

CREIGHTON MICHAEL
DRAWINGS 1990-1995

MARKS AND METAPHOR

SARRATT GALLERY AT
VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY

Creighton Michael

MARKS AND METAPHOR

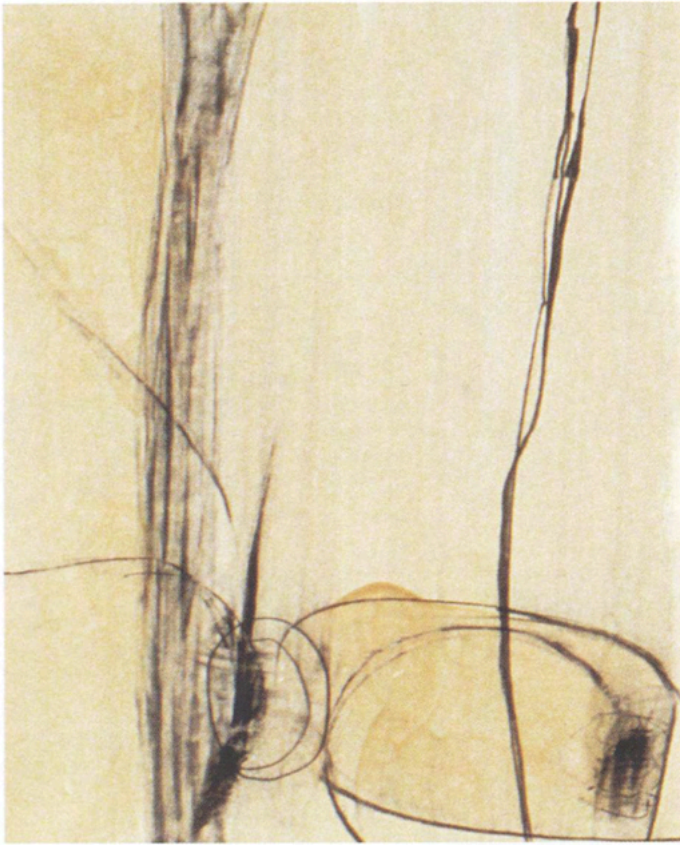
Drawings 1990–1995



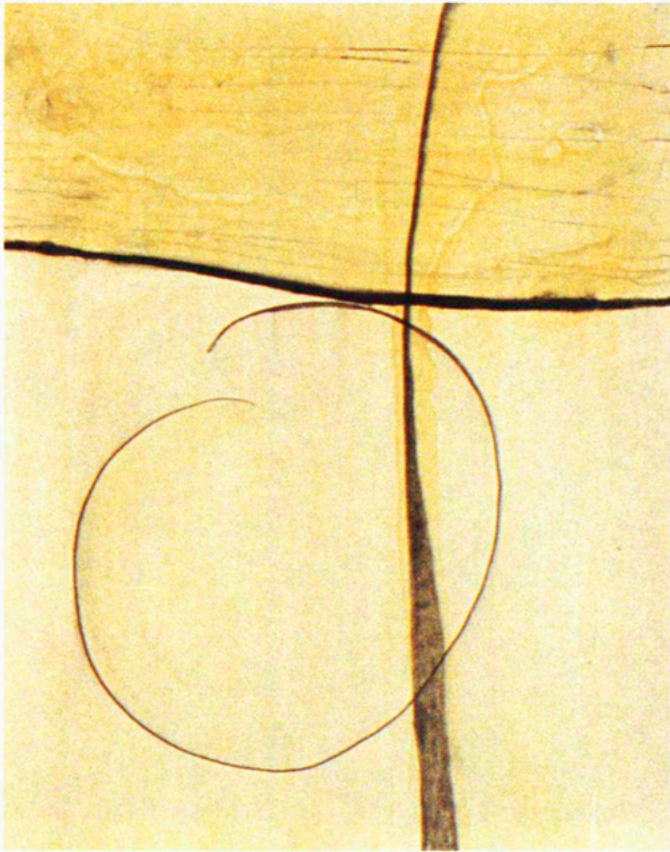
EDGE (393)
1993
graphite on paper
33 x 24 inches

April 21–May 17, 1996

Sarratt Gallery at Vanderbilt University



FOREWORD



TEAHOUSE PART 3

1995

graphite and shellac on paper

3 panels, 17 x 14 inches each panel

stretches from the mountains to the Mississippi. The Tennessee landscape provided rich source material. These early influences laid a foundation which was later reinforced by the artist's move to the countryside of upstate New York in 1990.

