

FLORA NATAPOFF  
ROSE ART MUSEUM  
BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY

**FLORA NATAPOFF**  
**OCTOBER 22 – NOVEMBER 17, 1974**

**BORN:** New York, 1936.

**EDUCATION:** Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, 1954-56.  
University of California, Berkeley, BA 1958, MA 1960.

**SOLO EXHIBITIONS:**

1967 Shore Gallery, Boston.  
1973 Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

**GROUP EXHIBITIONS:**

1960 University of California, Berkeley.  
1961 Northern California Painters Annual, San Francisco.  
1962 Berkeley Gallery, Berkeley, California.  
1963 Batman Gallery, San Francisco.  
1971 Loeb Theater, Harvard University.  
1972 Gund Hall, Harvard University.  
1972 Parker 470 Gallery, Boston.  
1974 Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.  
1974 Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University.  
1974 Marcus Krakow Rosen Sonnabend Gallery, Boston.

**FELLOWSHIP:** Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, 1971-73.

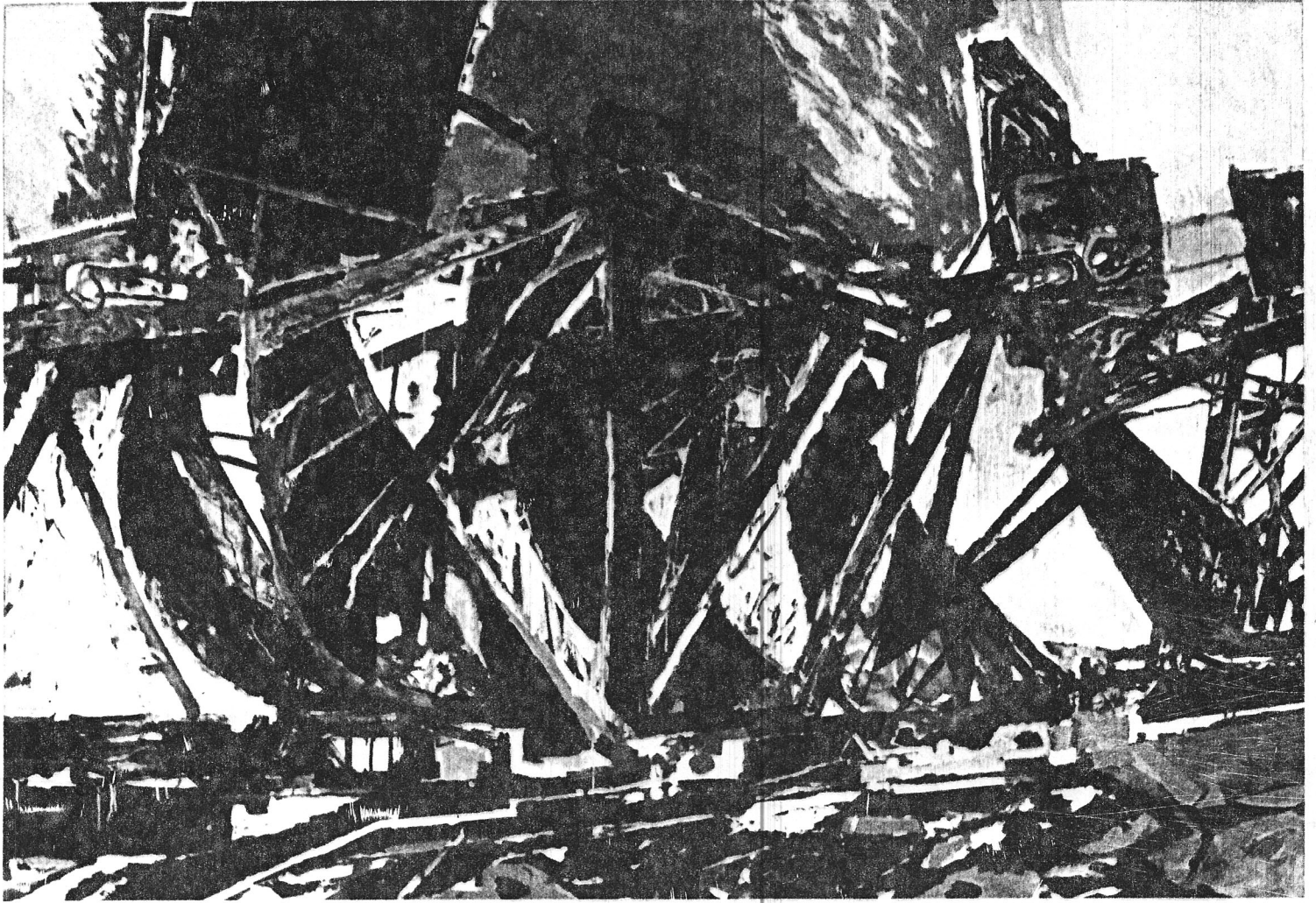
**TEACHING:** Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Harvard University, Summer, 1973, 1974.  
Brown University, Providence, 1974-75.

