

David Joel Pratt



An Artist's Life Observed



by
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Introduction and Acknowledgement



There are commonly two ways of writing about peoples' lives: biographies and autobiographies. Biographies, well written, can lay claim to objectivity and accuracy because their authors (though passionate enough to write) are still disinterested third parties. Autobiographies, if their authors are honest and their memories sound, can lay claim to deep insights into their thoughts, motivations, and feelings. This work is neither. David Pratt was my brother. The emotional involvements of a shared life hardly allow me to lay claim to objectivity. Nor am I my brother, and "what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him?"¹ So I can hardly lay claim deep insights. What then, can I offer in this literary low ground between objectivity and insight?

I can offer only memories supported as much as possible by available archival documentation and a shared life of 65 years. Memories may fade or be distorted. Archival chronology may have pieces missing or be in error. But these limitations cannot invalidate the beauty and truth of a painting. Honesty requires that all archival data that exists; be used in a kind of forensic jig-saw puzzle and love requires reflection on what is remembered so that we may uncover some truth of value. In the end, although we do the best we can, neither accuracy nor insight is central. What is essential is that you permit me to share with you my memories of my brother; a brother that I deeply loved and dearly miss. These are memories of two lives that intertwined like vines wrapping inseparably around one another. As an artist, David's life is well worth considering. And is that not what art really asks of us, that we share in the life of the artist through his work?

I once asked David, "What is art?" Without a moment's hesitation he answered, "Art is therapy." Art asks us to slow down and be healed from the sickness of haste which abounds in our world. It asks us to see and not just look; and to open ourselves to the possibility of having our attention arrested by what we see (that is to truly "behold"). It would cure us of our blindness. It would heal our inability to sense more deeply the evanescent whispers of truth and would open our eyes to the gossamer filaments of beauty invisibly suspended all around us. It would heal us of many spiritual and mental maladies. It is my sincere hope that this little memoir, the art of which it speaks, and the art which it accompanies will bring such joy and peace to your life that you will truly find your stillness well repaid.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to Hadrien Redouin, Gallery Director of the Southern Vermont Art Center in Manchester for his courage in hosting this posthumous retrospective of my brother's lifetime of art, and to Joan Teaford for her help in curating this exhibition. Joan has brought her considerable technical expertise from Sothebys to bear in interpreting a lifetime of my brother's art. Hadrien, who has had careers as a photo-journalist *extraordinaire* whose work has graced major European magazines, and a Professor of Photography *par excellence* at a major Photographic Institute in Paris, is a true artist following his muse to the cutting edge of modern art. Without their encouragement and friendship this dream could never have been realized. Most of all, they embody the boldness and courage of explorers of that last great frontier of human experience; not the blackness of outer space, but the depths of the mystery of the human spirit. They are the kind of persons who enrich humanity, not by recording art history, but by making it! May their tribe prosper and increase!

Joe Pratt.

¹ Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians 2:11a

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Memoir
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David Joel Pratt (1926 – 2008)



David Joel Pratt's birth name was David Joel Hetterich. He was born on April 29th 1926 in French Hospital in New York City, the offspring of an unfortunate liaison that his mother, Lillian Hetterich, had had during the "roaring twenties." Lillie, being unmarried, took David to live with her father, John Fredrick Hetterich, a first generation German immigrant who had trained as a butcher in Germany. He had worked for Armour meat packers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Tragedy struck in June 1904 when he lost his wife and three young children in the terrible Slocum disaster that claimed roughly 1200 lives. Depressed, John contemplated suicide but his land lady let herself into his apartment and removed his revolver. She introduced him, instead, to Lillian Olnhausen, who became his second wife. Almost a year from his tragic loss, Lillian Hetterich, the first child of that second

marriage, was born. In 1907, after the trauma of the Slocum, John Hetterich moved to New Jersey and never spoke of his loss again. He opened a saloon and beer garden. Eventually, prohibition forced him into the delicatessen business. In New Jersey, two daughters, Helen and Alice, and a son, John, were also born. It was in this household of six, that David spent the first five years of his life with uncles and aunts still in their teens.

Judging from early photographs, Lillian met Hugh Corley Pratt sometime around 1928. He was a Floridian who had learned the printing trade from his father Joseph, the editor of the Leesburg Commercial. He was employed by the Hudson Dispatch as a linotype operator. With the encouragement of her father, Lillian and Hugh were married on July 28th 1931, after the divorce from his first wife was finalized on July 1, 1931.



Lillian Hetterich, David Hetterich (on horse),
And Hugh Pratt c. 1928 or 1929

Hugh was very fond of David. In August that year, he and Lillian left for Florida on a honeymoon and to give her and David a chance to meet his family. They traveled south on US 1 in Hugh's Model T Ford. Stopping in tourist homes along the way, the trip took several weeks. David was just old enough to remember the trip and would sometimes reminisce about

his trip to Florida in "Tin Lizzy" and the warm reception of his newly found Florida family. The following month, on September 18th Hugh filed adoption papers for David with a motion to change his name to David Joel Pratt. The adoption was granted on October 7, 1931.



On the Beach at St. Augustine



Enjoying a Southern Treat

On their return, the little family lived in several rented homes in Cliffside Park, a borough a few towns north of Union City and an easy commute to his newspaper job by bus. The apartments were all sufficiently close that David could walk to Public School #5, which he started attending. I remember being told of an interesting exchange between his kindergarten teacher and David regarding a purple cow that he had drawn. When the teacher remarked that there were no purple cows; David informed her that "everything turns purple at sunset." His sensitivity to color was beginning to emerge. Sometime about age five or six, David was given his first oil paint set. Many of David's early paintings were focused on natural settings and small animals. (Catalogue 1) But

he also copied pictures that interested him, very often those from magazines.

A very sensitive boy, David told me of the loss of his beloved stuffed dog "Puffy" which he, in a moment of childhood distraction, forgot on a park swing. When he came back it was gone. The loss was so traumatic that he could vividly remember his feelings of desperation many years later. On balance, however, he had a happy childhood which included staying with a farm family in South Kortright, New York on the west Branch of the Delaware River (at age 6), and later at the YMCA camp on Lake Kanawauke, New York (at age 7). These childhood experiences are also reflected in the thematic material of David's early landscapes.



David and Friends with "Puffy"



Lake Kanawauke from a Postcard

David developed an early love for movies. At eight years of age, he surreptitiously left the woman who was providing child care for him to go to the movies for the first time. Amazed by what he saw, David stayed the entire day watching *Lime House Blues* with George Raft and Anna Mae Wong. Returning late in the day, he found a distraught mother and father with the Hudson County Police searching the Hackensack Meadows for him. More than once he snuck away from home to go to the STAR movie theater in Cliffside Park (affectionately spelled backwards as the "RATS"). There he watched the endless serial action adventures of the day and received a free pass to Palisades Amusement Park as well (Catalogue 2).

In 1937, while Lillian was expecting David's first brother Daniel, Hugh purchased a house at 4 Bender Place for the remarkable price of \$4000, on a VHA mortgage. The house would be David's home for the next 57 years. Situated at the end of a dead end street and perched almost on the edge of the cliff, the house overlooked both the Jersey side of the Hudson River and most of the western skyline of New York City from the George Washington Bridge to lower Manhattan. It was an amazing view that challenged David for the rest of his life. From the upper story of the house, across the street, he could look down on the neighbor's

house and yard and, to the east, what we all called the "Second Mountain." It was actually the property of the Capoletta Stone Quarry that had been blasting the mountain apart and crushing it for gravel for years. The quarry closed at some time around 1945 leaving a rugged mass of blasted rock outcrops that became a dangerous playground for generations of neighborhood boys. The mountain was a southern part the geological formation along the western bank of the Hudson known as the Palisades. A single road, named significantly "Gorge Road", was located far down the steep incline below our home. It passed between that mountain and our cliff. These scenes figured heavily in David's early art work. (Catalogue 4, 12)

David's second brother, Daniel was born on April 10th 1937 when David was in 6th grade. After moving into Bender Place, the family acquired a pet dog named Prince. Prince started David's lifelong love of animals in general, and pets in particular. Many of his early paintings were of animals. Prince was soon joined by a white rabbit named "Bucky" (for his ability to leave behind droppings that resembled buckshot) and a small alligator (name unknown). David never lost his love for animals. Till his last days in Florida, he fed stray cats and dogs.



Lillian Pratt and Daniel
In front of 4 Bender Place



David with his pet Dog, Prince

David's pre- and early-teen years were marked by a spirit of sometimes wild adventure that greatly worried his mother and father. He told many stories of his misadventures. His first and only swimming pool was the Hudson River off the end of the dock where the Palmolive Company dumped soap waste into the river. Coming home with bloodshot eyes and reeking of perfume, he could never understand how his father knew where he had been swimming or why he said "this is going to hurt me more than it does you" when he administered corporal punishment with his belt.

His first train ride was on a box car as it passed through the tunnel connecting the Edgewater rail yard to the Hackensack River. The trapped smoke from the diesel choked him as he lay flat in the few inches between the top of the car and the top of the tunnel that whizzed above his head.

David's first boat ride was aboard a fishing boat that he and some friends took out on the

Hudson, without the owner's knowledge or permission. The local police encouraged them to end their voyage of discovery with threats of prison and rounds from their pistols, discharged into the air. The frightened, would be sailors escaped amid the laughter of the police who had ended their escapade.

David continued to foster his interest in art by solo visits to New York City art galleries in his early teens. He also adopted the evangelical Christian faith of his mother. This transformative religious event had a lasting effect on his art as well as his life. David found his first serious romantic attachment during high school, a girl named Doris, whom he would hope to marry 'one day'.

David continued his artwork, much of which involved copying the works of others. Perhaps it was copying illustrators that convinced him to pursue commercial art and become one of them. He also copied well known works of art including a very recognizable small copy of Thomas Gainsborough's *Pinkie*.



David's Painting of Pinkie (after Gainsborough)

David completed several art projects for the school and won that year's art medal. His high school yearbook *sobriquet* was 'the Old Master'. By the start of his senior year, the Second World War had been raging in Europe for three years, but the United States would not officially enter the war for another four months. David had entered school early because of his April birth date, so he was only seventeen when he graduated in June of 1943. He had been accepted to Pratt Institute the same month, enrolling in their three year commercial art course. David started at Pratt in September, when many of his older classmates were already seeing active combat. Their letters to David doubtless held his interest. By July of 1944, David had received his draft notice. He entered basic training in August 1944 and heavy weapons training at Camp Blanding, Florida later that month. David began an active correspondence home in which he not only recorded what he experienced but drew what he saw. He sketched continually, a habit that he maintained throughout his active service. Because of his religious proclivities he became known as "the Preacher Man" among the other draftees.

In October 1944 David's second brother, Joseph was born. David had successfully completed heavy weapons training in mid December just as the Battle of the Bulge started. He was transferred to Fort Meade Md. for further training during January while the Battle raged to its conclusion on January 25th 1945. After a brief leave home where he met his newborn brother, David was transferred to Northern France, with the 78th division, 311th Regiment, 1st Battalion, Company H. in February 1945. The Regiment was called the "Timber-wolves."

For the eighteen year old soldier, war (as he later told me) was the most dramatic thing humans could do. The war brought out mixed responses. He was at once an active soldier trying to stay alive, a souvenir collector of medals and anything else of interest that he could find, a regular correspondent (sending home as many as five letters a day to various

people – including his two younger brothers) and romantic artist-tourist soaking up and sketching the sights and sounds of war torn Europe. He sent home continual requests for paper, ink, pens, and pencils. His sketches at this time were drawn on any kind of paper and in any medium that he could find. He cut large sketchbooks in half or in quarters so he could carry them in battle.

On February 9, 1945, David participated in the capture of Einruhr, south of the Schwammenauel Dam on the Urft River. After the battle, he had his first contact with the carnage of war around the dam, removing the epaulets, Iron Crosses and regimental insignia off dead paratroopers frozen under the snow.

On February 28, David crossed the Ruhr at Nideggen and moved south with his unit to help capture the towns of Blens, Hausen, and Heimbach. Finding a warehouse of 'ersatz' chocolate made from coal tar, he 'liberated' great sheets of it down into the street to the delight of the local children. When a fellow soldier beat up an old man and took his pocket watch, David silently retrieved it for him, a kindness which almost got him shot by the angry soldier. In early March, after regrouping at Burvenich, his regiment set off for the Ahr River. They arrived the night of the 6th after capturing twenty major towns in two days along the way. During one attack, as David was lying headfirst on the ground directly in back of another prone soldier, when a piece of shrapnel came hissing over the grass narrowly missing his head and amputating both heels of the soldier just inches in front of his face. On March 7th, the 9th Armored Division took the Ludendorf Bridge at Remagen. After a change in orders, David's regiment crossed the bridge the next day. The bridge was under attack by enemy aircraft. One bomb hit the bridge and did serious structural damage. Four Stukas were shot down. David remembers one of the pilots coming out of the water with his hands up only to be shot by a soldier. It seemed a senseless act of cruelty to him. One of the

soldiers, who had had too much to drink before the crossing, decided to emulate General Patton's urinating in the Rhine. The sergeant told David to "get that man off the bridge." So David had to back pack not only his 50 caliber machine gun but a somewhat inebriated soldier over the bridge, under fire. By 3:30 that afternoon, the regiment was across the Rhine. David's Battalion headed north along the east shore of the Rhine taking Unkel by evening, and had moved to Scheuren by 7:40 pm. During the night of March 8-9 David's battalion advanced north in single file to Honnef under cover of the river bank. For the next ten days, the battalion moved North along the Rhine helping take the command post at Drachenfels and continuing on til Buell opposite Bonn on the west. By now the German troops were well aware that the war was lost and began to surrender. David, who had been placed as a guard in a machine gun post along the rail line on the east side of the Rhine, heard the sound of German soldiers approaching his position and was ready to fire, when the sergeant (to David's great relief) told him to "let them pass." Not all of David's stories were of the horrors of war. Some involved the simple business of living. David was billeted in several ancient castles along the Rhine. One night he was urgent in need of restroom facilities, and finding none in the ancient building, made use of an open portal in the castle. To his great surprise and consternation, a sentry who was stationed directly below David's window let out a shout followed by threats against the unknown perpetrator. David returned to the 500 or so men lying asleep in the great hall just before the sentry bent on revenge appeared at the door, another narrow escape, but this time not from the hand of the enemy. In one castle David remembered finding a well painted canvas of 'der Fuehrer' dressed in medieval garb as a knight in armor. For many years, he regretted not liberating that painting. The taking of Wuppertal in mid-April marked the

end of combat for David's unit. In early May, Germany surrendered. During the following months, David served as part of the occupation troops. While expecting to be assigned to Berlin, David was surprised by an assignment to Biarritz, France. He was to receive a semester of fine art study at the American University there. The semester lasted from October 15th to January 1946. When he arrived, he received a somewhat caustic letter from his girlfriend, Doris, informing him that, having grown impatient of his delays, she had married someone else while he was away.

By late February 1946, David arrived at Camp Kilmer in New Jersey after Atlantic crossing on board the liner George Washington. By June, he was transferred from Fort Bragg, North Carolina to Fort Dix, New Jersey, for honorable discharge. On June 26, 1946, David's wartime experiences, good and bad were over, but the memory of whatever it was that he had experienced would continue to find expression in his art for roughly the next ten years. (Catalogue 3) Returning to Brooklyn that September, David resumed his studies at Pratt Institute under the G.I. Bill. Two years later on June 1, 1948, he graduated with honors after completing the three year course in illustration. Returning to Bender Place, he setup a homegrown studio in the upstairs front of the building whose windows faced north. For his three-year old brother Joseph, this was "the Magic Room." He would continue to paint in this studio apartment for the next 46 years.

The summer after graduation, David enjoyed a few weeks of well deserved rest at Word of Life Camp, a religious retreat that had been started by a local evangelist Jack Wyrzten on Schroon Lake in the Adirondacks. Here he met a young woman, Elizabeth Ratimer, whom he would eventually marry 46 years later!



David in Biarritz 1945



David with Friends 1948

David continued his art studies at the Art Students League, in New York while working from 1948 to 1951. He worked a succession of jobs, first in commercial art for a company that did storefront displays, then as a billboard

painter with his childhood friend Giuliano Fergonese, who has gone into sign painting, and last as a "watcher" in an embroidery company where his mother worked as a "mender."



David ... Painting Billboards



... and Watching Embroidery Machine

David's painting focused on local scenes in the area (Catalogue 4, 5, 13). He grew discouraged at the prospect of ever making a name for himself as a commercial artist, when he tried submitting his work to local galleries to no avail. His jobs all seemed to be taking him away from his ambition to become a commercial artist. He began to think in terms of teaching art. He applied to and was accepted by Teachers College in Columbia University on June 27, 1951. By the end of October 1952, he had graduated with a B.S. His studies continued, uninterrupted toward his Masters Degree. During the winter term, in November

of 1952, David saw an exhibition of art work done by children of the British Isles and the United States at Teachers College. The exhibition, the largest of its kind to that date, featured 421 works of student art (241 from the British Isles and 180 from the United States). This exhibition sensitized David to the role of art as therapy for children of the inner city. In February 1953, David started student teaching at Ben Franklin H.S. in New York City. This was the area of Spanish Harlem made famous by the movie: "Blackboard Jungle."