The artist's observations of the abundant natural world outside his studio window are mirrored in the suite of drawings encompassing the years 1990–1995. Michael's responses to his environment are intuitive sketches that reveal the artist's keen sense of the interplay between nature's opposing forces of light and dark, fragility and strength, spontaneity and control, regeneration and decay. The loose automatic drawing technique employed by Michael explores the very changing backdrop of our natural world.

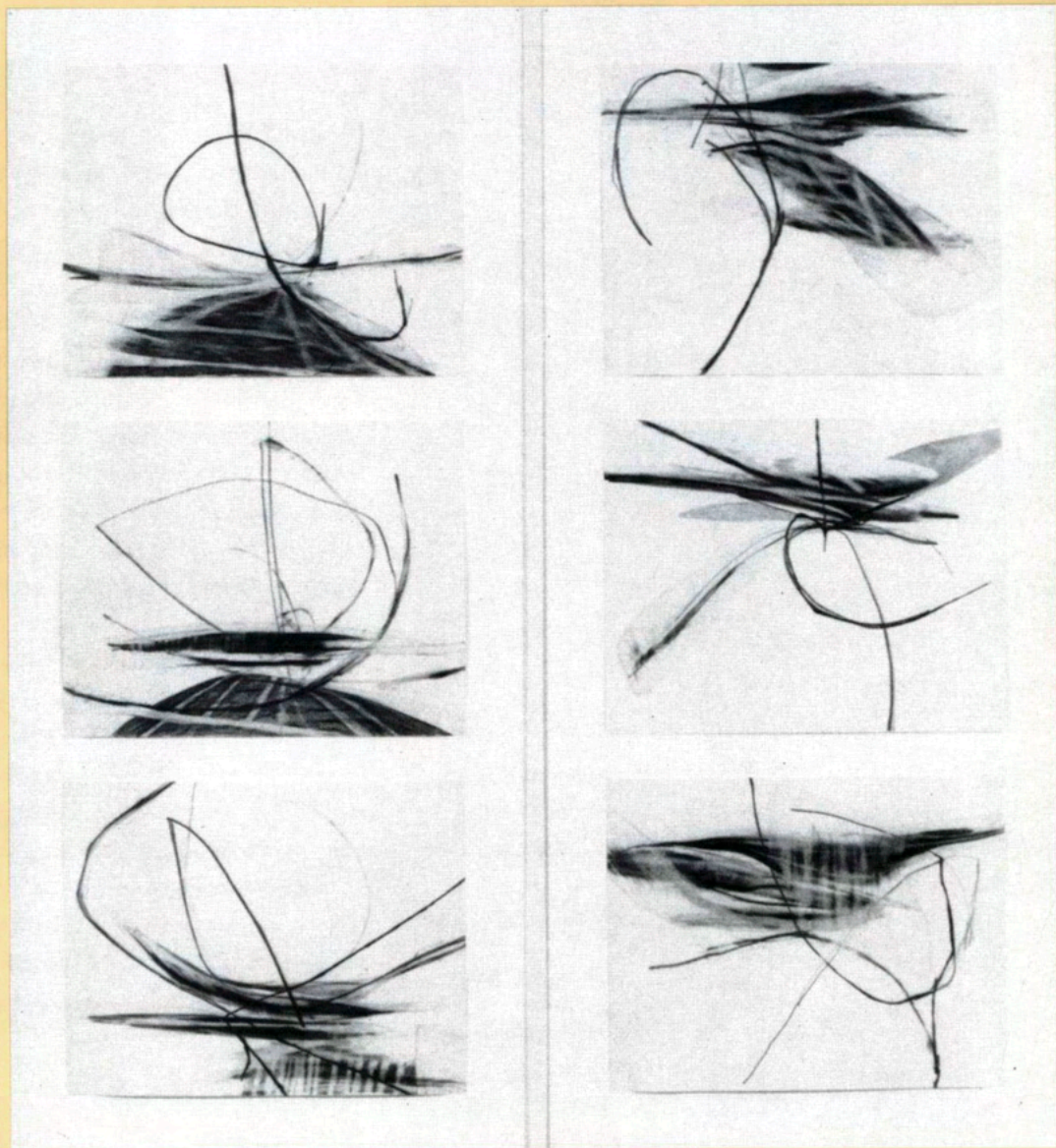
Almost half the works in this exhibition consist of small drawings arranged in sequences of three to six panels. Individually they are intimate views that invite introspection. Collectively the arrangement becomes a kinetic cycle of constant flux. Within these progressions, gestural lines are captured in a freeze frame frenzy of energy. Excitement is generated as animated lines collide with abstracted forms. From this charged arena, movement imitates nature and marks become metaphors. With these drawings Michael unveils his visions and personal expressions. The narrative that emerges reminds us of the reverent power that nature commands.