**REPRESENTED BY:** Marcus Krakow Rosen Sonnabend Gallery, Boston.

Abstract Expressionism has always been a troublesome label for the painting style that developed in New York during the late 1940's and the 1950's. Not all of the work displayed the same order of abstractness, nor was all of it inspired by an expressionistic approach toward its content. In fact, it is the expressionistic aspect of Abstract Expressionism which became especially problematic as the movement developed away from its original position. Most abstract painting in the 1960's eschewed the gestural side of A-E, favoring instead the soft, optical surfaces initially expounded in the works of Gorky, Pollock, Newman and Rothko. This development generated the view that expressionist-type picture making had played itself out, if indeed it had not been something of a myth in the first place — that is, a term seized upon to suggest the heroic posture of the new American painters rather than to describe their formal artistic achievements. Still, the word persists in wanting to be used, and it does so for a variety of reasons. First, to account for the general stylistic contributions of such individuals as DeKooning, Kline and Motherwell; second, to record specific art historical links like the one, say, between the mature Hofmann and his Fauve predecessors; and third, to acknowledge the widespread reappearance of expressionist surfaces in both abstract and representational painting of the current moment.

From our present vantage point, and particularly in view of the present exhibition, the continuing relevance of the term Abstract Expressionism becomes eminently clear. In Flora Natapoff's case the relevance is more than coincidental. Growing up in New York, she became familiar with the art scene there and absorbed the atmosphere of A-E during its apogee in the 1950's. DeKooning was a constant source of both challenge and inspiration. The gestural, expressive manner of paint application became a natural starting point for her art, just as it did for nearly every young painter at the time. What was a natural starting point, however, also contained natural limitations. For the most part, these were the typical limitations for any second or third generation follower of a style — the ones having to do with the fact that the style originated with someone else. The impetus for Abstract Expressionism could thus be felt, but only at a distance; the achievement could be appreciated, but it had not been lived; in turn, the feelings which inspired it became general rather than specific.

Natapoff faced these issues and served her artistic apprenticeship through the 1960's. An initial breakthrough to a more personal statement came in the early seventies when she executed a series of large collages based on the great religious paintings of Pieter Bruegel. Theoretically, the detachment and objectivity demanded by this enterprise would seem totally at odds with Abstract