David and Students c. 1953

David continued taking courses through the summer and, by the middle of December of 1953, had received his MA in Fine Art and Fine Art Teaching from Teachers College. He began teaching art as a full time substitute at P.S. 83 (Galvani Junior High School) in early 1954. It fell to David to provide the art support for that year's yearbook (and all successive yearbooks) where he is noted as the new art teacher.

During his first year, he took the test for a regular teacher's license but failed. He took the test at least once more and passed in late 1958. He was offered the permanent teachers license, in December 1958, requesting that he appear with a birth certificate and proof of inoculation. He declined the offer two months later citing "family legal difficulties" and according to the advice of "our lawyer, I will have to be satisfied with remaining a permanent substitute" The translation of that obfuscation was that David did not have the requested birth certificate, his birth being documented nearly five years after he had been born and that he had a different name, changed by adoption to his registered name. So with forgoing the regular teachers license went the retirement account that he might have had as a regular teacher. It was the first of several disappointments that David would experience.

That summer (1954) David returned for the last time to Word of Life Camp on Schroon Lake in

the Adirondacks. In the summer term of 1955, David started studies on what he hoped would lead to an Ed. D. from Teachers College. He continued teaching at Galvani JHS for the next four years until the school was changed to PS 117 Jefferson Park JHS. By the 55 – 56 winter term at Teachers College, David was already formulating his ideas on art education. He wrote in a proposed subject for study:

"In the Summer Session (1955) I did a study in which I observed "Creative Expression as a Means of Relieving Social Maladjustments among Underprivileged Children." The main emphasis of my study was the effect that various arts had on the behavior of underprivileged children over a long period of time. I was unable at that time to fully explore the hereditary and environmental factors that influenced their behavior. I would like to do this study both as a scientific analysis (readings) and by empirical methods (personal observations and experiences)."

David continued taking post graduate courses for the next eleven terms. In later half of May, 1956 he exhibited the artwork of his students at PS 83 as part of his work to explain the value of art therapy for troubled children in public schools. But by May of 1960 he stopped any further course work. While the exact date that he abandoned his doctoral pursuit is not clear, the reason, (as I remember it) is. David

had come to believe that his principal advisor wanted to have the results of his research published under her name as a *quid pro quo* for her support of his Ed. D. Whether or not his perception was accurate is moot. But, in refusing to agree, he abandoned all further studies. It was his second great disappointment. He continued teaching to earn a living and in

August 1963 bought a piece of property in Hunterdon County New Jersey in the hopes of building a studio gallery where he could show his art work and try once again to build a reputation as an artist. He had returned to the dream that he had abandoned twelve years before. In March 1965, David's adoptive father died. His mother received widow's benefits.



David and Students at Galvani JHS ~ c. 1956

In 1965 the principal for whom David had worked and with whom David had a very supportive relationship for twelve years, retired. His replacement was entirely different. After two years David requested and received a transfer to another school. It was like jumping out of the frying pan into the fire. His new administrator was even worse than the last had been. Within a year, David moved again. This time he was placed with an administration whose assistant – principal was very much like his old boss. It was very fortunate for David's painting. With the absence of friction on the job, David was able to concentrate emotionally on his painting and undertake some of his best works.

During these years of professional transition, the family had decided, collectively, to enter the antiques and collectible business. In 1966, a family corporation was formed with the express purpose of establishing and running a studio-gallery for David and as a means of entering the antiques business more formally. The land that David and his mother had

purchased nearly three years before, was put into the corporation as well as some fine antiques that the family had acquired. David, who naturally loved *objets d'art*, was bitten by the collector bug that had first surfaced in Germany during the war. There followed a whole series of flea markets in which very little economic advantage was gained, but the family had a wonderful time collecting antiques, selling some and above all meeting interesting people. One of them introduced us to the managers of the Seventh Regiment Armory Art and Antiques show on Park Avenue. In 1969 (the second time that we rented a booth at the show) we approached the managers who agreed to give David a chance at his first (and it turned out his only) one man show at 7th regiment armory from October 25 to November 2, 1969. The news article at the time noted that David has been teaching art and English in New York City Schools for 18 years. The article also noted that David was a graduate of Pratt Institute and Columbia University and has attended classes

at Union Theological and the Art Students' League. It mentions that by this time that David planned to complete his doctorate at Princeton, a dream that never materialized. David selected eight of his best paintings (Catalogue 16 – 20, 22). Nothing came of the showing of David's art. Now his only hope lay in keeping employed while waiting to build his studio gallery in Hunterdon County. But that dream was showing signs of distress as well. Unable to shift the family's economic basis from the New York area where all the family members had jobs, the family did not establish any real presence on the property. Nor was any attempt made to develop plans or start construction on the hoped for Gallery. Consequently the deserted property became prey to successive waves of vandalism which the family was unable to prevent or repair. The property began to be overgrown as well. The failure of the Armory exhibition and the decline of the property in Hunterdon County combined to form yet another depressing event for David.

Fortunately the years from 1969 to 1974 were good ones for David. He was well liked by the school administration. Feeling secure in his employment, David had the necessary emotional support to continue serious painting. But by 1975 economic clouds were gathering over New York City. Early that year, New York City's financial situation became more perilous. On September 3, 1975, David was dismissed from the New York City School system after 24 years of service as part of an austerity program attendant on New York's pending bankruptcy. On October 17, 1975, New York filed for bankruptcy and David had difficulty cashing his last paycheck, the bank being unwilling to accept any New York City check.

In 1976, his two brothers had married, causing even greater economic stress on David and his mother. The dreams of David's studio were

now dead and David began to slide into a creative lethargy. Unemployed, without pension, far from retirement age and with only his mother's widow's benefits, David tried to find other means of support for his mother and himself.

David continued gathering scrap metal and selling it as he had in his childhood and throughout his adult years. But he found a new opportunity that proved a great help to him financially and emotionally: teaching private art lessons. In preparation for the 1969 showing at the 7th Regiment Armory, he had had framed several paintings and made placards for them with a local framing store in Cliffside. Whether it was the store owner's idea or David's, the plan was for David to teach a private art lesson once or twice a week to a group of local people who were interested in painting. The class took place in the rear of the framing store. Art supplies were purchased at the store and David was paid directly for his teaching by each student. Not only did David find a new source of income and get to do what he loved doing – teach fine art, but he also received the emotional encouragement and validation that his students provided as part of the normal class experience. A typical class involved David setting up either a still life or presenting a composition drawn from his mind, in much the same way that some artists teach painting on television. He would produce a complete painting in a single class as well as go among his students correcting their work and making suggestions on their technique. Many of his students were quite talented. One student even started her own gallery. When she sponsored a local outdoor art show in town, she asked David to judge the show. Many of his students exhibited their art work. On the whole it was a good experience for David, but it held little hope for his personal future.



David and his Student Judging the Town Art Show ~ 1976

David also continued his involvement in flea markets. Among the things that he sold were inexpensive, paintings that had been mass produced in China and Korea. He finally decided to produce similar small, inexpensive paintings for sale. Unwilling to have his name associated with such inferior work, David signed numerous aliases. His art talents were reduced to the expedient of making a little extra cash. Occasionally he received a commission for a particular subject, but these were few. David's ability to paint complex compositions as he had in the 1960's declined greatly.

Eventually David found work for a florist who was the son of an antique dealer that he had done business with. He provided delivery and maintenance services for the florist's customers who lived in elegant new high-rise apartments in surrounding towns. The art teaching ended and with it pretty much all David's creative activity.

In January 1981, his mother died. David grieved for several weeks but his ever-present Christian faith sustained him. It was then that a strange process began. David began to sketch once more. Perhaps the lifting of his emotional concerns about his mother's care allowed him more time and emotional energy for art. For whatever reason, his desire to produce art

began to re-emerge, not as a means of earning a living, or gaining recognition, but (I am convinced) for reasons that lay buried within himself as an artist. Throughout his life, David had loved the ability to capture a scene with pencil or pen. At first the sketches were small studies of local scenes. Eventually he revisited subjects from his early life. At last, he revisited a series of shanties that had been built on the far side of the mountain opposite our home. By the time David and I visited and photographed them in the 1960's, they were deserted. They were remarkable in that they had grown up looking almost like one of David's architectonic abstractions. Almost 25 years later, he took the photographs and arranged them in his characteristic style (Catalogue 27). This sketch, (and a pen and ink version that he sold) mark the point at which David began to emerge from a creative lethargy of almost ten years. In the following years, he returned to painting the skyline of New York (Catalogue 28).

In the summer of 1984, David, my wife and I attended an exhibition at the Guggenheim, "Degas to Calder." After the show, as we were walking up Madison Avenue, David saw a small, lovely, and ultra realistic painting of some blue flag irises. Curious as to their price, he stepped inside. Shocked at a price tag of

\$20,000, he muttered almost to himself, "I can do as well – or better." We thought nothing of the event and went home. About a month later he told us he had something to show us and brought out a remarkable flower painting, unlike anything he had ever done before. We were shocked, and pleased. David had retreated to a familiar and well accepted genre of painting perhaps with the intension of 'proving' his painterly skill if only to himself. He said that he was going to hold on to the painting as a sample in case someone wanted a similar work. But he also admitted that it took "quite a bit of work." That Christmas, he gave the painting to us as a gift. We never thought he would ever do a similar piece. We were wrong.

In early January of 1994, David was contacted by the woman that he had met and kept company with in 1948 at Word of Life Camp. She had subsequently married someone else and had had several children. In time her first husband had died, and she remembered David. She called and restarted their friendship. At first David protested in his letters that he was not interested in marriage, but by that summer, he told us he was engaged to be married. I think the emotional lift of that pending marriage gave David the creative momentum to complete his last flower painting (Catalogue

29), not just to prove his skill as a painter, but as an expression of his new-found joy.

After marriage, there was a period when the couple lived the life of "snow birds" alternating between homes in Florida and New Jersey. David greatly enjoyed the warmer climate of Florida and continued to sketch and paint. By 1999, after a debilitating stroke, David asked for help in disposing of the house in which he had lived for 57 years. Knowing that he could not take all his acquisitions and art work with him to their somewhat small house in Tampa, David gave his accumulated art to me for safe keeping. It was *triage*. Fine antiques were auctioned. Serviceable furniture was given away. Junk was scrapped. But when David gave me all his artwork, it was hard to hear him ask me, "You wouldn't sell my paintings while I'm alive, would you?" I assured him that was not my intention. David's health continued to decline, but even after his stroke he continued to paint, just for the joy of painting. Art really was therapy for him. David died at Tampa General Hospital on June 9, 2008 and was interred four days later at the National Cemetery in Bushnell Florida. He had lived 82 years, 1 month, and 14 days, and left behind a small legacy of paintings and artwork that were completely unknown.

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Paintings
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Catalogue Number	Title	Page
1	Rabbit at Sunset	22
2	Palisades Amusement Park	24
3	Troops on the Cologne Plain	26
4	Second Mountain	28
5	St. Rocco's Feast, Cliffside Park	30
6	Study for Coney Island Summer	32
7	Coney Island Summer	34
8	Amusement Park at Night (after 1952 print)	36
9	City at Night	38
10	New York City Piers	40
11	Symphony Orchestra Abstraction	42
12	Second Mountain View	44
13	New York Tenements (unfinished)	46
14	New York Back Yards	48
15	Hackensack Valley	50
16	Exurbia	52
17	Parisian View	54
18	Old West Haven Park	56
19	East River Drive	58
20	Coney Island Summer	60
21	Venetian Fantasy	62
22	Bridgeport Fantasy	64
23	Boats in Harbor	68
24	Study for Manhattan Fantasy	70
25	Manhattan Fantasy	72
26	Geometric Abstraction	74
27	Shanty Town	76
28	New York Skyline	78
29	Floral Arrangement	80



1. *Portrait of a Rabbit at Sunset ~ c. 1932 (Age 5)*
Oil on Board (8 x 5 in.) signed 'D. Pratt' lower right

This diminutive little rabbit, standing before a setting sun, is the earliest surviving painting by David Pratt. It was most likely painted in 1932 or 1933 when David was in first or second grade. It is a happy piece with bright colors and reflects a childhood awareness of fore-, middle-, and back-ground. It is the result of a small paint set that he had been given as a present. Although primitive, a closer examination reveals elements that continued into his later works. The time of sunset was important for David. David once drew a purple cow. His kindergarten teacher told him that there were no purple cows. "Everything is purple at sunset" he explained. David was sensitive to color from a very early age realizing that the nature of incident light altered the colors that the viewer saw. At sunset, the long rays of the sun could effectively limit the palette of the painter. In this scene, David suggested reflection of the setting sun on the water behind the rabbit. The clouds demonstrate a turbulent brushwork that attempts to suggest the varied reflections of the setting sun. The trees in the far background involve brushwork that suggests their delicate tracery against the orange evening sky. The two partially barren trees emerging to different heights out of the otherwise, amorphous green undergrowth that borders a body of water

(a river or lake) very effectively used to suggest strong verticals to balance the verticality of the rabbit's ears. The rabbit's face is well defined and is traced by a pink reflected light around his face and chin suggesting the volumetric reality of the animal's head. The bright colors give a hint of David's tendency to chromatically intense colors that would characterize his mature art.

The rabbit is not just set in the scene, but is almost caught in a moment of surprise as he travels on the pathway. He is wearing a pair of pants as he walks upright on his hind feet in a human-like stance. The painting invites the viewer to see the scene as part of a story in the young artist's mind. The sunset suggests the passage of time, while the pathway with a little rabbit is part of a story that is unfolding. The painting could almost be an illustration for a children's book. The use of a path as a visual means to draw the viewer's eye into the painting will occur throughout David's lifetime. Finally one can wonder at the dexterity of the young artist who clearly signs his name in neat block letters at the bottom right. The ability to print one's name is a traditional step to literacy for most children. But to do it with such facility in oil as a testimony of accomplishment in the creation of such a miniscule painting is truly amazing!



2. *Palisades Amusement Park ~ c. 1938 (Age 12)*
Oil on Masonite (15½ x 227/8 in.) signed 'Pratt' lower right

This is the largest of David's early paintings. Size, as well as subject matter, was important in his thinking. To David, size meant confidence. By this time David had done several oil paintings with growing confidence in his ability to handle a brush and oil paints. The subject is a scene in Palisades Amusement Park. But it is not a scene from a particular vantage point in the park. Instead the scene juxtaposes several visual elements that were all familiar to park goers. The two women are seated on a bench that surrounds a tree growing in the park. There were many such benches. The tall poles that bear American Flags are embellished with circular canisters bearing nautical emblems. They are part of the park's perimeter fences. The largest and most notable feature, the flying rockets circling a tall central tower, was one of dozens of rides that the park offered. The fence on the left marks the edge of the salt water swimming area as evidenced by the bathhouse lying just beyond its perimeter. Even the waste baskets were typical of the park. To the right, the operator of an arcade game leans out of his stall. The apparent random juxtaposition of elements for compositional reasons would be central to David's approach to painting for his entire life as an artist. In season, the

amusement park was usually quite crowded with people who amused themselves with the sights, sounds, tastes, and rides that the park offered. But the park shown here is not overpopulated. David's choice of people is interesting. There is the mother out for a breath of fresh air as she pushes her baby carriage. There is the young couple (a sailor and his date) strolling toward the mother, perhaps carrying on a new romance. There is the somewhat bald arcade game proprietor, trying to make his living as he leans out of his cubicle, calling to the little boy by to try his luck with the pennies in his pocket. There are the two ladies sitting under the shade of a tree, resting their tired feet (very likely) after an even more tiring work week. Finally, there is the little boy, standing all by himself, in amazement at the sights and sounds of the park. This is a place for everyone, and for all kinds of reasons. For David, whom we suspect is the little boy; it was a place for pleasure! Amusement parks would become one of the leitmotifs of David's artistic *oeuvre*, but it was more than pleasure that surrounded his treatment of this quintessential American entertainment. There were darker shadows of melancholy waiting in the wings. (Catalogue 8)



3. *Troops on the Cologne Plain* ~ c. 1946-47
 Oil on Canvas (22¼ x 34 in.) signed 'Pratt' lower right

For many years after the war, David produced art that reflected war time experiences. For a course in Pratt Institute, David created a sample book cover that showed tanks and ruined buildings for a book called "Brave Men" by the Pulitzer-prize winning war journalist, Ernie Pyle.

Mother encouraged him to paint the scenes he remembered on a large Masonite wall in her bedroom! For David art was therapy. His later interest in Art Therapy for troubled children had its roots in his own therapeutic use of art to make sense of

what he described as "the most dramatic thing humans can do."



