bomber, Schueler witnessed the skies over Europe desecrated by fire and smoke as well as the beauty of the mountains, land and horizon as seen from the sky. He later wrote that “there in combat the sky held all things: life, death, fear and joy and love. It was storm, enemy, friend.” Schueler was haunted by what he saw and racked with survivor’s guilt in the face of huge losses to his squadron (he was one of only two from the crew of Bad Check who returned home). He was discharged in 1944 on medical grounds, suffering what would now be diagnosed as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. For Schueler, the sky had become a place of inextricable beauty and loss. He later commented that his skyscapes were imagined and realised as if he were still airborne rather than rooted to the ground.

Schueler enrolled full-time at the California School of Fine Arts in 1949 where he studied under Clyfford Still. In 1951, encouraged by Still, he moved to New York and immersed himself in the world of the Abstract Expressionists. His work was well-received by critics and he had two solo exhibitions with Leo Castelli in 1957 and 1959. However the intense urban environment of New York did not provide the artist with the stimulus he felt he needed and he dreamt of finding a specifically northern landscape with dominating skies and wide expanses. Bunty Challis, with whom he had a brief relationship with in London during the war, had regaled Schueler with stories of the magnificent Scottish landscape, but he was prevented by familial and financial reasons from seeing these vistas for himself until September 1957.

As he approached Mallaig for the first time he saw the massive forms of the islands of Eigg, Muck, Rhum and the Southern tip of the Isle of Skye emerging across the sea “glowing in this kind of wild light” and he was instantly captivated. He found that the skyscape over the Sound of Sleat was vast and changed rapidly; clouds and storms engulfed and then passed over the horizon, with rays of sunlight intermittently piercing the expanse.

Schueler altered his technique to adequately render the ephemeral beauty he witnessed. During his early career he had applied oil paint with a palette knife in a style indebted to his mentor, Clyfford Still. This impasto technique gave way to a more sensitive modelling of colour to capture the soft diffusions of light through clouds. To achieve these very particular atmospheric effects, Schueler turned to the work of J.M.W. Turner, whose work he first encountered as a student. He studied Turner’s painting and watercolours in London in 1958, learning techniques of layered coloured glazes and how to anchor a composition with the mere suggestion of a horizon or cloud. Schueler believed that Turner had gone further than any other painter in emulating the effects and sensations of nature, and in doing so, transcended his medium to become an extension of nature itself. In acknowledging the influence of Turner on his work, Schueler considered himself to be rebelling against the tenets of Abstract Expressionism, a movement which denied derivation.
Schueler’s skyscapes capture the subtleties and moods of atmosphere so skilfully that his paintings become extensions of nature. However, at the same time they move beyond figurative painting in that they express psychological and metaphysical complexities. This paradox was expressed in a conversation held with his then dealer, Ben Heller, while looking at the Isle of Skye over the Sound of Sleat:

“We sat and rested awhile. ‘What people don’t realise,’ he said, ‘is that your work is completely abstract.’

I nodded. ‘And then what they don’t realise is that your work is absolutely real.’

‘That’s it, Ben,’ I said. ‘That’s exactly it. That’s what I want. The abstract is real and the real is abstract.’ It’s right in front of you. Right in front of your eyes. That’s where the mystery is. That’s where the truth lies.”

Amelia Williamson
April 2019

Schueler’s solution is more difficult because it is less obvious. He risks more by deliberately exploring a narrow area where nothing is secure, where everything is changing, evanescent, and evocative. We see his paintings one minute as clouds and sea and islands, the next as swirling arrangements of pure colour and light.”

In the same year as his solo show at the Whitney Museum, Schueler was part of a three-man exhibition, alongside Milton Avery and Mark Rothko, at the Cleveland Museum of Art. Titled ‘Landscapes, Interior and Exterior’ Schueler’s skyscapes were described as sensorial expressions of inner experiences compared to Rothko’s suggestion of introspective space through meditation on form.

Schueler described his painting as the “rendering of a veil,” an attempt to reveal fundamental human truths through meditation on his skyscapes. He described this search as a profound impulse to confront truths about life, whether that meant humanity, love, loneliness or eternity. Schueler desired that his search would ultimately break through figuration to grasp at a fundamental universality. This pursuit aligns him with Abstract Expressionism but he questioned the obstinacy with which other Abstract Expressionists embraced non-objectivity as the prerequisite of freedom of thought and expression. Jack Baur, Director of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, (where Schueler had a solo exhibition in 1975) wrote:

“Jon Schueler has walked a difficult path between opposites. His paintings look abstract but are not. The character of the Scottish coast, where he lives, speaks through these poetic canvases with remarkable clarity and exactness...

