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Its size and physical presence are overwhelming, but even at a distance it does not diminish in intensity. The viewer has no way to escape. The forms in tension are on a startling new scale. Contradictory structures run throughout. The painting is colorful but within a narrow range of colors. It contains more than one picture, more than one thought. Batuz wanted to express the full range of his ideas, to fix them in the conflicting forms without selecting or suppressing them, a process of invention that has been described by the British biologist Francis Galton in reference to his own field:

When I am engaged in trying to think anything out, the process of doing so appears to me to be this: The ideas that lie at any moment within my full consciousness seem to attract, of their own accord, the most appropriate out of a number of other ideas that are lying close at hand, but imperfectly within the range of my consciousness. There seems to be a presence-chamber in my mind where full consciousness holds court, and where two or three ideas are at the same time in audience, and an antechamber full of more or less allied ideas, which is situated just beyond the full ken of consciousness. Out of this antechamber the ideas most nearly allied to those in the presence-chamber appear to be summoned in a mechanically logical way, and to have their turn of audience.¹⁰

There are a number of immediate possible associations the painting evokes: a primordial landscape, a geological formation, the desert, cave paintings, the monochromatic paintings of Rembrandt or the Cubists. But the first impression is of a big map. It seems not to be painted, but as real as the objects in a science museum. One becomes aware of an inner,

49. *Omen*, detail

Overleaf:

50. *Omen*, detail







mental landscape, a landscape of pure invention constructed by the spirit of man, the artist's spirit, one's own spirit. But the size is all-encompassing and the turn from the horizontal of a landscape to the vertical of the painting brings it into direct confrontation with the viewer. There is no distance, no foreground and background; everything is contained in the surface, the materials themselves. We are *in* the picture as we are in nature and we search for places to stop and find our places along and around the cataclysmic line that splits the picture in two. There is no beginning and no end. Within a large, partly hidden oval that almost contains the composition, the picture circulates into itself continuously. It is an entity unto itself, paralleling the experience of nature's forces and textures without imitating nature. The surface is complete but nevertheless wounded by its own internal conflicts, protective but vulnerable and open.

The colors in themselves are not bearers of expression. Rather they activate the dialectic of lines and forms in tension. The central axis is not a focus of quietness but of activity, a multiplier of feelings and remembrance. *Omen* is neither beautiful nor ugly. As carefully as Batuz has constructed the painting in terms of craftsmanship, form, color, and line, he has also attacked it, depriving it of beauty and charging it with new and disturbing life. It simply exists, a powerful web of associations that run beyond the confines of the spaces Batuz has created. Pascal once pointed out that our knowledge is like a circle—the bigger the circumference, the greater the connections with the unknown. An innovative artist works exactly in this tangential sphere between known and unknown. The more the picture contains of the unknown within its own structure, the closer it comes to true originality, and to origins.

In *Omen* Batuz reaches the most advanced point in his art. He draws a drama of thousands of unknown ciphers. There is neither security nor

satisfactory resolution. It is as destructive as it is constructive, as full of pessimism as it is of optimism. The work is not finished, and yet there is no possibility of going further, as in the late works of Cézanne. It finds its continuity in the intellectual and existential structures of the artist and the viewer. It does not persuade, it imposes, as Rafael Squirru has written elsewhere in this volume. *Omen* is its own cosmos with its own rules where historical roots are remembered and then forgotten. It is outside habitual knowledge, posing a new knowledge that can only be understood in an ongoing dialogue with the painting.

Omen is an icon of our life. It is full of a spirituality that differs from that of Rothko's work in that it does not aim for inner certainty but creates excitement and rebellion. As an allegory of human existence it moves from life to being, through countless contradictory motifs, through intervals of action and contemplation. *Omen* seems to me one of the great pictures of our time—and a picture of our time, because our time is the sum of all other times. It contains every possibility of misunderstanding as well as every chance of new experience.

Notes

1. Hilton Kramer, "The Avant-Garde in Russia, 1910-1930," *The New York Times*, July 7, 1980, sect. III, p. 11.
2. *Batu: Interrelation of Forms*. Washington, D.C./São Paulo, Brazil: The Phillips Collection/Museu de Arte de São Paulo, 1977, n.p.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. Wassily Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*. New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1946, p. 98.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Harold Osborne, *Aesthetics and Art Theory*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1970, p. 262.
8. A.S. Eddington, *The Nature of the Physical World*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1928, p. 251.
9. J. Hadamard, *The Psychology of Invention in the Mathematical Field*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1945, p. 142.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