In the painting, troops march through a scene of devastation. Huddled together, oblivious of their surroundings, they march to who knows where. The scene gives the sense of endless, constant motion through what were once architecturally interesting but are now ruined abstractions of civilization. A cathedral sits far left in an unlikely country setting. Relatively untouched, only the roof shows signs of fire damage. This is no particular locale, although David did tell me that it grew out of his memories of the Cologne Plain. In the distance are several scattered villages and a tank on patrol. Smoke rises from a village in the far distance on the left behind another village that seems relatively untouched. Unseeing troops pass by two

cows that sit and stand unperturbed in a field nearby. A few women (one a mother with a small child) are walking alongside a troop transport vehicle. Are they refugees on a journey to safety? The roadway winds, snakelike, across a small bridge over a river and continues on into the distance. The eye is drawn by the moving people through the various scenes of devastation. The two officers, in the lower left, survey the troop movement; while another near the jeep scans the horizon for enemy movement and possible danger. To the far right, sunlight breaks out through the dark clouds. Was this expressive of David's hope that things will get better after all the horrors of war?



David's Mural of Remembrances of Europe



4. *Second Mountain* ~ c. 1949

Oil on Canvas (14 x 18 in.) signed 'Pratt' lower right

The Rocky Promontory in this picture was locally referred to as the “second mountain.” It was the site of the Coppeleta stone quarry that had ceased operations many years before. The “first mountain” was the high cliff on which David’s home was located. This promontory and its adjacent cliff (for which Cliffside Park was named) were once a continuous cliff but now were separated by a road passing between them known, appropriately, as Gorge Road. They were both part of the rocky cliffs called the Palisades that border the western shore of the Hudson River. In North Bergen and Weehawken, the cliffs provide spectacular views of the New York Skyline that David would paint many times in later years. The abstract and amorphous shape of blasted rock opposite David’s home was a fascinating

challenge to David. He painted the scene several times over the years.



The “Second Mountain”

In earlier paintings he seemed to focus on making visual sense of the various outcroppings of the rock. I suspect that the mountain was to David, what the haystacks were to Monet. The skyline of New York (visible in the photo) seemed secondary to David. Gradually David began to note of the

skyline in the distant background as representation of architecture began to occupy more of his observation.



Two Earlier Paintings of the Second Mountain

In the paintings above two aspects should be noted that would be central to David's future direction in painting: significant rearrangement of visual elements in service of the composition, and his point of view: above and looking down on the subject portrayed.

Arrangement of visual elements: As the photograph makes clear the large beige and brown building with flag atop is nowhere visible. The building was the Hills Brothers Coffee plant and was located farther behind the mountain and only barely visible if one looked farther north. The long flat factory building in the photograph adjacent to the numerous rails was a Ford Motor Company Assembly Plant. The rail lines served both the plant and cargo container ships that docked in Edgewater. The Hills Brothers Plant was just

north of the rail lines. In this painting, David 'slid' the entire Edgewater shoreline farther south making the Hills brothers plant clearly visible, eliminating the Ford Assembly plant. He did this so the plant could provide a vertical 'bridge' for the viewer's eye to the New York Skyline behind the mountain and across the Hudson River. The low-lying rails that turn to the docks that jut into the river together with the imaginary equipment on the ends of the two docks provide a visual balance for the "weight" of the mountain. The tall smoke stack which wasn't there (see photo) was added as a strong vertical balancing exactly the vertical Hills Brothers Plant. The skyline of the city has also been shifted farther south. (See the shift in the Rockefeller Church steeple from the photograph to the painting). I remember David telling me as a young boy when I would visit him upstairs while he was painting that he didn't have to paint things exactly as he saw them but was free to move them around or add visual elements to suit the purposes of the painting's composition. This painting clearly illustrates his approach. Nevertheless, it is still highly representational and scenic.

It is in the skyline, increasingly figuring in these compositions, that we begin to see how the box-like architectonic elements that make up the skyline anticipate a more abstract representation. They are small and no effort is made to represent their forms in greater detail. They are colored boxes that echo the colors of the Hills Brother's plant in the foreground.

Point of View: These paintings have a point of view that is above the principle subject and looking down. It is one instance that a serendipitous location reinforced a point of view that would allow David to exploit a layered view of architectural elements in later paintings. It became, in short, David's favored point of view whether he was dealing representationally or abstractly with the subject of the painting.



5. *St. Rocco's Feast, Cliffside Park ~ c. 1951*

Oil on Canvas (25 x 36 in.) signed 'D. Pratt' lower right

This painting is an excellent example of the influence of local culture on David's work. Cliffside Park and adjacent Fairview were home to large numbers of first generation immigrants from southern Italy. In consequence, many Italian traditions were preserved, including the Saint Rocco Society. The presence of such societies not only satisfied needs for the preservation of cultural identity in a newly adopted country but social and religious needs as well. In order to raise income to support the mission of the society, a feast would be held in August on or near the Saint's feast day. In this painting, David has shown the central figure of the feast the *giglio* (pronounced jill-eey-yo) a tall tower that was topped, in this case, with the statue of St. Rocco. The tower in Fairview typically was accompanied by a stage on which a small band or an opera singer would perform. At the height of the

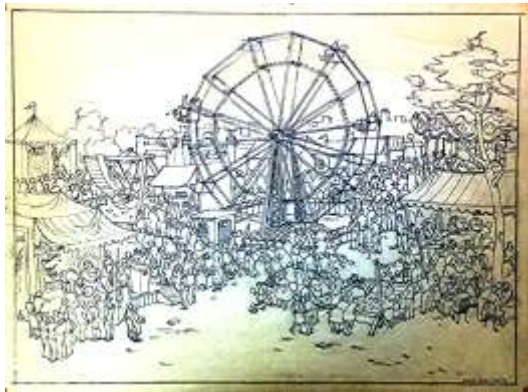
feast a great number of devotees (the "lifters") would shoulder under the *giglio* and on the direction of the *Capo*, lift the entire *giglio*, including the band which continued playing, and 'dance' it through the street.

While no actual sketch of this composition is known, there are several small onsite sketches that capture elements that would go into the work.



Small Sketch of Saint Rocco's Feast

There are also a few large compositions that capture the crowds of people gathered around food and amusement attractions.



Sketch of Saint Rocco Feast

The crowds in these sketches capture a sense of community that is lacking in amusement parks. Note the spectator powered community swing and other simple games of chance.

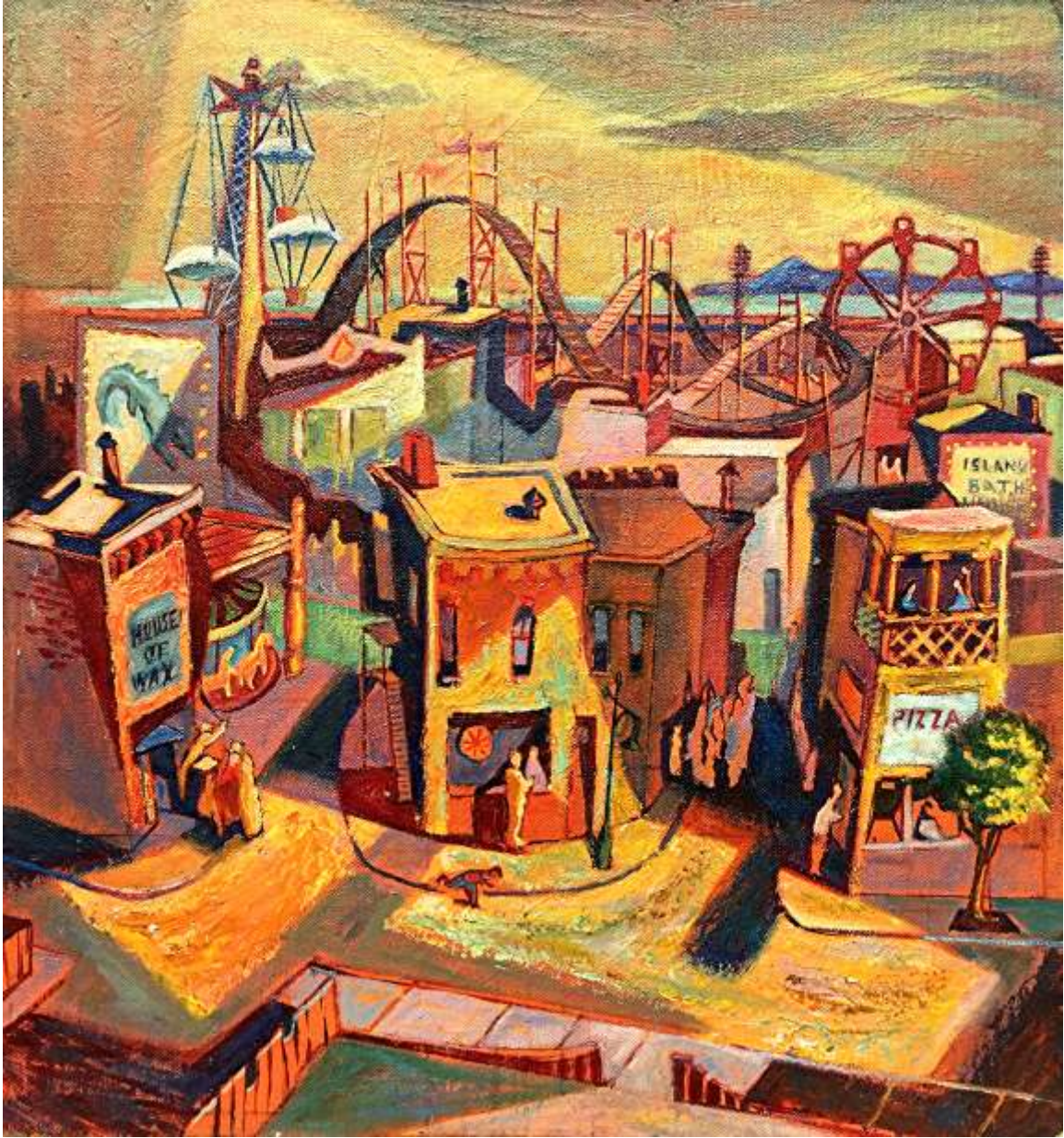
Painting scenes like this, for David, was not just about recording material objects. He also had a sense of the psychological or spiritual motivations behind the places and people he painted. In particular, he visually explored the human preoccupation with pleasure as it occurred in everyday life. This explains David's amusement park leitmotif as well as festival scenes like this. Painting the Feast of St. Rocco, however, allowed David to explore pleasure in a different context. Amusement parks were commercial ventures that, in many cases, started as weekend Trolley Parks to keep the trolley lines busy on week ends. They operated all summer long and provided public recreation and amusement for a fee. The crowds were just crowds. But a feast like St. Rocco's had the additional overtones of a community bound together by religious principles and not strictly bent on making a profit from amusement. Lasting only about a week, the feast was temporary. The rides and games of chance were homemade affairs like the communal swings. The few mechanical rides present were run by small, for hire, carnivals that made a regular circuit from fair to fair.

As a deeply committed Christian, one aspect of David's creative focus lay in exploring the tension between the spiritual life from within a Christian context (with its emphasis on self-sacrifice) and the gratification of pleasure principle (with its emphasis on self-satisfaction). While the amusement park theme might explore the interplay of melancholia with excessive gratification of the pleasure principle (Catalogue 8), Saint Rocco's feast, with its twin focus on Christian mission and innocent amusement provided a more balanced picture of this aspect of the human experience. It also provided a simple resolution to the perceived tension that David could identify with. The Farmland Dairy sign, high up on the building to the right of the *giglio*, provides a clue to this.



Saint Rocco's Feast- Detail of Dairy Advertisement

Painting such advertising signs were a very important part of David's artistic experience. For several years after graduation from Pratt Institute, David had worked in a number of jobs (some requiring more artistic skill than others). One of those jobs included sign painting with his childhood friend Guiliano Fregonese who had gone into the sign painting business and asked David help him on several hand-painted billboards for Honeker's Dairy. The sign on the building may actually have been painted by David. But its presence in this painting is clearly a symbolic way in which David associated himself sympathetically with the festival and its people.



6. (Study for) Coney Island Summer ~ c. 1952

Oil on Canvas glued to Masonite (15¾ x 16¾ in.) unsigned

These two paintings (Catalogue 6 & 7) represent an adaptation of techniques David had learned at Pratt Institute and a new step in the development to his approach to painting. There are several examples of exercises at Pratt Institute where David first executed a line drawing and then explored tonal values *en grisaille*. Finally colors were added. David used this approach to separate

the compositional design of the painting and the tonal qualities he desired in a graphite sketch. After transferring the sketch to canvas, he could then work out the problems of color during the process of painting. In this study, the *chroma* of David's palette has shifted to red-orange-yellow of greater purity and intensity than his earlier pieces.



Sketch of (Study for) Coney Island Summer



A Foundation Exercise from Pratt Institute



7. *Coney Island Summer* ~ c. 1952-53
Oil on Canvas (26 x 22¼ in.) signed 'D. Pratt' lower right

Consideration of the study for *Coney Island Summer* and the finished painting reveals compositional stability, but the color scheme has shifted dramatically away from the limited palette of red-orange-yellow to a more robust palette that includes many more colors

which are chromatically relatively pure and quite intense. It may be that David sought to reinforce compositional unity in the study by using a limited palette which also hinted at the sweltering heat of the town. But if the initial color scheme helped unify the painting,

it did so at the expense of the definition of individual elements in the composition itself. Perhaps he was not sufficiently confident yet of the coherence or his initial sketch. But, for whatever reason, the broadening and intensifying of the palette in the final painting creates a richness and vibrancy evocative of medieval illuminations lacking in the study. It is interesting to note that the buildings with their undulating lines and window placement almost give them unique personalities of their own. They seem happy to be in Coney Island.

The point of view of these paintings is the same as David had used several times in painting the "Second Mountain" above and looking down. This point of view makes it possible to survey the structures of the buildings and their surrounding streets like an isometric map that guides the viewer's eye between the buildings toward the midway and amusement park in the background.

It is also interesting to note the juxtaposition of the midway and amusement park in the middle ground with Long Island Sound in the far ground. The strong vertical line of the Parachute Jump (whose iron work frame was a Brooklyn landmark sometimes called the "Eiffel Tower of Brooklyn") unites both the mid and far grounds. It also points to an undefined source of light radiating downward that by its very nature is fundamentally incompatible with the shadows of the foreground. But in the happiness of the composition, the viewer simply doesn't care. The viewer is invited to be like the buildings in the center foreground: happy that they are in Coney Island.

The development of the foreground shadows is another interesting feature of the sketch and

two associated paintings. The interplay of light and dark carries through the compositions almost untouched.



Sketch



Study

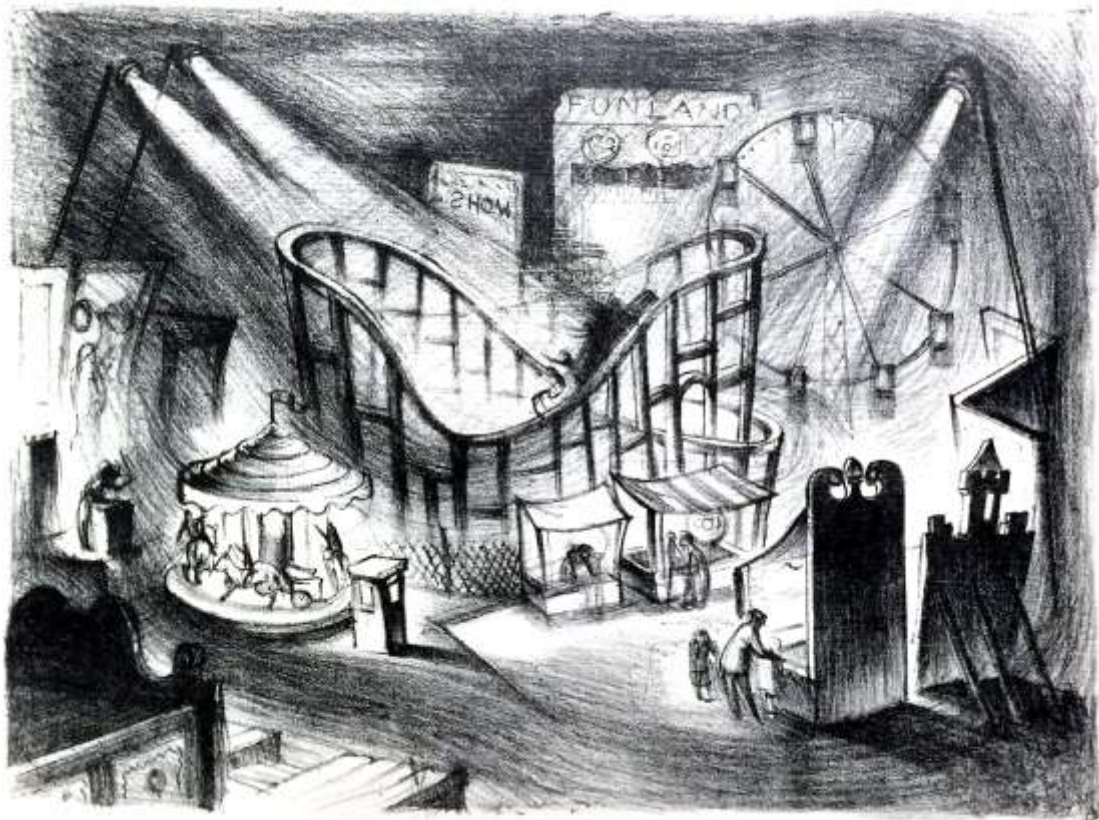


Painting

The light and shadow seem to be cast by objects outside the field of view, but it is not clear what kind of structures could create such *chiascuro*. In fact, the patches of light and dark seem to be parts of the painting created purely for their compositional value and not any attempt to represent real light and shadow. If this conjecture is so, then this painting marks one of the first occurrences of a feature of David's more mature style that introduced atmospheric and topographic disjoints in color for purely abstract compositional reasons (Catalogue 15 and subsequent).