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And yet these are basically abstract pictures, not unrelated to the work of Mark Rothko or some of Clifford Still’s big canvases. They have that kind of largeness, mystery and power. They strike a more precarious balance between observation and abstract form...

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Schueler quotes from ‘The Sound of Sleat: A Painter’s Life by Jon Schueler’, edited by Magda Salvesen and Diane Cousineau, Picador USA 1999

Jon Schueler with Ben and Pat Heller, Mallaig, 1974.
Photo: Magda Salvesen

Jon Schueler, Edinburgh, 1981.
Photo: Archie Iain McLellan
Storm, 1962
Oil on canvas
54 x 72 in / 137 x 183 cm
Estate ref: o/c 62.14
April Sky, 1963
Oil on canvas
56 x 70 in / 142 x 178 cm
Estate ref: o/c 63-17
A Memory of the Sound of Sleat, 1963
Oil on canvas
51.5 x 60 in / 131 x 152.5 cm
Estate ref: o/c 63-18
Sound of Sleat: June Night IX, 1970
Oil on canvas
32 x 40 in / 81 x 101.5 cm
Estate ref: o/c 46
Sound of Sleat: June Night VI, 1970
Oil on canvas
10 x 12 in / 25.5 x 30.5 cm
Estate ref: o/c 43

Sound of Sleat: Summer Night II, 1970
Oil on canvas
10 x 12 in / 25.5 x 30.5 cm
Estate ref: o/c 28
Night Sky: July, 1973
Oil on canvas
30 x 36 in / 76 x 91.5 cm
Estate ref: o/c 378
Night Sea Burning, 1974
Oil on canvas
69 x 76 in / 175 x 193 cm
Estate ref: o/c 530
Mood with Magda: Blues and Greys, 1974
Oil on canvas
30 x 36 in / 76 x 91.5 cm
Estate ref: o/c 442
Jon Schueler, Mark Rothko and Milton Avery at the Cleveland Museum of Art, 1975.
Photo: Courtesy of the Cleveland Museum

Changes, 1974
Oil on canvas
36 x 32 in / 91.5 x 81.5 cm
Estate ref: o/c 481
Jon Schueler (solo exhibition)
Photo: Geoffrey Clements

Separate Ways: Storm and Sea, 1975
Oil on canvas
48 x 44 in / 122 x 112 cm
Estate ref: o/c 608
Line of Sky, 1977
Oil on canvas
29 x 32 in / 73.5 x 81.5 cm
Estate ref: o/c 866
The Search: Variations, Umber and Black II, 1981
Oil on canvas
14 x 18 in / 35.5 x 45.5 cm
Estate ref: o/c 1167
Long Descent into Sound of Sleat, 1989
Oil on canvas
36 x 48 in / 91.5 x 122 cm
Estate ref: o/c 1650
Calamity, 1990
Oil on canvas
32 x 48 in / 81.5 x 122 cm
Estate ref: o/c 1672
Eagle's Wing, 1990
Oil on Canvas
24 x 36 in / 61 x 91.5 cm
Estate ref: o/c 1704
Chester Study I, 1969
Watercolour on paper
15.75 x 15.5 in / 40 x 39.5 cm
Estate ref: w/c 69-16

Untitled, 1972
Watercolour on paper
11 x 14 in / 28 x 36 cm
Estate ref: w/c 90

Untitled, 1985
Watercolour & pencil on paper
9.25 x 13.5 in / 23.5 x 34.5 cm
Estate ref: w/c 577

Untitled, 1973
Watercolour on paper
21.75 x 10 in / 55.5 x 25 cm
Estate ref: w/c 197
Jon Schueler

1916 Born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin
1938 BA in Economics at University of Wisconsin, WI
1940 MA in English Literature at University of Wisconsin, WI
1941 Enlists in the US Army Air Force as a B-17 Bomber navigator
1949 Enrolls at the California School of Fine Arts
1951 Moves to New York and becomes immersed in the Abstract Expressionist milieu
1957 Visits Mallaig in Western Scotland for the first time
1970-75 Lives and works in Mallaig full-time (after which time he maintained studios in New York and Mallaig)
1992 Dies in New York on 5th August