Winter in Tennessee reveals nature's innate ability to scribble and scrawl. At twilight the twisted lines of tree limbs are backlit against the gentle contours of rolling hills. This stark contrast of skeletal shapes and organic forms is a constant reminder of the natural ebb and flow of life's cycle. Nature's revolving scenery has influenced many artists and no doubt has had an impact on the drawing sensibilities of Creighton Michael.

The artist spent the first twenty-five years of his life experiencing the contrasts of the Tennessee landscape. Raised in Memphis and Nashville and educated in Knoxville and Nashville, Michael had many opportunities to observe the unique beauty of the vast region which

JoEl Levy Logiudice, Director
Sarratt Gallery at Vanderbilt
January 1996

MARKS AND METAPHOR



DART

1992

graphite on paper

6 panels,

11 x 14 inches each panel

“It was a world that imperturbably regenerated itself from instant to instant.”

Yukio Mishima, *The Temple of Dawn*

A mark can be a boundary that separates us from another space, another country. It can have physicality such as a fence line between two pieces of property or it can be a psychological marking between two individuals. A mark can link as well as separate. It can connect us to another world as a spider might draw a small insect into its web to consume. We can also be joined to another world through the vision of an artist as he puts pencil to paper pulling his viewer into the delicacy of his line and the mood of his strokes.

Creighton Michael stood on the edge of another world, the world of nature that he discovered on his property after moving to upstate New York in 1990. He observed the life in his pond and in the surrounding woods. Gradually, the boundary between him and the vibrant plant and animal life metamorphosed into a bond that quickly enveloped him. The bond became line on paper, a way of developing his understanding of the regenerative cycle of nature and a way of communicating this understanding through the completed work. Michael's working process echoes that of nature, marks are obsessively made, layered, erased, and added, as nature calmly builds, destroys, and regenerates itself. This intuitive technique allows Michael to develop drawings that are not just products of observation but of understanding.

Michael's first drawings after his move to Westchester were grouped together under the title *Navigator*. As he worked on the series, he began seeing the drawings as a related experience and decided to show them in a narrative sequence. The narrative is linear only in the visual presentation; the intent is circular as one image leads to the next, end to beginning, beginning to end. Michael's delicate *Navigator* buzzes about the periphery of the pond, carefully avoiding the ominous darkness of the land mass. This simple activity leads one to con-

sider a potent metaphor—our fragility as we negotiate our way in contemporary society, avoiding danger, keeping close to the source of our nourishment, yet knowing that death/destruction is at the edge of our existence.

Water Music is a more specific continuation of *Navigator*. Michael focuses on an expanded view of the pond, one that includes sound and makes reference to the dangerous and mysterious depths in the water. Again, he contrasts fragility and strength, beauty and horror. Perhaps the music that he references in the title is the beating of the hearts of the predator, the prey, and the observer. *Water Music* firmly establishes the conceptual thrust of Michael's drawings for the next four years. He explores conflict and resolution in nature as a metaphor for contemporary existence. He uses visual devices such as the co-existence of abstraction and representation, delicacy of line contrasting harsh areas of blackness, and intuitive marking/erasing to give his vision power.

The 1992 series, *Dart*, is more focused than the previous works and more formal. The insect-like creature who appears in *Navigator* and *Water Music* now takes center stage and consumes the majority of the physical and psychological space in each drawing. *Dart* spotlights the struggles of an “individual” in a similar manner to that of Francis Bacon's great portraits. We are mesmerized by the creature's skittering movements and subtle beauty. We observe as we would observe the flailing of an insect pinned to a dissection board for study—with a dispassionate, intellectual curiosity. This distancing enables us to analyze the relationship between the powerful and powerless through the sufferings of an individual. *Dart* suggests that compassion is a necessity in contemporary society.

Two groups of drawings from 1993, *Edge* and *Aquifer*, became increasingly theatrical and surreal. Are we seeing beautifully rendered views of life at the edge of the pond or are we at the edge of a furious cauldron awaiting our destruction? Michael toys with our perceptions. He knows that life is not as it often seems. He focuses our

NAVIGATOR

(detail from panel 1)

1990

graphite on paper

4 panels, 14 x 11 inches

each panel



attention on the action through the ovals of dark and light that are similar to the stage lighting for a dramatic soliloquy. The path of the spotlight is expressed by the obsessively drawn reeds and streams of water. The source of this light is beyond our vision, out of the picture plane. This absence is chilling and reassuring. We are not in control. As individuals the notion is frightening. More horrific is the thought of the ensuing chaos were humanity to gain mastery over natural processes. Michael's drawings eloquently remind us of the dilemma.