8. *Amusement Park at Night* ~ c. 1953-54
Oil on Canvas glued to Masonite (16 x 20 in.) signed 'D. Pratt' lower right



Lithograph of Amusement Park at Night ~ c.1946

Among the many paintings of amusement parks that David completed, this painting is unique. He dealt with this composition twice before while at Pratt Institute. Two distinctly different prints survive, the latter of which (shown above) became the model for this painting, clear evidence that the subject had continued on in his mind.

In the lithograph, David reproduced the composition that anticipated the painting point for point on the stone, not realizing that the image would be reversed. He carefully wrote the title "FUNLAND" backwards so that it would appear correctly, but failed to notice the reversal of the letter "S" in the word "SHOW" adjacent to the other sign.

Years later, as I watched David painting this scene, he commented that most people think of an amusement park where everyone is happy. "What do you think" he asked me, "it is like after every one goes home?" He was focused on the transitory and hollow nature of the amusements offered. Here, the park is a melancholy affair whose lights are barely able to hold back the darkness of depression. As I look at the painting now I wonder if the backs of the arcade booths aren't more like tombstones! The somber tone of the canvas, with the small illuminated spaces around each attraction, creates a scene of intense melancholia, which I believe is the fundamental emotional tone that all really creative people (including David) must wrestle with.



9. *City at Night* ~ 1956 - 57

Oil on Canvas (24 x 18 in.) signed 'David J. Pratt' lower left

Amusement parks were not the only source of pleasure in David's childhood. He developed a love of movies at age eight when he saw his first movie "Lime House Blues" with George Raft and Anna May Wong. He would often sneak away to see the endless serial action adventures of his day. The sketch for this

painting reveals a great deal about the theatrical content on David's mind that he was unable to translate into oils. There are at least five references to movies in the center section of the sketch, shown circled. The reference to *Lust for Life* helps date the sketch to no earlier than September 17, 1956 when the movie about Vincent Van Gogh was released.



Sketch of "City at Night"



Five References to Movies in the Sketch

The ambiguous billboard advertisement (upper left of center of the sketch) was also a movie advertisement. The non-descript sketch within it was replaced in the painting by "The Robe" a reference to the movie of that name released in 1953, a biblical epic about a disillusioned Roman who had won Jesus' robe in a dice game after the crucifixion. The proximity of this billboard to three cross-like structures that stand like telephone poles and the statue of veiled justice bearing a drawn sword in the lower center provide clues to the real issue of this enigmatic painting.

The painting presents the tension between the immediate pursuit of the pleasures of both the eye (movies), the palate (eating places and signs for liquor), and possibly sex (the soldier

and his female companion entering a hotel) with the higher call of the Christian faith (symbolized by the three crosses & "The Robe") with its



Three Crosses above a Billboard and a Statue of Justice



A Street Evangelist (?) and His Audience

emphasis on coming judgment (the statue) and the possibly preaching of the Gospel (is the group at bottom center hearing a street evangelist?). The painting also describes a more personal tension. Both movies dealt with themes that were important for David. *The Robe* would have greatly appealed to his Christian faith, while *Lust for Life* would have been of great interest for him both for its visual summaries of Van Gogh's work and for the life of the artist. Throughout David's life there was a constant tension to employ his artistic abilities in the service of his faith, but there was also the constant need to be true to his unique vision of the world as an artist, even when that view had no obvious bearing on his faith.



10. *New York City Piers* ~ c. 1956-57
 Oil on Canvas (22 x 28 in.) signed 'D. J. Pratt' lower right

At some point David transitioned from treating the New York Skyline as background for paintings of local scenes in New Jersey to using them as his primary subject matter. This early skyline painting reminds us that, although David was committed to painting recognizable objects (particularly buildings) he was not bound by the necessity to portray them exactly as they existed. For him, forms were subservient to color and composition. In this unusual painting, the skyline is viewed with two vanishing points. On the viewer's right is a skyline that recognizable as the west side of Manhattan looking south, (including Riverside Church and Grant's Tomb). On the viewer's left, there is (what appears to be) a pastiche of various architectural elements some from lower Manhattan and some of which are

fanciful. These two "skylines" meet at the middle of the picture at a bifurcated set of docks whose principal axes follow the direction of each skyline. They almost appear to look out



Missing Sketch of New York City Piers (from a photo)

on two different rivers that meet at mid-canvas. Wrapping around the two skylines to unite them is an elevated train that merges with the west-side highway. At about two-thirds up on the canvas, the line of the combined elevated train / highway forms a soft ellipse that separates the actual composite skyline from the docks below. It is these few docks that dominate the picture. One might ask why David would compose the picture from this point of view. The answer lies in David's childhood experience. Much of David's early life as a boy was lived on the New Jersey side of the Hudson River near an area below North Hudson where the railroad tracks bordered the edge of the Hudson River and where old barges were abandoned in the mud flats. He grew up haunting such places for scrap iron from the burnt and rotting barges which he sold to earn a few pennies in order to go to the movies or to take the ferry to New York to visit the art galleries in lower Manhattan. It is no wonder that the sounds, smells, and the memories of such childhood adventures

surfaced years later in paintings like this. Yet for all the nostalgia that may have influenced his selection of this subject matter and his treatment of this early skyline, David was still struggling with the problem of light, particularly at sunset. In this painting, the sky is aflame with sunset reds, oranges, and yellows. The western sides of buildings in both halves of the skyline are brightly lit in answering yellows and oranges while the northern sides are deep purple, blues, or even black. The area under the elevated railway, facing northwest, is a succession of rectangles and triangles that are each filled with deep blue, turquoise, or purple as a kind of mosaic. The entire turquoise surface of the river reflects the hot evening colors in a kind of impressionistic vision while the pilings reflect darkly in the rippling waters. On the one hand, David is clearly honing his mastery of the more intense palette that will characterize his later work. On the other hand he has still not found exactly what he is looking for in terms of a unique style that will allow him to use color and not specific detail to express the complexity of his vision.



A Scene on the West Bank of the Hudson River Evocative of David's Childhood

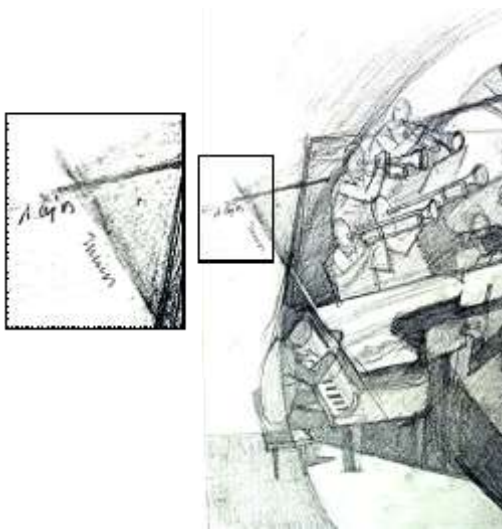


11. *Symphony Orchestra Abstraction* ~ c. 1957
Oil on Canvas (24 x 32 in.) unsigned

This is the only semi-abstract that David ever did of a symphony orchestra. The composition, when compared to the sketch for the painting seems stable enough. In the sketch, the curved line separating light and dark areas to the left of the canvas passed through the back of the pianist. After it wraps around the wind instruments, it seemed to lose definition and disappears. But in the painting the line is sharply defined and has been moved in to wrap around the wind instruments to terminate at the conductor. As such it achieves a much greater role in organizing the composition around the conductor. There are other minor differences, but on the whole the initial idea of the composition has remained stable except for the elimination of the treble clef lying pointless on the floor.

The extension of the color away from the recognizable shapes of the orchestra members and their instruments is an important step in the use of abstract color fields as part of the composition. The fields of color emanating from the orchestra have been given different textures to further define their presence. Perhaps this was David's way of suggesting the various colorations of the music that emerged from the orchestra, point and counter point. In any case this approach anticipates much of David's later work which makes extensive use of the extension of fields of color (and texture) beyond the limits of the recognizable shapes in the painting.

Unlike any other sketch David ever produced, he labeled the two principle axes of the sketch major and minor using musical as well as artistic terms.



Symphony Orchestra Abstraction Sketch detail

The further definition of the edges of the winds and strings are all by means of a fine yellow (or white) line. The major and minor axes of the work are also defined in part by similar fine lines. As usual, there is more detail in the

sketch than David wanted to translate into the painting. None of the music stands have been shown, only the music, apparently floating in mid air. Also none of the bows have been added. Given the nature of the approach, this does not seem too strange. But in this particular case the omissions seem to be significant. The orchestra members in the center of the painting blend into an ill defined mass of dusty mauve that sits as an amorphous shape in the midst of an otherwise carefully defined composition. It may be that David intended all this, but he never signed the painting and he never painted another like it. I think that the painting was clearly experimental and not entirely satisfactory to him. Nevertheless it does mark an important step in the development of his style and despite being (possibly) unfinished; the painting has a certain charm that can arrest the eye of the beholder.



12. "Second Mountain" View C. 1958

Oil on Canvas (26½ x 41½ in.) signed "David Joel Pratt" lower right

It was not unusual for David to return to a subject that he had undertaken years before. In the case of the "Second Mountain" he completed no fewer than five paintings from various angles. This is the last of that series and in many ways marks his final solution of the problem. By comparing this painting to the ones that he had done almost twelve years before, several things are apparent. As noted elsewhere, David's palette shifted away from dusty yellow, ochre, and brown to chromatically more intense green, blue, and purple. Not that yellows and ochre are not in this painting. They had to be included because that was the color of the rocks. But the shift makes this painting much more radiant and intense.

In this painting, David assumed a much higher vantage point which, in effect, lifts the New York Skyline up from behind the mountain. Also the location of the skyline as indicated by the tower of Riverside Church is much nearer its actual location when viewed from the end of Bender Place.



The New York Skyline Anticipates later Paintings

This shift also allowed David to elevate the Hills Brothers' Coffee Plant as a strong vertical uniting the middle ground of the mountain with the far ground of the New York Skyline.



Detail: Second Mountain View

The building also nicely frames the freighter traveling down river as a well balanced and completely self contained composition.

By now David had also mastered the naturally occurring abstraction of the blasted rock face of the mountain.



Second Mountain Detail (c.1949)

Rather than burying complex details of the rock in an amorphous brown mass he deliberately highlighted each facet by playing vibrant yellow ochre against blues and purples in a consistent pattern of light and dark that invites the viewer to consider the rugged nature of this once active quarry.

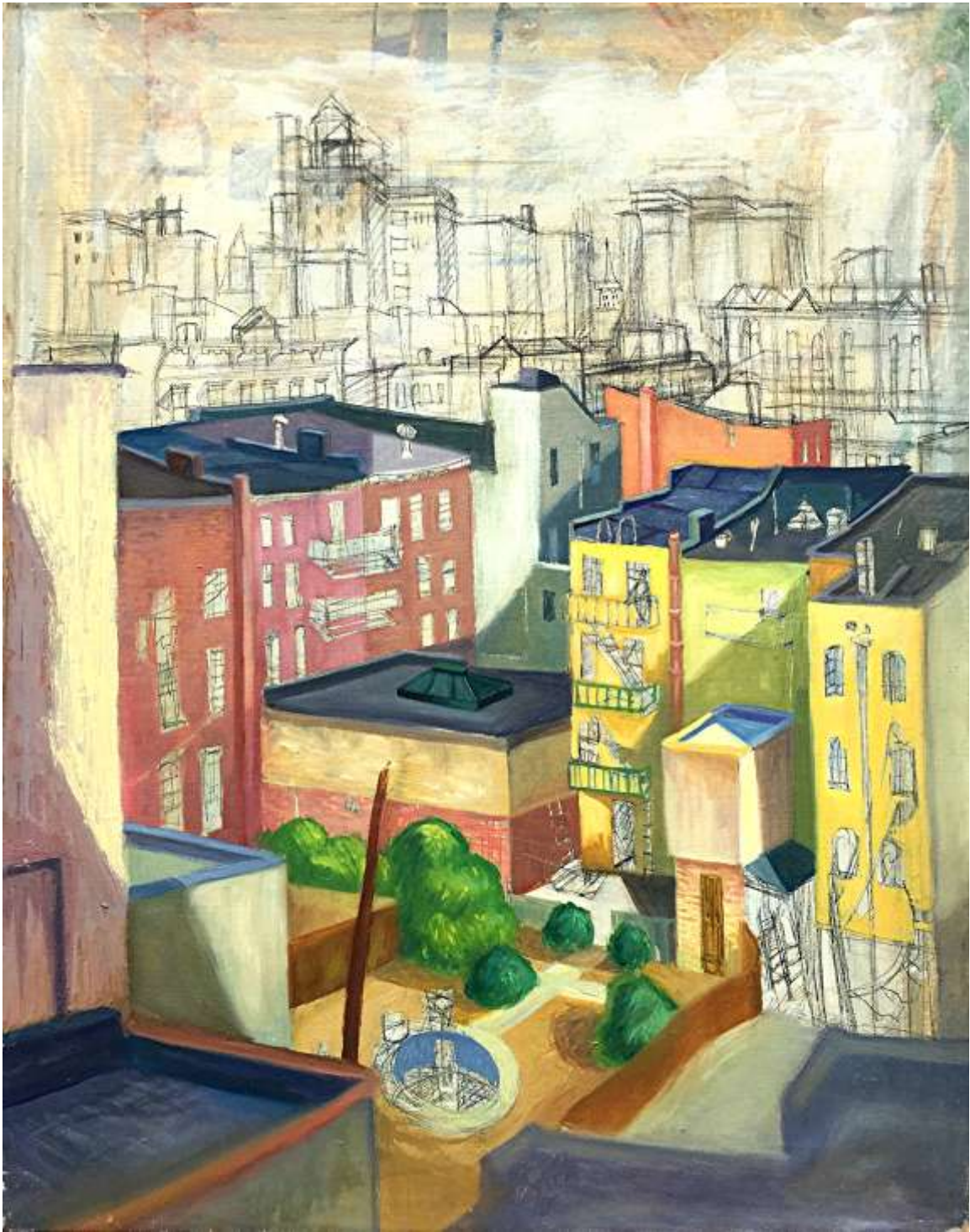
By choosing an oblong canvas, David was able to expand the view of the mountain to

include its total length and not just its southern half as he had in earlier paintings.



Second Mountain Detail (c.1958)

Finally David, by ending the view at the southern end of the mountain, omitted the details of the industrial complexes lying far below that he had included in all his earlier paintings of this scene. The resulting composition achieves a better balance between near and far scenes. After this painting David stopped painting the mountain and turned his attention southward to survey the unobstructed New York Skyline that he had increasingly come to appreciate.



13. *New York Tenements* ~ c. 1958
Unfinished Oil on Canvas (28x22 in.) unsigned

Working in New York gave David a different view of the city, particularly the tenements of the inner city where his students lived. This view may have actually been visible from one of his classrooms or may be one of his assemblages of buildings. Two things are clear. It is unfinished and it marks an unsatisfactory approach, not because there is something wrong with the painting itself, but because of the way in which David tried to combine both the sketch and the painting on a single work surface.

There were two basic ways David transferred a sketch to the canvas. Either he covered the back of the sketch with graphite and then retraced it onto the canvas, or he covered the sketch with a clear plastic grid that matched a grid drawn on the canvas so that each little 'tile' could be transferred by eye. In either case it took time. Here, David tried to save time by drawing the sketch directly onto the canvas. It is understandable why he might try this. His sketches were complex compositions and getting more so. They took a great deal of thought and time but were not particularly salable in themselves. Combining the sketch with the painting would eliminate the transfer time from sketch to canvas. It might also limit the amount of detail making the painting easier to produce. But, unlike the typical

"paint by the numbers" approach, David's compositions were so complex, that as soon as he painted in the larger areas, all the details of the composition were swallowed up and he had nothing to refer back to. Clearly in this piece he tried to find a way around this problem by delaying filling in certain small details of the composition until the last moment.



Two Unpainted Details Left to Preserve the Design

The problem only got worse as he moved up the canvas with the details of the distant background getting smaller and more difficult to paint around. Instead of saving him time, the shortcut cost more time, thought, and labor. He abandoned the approach, put the painting away, and never returned to it.

Despite its unfinished state, the painting still preserves a pleasing composition and color scheme. It also gives the viewer some insight into how David (and perhaps many other artists) worked at that time.