Solo exhibitions:
1950 Jon Schueler, The Contemporary Gallery, Sausalito Gallery, Sausalito, California
1954 Jon Schueler, Stable Gallery, New York
1957 Jon Schueler, Leo Castelli Gallery, New York
1959 Jon Schueler, Leo Castelli Gallery, New York
1960 Jon Schueler, Hirsch and Adler Galleries, New York
1961 Jon Schueler, Stoeckel Hall Gallery, Yale Summer School of Music and Art, New Haven, Connecticut
1961 Jon Schueler, School of Architecture, Columbia University, New York
1962 Jon Schueler, Recent Paintings and Drawings, Stable Gallery, New York
1963 Jon Schueler, Franklin Gallery, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York
1967 Jon Schueler, The Gallery of the Maryland Institute, Baltimore, Maryland
1968 Jon Schueler, The Gallery, Illini Union, Champaign, Illinois
1970 Jon Schueler, Davison Art Center, Wesleyan University, Connecticut
1971 Jon Schueler, New Paintings 'The Sound of Sleat', Richard Demarco Gallery, Edinburgh
1972 Jon Schueler, Community Hall, Mallaig, Scotland
1973 Jon Schueler, The Sound of Sleat. An Exhibition of Paintings, arranged by Richard Nathan at The Edinburgh College of Art, Edinburgh
1974 Jon Schueler, Lester Gallery, Inverness, California
1977 Jon Schueler: Paintings and Watercolors, Dayton's Gallery 12, Minneapolis, Minnesota
1978 Jon Schueler: Paintings from Mallaig, House (Gallery), London
1980 Jon Schueler, Paintings, Peter Chinni Sculpture, Squibb Gallery, Princeton, New Jersey
1982 Jon Schueler, Dorrty Gates Gallery, Kansas City, Missouri
2007 Jon Schueler: Paintings from Mallaig, House (Gallery), London
2008 Jon Schueler: Watercolors, John C. Stoller & Co., Minneapolis, Minnesota
2011 Jon Schueler: The Search, Talbot Rice Art Centre, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh
2013 Jon Schueler, City Art Centre, Edinburgh, then touring
2017 Jon Schueler, Virtual Tour, Digital Exhibition, City Art Centre, Edinburgh, then touring
2018 Jon Schueler: To the North, City Art Centre, Edinburgh, then touring
2020 Jon Schueler, Cross Currents: The Fifties and Seventies, A.C.A. Galleries, New York
2021 Jon Schueler, Cross Currents: The Sixties and Eighties, A.C.A. Galleries, New York
2022 Jon Schueler: The Sound of Sleat, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh
2023 Jon Schueler: A Homecoming: Jon Schueler (1916-1992), Dean Jensen Gallery, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
2008 Jon Schueler: Works from the 1950s and 60s, David Findlay Jr. Fine Art, New York
2009 Jon Schueler: Weathering, Springfield Art Museum, Springfield, Missouri
Jon Schueler: Sound of Sleet Shadows, Moray Art Centre, Firthorn, Scotland
Jon Schueler, The Depicted Unknown, Diebenkorn's Circle: Paintings by Abstract Expressionists of the California School of Fine Arts and Beyond, Moray Art Centre, Findhorn, Scotland
Jon Schueler's Song, Hines, New York
2013 Jon Schueler: Paintings from the 70's, Dean Jensen Gallery, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
2016 Mapping Memory: Jon Schueler Skylscapes, Bridgewater State University, Wallace L. Anderson Gallery, Bridgewater, Massachusetts
Jon Schueler: Sound of Sleet Reflections, Malaggy Heritage Centre, Malaggy, Scotland
Jon Schueler: Speaking of the Sky, University of Stirling, Stirling, Scotland
Jon Schueler Skylscapes, Inverness Museum & Art Gallery, Inverness, Scotland
Jon Schueler: Weathering Skies, Arkansas Arts Center, Little Rock, Alaska
Jon Schueler Skylscapes, Thurso Gallery, Caithness, Scotland, then touring
Jon Schueler: Sea to Sky, Resipole Studios and Fine Art Gallery, Acharacle, Scotland
Jon Schueler: The Women Paintings of the 60's, Berry Campbell, New York
Jon Schueler Skylscapes, The Iona Gallery, Kingussie, Scotland, then touring
2017 Jon Schueler: Weathering Skies, University of Wyoming Art Museum, Laramie, Wyoming
2017 The 19 Jan Schueler oils in the Collection, University of Wyoming Art Museum, Laramie, Wyoming
2018 Jon Schueler: Sky As Landscape, LewAllen Galleries, Santa Fe, New Mexico, London
2019 Jon Schueler Skylscapes, Waterhouse & Dodd, London
2020-22 Lost Man Blues: Jon Schueler – Art and War, then touring
Selected public group exhibitions:
1955 Vanguard 1955: A Painter's Selection of New American Painting, The Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota, then touring
1958 Corcoran Gallery of Art Biennial, Washington, DC (also 1962)
1958 New Talent, 1958, Art in America, American Federation of Arts, Stoeckel Hall Gallery, Yale Summer School of Music & Art, Norfolk, Connecticut, then touring
1960 School of New York: Some Younger Artists, American Federation of Arts, then touring
1960 60 American Painters: 1960, Abstract Expressionist Paintings of the Fifties, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota
1961 Group exhibition, Baltimore Museum of Art, Maryland, Baltimore