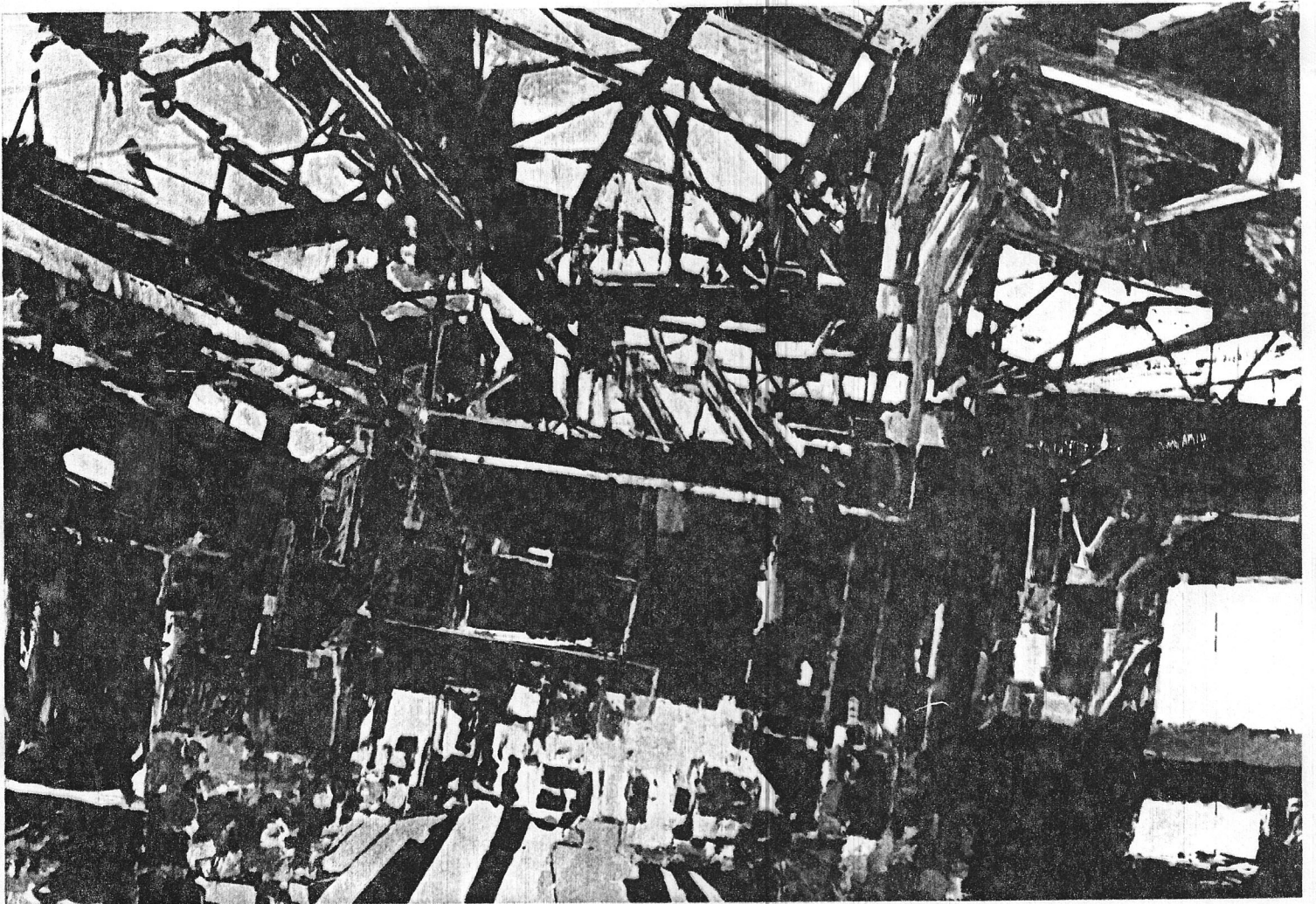


SOUTH STATION BRIDGE #2, 1974, 72 x 121½ inches

Expressionism's spontaneous approach to picture making. Surprisingly, however, the collages have an intensity which is not at all foreign to the A-E aesthetic. The affinity is particularly evident in the torn paper, the loose handling of paint, and the generally rough, agitated surfaces of the works — all hallmarks of the gestural style of the 1950's. In fact, it is the expressionism of the Bruegel series which makes the works more than exercises in art historical understanding or the opportunity for a contemporary artist to pay homage to a past master. The stylistic approach, then, allows them to stand on their own; but they also do so because, through size, intensity, and care of observation, they acknowledge that tribute was a part of their inspiration.

The Bruegel series proved to be a crucial transition into Natapoff's recent works. Generally, they forced the artist to be objective, to take a step back from her subject matter, and to translate, as it were, statements written in a foreign language into her native tongue. In doing so, she learned to control the torn paper vocabulary she had begun to experiment with in the late sixties, at the same time adjusting that vocabulary to the data of an external, visible world. What she still needed, however, was a subject matter that would allow broader interpretative responses — for the Bruegel statements ultimately circle back to *his* interpretations — and she found it in the constructions and destructions, the bridges and abandoned warehouses of our industrial landscape. By concentrating on the stark force and raw weight of these subjects, Natapoff found a natural inspiration for the spontaneous, energetic handling of paint and paper she initially learned from Abstract Expressionism and later mastered under Bruegel's tutelage. Her combination of intense detail with a panoramic breadth of vision might also be traced to Bruegel's "influence," but the explosive power of her imagery is entirely her own.

Natapoff's materials consist of paint, torn paper and pastel. Technically, the works belong in the realm of collage, though collage does not feel like an appropriate category for them. That is, it doesn't feel right if we think of collage in terms of its classic Cubist origins: clear, elegant, formally oriented compositions in which scraps of paper, generally cut rather than torn, are made to reaffirm a picture's shape or flatness or to provoke some irony of space or identity. But Natapoff's works are not meant to be first of all elegant, nor do the scraps of paper play an exclusively design role. Instead, the fragments of paper are descriptive; they function like a repertory of brushstrokes, each possessing a different shape, edge or color, depending on the combined requirements of the subject and its image. One senses that the pictures are moving steadily in