14. *New York Backyards* ~ c. 1959
Oil on Canvas (28 x 37 in.) signed D. J. Pratt lower left

This painting grows out of the same period as that of "New York Tenements" (Catalogue 13), when David was teaching art at Jefferson Park Junior High School No. 117 on east 109th Street in the East Harlem neighborhood of Manhattan. This scene was visible both from street level and from observations in the classroom. Unlike any other painting, there is an impulsiveness connected with this work, because David was moved to sketch the entire painting in charcoal above the mantelpiece of the fireplace in his room. He subsequently placed tracing paper over the entire sketch, copied it, and used the tracing paper to transfer the design to canvas.



*The Original Sketch of New York Backyards
On the Wall over David's Fireplace*

Growing up in Bender Place, the backyard was a special place for David. It was a kind of personal park. Several of his earliest works are paintings of the back yard of the house.



*Backyard at 4 Bender Place (oil 8"x10" c. 1950)
(The dog was Rex a German Shepherd-Malamute 'Mutt')*

There were also studies of backyards that he did while at Pratt institute.



*Backyard Scene
Graphite on Paper (c.1946)*

These sketches reveal that David did not see the backyard merely as a space, but rather as a place filled with activities. It was, in a sense, the largest "room" in what could be a stifling tenement in summer, a place of escape from indoors; a place of light where the life of the family could play out in more congenial surroundings. The lot for David's home was 40 feet by 100 feet. All the houses on Bender Place were situated on long narrow lots. The backyards of adjoining houses were lined up

in close proximity. Neighbors could discover one another engaged in their humble backyard activities (hanging wash, painting screens, weeding small gardens, playing with pets, ...) and visit 'over the fence'. So the backyard became a place where the community could express its corporate identity.

David taught inner city children for nearly 25 years. Because of his own childhood lived in cramped and less than ideal surroundings, he had a real affinity for his students. It is not without reason that the notion of the importance of the "back yard" to inner city children should resonate with him. In the painting, the tenements are 'cheek by jowl' but the back yards are not isolated. There are no fences between the various long narrow lots. Every tenement has a stairway granting access to the space behind the buildings. The space shown is the common property of a (poor) community. The painting echoes David's early childhood as well as his experience of the entwined family – community identity. In this painting, however, there are no people. Instead, a few pieces of detritus (a tire, a barrel, and some boards) litter the space adjacent to several barren trees. The selection of this particular subject has more than just aesthetic reasons behind it. The litter bespeaks the carelessness and uncaring nature of the inhabitants for one another. The absence of people marks a space that is neither cared for nor used effectively to express either family or community life. It is a space that has failed to achieve the full potential that was there for the development of both. It is like Bender place topographically but not socially. It breathes not life as David's earlier back yards, but tragedy, the tragedy of inner city life whose family and social structures have been robbed and corroded by extreme poverty; a poverty of life that David saw each day, as he tried faithfully to alleviate suffering through the therapeutic value of the artistic experience in the lives of his children.



15. *Hackensack Valley* ~ 1959-60
Oil on Canvas (32 x 38 in.) signed "D. J. Pratt" lower left

By his own admission, this painting marks a watershed for David's artistic development. It was completed as part of the Teachers' College courses that he took in Advanced Painting (TCFA 283) and Advanced Studio Work (TCFA 281) under the direction of a professor Young in the winter term (1959-60). The subject that he chose was the Hackensack Meadows. The meadows are a great expanse of low lying alluvial land adjacent to the Hackensack River. The river is a meandering flow that snakes its way through a valley between the high trap-rock ridge to the east where Cliffside Park and other communities sit astride the Palisades and the lower lands to the west. The land is too soft and water logged for extensive construction. Here and

there a road runs through the extensive grassland but there is a real scarcity of buildings. Only at the eastern foot of the ridge is there land suitable for building. In selecting of this subject, David (either knowingly or unknowingly) created a compositional problem for himself that his earlier work had not prepared him to address. In earlier works, there were ample architectonic shapes that he could weave into a complex but recognizable pattern. But here only the immediate foreground was sufficiently populated for such a treatment. With the exception of a few roads and utility structures like power line supports, the vast, swampy area of the meadows itself is almost totally devoid of any architectural elements.



Original Sketch for Hackensack Meadows

The sketch for this painting is quite different than the final painting. The painting is far less populated with architectural elements. In the sketch, the composition above the serpentine edge of the meadows is relatively empty. The absence of shapes that could be woven into a coherent geometric pattern was a problem that David had not faced before. With the exception of his symphony orchestra painting (Catalogue 11), Color had always been subservient to composition. Now, with his professor's encouragement, David used a new approach in which fields of color assumed a greater role in providing a unified and balanced composition, even though there was no physical element to anchor them in. While some of the architectural elements of the sketch reappear in the lower right hand part of the painting, they are much less dense. Instead, they are distributed more evenly throughout the canvas especially along the road and bridge that wind through the meadow. Architectural elements now become the

anchors of intersecting fields of color. Of themselves, the small clusters of buildings are not sufficient to provide compositional unity, but their use with color fields, works together to produce a more unified composition. David expressed his indebtedness to his professor in a letter that he wrote in May of 1960.

*Dear Professor Young,
How does one thank another to whom he owes so much?
In large part, I am deeply indebted to you for guiding my thoughts aesthetically toward contemporary art forms. Without your patience and insight my present artistic growth would be greatly retarded. In the ten years I have studied beyond secondary schools there are only a handful of inspired instructors I can recall. You are one of those. To know you as a person, has been to know a man of tremendous ability in many fields, but more than this, something rarer, a self made man. I can only adumbrate the work that you have done. But I am sure it has been, and will continue to be, of immense quantity and quality. ...*

*Your Friend and Student,
David Pratt*



16. *Exurbia* ~ c. 1961 - 62

Oil on Canvas (26¾ x 21¾ in.) signed "D. J. Pratt" lower left

The paintings that followed after "Hackensack Valley" virtually all reflected the use of color as well as form/line for compositional unity. From his earliest work David demonstrated a gift for color. While architectural density in complex patterns might return to his

compositions, as here, the flow of color throughout the composition was altered. No longer was color confined to architectural artifacts as was the case in *Coney Island Summer* (Catalogue 6 & 7) or as late as *New York Backyards*" (Catalogue 14). Here fields of

color are employed in carrying out the lines of the composition. The subject matter of this painting also reflects a change in the subject matter. For several years before this painting, David and mother were considering the purchase of property in the more rural areas of northwestern New Jersey for a possible studio-gallery. The search took them throughout the Hunterdon County area. As David began to look at these suburban and rural areas, he also began to explore the artistic possibilities of compositions that included the homes of suburbia.

The subject matter of his ephemeral works (Christmas cards and yearbook art) at this period also reflects the shift in subject matter. from New York City...



... to the suburbs in New Jersey.



Typical Christmas Cards c. 1960-66

In August of 1963, David and mother purchased a seven acre property in Hunterdon County New Jersey. This was the culmination their searches and the beginning of a dream of an independent studio that it was hoped would lead to artistic recognition and the ability to live by his art rather than teaching art for a living. The title that David chose for this work (well after it was painted but just before it was shown publicly in 1969) is significant. It is EX-urbia, not SUB-urbia. I believe that it reflects David's desire to be out of New York City and rid not only of the weariness of petty school politics but with a life whose disappointments were beginning to mount up.

The dominant color pattern (light green with some darker shades) and the barren trees suggest a scene in early spring. It is a work which represents not only the exploration of a new environment but one imbued with the hope of a new life in which he will be able at last to pursue his dream of artistic recognition.

The compositions in his later ephemera, wrap themselves around a central way forward that draws the viewer into the composition on a mini-pilgrimage of discovery. In the card on the left the small artist (lower left) contemplates the way before him. It is manifestly the way of the Cross in its most Christian sense. In the card on the right the way is still there, being entered by a gate, but the way (and message) is not so clearly defined. In this painting, there is also a way which the viewer enters at the very center bottom of the foreground. But here the way, though well defined, is not at all direct. Instead it makes a sharp turn to the right and proceeds up the far side of the canvas, under arches of barren trees to a house far in the upper right hand side. It is a clear path but not a direct one. It never actually materialized. The family's finances were too tied to New York for the transition and the studio, tragically, never materialized.



17. *Parisian View* ~ 1966

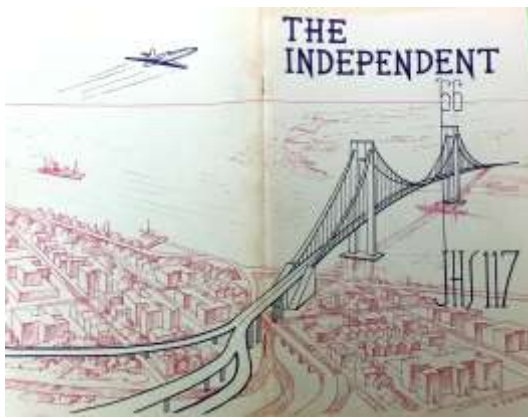
Oil on Canvas (20¾ x 26¼ in.) signed "D. Pratt" lower left

It was during the late 60's that David began to develop what would become his fantasy approach to portraying cities. The paintings in this mode would include Paris (shown here), Venice (Catalogue 21), Bridgeport, Ct. (Catalogue 22) and New York (Catalogue 24 and 25). Although the paintings were completely different, the approach used was the same in each case. Significant, iconic, or just interesting architectural structures were selected and assembled together using extensions of the elements' horizontal, vertical, and curvilinear lines to form a complex and coherent geometry, amplified by patterns of light and dark as they are juxtaposed to one another. Finally the composition is further defined by fields of complementary colors. Although the architectural elements would be more or less recognizable, their orientation in the

composition and the associated colors would have little or no relation to their actual geography. It was the way in which recognizable shapes were assembled that was the fantasy. As such, the resulting painting was fundamentally an abstraction but with recognizable elements throughout that could appeal to a public more comfortable with representational art. Compositionally, David had been exploring this approach in his Christmas cards and yearbook work for several years before he used it in oil. The Parisian scene, shown above, marks the first transition to this new genre for David. It came about as follows.

One of David's responsibilities as the art teacher at JHS 117 was the production of the annual yearbook for the graduating class as a memento for the graduates, and to make

the school look good. David not only produced the master for the book, but did the cover and most of the artwork as well.



P.S. 117 Yearbook Cover - 1966 (Signed D. Pratt lower right)

On the staff page, David was listed as Art & Layout, Photography, and Advertising managers. (He also did all the write-ups as well.) On page 43, devoted to the foreign language department, there was an unusually small staff picture (only four teachers) and no student group. So David had a space to fill at the bottom of the page. Since his days in World War II, David had a fascination with Paris. He passed through the city on his way to the American University in Biarritz for a semester study after the war was over and before he was discharged. While there he obtained a series of reproduction watercolors of the iconic sights. He used those watercolors to prepare a small sketch that brought together arguably the five most recognizable sights of Paris. They are the very icons one sees on the average souvenir coin: the *Moulin Rouge*, the *Cathedrale de Notre Dame*, the *Basilica de Sacra Coeur*, the *Tour Eiffel*, and the *Arc de Triomphe*.



Familiar Sights of Paris

But David arranged those sights in a totally new way.



Sketch of the Sights of Paris for the 1966 Yearbook

David decided to use this charming little (4" by 6½") sketch as a basis for this painting. While it was not the first time he had used a piece of ephemera as the basis for a canvas, it was the first actual fantasy of any city. Unlike all of his other fantasies, however, the point of view is strictly at ground level or looking up at the *Basilica de Sacra Coeur*. David had to preserve the point of view of the watercolorist in favor of his own preferred point of view: above center and looking down. (See the other Fantasies - Catalogue 21, 22, 24 & 25).

In the sketch and the painting the *Tour Eiffel* dominates the composition as a strong vertical among several others, the next closest being the towers of *Sacra Coeur*. The Tower bisects the strong verticals of *Basilica's* domes which David shows somewhat distorted as seen from the *Place du Tertre* in the heart of *Montmartre*. The *Moulin Rouge* is shown from the median park near Metro Station *Blanche* looking back up the *Boulevard de Clichy*. *Notre Dame* is shown from a point near the *Hotel-Dieu* on the *Ile de la Cite*. Its juxtaposition to the *Moulin Rouge* would be scandalous for any other city than urbane Paris though (perhaps) David was unaware of the dichotomy. Lastly the *Arc de Triomphe* is viewed from somewhere around the great circular hub of Paris.

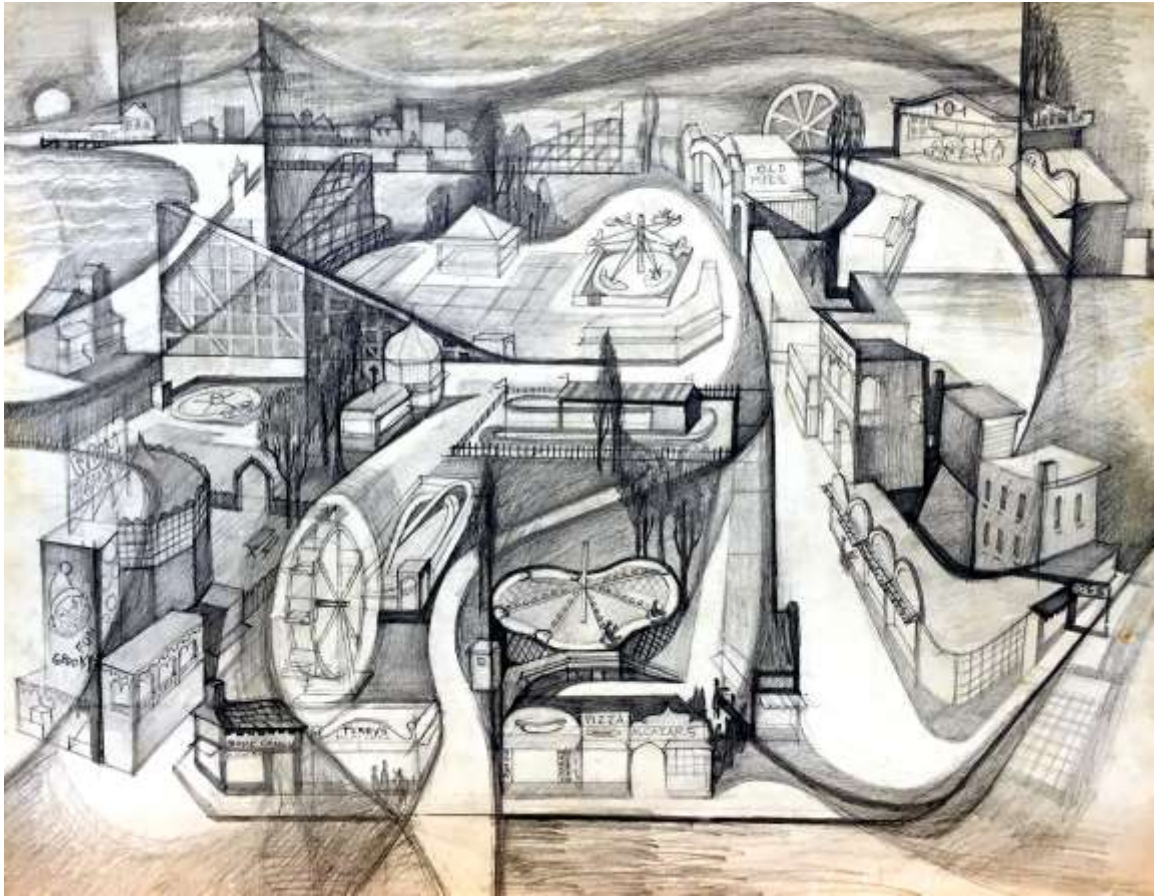


18. *Old West Haven Park ~ 1966-67*

Oil on Canvas (26½ x 32½ in.) signed "D. J. Pratt" lower left

In 1962, David's youngest brother Joseph graduated from Stevens Institute with a degree in Engineering. Within a week, he started work at Sikorsky Aircraft, a helicopter manufacturing company in Stratford Connecticut. He moved into an apartment in Stamford but soon became unhappy away from his family, so he moved home. Thus began many years of a long commute between New Jersey and Connecticut. As Joseph became aware of the areas around Stratford, he discussed them with David. One site in particular attracted David's interest, West Haven Amusement Park. When Joseph discovered the park, it was totally defunct with only a few landmarks still standing. A closed and shuttered merry-go-round, a few old concession stands that had continued on as independent businesses and an abandoned

roller coaster were still enough to engage David's imagination of what the park might have looked like. This painting is the result of trips the brothers made to West Haven in the winter of 1962-63. In this painting, the individual rides are not specific to the park, though there were probably some like them. David's intent was to capture the ethos of such parks, rather than describe the one of which David had seen only the vestiges. The orientation of the rides has no relation to where they were actually situated. Many of the best rides were located along the beach front on Long Island Sound, unlike those shown clustered together here. Many rides in this painting lack definition. It is actually the flow of color and light that define the work. Unlike the linearity of "exurbia", the composition is dominated by strong sinuous



Sketch "Old West Haven Park"

lines derived from the roller coaster, the merry-go-round, the Ferris wheel, and various circular rides, shown throughout. The few strong verticals and horizontals are all partial. While the painting mirrors the sketch quite faithfully, the sketch includes far more detail than was necessary to support the painting. In separating the patterns of the composition, David seized the opportunity to invent an amusement park based on his experience of West Haven. But the sketch does not tell the whole story. David makes use of the early evening (note the moon rise in the upper left corner and the after glow of the sun set in the center top) to explore that wonderful hour when natural light has not completely subsided but artificial light has been turned on to create an aura of light and shadow in the

offset center of the park where anything is possible. Light and shadow (deep blue-purple and yellow-orange) seem to waltz through the canvas in a sinuous flow that is frozen at the moment of transition from day to night. It is this interplay of light and dark, not the details of the rides, that dominates the canvas, giving it a life that the sketch can only anticipate. In the sketch the rides play an important part, but in the painting, David suppressed many details to give color a far more important sweep. The lines of contrasting colors flow off the buildings and rides that anchor their presence and into the roads or the sky beyond. This is not the sad melancholy of his earlier amusement park (Catalogue 8) but the joyous celebration of the effects of light and dark on the soul of the artist.