1962 Maryland Institute, Baltimore, Maryland
1962 Selections from the Art Lending Service, Penthouse Exhibition, Museum of Modern Art, New York
1963 Landscape in Recent American Painting, Wolman Hall, The New York Public Library, New York
1964 Recent Paintings by Schueler-Scarpitti, The Maryland Institute Gallery, Baltimore, Maryland
1975 Landscapes, Interior and Exterior: Avery, Rothko and Schueler, Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio
1980 The Artist and the Sea, The Scottish Arts Council, Edinburgh, then touring
1992 The Depicted Unknown, Procter Art Center, Bard College, New York
1996 El Expresionismo Abstracto y La Experiencia Estadounidense, Centro Cultural/Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico City, Mexico
2005 Pairings II: Discovered Dialogues in Postwar Abstraction, Hackett Freedman Gallery, San Francisco, California
2007 Suitcase Paintings: Small Scale Abstract Expressionism, Georgia Museum of Art, Athens, GA, then touring
2010 Window to the West, The Rediscovery of Highland Art, City Art Centre, Edinburgh
2012 Abstract Expressionism, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
2013 Personal Perspectives, Springfield Art Museum, Springfield, Missouri
AB-EX / RE-CON: Abstract Expressionism Reconsidered, Nassau County Museum of Art, Roslyn, New York
New Acquisitions, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh
2015 Scottish Art: People, Places, Ideas, City Art Centre, Edinburgh
2016 Clouds: Temporarily Visible, Weisman Art Museum, Minneapolis, Minnesota
Gesture: Expression in Modern Art, Paisley Museum and Art Galleries, Paisley, Scotland
Out of the Frame, The McManus, Dundee City Art Gallery, Dundee, Scotland
First 5 Years of Art of Our Time, Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, Florida
2017 Diebenkorn’s Circle: Paintings by Abstract Expressionists of the California School of Fine Arts and Beyond, Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, California
2018 American Masters 1940-1980, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Master Class: Hans Hofmann, Nassau County Museum of Art, Roslyn, New York
A full exhibition list can be supplied by the gallery on request
For further information, please refer to the following books:
2002 Jon Schueler: To the North, by Gerald Norland & Richard Ingleby, Merrell, London
A full bibliography can be supplied by the gallery on request
List of Public Collections:

Aberdeen Art Gallery, Aberdeen, Scotland
Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, MA
Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY
Arkansas Art Center, Little Rock, AR
Art Institute of Chicago, IL
Baltimore Museum of Art, MD
Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Archive, Berkeley, CA
Chazen Museum of Art, University of Wisconsin, WI
City Art Centre, Edinburgh, Scotland
Clan Donald Centre, Armadale, Skye, Scotland
Cleveland Museum of Art, OH
Colby College Museum of Art, Waterville, ME
Crockett Art Museum, Sacramento, CA
de Saisset Museum, Santa Clara University, CA
Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, MI
Eskerazi Museum of Art, Indiana University, IN
Fralin Museum of Art, Charlottesville, VA
Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow, Scotland
Greenville County Museum of Art, Greenville, SC
Grey Art Gallery, New York University, New York, NY
Harwood Museum of Art, Taos, NM
Heckscher Museum of Art, Huntington, NY
Housatonic Museum of Art, Bridgeport, CT
Inverness Museum and Art Gallery, Inverness, Scotland
H.F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, NY
Kirkcaldy Museum and Art Gallery, Kirkcaldy, Scotland
Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, Madison, WI
Mallag Heritage Centre, Mallag, Scotland
The McManus, Dundee, Scotland
Mills College Art Museum, Oakland, CA
Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minneapolis, MN
Museum of Wisconsin, West Bend, WI
Nassau Co. Museum of Art, Roslyn Harbor, NY
National Academy Museum, New York, NY
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Neuberger Museum, SUNY, Purchase, NY
New Britain Museum of American Art, New Britain, CT
Paisley Museum and Art Galleries, Paisley, Scotland
Racine Art Museum, Racine, WI
Redding Museum of Art, Redding, CA
Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, FL
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, CA
Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh
Sinte Museum of Art, South Bend, IN
Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville, IL
Springfield Art Museum, Springfield, MO
Sweet Briar College, Sweet Briar, VA
Telfair Museum of Art, Savannah, GA
Union College, Schenectady, NY
University of California at Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz, CA
University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, Scotland
University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA
University of Stirling, Stirling, Scotland
University of Saint Joseph, West Hartford, CT
University of Wyoming Art Museum, Laramie, WY
Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum, Minneapolis, MN
West Highland Museum, Fort William, Scotland
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY
Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT
Yellowstone Art Museum, Billings, MT