51. No. 39, July 1979, 19 x 14½,"
Collection Dr. and Mrs. James M. Shelley,
New York, N.Y.

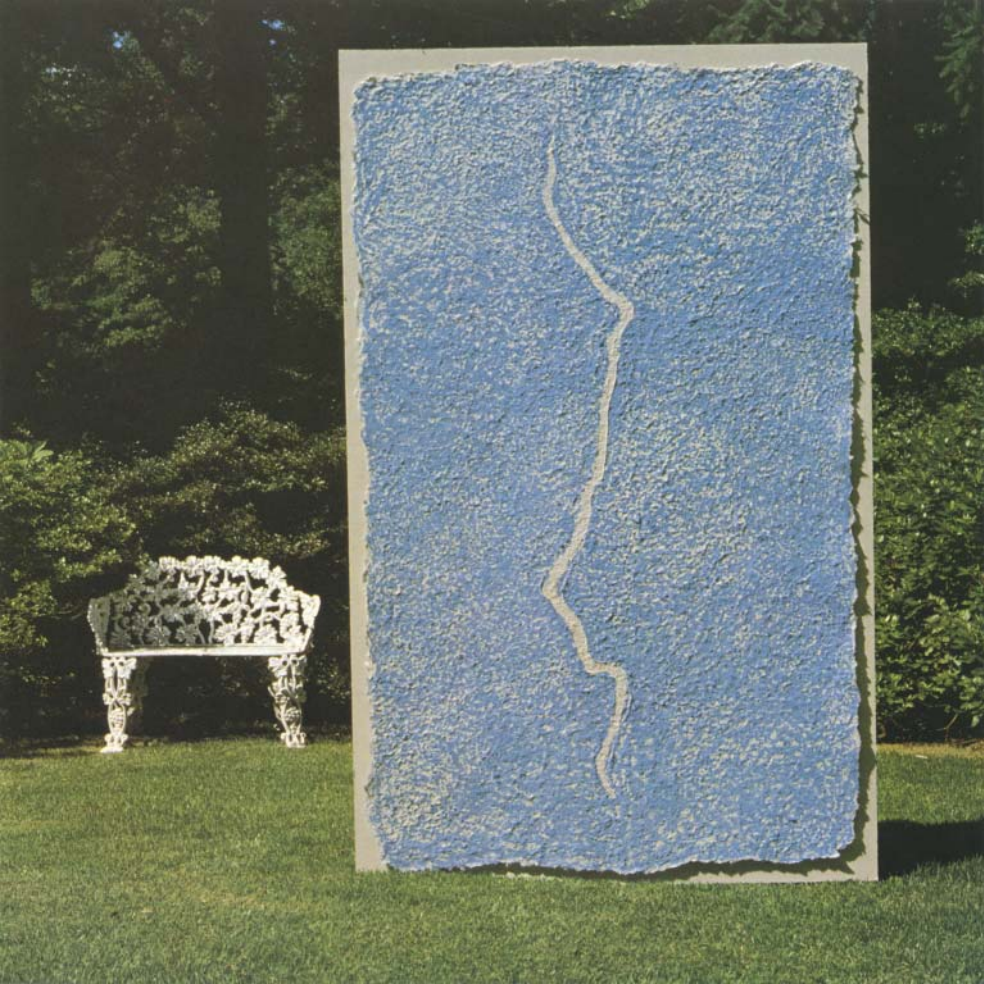


52. No. 84. Aug. 18, 1980. $42\frac{1}{4} \times 69''$.
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Joseph H. Hirshhorn, Washington, D.C.