19. *East River Drive ~ c. 1966 - 67*

Oil on Canvas (18¾ x 25 in.) signed "D. Pratt" lower right

Many people see the artist is someone different, even strange. In high school, David used to call himself the "Old Master" as if to promulgate his ability or perhaps to build youthful self confidence. David and I used to laugh when I called him "the crazy artist"! But for all such hollow jests, David was profoundly human and, in his art, did what all of us try to do in our lives (even our dreams) – make sense of experience. For David, life was supremely a visual experience and making sense of life meant achieving compositional coherency even where no compositional pattern was manifest. Life for many has to have meaning. For David, this translated into a painting having to "work." As an art teacher in the inner city, David was exposed to New York in many ways, some of which were unpleasant, and some of which were everyday drudgery. The daily commute home from work or to Columbia at night after work was definitely of the latter. But for all the drudgery,

his commute from 109th street in Spanish Harlem up the FDR and Harlem River Drive exposed him to the skyline along the East River. Visually the skyline of New York is a jagged affair. The heights of the various 'skyscrapers'; driven by economic necessity as much as (in some cases) the wealth and vanity of the builders; are of all different heights. The buildings all along the East River Drive were similarly chaotic.



*A Later New York Skyline by David
(The heights seem chaotic until one sees
the "X-like" pattern in the center and many salients)*

What to most commuters went unnoticed was, for David, a challenge to make visual harmony out of architectural chaos. He did what many human beings do - look for a unifying principle that could help them understand what they are seeing. Basically he was challenged to see, not the imaginary but the ideal. And he found this in the bridge just to the right. It is not clear which of the several bridges David used. But it is clear is that he has integrated the curve of the roadway with the catenary of the bridge on the right to present a powerful thrust that carries the viewer's eye from the lower right foreground up into the canvas where it merges with the catenary of the bridge that carries the viewer's eye up into a series of five counterpoised catenaries that sweep the eye quickly up and down first to the left (or west) side of the painting and move the viewer to the east again. Looking back the viewer realizes that David has now adjusted the relative chaos of building height and replaced the jagged skyline with a series of buildings which, while they do not lose their individuality, all blend into a harmonious composition. Chaos has been replaced by harmony and order. Going back the viewer realizes that the curve of the roadway is given a kind of solidity (reality) by the inclusion of the other median (itself a rising catenary) in the middle of the two lanes and the light post in close association to the bridge abutment. The reality (or stability) of the bridge's catenary is attested to by the triangular support structure of the bridge. But the resulting intersection of the two lines points the eye to a slanting roof that is balanced by the bridge abutment which slants in the other direction. The resultant movement is not immediately apparent but it places the viewer's eye between two catenaries that are not at all "real" but are superimposed as an organizing shape for the otherwise jagged skyline. The eye finds it easier to move up the one third distance to the upper catenary that introduces it to a series of delightful curves

that rise and fall like waves or peaks across the top of the canvas.



Detail showing some of the Introductory Catenaries that lead the Viewer to the heights of the Canvas.

As the viewer's eye moves back and forth between the 'peaks' across the top of the painting, the painting glows with a pastel light seems to radiate upward bounded by well spaced verticals that originate in the buildings but propagate heavenward suffusing as they rise. The buildings are seen not as a chaotic assemblage of structures besetting the eye of the weary commuter on his way home but as anchors of an almost divine interplay of light and dark originating on earth but carrying the eye heavenward in sublime light. The organizing principle of a single geometric construct has been used to not only transform chaos to harmony but to open the viewer to seeing the mundane in a totally inspiring new way. One wonders what humanity might realize if, in their pursuit of meaning in their lives, they once laid hold of the principle that David employed here visually to such great effect.



20. *Coney Island Summer* ~ c. 1967 - 68

Oil on Canvas (30 x 24 in.) signed "D. Pratt" lower right

David once explained to me that painters who repeated a particular theme in a painting with minor variations from canvas to canvas were "stuck in a mode." David did revisit certain subjects within a leitmotif but he was hardly stuck in any mode. This painting of "Coney Island Summer" was completed some ten years after his first use of the subject (Catalogue 6 & 7). Some of the elements are repeated; the parachute drop (a Coney Island icon), the roller coaster, the Ferris wheel, and even the presence of a pizza parlor. But the

two compositions are very different and reveal how much David's approach had changed in those years. The roller Coaster has become a dynamic part of the composition on the left side capable of transporting the viewer's eye from the foreground to the far background and back again in a long smooth line as opposed to the more representational version in his earlier canvas, where the ride is half hidden horizontally behind buildings in the foreground and plays little role except to

help identify the assemblage as an amusement park.



Coney Island Roller Coaster c. 1952-53

In this painting, the roller coaster becomes not only a powerful vertical composition uniting the fore and far ground, but a complex design in its own right.



Coney Island Roller Coaster c. 1963-64

The supporting structure is not shown explicitly but a complex pattern of dark blue and purple suggest the geometry of shadows cast by the ride itself. This recalls David's treatment of the area under the elevated train in New York City Piers.



Detail New York City Piers (Catalogue 10)

But here the interplay of light and shadow is much more integrated allowing the viewer's eye to 'climb' up to the far ground on the understructure instead of 'riding' the rollercoaster to the far ground.

For David, amusement parks come alive at night. The full moon shines half occluded by fluffy clouds at the top of the canvas. But unlike "Old West Haven Park" the color scheme is heavily in blue, suggesting a far greater role for moon light. Individual attractions, like the carousel, have a nimbus of artificial light hovering close but contained by the gathering darkness. Even the streetlight casts a lonely and ineffectual cone of yellow light against the dark street behind. Strong verticals everywhere dominate the composition intersected by several coherent diagonals. The ten or so short horizontals integrate seamlessly with the composition and are spaced (ladder like) up the right side of the canvas, allowing the viewer's eye to ascend up the canvas by a different, though less obvious route. Apart from the roller coaster and the moon lit shore of the beach far up, there are no strong curves uniting the elements of the composition. The central figure of the painting is not a concession or a ride, but a swimming pool!



Coney Island Swimming Pool

The lighting of the pool and its immediate surroundings is ambiguous, on the left daylight, on the right moonlight, as if time but not light has stood still. Day or night this safe man-made 'ocean' is a source of constant pleasure for David whose only childhood pool was the polluted Hudson River.

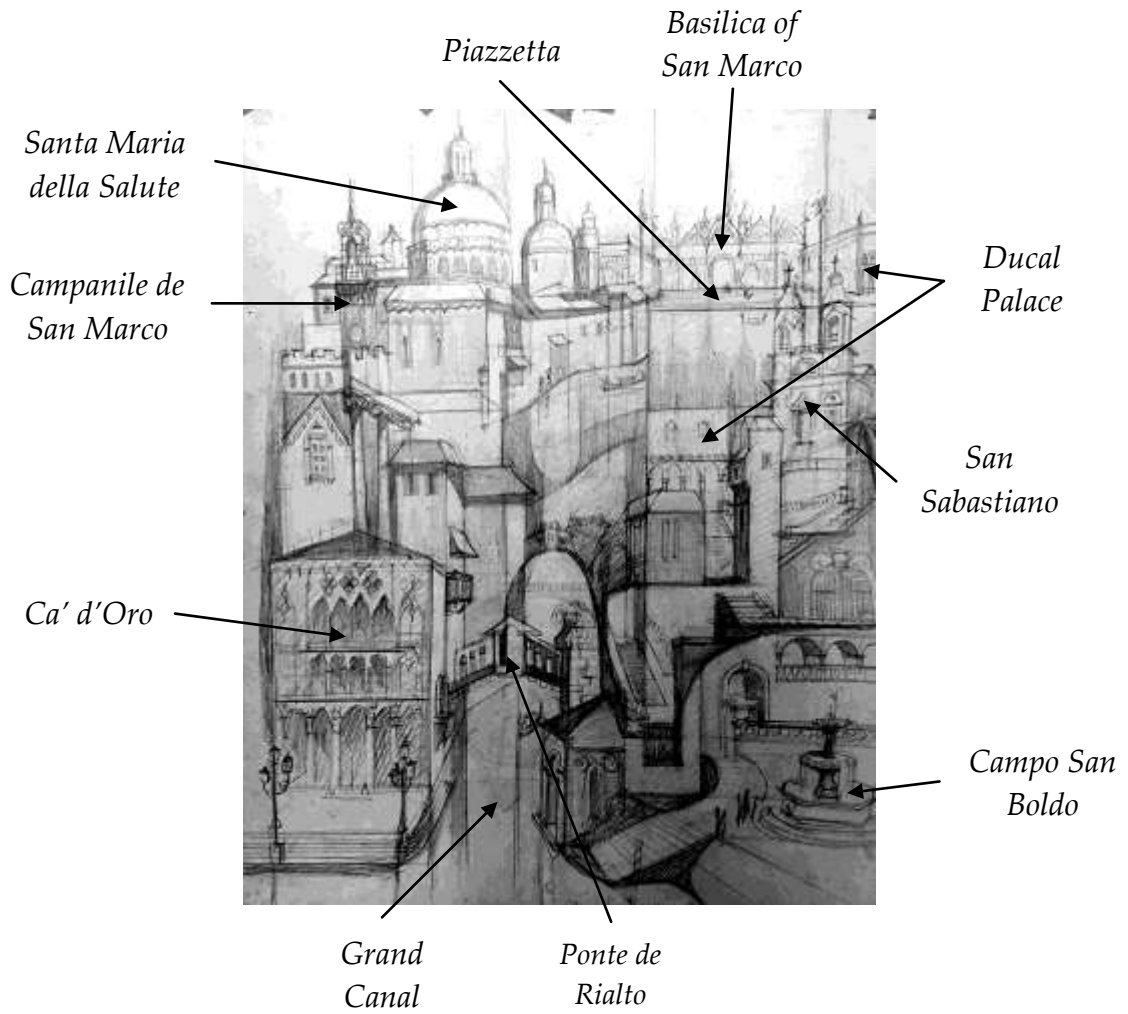


21. *Venetian Fantasy* ~ c. 1967-68

Oil on Canvas (25 x 20¼ in.) unsigned

David loved Venice, even though he was never able to visit it. But he never was happy with this lovely little painting of Venice. He never signed it, framed it, or displayed it with the other eight paintings that he exhibited at the 7th Avenue Armory Art and Antiques show in 1969, even though its style is not unlike the others that he did show. I

remember talking to David as he was working on the details of San Marco. I felt it was beautiful, almost like a medieval illumination in a book of hours. I marveled at the detail. But that was the problem. David wanted the architectural elements of his painting be recognizable but in a totally new way, juxtaposed in complex, abstract patterns.



With modern buildings like the Guggenheim, overall shapes are the icon. But with the architecture of Venice, recognition of each structure depended *in part* on the details of their ornamentation. The sketch integrated ten well known structures into a single composition, but, on the scale of this painting, even the most salient shapes were small. To execute the ornamentation David needed would have required great effort which, from an economic point of view, would be unrecoverable. As an unknown artist, the prices of his work could not remunerate the time it took him to produce them. The sky above the Basilica reveals how complex the details were that he felt necessary. I argued that he was undervaluing his work, but he would not accept my reasoning. David responded to sketch details throughout the

composition by leaving many small areas unpainted so the gold ground could show through. In the end he gave up on the painting.

In the composition, The Grand Canal opens on the bottom and guides the viewer's eye up past the Ca' d'Oro on the left and under the Rialto. The viewer can 'debarck' at the Campo San Boldo and go on foot or follow the canal under the successive arches where it disappears between the Campanielle San Marco and the Domes of Santa Maria della Salute (on the left) and the arches of the Ducal Palazzo and San Sabistiano (on the right). Even though he was dissatisfied with it, *The Venetian Fantasy* is still a very important intermediate step between his *Parisian View* and the *Bridgeport Fantasy* that was to follow next.



22. *Bridgeport Fantasy* ~ 1968 - 69
Oil on Canvas (56 x 43 ½ in.) signed "D. J. Pratt" lower right

Bridgeport Fantasy is easily one of the most complex and important of David's paintings. I remember the day that we traveled to Connecticut to photograph various buildings along the route 8 corridor and on the back streets of the city. With the exception of the

Barnum Museum, in the upper left hand corner, none of the buildings would really be known far outside the city. David chose buildings that interested him, (usually because of the roofs which in three cases were onion domes).



Architectural Sources of Bridgeport Fantasy

As in other paintings, he worked out the composition and grayscale in a full scale sketch which he transferred to the canvas by cross grid. In choosing a larger canvas, he tried to avoid the struggle with detail of the Venetian Fantasy and hoped that the size would make it more salable at a price that could recover his time and effort.

Although the two paintings look different, there are compositional similarities. Both paintings open a large way into the composition in the lower left side, the Grand

Canal of Venice and a large nameless roadway bordered by a similar serpentine stream in Bridgeport. Both move past a 'jumping off point' at the lower right, one: the fountain of the *Campo San Boldo* and the other by a purple and blue Victorian mansion. A nameless bridge crosses the stream but more forward than the Rialto. Where the Bridge of Sighs spans the canal just behind the Rialto; and more to the right, the Mosque Roller Skating Rink bridges the stream in Bridgeport. In the lower left the *Ca' d'Oro* is replaced by a two

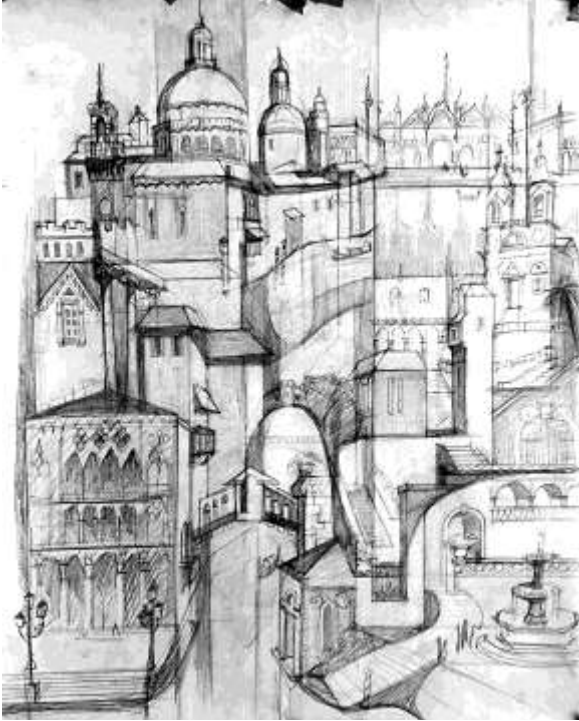
and a half story house almost devoid of ornamentation. The viewer can go up by roadway or by canal into the middle third of each canvas where they are lost among a mass of structures that they can visually explore at will. In place of *San Sabastiano* on the right, there is a nameless rounded corner building with three pinnacles. In place of the great domes of *Santa Maria della Salute*, there is the smaller and singular dome of the Barnum Museum pushed further back in the upper left corner. Both compositions are marked by several strong verticals that are carried up from building to building (as well as shade or light) eventually into the sky. Serpentine lines answer one another as they coil back and forth. Diagonals are also found in both.

There is more to this painting, however, than what is visible. David was struggling with growing depression as the result of career setbacks. When David first taught, he observed how the emotionally troubled and economically disadvantaged students were helped by the process of creating art. Art therapy was not so well known in David's early career as today. Realizing the potential in his discoveries, he refocused his career on being a successful art educator for which a Doctorate in Education seemed essential. The degree would give him the recognition needed to develop the theory and publicize the practice of art therapy. He studied at Teachers College in Columbia University well past the Masters degree. When it came time for his thesis, he believed that his advisor was intent on purloining his ideas. While there is no record why he felt this; he chose to give up his

doctoral program at Columbia. Meanwhile the family had gone into the antique flea market business and had signed for a booth at the 1969 Art and Antiques show at the 7th Regiment Armory. The managers agreed to let David show several of his paintings - gratis. A newspaper interview just before the show, David states that he expects to complete his doctorate at Princeton University!

As he started on this painting, he felt the *Bridgeport Fantasy* was the first of what he hoped would be many like it, on which he could build a reputation as a significant artist. I remember that he turned to me, near the painting's completion, and lamented that he "could not go on like this." The sale of the painting would never compensate for the work that had gone into the complex and highly detailed sketch and the numerous color problems that he solved in painting. He feared his approach to painting would ever bring him recognition and a reasonable living. What little hope he still had was placed in the outcome of the pending exhibition.