In the final group of drawings from 1993, *Aerial*, Michael gives us the "creator's" view of the landscape. We are the light ourselves. We are moving over the landscape and viewing the action below. We are searching. We hope to discover and to reveal. Michael enables us to experience his pursuit for truth by giving us access into his intuitive process. The translucency of the graphite allows us to observe the layers of existence in the world below. This formal quality along with the integration of form and light and the repetition of line symbolize the greatest aspirations of a creator—to engender harmony and revelation.

Michael's drawings shifted significantly in form during 1994. This change was the result of an opportunity to create an installation for the Katonah Museum of Art² involving sculpture, drawing, and painting. He conceived the drawings as a way to relate the interior and exterior environment of the museum. The result was a startling group of panoramic views focused on sections of pine trees. The *Conifer* drawings are more pictorial than the previous drawings and more related to the physical side of nature. They are violent and sexual. The thrusting and intertwining limbs explore conflict in contemporary society. The narrow visual perspective and the stark darks and lights of the forms remind us how consuming physicality can be and how fixated we as a society have become on the physical rather than the spiritual.

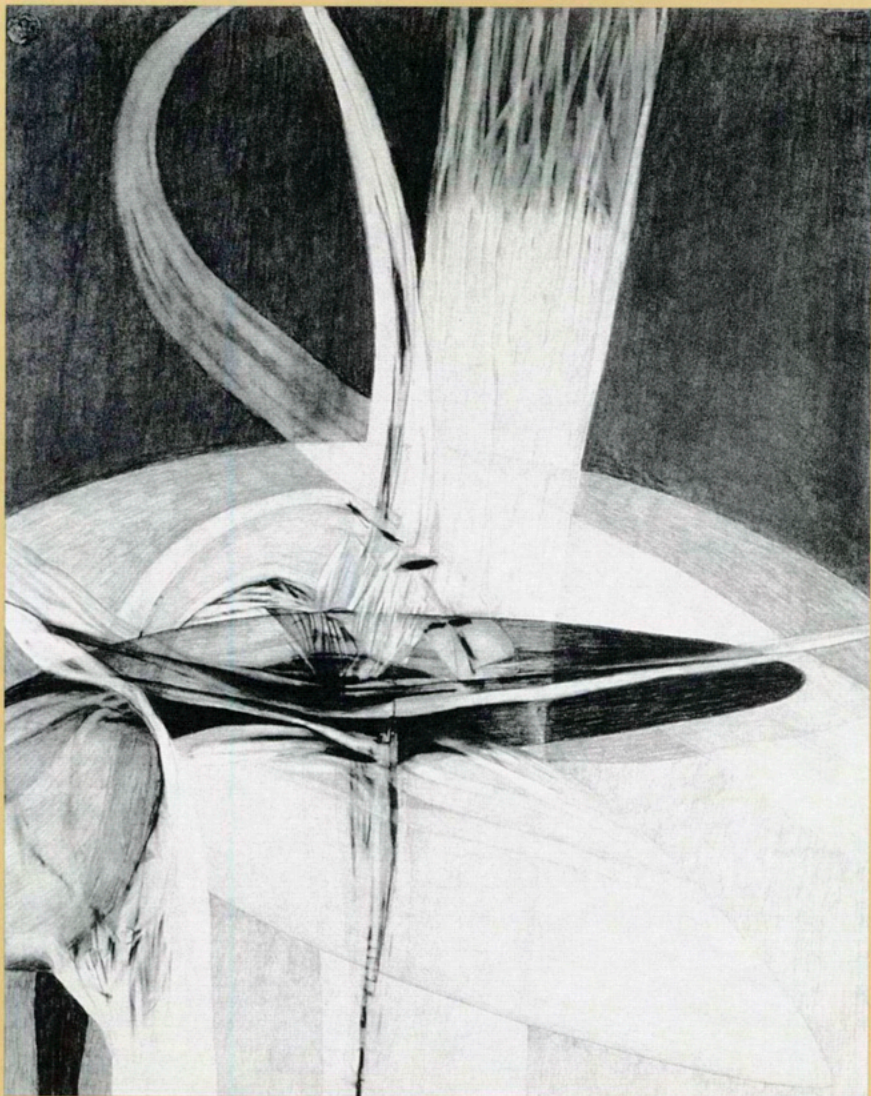
Michael felt that *Conifer* completed the group of drawings that originated in 1990 with *Navigator*. However, after a six months sabbatical from drawing, he began the *Teahouse* series in the summer of 1995. The *Teahouse* drawings became a source of reexamination for Michael. They not only incorporate references from the past five years of drawings but are strongly influenced by his sculpture from the early 1980s to the present. He also introduced color and materials (shellac and gesso) that hearken to earlier works. In a sense *Teahouse* is not only a reexamination but a retrospective. We revisit the fragile navigator, the swirling cauldron, the pond's delicate edge, the moving landscape, and the aggressive branches. *Teahouse* is a dwelling where we are served unique refreshments for sustenance and meditation. We consume with pleasure and are enriched by the experience. Michael is an artist who nourishes his viewers visually and conceptually, yet leaves us hungry for more.