53. No. 36. June 26, 1979. 73 x 45"





54. No. 54. Nov. 25, 1979. 28 × 38", Private collection



55. No. 26. Apr. 18, 1979. 70 x 60"

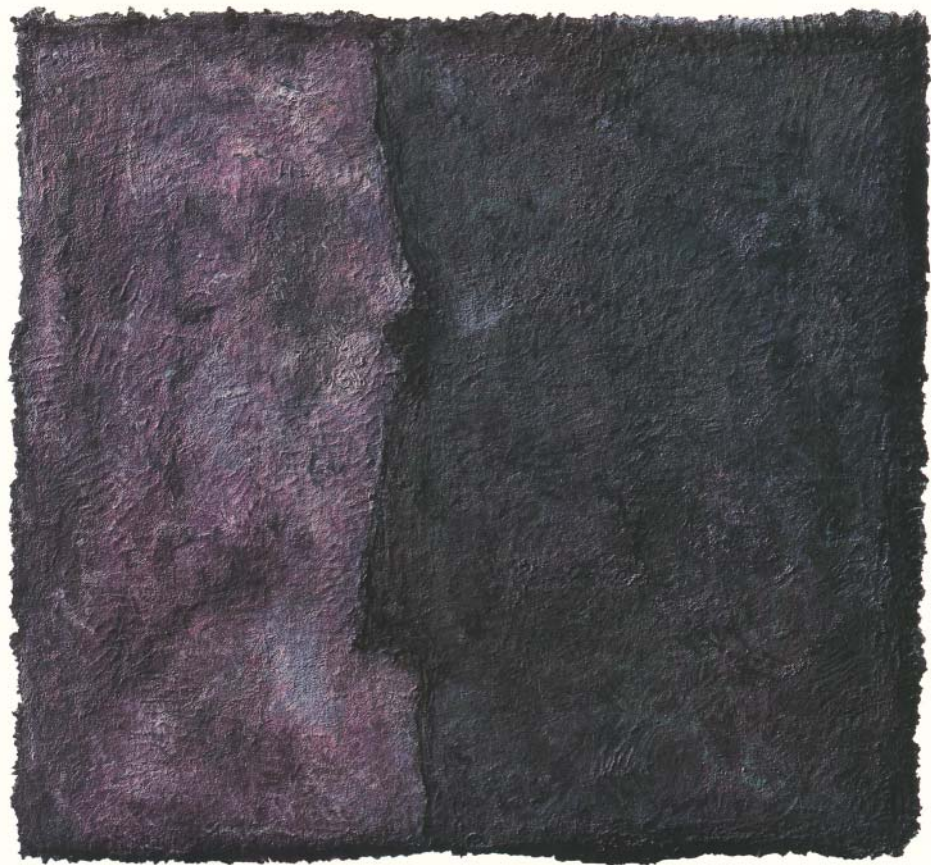




57. *No. 69*. Mar. 1980. 96 × 70". Private collection



58. No. 74. May 15, 1980. 65 x 71"



59. No. 70. Mar. 1980. 32 x 39"



60. No. 30. May 20, 1979. 63 × 38". Private collection



61. *No. 57*, Dec. 1979, $31 \times 38''$. Private collection

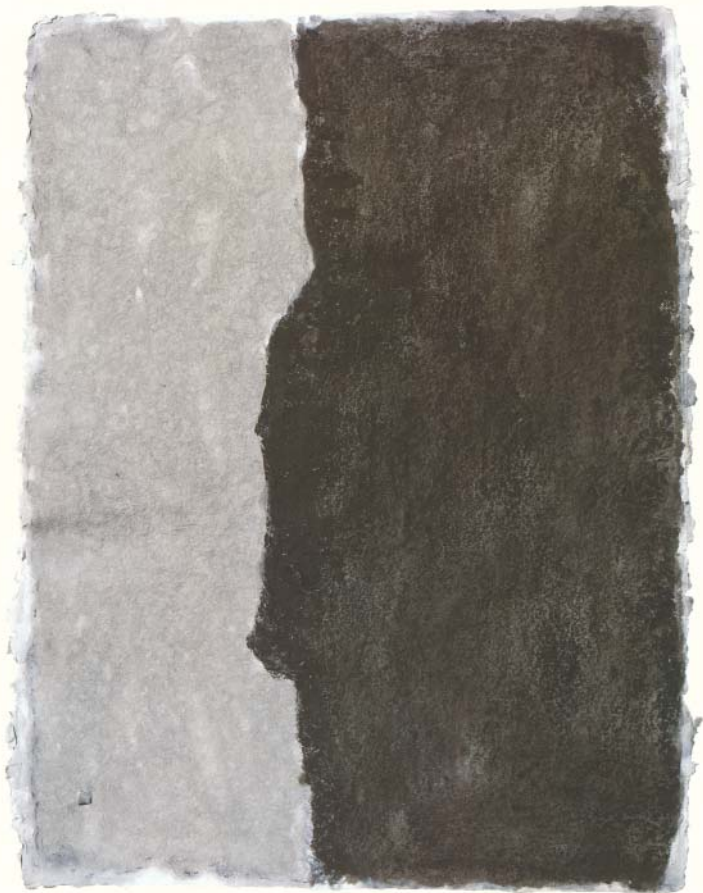


62. No. 17. Mar. 1979. $31\frac{1}{2} \times 24"$. Private collection

Overleaf:

63-64. No. 40. July 15, 1979. $71 \times 45"$.