He selected, framed, and placarded eight paintings to show. It ran from October 25th to November 2nd 1969 but achieved nothing, which added to David's growing disappointment and depression. I believe he gave one painting (a New York Fantasy) to the Show's organizer as a thank you. But the only way forward now seemed to be by building David's own studio gallery on a seven acre property that had been bought nearly six years earlier.



Venetian Fantasy Sketch



Bridgeport Fantasy Sketch

~ Comparison of Venetian and Bridgeport Fantasies ~



23. *Boats In a Harbor* ~ c. 1972
Oil on Canvas (24 x 36 in.) signed "D. J. Pratt" lower left

David's painting of *Boats in a Harbor* is the final canvas in a series on this subject that began with a small, 9" by 12", canvas. It was more representational and compositionally simpler than much of his later work.



Although unfinished, it represents more of an exploration in color than composition. The next painting (20" by 24" on canvas board) was a picture of a barge and a work boat alongside a dock. In this somewhat cubist oil painting, David's use of strong verticals to

unite the boats with the buildings on the dock, clearly date the painting as after his Hackensack Meadow scene (Catalogue 15) in 1959-60.



While the simple composition did not require a separate sketch, the marked difference in styles between the two paintings reveals just how far David had progressed in his handling of similar subjects. Its simplicity is clearly just a step along a path to a more complex

composition as the next painting in the series makes clear.

The next painting that followed in this motif was a 24" by 18" canvas that blended of the representationalism of the first and the abstraction of the second. In this painting,



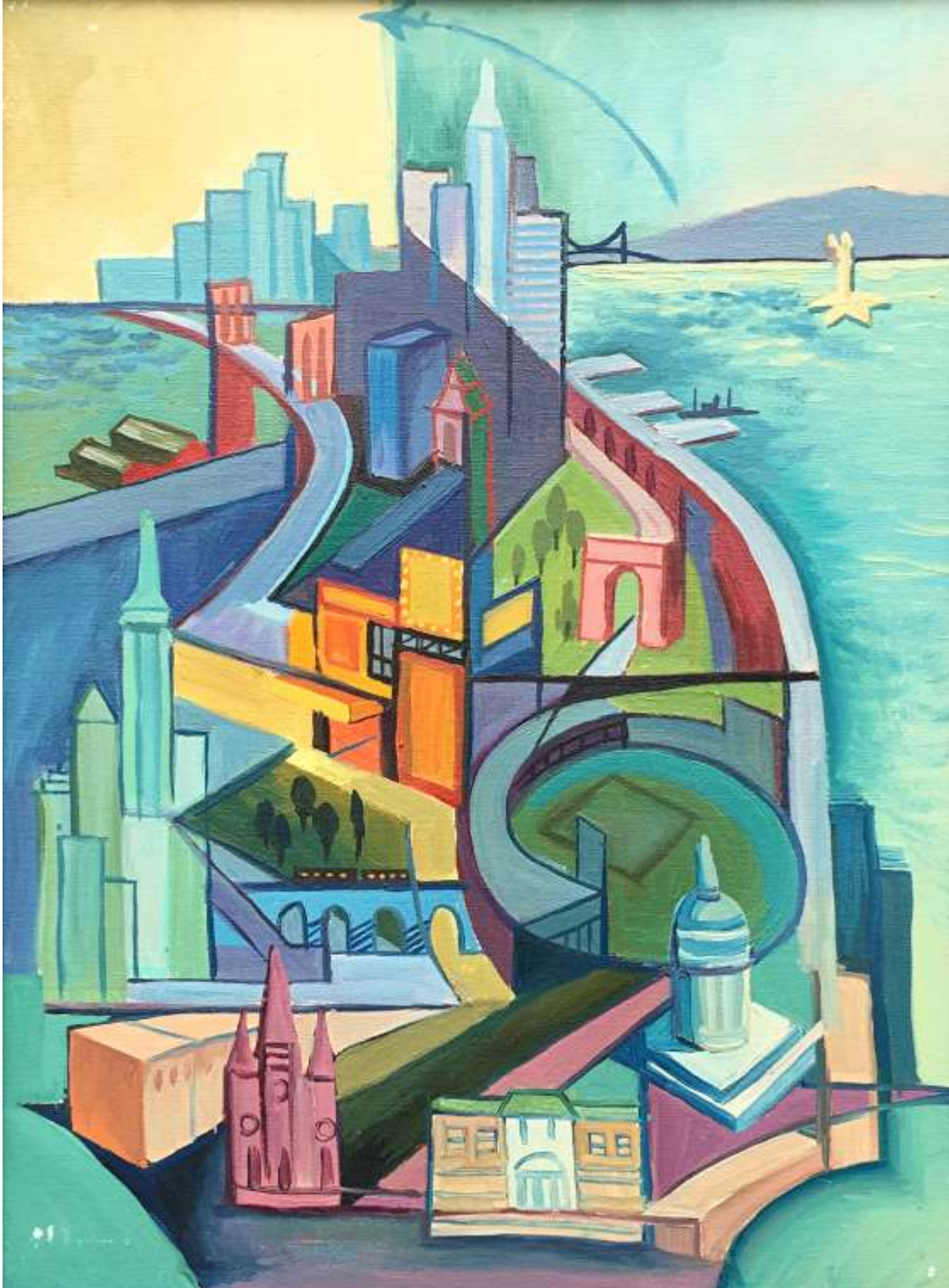
David juxtaposed the triangularity of the sails with the rectilinearity of the various buildings on shore. These differing shapes are united by the strong verticals of the masts that carry on up into of the buildings which, again, carry up into the sky. Together with the vertical reflections of the boats in the water in the foreground, David created a complex linear pattern in which the cool blues and purples contrast with the warm beige and occasional brown highlight. What lies behind the scene, however, is more than form, line, and color. It is the interface of the water with the land, the interface of two totally different worlds suggested by the paintings' light purple horizontal shoreline that weaves itself between the buildings and the boats. Unbeknownst to the viewer (and possibly David, himself), this land/water interface

harks back to the days of his childhood spent exploring the rotting barges and swampy grasslands along the edge of the Hudson River in Edgewater. Artistically, it provided David with a rich assortment of densely packed boats, buildings, and shapes whose orientation relative to one another was fair game for his compositional imagination. In the fourth painting (a small 16" by 20" study for the Catalogue 23 painting), David turned the composition on its side, a change in aspect that emphasized the low horizontality of the land rather than the overarching verticality of the masts. Both are still there but by placing the shoreline at roughly mid canvas, he could



cluster the boats farther up the canvas and leave space to exploit striking variations of contrasting colors in the reflections on the surface of the water rather than the simpler and more limited variations of blue in the sky above the buildings.

The final transition from study to finished canvas is marked by outlining some of the shapes to give them better definition, by color changes from yellow to yellow-orange for greater contrast, by improvements in the definition of the various shapes as they relate to one another, by deeper hues of blue and purple for greater contrast and by changes to the reflections in the water.



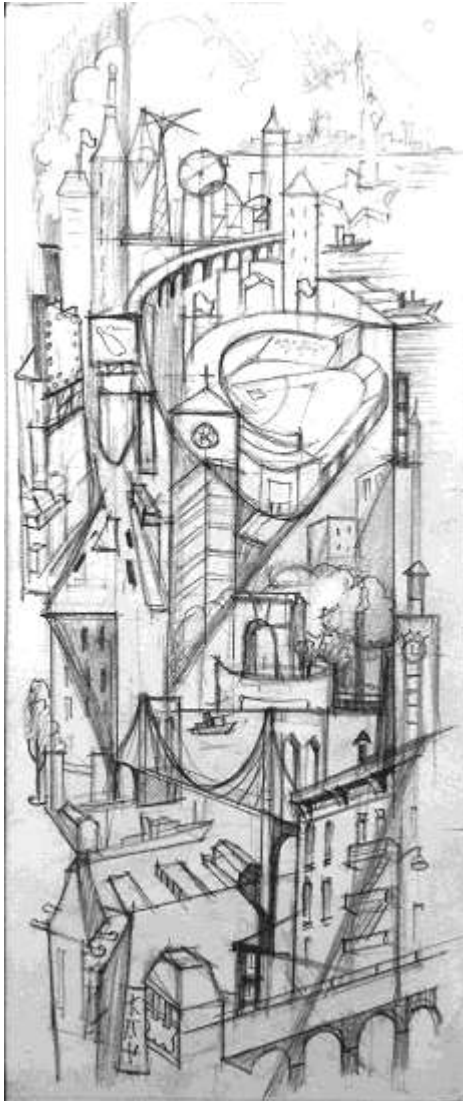
24. *Study for Manhattan Fantasy* ~ c. 1973

Oil on Canvas (24 x 18 in.) unsigned

Among the paintings that David selected for display at the 7th Regiment Armory Antiques

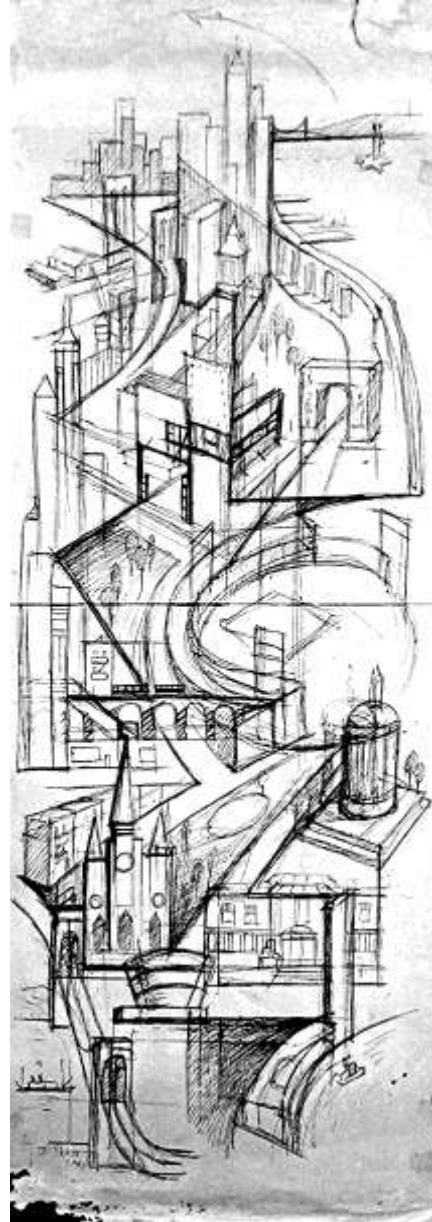
and Art Show in 1969 was a painting that he subsequently gave to the show's manager as a

thank you gift for allowing him to exhibit his work. The sketch for that painting measured only 9½" by 4" - exactly the size that David used for all his Christmas cards. This suggests that the design for this study and its full-size counterpart may have started as a Christmas card. Despite its small size, the sketch is remarkably crowded with numerous familiar architectural elements.



The nature of the composition is like earlier fantasies of cities: Paris (Catalogue 20), Venice (Catalogue 21), and Bridgeport (Catalogue 22). Individually recognizable architectural elements are arranged to form an abstract pattern without reference to their actual locations in the city. Principal lines of each

element's architectural geometry flow into one another providing compositional unity and as frame work for the painting's coloration. David revisited the subject using a second much larger sketch (26" by 10") dated 1973.



It is amazing that this second sketch, though seven times larger than its little predecessor, does not present any more detail, a testimony to David's draftsmanship. The resulting study allowed David to work out the basic color scheme for the larger painting that would follow.

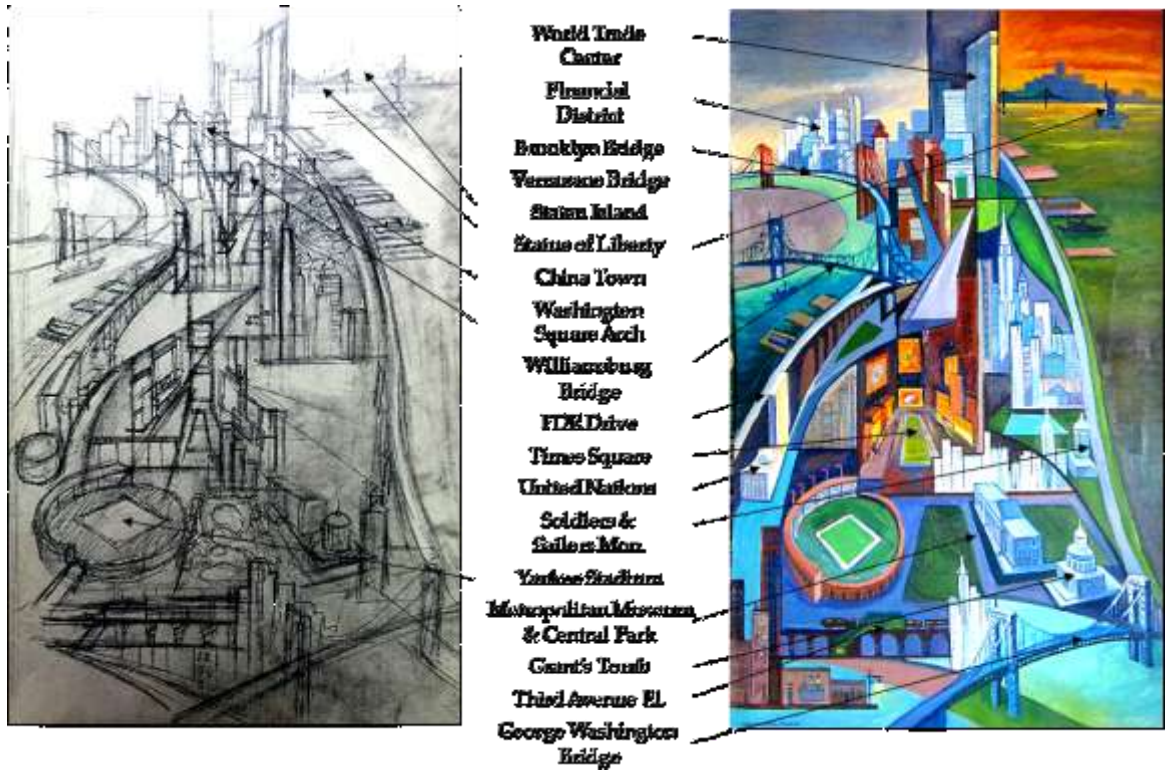


25. *Manhattan Fantasy* ~ c. 1973 - 74

Oil on Canvas (56¼ x 34 in.) signed "David Joel Pratt" lower left

This is the third and final painting in the series of Manhattan Fantasies. Unlike the first version which spread the architectural elements more widely over the canvas and with no reference to the placement of iconic bridges like the Brooklyn bridge, which was placed in the lower center of the first canvas,

this composition uses the east side and west side highways as bounds that define roughly the long, narrow, and somewhat triangular shape of the island of Manhattan. The four bridges shown in the painting occur in somewhat of their actual positions in the painting, as do many of the buildings.



It is a testament to David's ongoing creative processes that, having completed a sketch and a study for this painting, he created yet another compositional sketch because he was still not satisfied with the arrangement of elements in the painting. In this version of *New York Fantasy*, he achieved something he had not accomplished in any of his earlier fantasies. Before, David had arranged recognizable and iconic structures in a pattern without regard to their geographic relationship to one another. They were the servants of the composition. But in this painting, he includes more recognizable architectural elements than any other canvas (19) and does so with sensitivity to their relative locations on the island of Manhattan. He did this without sacrificing the essential style of his painting. In doing so, he tells us that a single significant architectural site is not just an isolated iconic shape but part of an assemblage of, an integrated pattern of associated icons that in their aggregate sum become a single icon of the city itself. In effect, the total visual effect is more than the sum of the parts. Undoubtedly, this transition from

representing isolated iconic structures like the Paris or Venice Fantasies to a representation of the total icon of New York City was possible only because David had spent almost his entire life in the orbit and the heart of that great metropolis and loved its essence. New York, of course, is remarkable visually because of its proximity to the Hudson River and the East Rivers which set the viewer back from the towering skylines by almost an unobstructed mile on both the New Jersey and Queens sides adjacent to Manhattan. So the Skylines of lower Manhattan, in particular, are the usual icons of New York, in much the same way that views of the Eiffel Tower are icons of not only Paris but all of France. But such a view of lower Manhattan leaves out much of the rest of the city that David loved. By moving his 'viewpoint' to the far northern end of the island and, consistent with much of his life's work, sitting up high and looking down toward the south, the city stretches out before him in all its iconic beauty. Thus, David 'saw' a totally new and yet profoundly familiar Icon of New York.



26. *Geometric Abstraction* ~ c. 1980

Oil on Canvas (24 x 30 in.) signed "D. J. Pratt" lower left

In one sense, abstraction as an artistic modus operandi had been part of David's approach for decades before this painting. His fantasies of Paris, Venice, Bridgeport, and New York are all, basically, abstractions. But the reasons for David's forays into 'pure' abstraction are complex and rooted in his life at this time, particularly his hopes, dreams, and (unfortunately) the frustration of those hopes and dreams.

