

## **Bruce McClain**

Minnesota painter Bruce McClain titles his aerial landscape series *Artificial Horizons*. He explains, “The landscape has a long tradition as a standard subject of painters. A driving excursion through Normandy on the French coast renewed my own interest in painting the landscape.” His works combine this interest with a fascination with aircraft to create paintings based on photos taken through gun cameras on battle planes. Often the angle from the aircraft provides a tilted, artificial horizon, which is appealing for its sense of instability: the juxtaposition of the idyllic landscape and the dynamic aspect of its military history.

For McClain, the rural French landscape of small towns and the surrounding cultivated fields gave a sense of the familiar from his own experience of growing up on a farm in Wisconsin. There was also the unfamiliar mystery of land marked with the violent history of World War II battles. “The combination of the pastoral and the tragic interested me. Through the interpretation of landscape in the grainy backgrounds of aerial gun camera film I found a means of bringing the pastoral and dynamic together. Such photos, taken from aircraft, often depicted the horizon skewed on a diagonal. While the landscape in the aircraft film was only an incidental background to the target, my intention was to recompose the inadvertent image into the primary focus of the paintings.”

McClain has been a professor of art at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, MN since 1965. He holds a MS degree in art and an MFA in drawing and painting from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. At Gustavus Adolphus, he has frequently served as department chair and is the recipient of numerous research grants, including a National Endowment for the Arts sabbatical. His work has been exhibited in galleries across the Midwest and is in permanent collections that include the National Air and Space Museum, Washington, DC and the Whitney Museum of Art in New York.

### **Statement**

“The background seen in the aircraft film is similar to that which we see indistinctly at the periphery of our vision. The half-seen views slide past us without a full description, leaving a space for fragments of memory and imagination.”