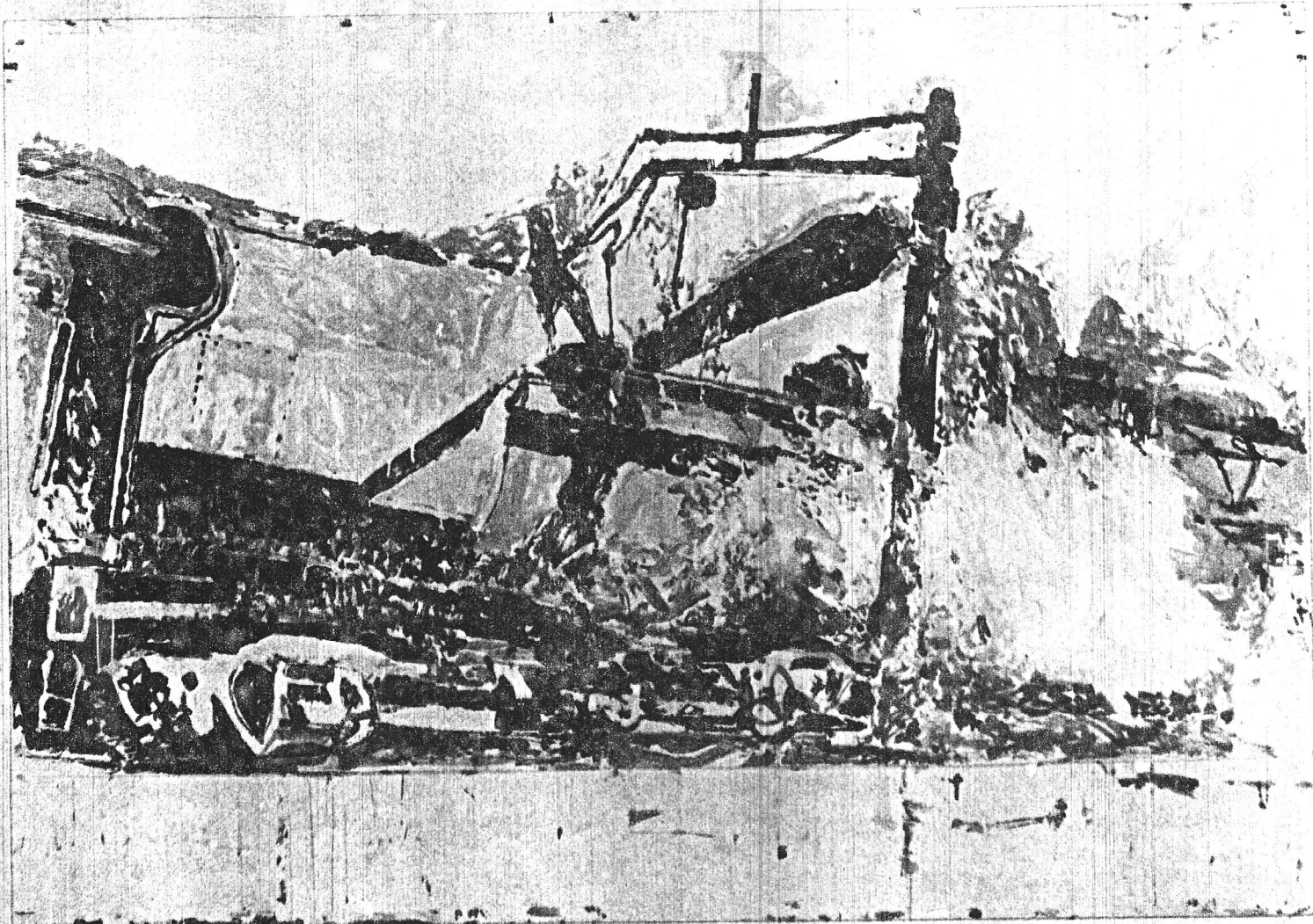
SHADOWS, 1974, 72 x 97 inches

the direction of paint alone, for, even in their present moment of development, it is a notion of painting which the artist's mix of media most forcefully states.

In the above remarks, I have suggested that Flora Natapoff's work bears an innovative relationship to the tradition of collage, and that it marks a vital and continuing dimension of the style we call Abstract Expressionism. A third significance, and the one that is admittedly the hardest to pin down, has to do with her art's realist character. During the past three or four years, we have seen a large number of realist or quasi-realist pictures, most of them of the "sharp focus" variety, and most of them not particularly interesting except as technical exercises. What most realist pictures seem to lack is conviction — in either their subject matter or their medium, or both. With few exceptions, they are content only to report or to raise academic questions such as the relation between painting and photography, but without taking a position in terms of one medium or the other. By comparison, the power of Natapoff's work results from the artist's unequivocal commitment to her art as well as to her subject matter. Each subject is investigated through a series of pictures and each thereby becomes a theme rather than an isolated or merely personal incident. The resulting objectivity is reinforced, it seems to me, by the use of torn paper: each scrap has its inherent properties of color and surface which, like facts, are allowed to show in the final product; while the paper fragments are willfully manipulated like brushstrokes, then, they automatically avoid a certain amount of arbitrariness. Still, the combination of objectivity and conviction in these works comes not from the use of torn paper in and of itself, nor from the latent power of the industrial subject matter. Those elements count, but they become meaningful only because the artist emerges herself as fully and expressively in her art — in tearing, pasting and painting — as she does in selecting her subjects in the first place.

