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Bisti Portfolio
by
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In Northwestern New Mexico, located off the well traveled roads, is a little known area of unique geological formations produced by erosion of layered rock of varying hardness resulting in spires and columns capped with slabs of lighter rock called hoodoos. The bright colors of the mineralized structures interleaved with thin black bands of coal adds to the beauty of this wonderland, and intrinsic to the mystery and scientific importance of the place are the fossil remains of ancient animals of the Cretaceous period.

A small part of this eroded badlands named Bisti by the Indians has been set aside in perpetuity, because of its unusual character, for preservation against greedy exploitation by short-sighted interests that recognize no value beyond immediate gain. But what are the resources here that could attract such cupidity? What makes Bisti vulnerable to attack are those black veins of coal that add so greatly to its beauty and speak so eloquently of its history. The strip miners of coal would hesitate not to destroy this wondrous geological phenomenon and paleontological treasure for a product of ephemeral benefit.

When he first visited the Bisti badlands David Scheinbaum immediately recognized their aesthetic worth and determined to record them photographically. Surrounded there by these exotic remnants out of the distant past, obsessed by them, was his inspiration. In the last analysis nature is the source for the artist of all his creative efforts. Even abstract expressionism, which originates in his mind has its source in nature, if we accept the premise that man is part of nature. The connection of course is much closer in the schools of objective realism.

In his attempt to understand nature the artist is constantly

portraying it in painting or slicing out bits in photography. He believes that an understanding of nature is to be found in its complexity and beauty, not in its utility. Unfortunately, beauty per se has acquired soft sentimental over-tones which are not at all what the artist finds so compelling in nature. What he sees is rather the extraordinary complexity and infinite variability in the world around him. This is what entertains him. In this respect the artist and the scientist, specifically the ecologist, have much in common. One expresses it emotionally in his pictures and the other with the same preoccupation intellectually. The difference being that art cannot exist without emotion and good science with emotion. Attempts to produce pure intellectual art succeed only to the degree that they fail in sterilizing the emotional content.

The artist is particularly concerned with conservation because of his commitment to nature. He speaks for nature through his art. Nature being the subject in which he is totally involved he must believe in the conservation of nature otherwise he is self-destructive. If the natural world were destroyed his art would, in proportion to the place it occupies, perish. Piecemeal destruction of wildness will amount to piecemeal destruction of inspiration.