



GERSHON ISKOWITZ

*Uplands II, 1972*

oil on canvas, 95" x 144"

Coll: Canada Council Art Bank, Ottawa

Photo: courtesy Gallery Moos, Toronto

illusion of the receding landscape.

The space experience of the *Uplands* series then hovers between modernist pictorial space and the traditional space of landscape painting. Insofar as the color-patch tends to play the double role of surface affirmation and atmospheric depth description the immediate source is Impressionism. Insofar as the landscape space is inhabited by freely floating abstract forms – products of the visionary or of the creative process whose reference point is imaginative experience rather than direct sensory impression – it is reminiscent of the dream space of abstract Surrealism. Curiously, or perhaps inevitably, it is the more abstracted presences which take on the most material reality, while the marks of direct visual experience fade off into memory. Peter Mellen writes of Iskowitz' response to his excursion into the North, "these experiences are internalized and might not appear in his paintings for months or years." (*arts-canada*, Oct/Nov 1971, p. 52.)

The pictures are powerful and impressive, but there remains a tinge of doubt which is perhaps a result of being too

intent on looking for formalist, in addition to primarily lyrical, meaning. But the pictures themselves suggest a search for purely pictorial form in a modernist sense which contradicts the 'lingering landscape' space. Insofar as the foreground forms tend to let go of their surface anchorage to float in deep space rather than across the picture surface, and insofar as they lose contact with the picture edge and hover independently, they tend to demand symbolic interpretation beyond purely visual meaning, much as do the color-patches and wriggly shapes in *Triptych*. Because of their landscape context they become animate presences which evoke a more dramatic response.

*Uplands II* – which because of its central, gloriously red form predicts the most recent work – would perhaps have been a stronger picture had it been composed of

only the right half of the diptych. In it the lilac-tinged sky, the greenish foreground and the red shape are securely anchored on the framing edges and retain their full formal integrity. In the left half the wooded landscape recedes deeply into space behind the red form and the picture tends toward the representational. Then there is the diptych format itself which in the entire series breaks the continuity between right and left, contradictory in relation to landscape space but affirmative in favor of formal surface composition. And concentration on the latter, as we know from Rothko, Still and Newman, in no way precludes devotional or lyrical expression.

Also prophetic of the work exhibited at Gallery Moos, and perhaps the most beautiful picture at Hart House, is *Painting in Lilac*, 1972 which is much less apparently a landscape, without denying its landscape origins. It is composed of a mottled curtain, predominantly lilac, spotted with orange and green, suspended centrally from the upper edge. The pale, greenish ground gives little sense of background but acts rather as a foil to the vibrancy of the