During a period when fads and fashions seem to dominate the art world, and when each new aesthetic wrinkle is immediately heralded as the latest major trend, it is refreshing to find an artist who has been patient in finding herself and who has been willing to acknowledge and absorb her near and distant past while doing so. Flora Natapoff is such an artist, and I am extremely proud to present her works in this exhibition. To me, they reveal a painter with deep convictions in her enterprise, and they demonstrate the uncommon richness of feeling that results when such convictions are translated into high quality artistic statements.

Carl Belz



FUELING UP, 1974, 54 x 95 inches



## CATALOGUE OF THE EXHIBITION PAINTINGS

Height precedes width; all works consist of torn paper, acrylic and pastel on rag paper.

1. **Etoile**, 1972, 72 x 91½ inches.
2. **Overpass**, 1972, 72 x 98 inches.  
Courtesy of Mr. Alan Levitan, Cambridge, Mass.
3. **Construction Site**, 1972, 72 x 97 inches.
4. **Construction Site**, 1972, 42 x 106 inches.
5. **Construction #1**, 1973, 32 x 49 inches.
6. **Construction #2**, 1973, 41 x 37 inches.
7. **Construction #3**, 1973, 39 x 57 inches.
8. **Traffic**, 1973, 55 x 38½ inches.
9. **Roundhouse**, 1973, 72 x 97 inches.  
Courtesy of Ms. Judith Wechsler, Cambridge, Mass.
10. **Factory Interior**, 1973, 72 x 97 inches.
11. **Red Cauldron**, 1973, 81 x 72 inches.
12. **Deep Space**, 1973, 91½ x 72 inches.
13. **Factory Interior #1**, 1973, 86 x 72 inches.
14. **South Station Bridge #1**, 1973, 72 x 90 inches.
15. **South Station Bridge #2**, 1974, 72 x 121½ inches.
16. **Disintegrating Factory Wall**, 1974, 93 x 72 inches.
17. **Shadows**, 1974, 72 x 97 inches.
18. **Calligraphic Interior**, 1974, 72 x 102 inches.
19. **Locomotive**, 1974, 72 x 87 inches.
20. **Agitated Overview**, 1974, 72 x 94 inches.
21. **Harbor**, 1974, 72 x 95½ inches.
22. **Highway**, 1974, 89½ x 72 inches.
23. **Trains**, 1974, 72 x 61½ inches.
24. **Skylight**, 1974, 72 x 83½ inches.
25. **Radar Station**, 1974, 42 x 90 inches.

## **PAINTINGS AFTER BRUEGEL**

26. **Adoration of the Magi**, 1971, 42 x 82 inches.  
Courtesy of Dr. Alan Lechuk, Cambridge, Mass.
27. **Numbering at Bethlehem**, 1971, 42 x 78 inches.  
Courtesy of Mr. Alan Levitan, Cambridge, Mass.
28. **Tower of Babel**, 1971, 36 x 48 inches.  
Courtesy of Dr. and Mrs. Robert Preyer, Cambridge, Mass.
29. **Massacre of the Innocents**, 1971, 42 x 80 inches.  
Courtesy of Dr. and Mrs. Sylvan S. Schweber, Lexington, Mass.
30. **Tower of Babel**, 1972, 72 x 96 inches.

## **DRAWINGS**

Height precedes width; all works consist of acrylic on process art paper.

31. **Overpass**, 1973, 54 x 88 inches.
32. **Wheels**, 1974, 54 x 68 inches.
33. **Fueling Up**, 1974, 54 x 95 inches.
34. **Trains**, 1974, 54 x 64 inches.
35. **Disintegrating Factory #1**, 1974, 54 x 103 inches.
36. **Disintegrating Factory #2**, 1974, 54 x 130 inches.
37. **Factory Ruin**, 1974, 54 x 73 inches.
38. **Elevator**, 1974, 54 x 78 inches.
39. **Train Yard**, 1974, 54 x 82 inches.
40. **Broken Window**, 1974, 54 x 83½ inches.