Judith Page

January 1996

1. This structure originally appeared in Michael's sculptures from 1985–1987.

2. Creighton Michael: *Landscape*, Katonah Museum of Art, Katonah, New York, 1994



AQUIFER (193)

1993

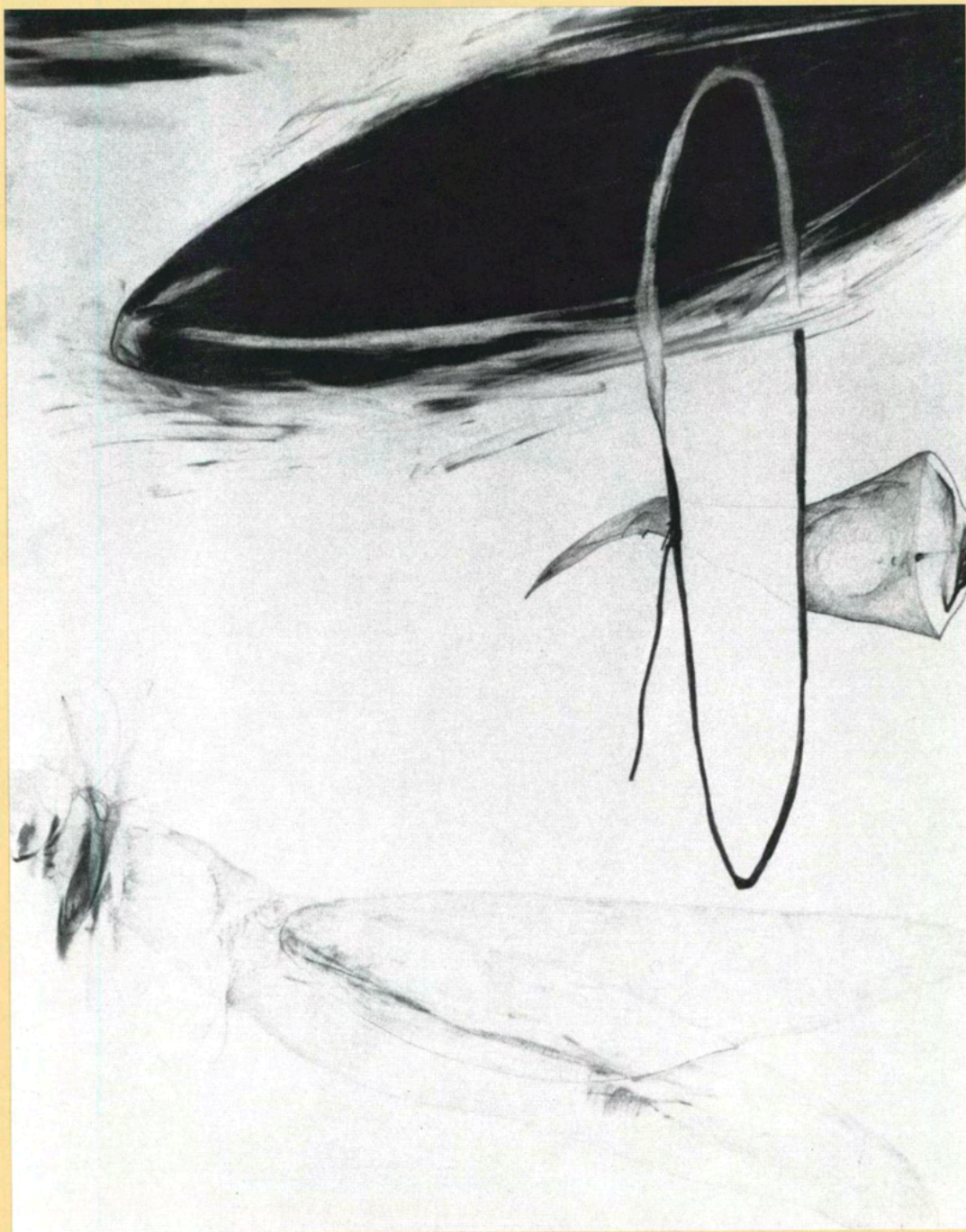
graphite on paper

29 x 23 inches



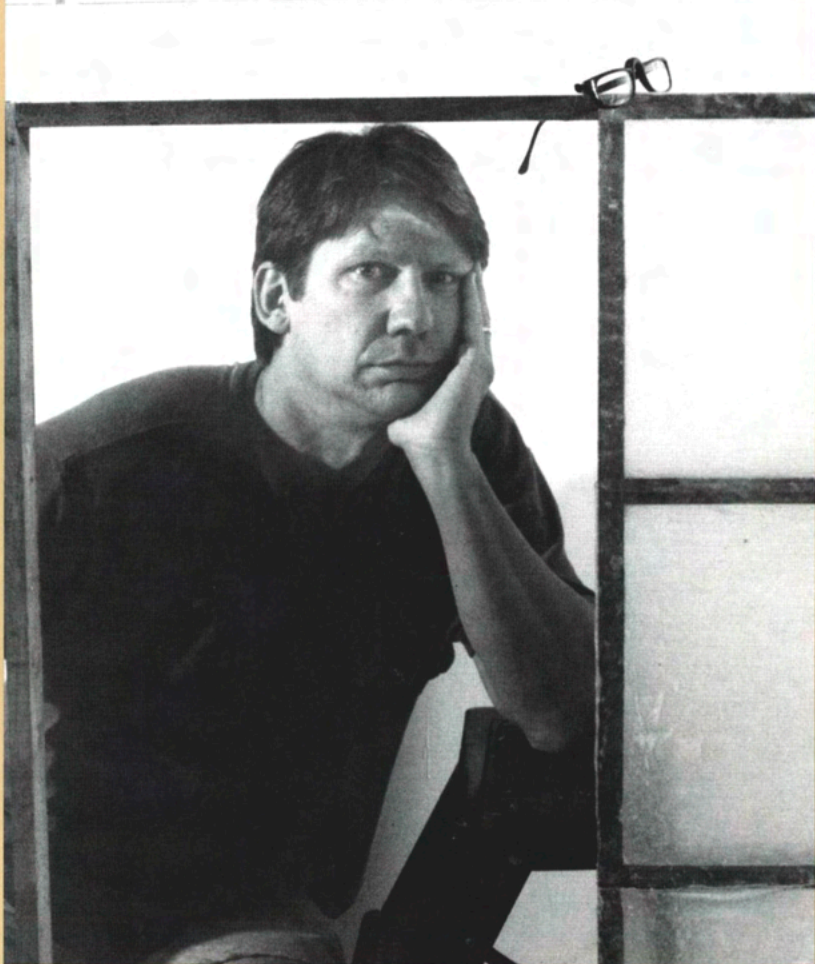
AERIAL (393)

1993
graphite on paper
18 x 24 inches



**WATER MUSIC
PART I**

(detail, panel 5), 1991
graphite on paper
6 panels,
14 x 11 inches
each panel



Creighton Michael with
Water Music Part 3, 1995

CREIGHTON MICHAEL

born in Knoxville, Tennessee
raised in Memphis, Tennessee
resides in Mt. Kisco, New York