Kupferstich Kabinett, Staatliche Museen (Dahlem Museum), West Berlin



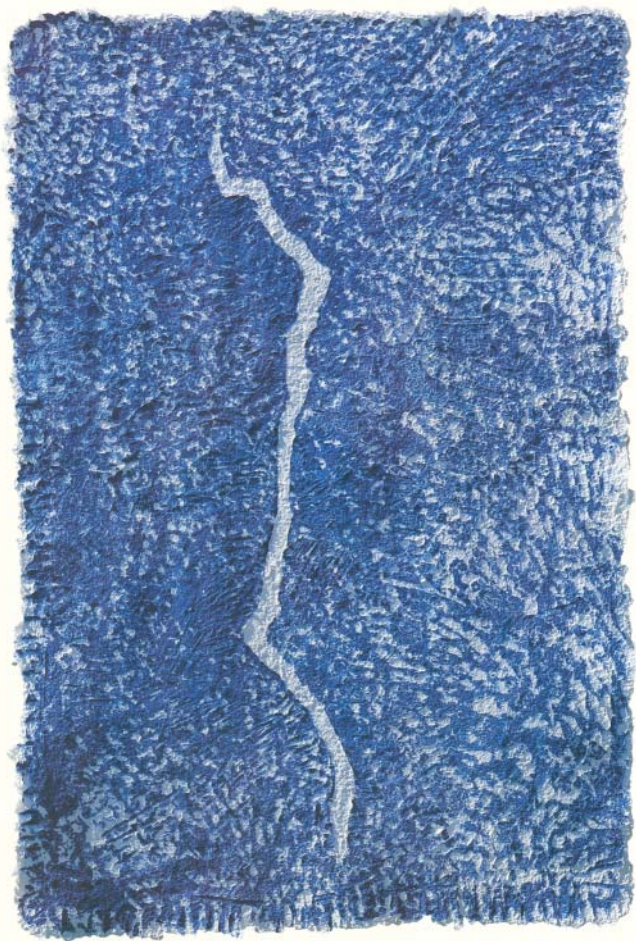




65. No. 34. June 10, 1979. $38 \times 44\frac{1}{2}$ ".
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Le Roy Rubin, Stamford, Conn.



66. No. 37. June 30, 1979. $66\frac{1}{2} \times 45''$. Private collection



67. No. 45. Aug. 5, 1979. 72 x 67".
Private collection

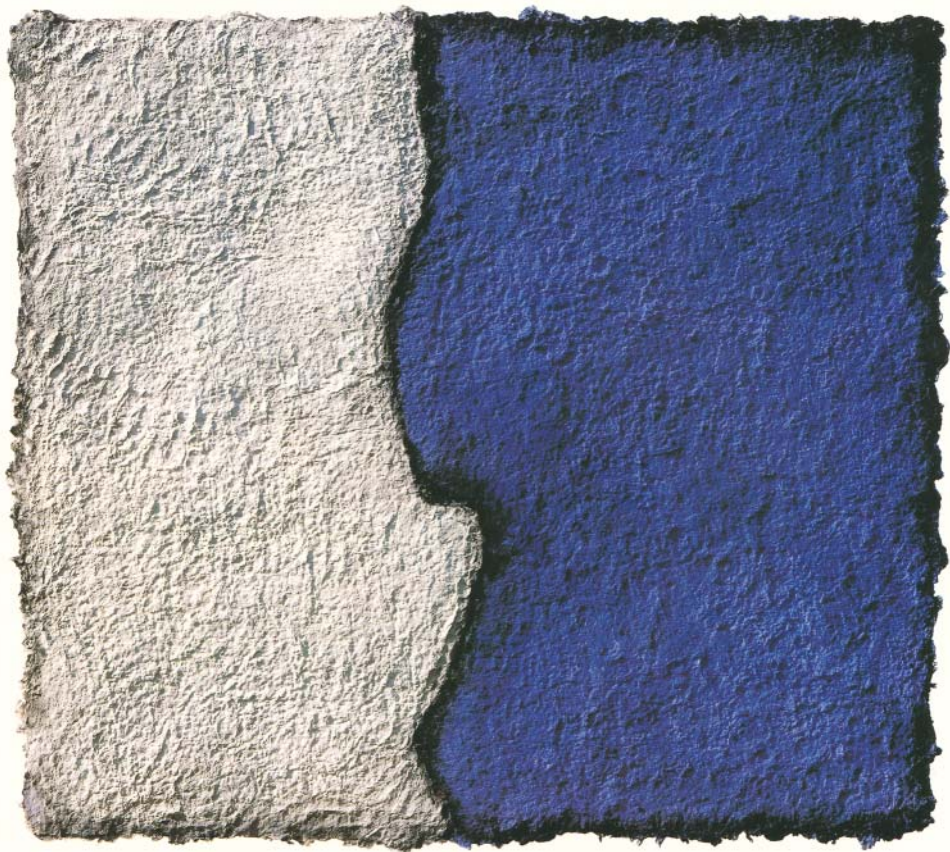


68. No. 33. June 6, 1979. 43 x 72".

Collection Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Levy, Paramus, N.J.



69. No. 61. Jan. 1980. 43 × 48". Private collection



70. No. 35. June 20, 1979. 21 x 18".

Collection Mr. and Mrs. Jay Bauer, Westport, Conn.

Overleaf:

71. No. 71. Mar. 1980. 84 x 60".

Collection Mr. and Mrs. Barton L. Weller, Easton, Conn.







72. No. 77. June 1980. 62 × 94". Private collection



73. No. 28. May 4, 1979. 73 x 46".
Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis, Ind.