EDUCATION

Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri,
M.F.A., 1978

Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee,
M.A., 1976

University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee,
B.F.A., 1971

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

1993 Haverford College
Visiting Artist
Haverford, Pennsylvania

1992 San Antonio Art Institute
Visiting Artist
San Antonio, Texas

1991 Virginia Commonwealth University
Visiting Artist
Richmond, Virginia

1988 SUNY
Visiting Artist in Sculpture
Purchase, New York

1987 Washington University
Visiting Artist
St. Louis, Missouri

1986, 1991 Muhlenberg College
Visiting Artist
Allentown, Pennsylvania

1986-1991 Rhode Island School of Design
Adjunct Faculty
Providence, Rhode Island

1986 University of Alaska
Visiting Artist
Anchorage, Alaska

AWARDS

1987 New York Foundation for the Arts
Fellowship

1985 Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant

1985 Edward Albee Foundation Fellowship

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

1996 Kim Foster Gallery
New York, New York
Drawings and Sculpture

1995 Kim Foster Gallery
New York, New York
Recent Work

1994 Katonah Museum of Art
Katonah, New York
Creighton Michael: Landscape

Robischon Gallery
Denver, Colorado
Solo shows in 1994, 1992, 1990

1992 Littlejohn/Sternau Gallery
New York, New York
New Sculpture and Drawings

San Antonio Art Institute
San Antonio, Texas
Drawing Sculpture

1990 Ruth Siegel Gallery
New York, New York
Creighton Michael: Constructions 1990

1987 High Museum of Art
Atlanta, Georgia
Art At The Edge: Creighton Michael

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1994 David Winton Bell Gallery
Brown University
Providence, Rhode Island
A View To The Future: Recent Acquisitions
- Neuberger Museum of Art
Purchase, New York
Inspired By Nature
- The Police Building
New York, New York
Out Of Line II: Abstract Painting and Sculpture
- Arkansas Arts Center
Little Rock, Arkansas
1994 National Drawing Invitational
- 1993 Weatherspoon Art Gallery
University of North Carolina
Greensboro, North Carolina
Art on Paper
- 55 Ferris Street
Brooklyn, New York
55 Ferris Street III
- 1992 The Morris Museum
Morristown, New Jersey
Corporations Collect: I
- 1990 High Museum of Art
Atlanta, Georgia
Working on Paper: Contemporary American Drawings

- 1988 Long Beach Museum of Art
Long Beach, California
Selections from the Berkus Collection
- Southeastern Massachusetts
University
North Dartmouth, Massachusetts
Nomadic Visions: Recent Work by Six New York Sculptors
- 1987 Rosa Esman Gallery
New York, New York
Sculpture: Material Transformations
- 1986 The Center for the Arts
Muhlenberg College
Allentown, Pennsylvania
Archaic Echoes

SELECTED COLLECTIONS

- Edward Albee
- David Winton Bell Gallery, Brown University
- The Brooklyn Museum
- Denver Art Museum
- High Museum of Art
- New York University

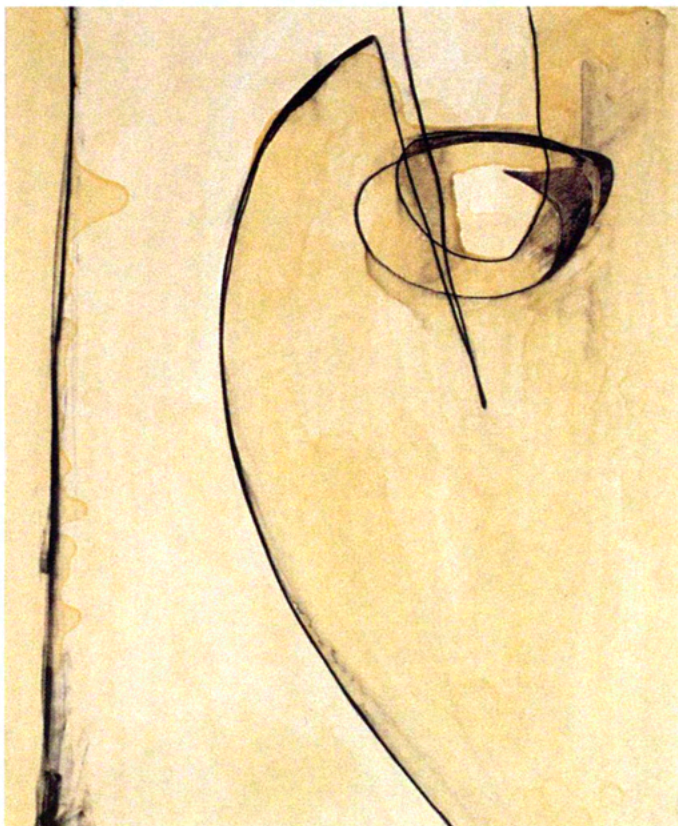
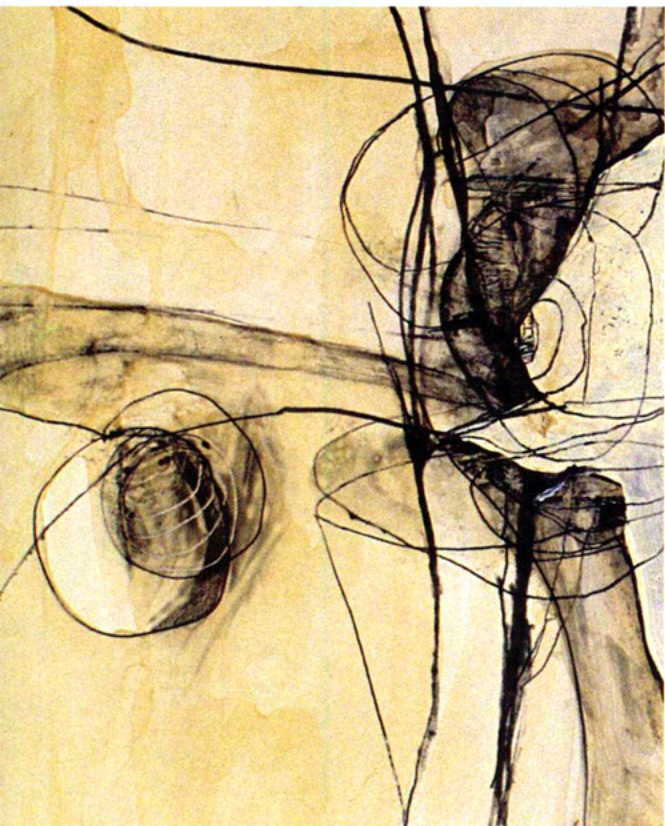
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- Dickinson, Carol V. "Denver: Creighton Michael: Robischon," *ARTnews*, April 1995.
- Frank, Peter. "Art Picks of the Week," *LA Weekly*, Vol. 12, No. 51, 1990.
- Melrod, George. "Reviews/Creighton Michael," *ARTnews*, October 1992.
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CONIFER (1094)

1994
graphite on paper
15 7/8 x 40 inches

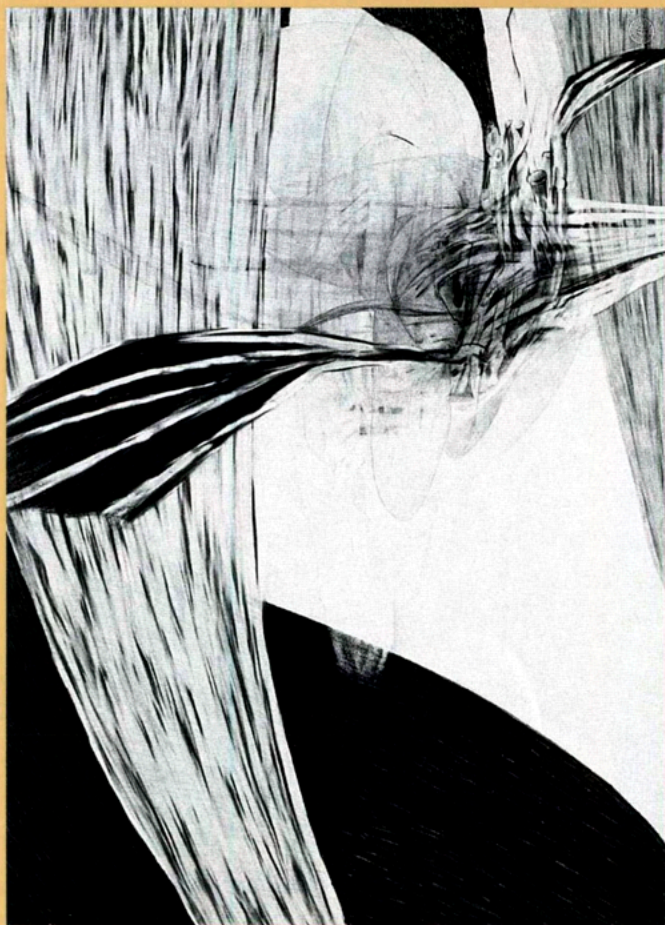


TEAHOUSE PART 4

1995

graphite and shellac on paper

3 panels, 17 x 14 inches each panel



EDGE (593)
1993
graphite on paper
30 x 22 inches



Sarratt Gallery at Vanderbilt University
sponsored by the Sarratt Visual Arts Committee

Capera Ryan, gallery committee chair

Allison Langston, gallery intern

JoEl Levy Logiudice, gallery director

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Vanderbilt University is committed to principles of equal opportunity and affirmative action.

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

Navigator, 1990
graphite on paper
4 panels
14 x 11 inches each panel

Water Music Part I, 1991
graphite on paper
6 panels
14 x 11 inches each panel

Dart, 1992
graphite on paper
6 panels
11 x 14 inches each panel

Edge (293), 1993
graphite on paper
29 x 23 inches

Edge (393), 1993
graphite on paper
33 x 24 inches

Edge (593), 1993
graphite on paper
30 x 22 inches

Aquifer (193), 1993
graphite on paper
29 x 23 inches

Aerial (393), 1993
graphite on paper
18 x 24 inches

Conifer (994), 1994
graphite on paper
16 1/8 x 40 inches

Conifer (1094), 1994
graphite on paper
15 7/8 x 40 inches

Teahouse Part 3, 1995
graphite and shellac on paper
3 panels
17 x 14 inches each panel

Teahouse Part 4, 1995
graphite and shellac on paper
3 panels
17 x 14 inches each panel