David suffered a series of setbacks, the last of which was being "excessed" from teaching in New York in September of 1975. Without significant savings and with no retirement plan (he had been a substitute teacher for all those 24 years), David suffered economic concerns as well as a sense of non-recognition both as a teacher and an artist. Two things gave him comfort and hope, however. He

started to teach adult art classes in a local framing shop and he still had hopes of opening his own studio-gallery on the family's property in Hunterdon County. His students were in some cases talented and promising artists and their appreciation of his ability as an art teacher was very consoling. At least someone recognized his talent. He also served as the principle juror for local art shows in his home town of Cliffside Park in which many of his students showed their work.

Part of the hope associated with his dream of a studio gallery; however, was to achieve a sphere of recognition wider than the small circle of his adult art students. And to achieve that recognition he would have to produce sufficient paintings to sell at prices that would recover his time and effort in creating them. David was an excellent draftsman and colorist.

But the complexity of his fantasy compositions had been driven thus far by the need to be representational, a feature that made his work visually and affectively accessible to a general public that was not highly appreciative of more modern idioms of artistic expression. In order to create the complex compositions he had been using, many problems in perspective had to be solved, in order to warp the principal lines of each architectural unit so that it could be linked to others as part of a pattern that was fundamentally abstract. The need to maintain varied perspectives for each element in a believable way took a great deal of effort. The process of coloration to heighten the elements and yet not detract from the overall composition took even more time. Pure abstraction obviated these constraints and made the process much simpler. For David, abstractions were basically flat. He had explored this flattening aspect in earlier works relating to his interest in amusement parks, but was not entirely satisfied.



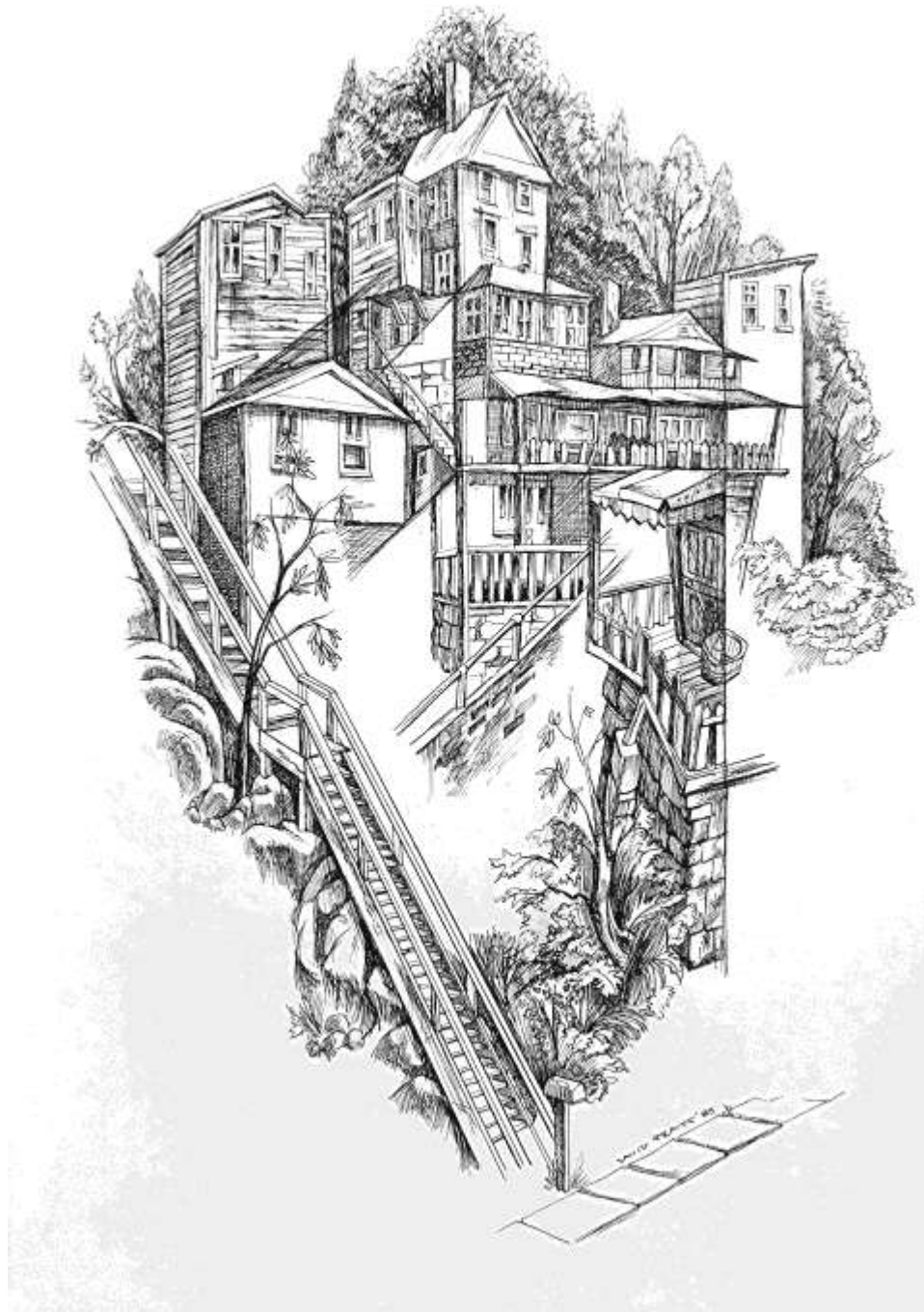
Abstract Amusement Park

This study is neither pure abstraction nor pure representation, but somewhere in between. While preserving a sense of recognition for the rides, the flattening effect of abstraction and lessening of representational constraints, alleviated the need for complex composition while giving him freedom to express himself in contrasting colors and forms.



Abstract Architectural Assemblage

David also experimented with architectural elements that, because they were not iconic, had no need to be made recognizable. What David found in such an approach was a greater degree of freedom to express his artistic vision in color, line, form, composition and texture without the time consuming constraints of earlier modes of artistic expression. I remember speaking to him about his approach at this time. He told me the painting had to “work.” I took this single word as an expression of his personal satisfaction with what he had put on canvas. For David, the hallmark of that satisfaction was his signature on the canvas, an expression the fact that he was willing to have his name associated with a particular piece of work. Just as *he did not sign* the Venetian Fantasy, *he did sign* this piece, signifying that, at least at this time, he was satisfied with the approach and was willing to continue for a while to see where it would take him.



27. *Shanty Town ~ 1985*

Pen & Ink on Bristol Board (29 x 20 in.) Signed David Pratt '85

It was not unusual for David to revisit subjects of particular interest after many years. Such reinterpretations of subject matter are interesting because they allow the viewer to understand how his style of painting had changed over the years. This pen and ink

sketch is one such revisitation. The subject was a group of shanties that were built on a very steep incline on the far side of the "Second Mountain" (Catalogue 4 and 13) that David had painted for many years.



Shanty town Oil on Canvas ~ c. 1950

Located on a bend in the back of the mountain, the land was poor and, I suspect, quite inexpensive. This was more than just a few dwellings; it was a small community complete with a little grocery store high up the incline. When this painting was made it was still occupied. I stumbled into it while wandering around the mountain which, in the mid 60's, was still undeveloped and open for visits. By then the buildings were deserted. It had become a ghost town. David and I decided to pay the shanties a visit and spend the day photographing them, up and down the slope with its high (and dangerously rotten) stairways.



*Shanty town Pen and Colored Ink ~ c. 1960
(Note the Hills Brothers Coffee Plant- right)*

This drawing is the montage of those photographs. There is evidence that David also produced a version of this scene in colored ink which he sold.



Shanty town Colored Inks ~ c. 1985

These works are more than a revisiting of an old subject. They came after a long period of artistic lethargy. With the loss of his dream of a studio gallery and the need to care for his elderly mother whose health was failing, David lost much of the enthusiasm necessary to create works in his labor intensive style. He stopped creating art. But he could not deny the artist within forever. Near the end this artistic lethargy, after his mother had died, David took up, not the brush, but the pen. All his life, David loved the precision of drawings. I remember how pleased I was to see this drawing when he showed it to me. But David was also a gifted colorist. The black and white nature of sketching left no room for that ability to express himself in color, but the colored ink version of this composition marks the return of David's other strength as a colorist. It was as if my brother had come back from the dead!



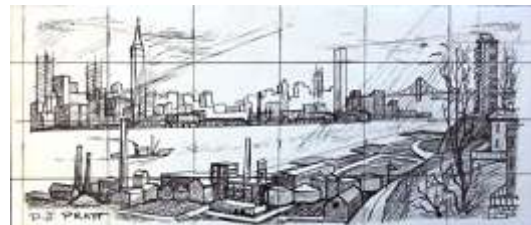
28. *New York Skyline ~ c. 1988 - 89*
Unfinished Oil on Canvas (40 x 56¼ in.) unsigned

This painting represents the culmination of nearly forty years of David's preoccupation with the New York Skyline. In his early paintings of the second mountain (Catalogue 4 et al.) the city appears almost as an after thought.

Sometime around 1959, David drew the skyline for a Christmas card from a new perspective on the top of the second mountain looking south.



Second Mountain & Detail c. 1949



Christmas card view of New York ~ c. 1959

Finding the view interesting, he ruled one of the cards (above) and transferred the drawing to a canvas.

As time went on in his mountain scenes, he took a broader view of the skyline (Catalogue 4 and 10)



Detail Second Mountain view c. 1958



View of New York from the Second Mountain ~ c. 1959

The top of the mountain (and hence the point of view) is clearly seen in the bottom of the painting. This painting (Catalogue 28) was completed after David's creative

lethargy when he was recovering his artistic interest in life. But it was preceded by another painting (apparently sold?) whose composition is virtually identical to



this painting except for a small variation of the relative size of the buildings in the foreground, and an accentuation of the height of the buildings in the middle of the skyline. It is the color palette that is the most noticeable difference between the two paintings.

David had regularly relied on his compositional skills to provide a pleasingly coherent abstract composition without losing his representationally prone audience. The New York skyline however is quite jagged and not easily integrated by patterns as is seen in another of his paintings.



David painting the Skyline *Plein-air*

The skyline does not yield easily to unification by pattern or shadows. In the painting directly above, David limited his palette to blue purple set against a pink evening sky that was also reflected in the water. I suspect that he was not entirely satisfied with the intensity of the colors. In this last painting, he resorted to an idea from his childhood with its sunset rabbit and kindergarten purple cow at evening. He painted the entire skyline at that wonderful moment of sunset when the long red-orange rays of the sun bathe all west facing buildings of the skyline in golden tones and plunge the other sides in complementary blues and deep purples. The foreground of Edgewater, lying in the shadow of the western palisades, sinks to gentler brown. Painting the skyline at the moment of sunset allowed David to limit his palette, in a totally believable way, and bring unity to the composition not by complex design but by his other great strength – color.



29. *Floral Arrangement* ~ c. 1996
Oil on Canvas (44¼ x 32¼ in.) signed "D. J.Pratt" lower left

Floral paintings were among the several genres of paintings that David did over the years, but not with any great success.



Floral Bouquet c. 1954

In the summer of 1984, David, my wife and I attended an exhibition at the Guggenheim, "Degas to Calder." After the show, we were walking up Madison Avenue toward our car when David saw a small, lovely, and ultra realistic painting of some blue flag irises. David was curious as to their price and stepped inside. I think he was shocked to find a price tag of \$20,000 on the painting. I remember him muttering almost to himself, "I can do as well – or better." We thought nothing of the event and went home. About a month later he told us he had something to show us and brought out a remarkable flower painting, unlike anything he had ever done. We were shocked, and pleased. By now, of course David was coming out of his creative lethargy but I do not think that he had any pretensions to creating a name for himself. Too many dreams had come and

gone. I think David had retreated to a familiar and well accepted genre of painting with the intension of 'proving' his painterly skill if only to himself. He said that he was going to hold on to the painting as a sample in case someone wanted a similar work. But he also admitted that it took "quite a bit of work." That Christmas, he gave the painting to us as a gift. I never thought he would ever do a similar piece. I was wrong. In December of 1989, David married a woman that he had been in love with some fifty years earlier. Why they never married is a mystery. She married someone else and had children who were grown when he husband died. Remembering David, she called and restarted the friendship. By that summer, David told us he was engaged to be married. I think that the flowering of love late in life, gave David the emotional lift to complete this last flower painting, not to prove his skill as a painter, but as an expression of his new-found joy.

After his marriage, David moved to Florida and for a few years became what is called a "snow bird." Eventually, too old to continue the long commute, he asked us to help him sell his home in Cliffside Park. As we emptied the contents of the house, David gave his accumulated art work to me to manage or dispose of as appropriate, asking only that I not sell the works before his death. As we went over the confused mass of David's lifetime of art work, we came upon this painting. We were amazed that he had created yet another work that surpassed the first. It was in every sense his last flowering. David continued into his eighties painting and sketching in Florida, even after a crippling stroke. He continued to produce scenes of beauty both from local scenery and from his imagination, but he would never reach the height of these last paintings.

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Chronology
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Date	Event
April 29, 1926	David Joel Hetterich born at French Hospital in NYC
September 1, 1930	Starts Kindergarten
July 18, 1931	Hugh Pratt divorced from first wife
July 28, 1931	Hugh Pratt marries Lillian Hetterich
September 9, 1931	David starts 1st grade in Public School # 5, Cliffside Park
October 8, 1931	David Joel Hetterich adoption granted. Name changed to David Joel Pratt
April 29, 1932	Receives paint box kit as sixth birthday present from his father. He begins painting career that will span almost eight decades. Paints <i>Rabbit at Sunset</i>
Winter 1934	Sees his first movie "Lime house blues" with George Raft and Anna Mae Wong. He is fascinated by the movie and stays all day causing his parents to fear the worst and the police to search the Hackensack Meadows for him. He is in grade 4 and eight years old.
Winter 1937	Hugh Pratt buys 4 Bender Place where David will live for the next 57 years until he marries in 1994 at age 68. (David is in grade 7)
c. 1938	Paints <i>Palisades Amusement Park</i>
June 13, 1940	Graduates from Cliffside Park Junior High School

June 17, 1943	Graduates from Cliffside Park Senior High School
September 1, 1943	First year at Pratt Institute
August 2, 1944	Inducted into the Army
August 21, 1944	Training in heavy weapons at Camp Blanding in Florida. Begins an extensive correspondence (with many sketches) that will continue throughout the war.
December 16, 1944	Completes training. Battle of the Bulge in Europe (December 16, 1944 - January 25, 1945)
February 1, 1945	Transferred to Northern France, 78th Division, 311th Regiment, 1st Battalion - the "Timberwolves"
February 9, 1945	Supports the capture of Schwammenauel Dam.
February 28, 1945	Crosses the Ruhr at Nideggen and moves south to capture the towns of Blens, Hausen, and Heimbach.
March 5 - 6, 1945	After regrouping at Burvenich, the 311 Regiment sets off for the Ahr River. Arrive after capturing twenty major towns.
3/7- 8/1945	9th Armored Division takes the Ludendorf Bridge at Remagen. 311 regiment crosses the Remagen Bridge, heads north taking Unkel and Scheuren by evening of the second day.
March 9 – 20, 1945	Battalion moves north along the Rhine continuing on till opposite Bonn.
May 8, 1945	Germany Surrenders
August – September 1945	Occupation Army Duties

October 15, 1945-January 1946	Studies fine arts the American University at Biarritz
February 22, 1946	Arrives in Camp Kilmer, N.J. after crossing Atlantic on the George Washington
June 26, 1946	Honorably discharged at Fort Dix, N.J.
September 1, 1946	Resumes studies at Pratt Institute. Paints <i>Troops on the Cologne Plain</i> c. 1946-47
June 1, 1948	Graduates with honors from the three year illustration course.
September 1948 - June (?) 1949	Studies at Art Students' League. Paints <i>Second Mountain</i> c. 1949
June 1948 - November 1951	Works at several jobs: store front displays, sign painting and as a "watcher" in an embroidery factory. Paints <i>St. Roco's Feast</i> c. 1951
April 10, 1951	Fails to get into Grand Central Art Galleries NYC
November 29, 1951	Admitted to Bachelor's program at Columbia University
June - July 1952	Completes 2 Lithographs of <i>Amusement Park at Night</i> as part of litho course
October 29, 1952	Completes Bachelor Fine Arts. Paints <i>Study for Coney Island Summer</i> c. 1952
September 1, 1952	Start Masters Program at Columbia University. Paints <i>Coney Island Summer</i> c.1952
February to June 1953	Student Teaching at Ben Franklin JHS

December 16, 1953	Completes Master Fine Arts. Paints <i>Amusement Park at Night</i> c. 1953 - 54
September 1, 1954	Starts in PS83 JHS Galvani. Will teach here for 13 years till 1967
September 1, 1954	Starts Ed. D. at Teachers College, Columbia U. (Takes courses from 1954 to 1960)
May 18-31, 1956	Exhibits artwork of his P.S. 83 students at Teachers College as part of his work in advancing the cause of Art Therapy in public school for troubled children.
Winter 1956	Paints <i>City at Night</i>
January 1957 - December 1957	Paints <i>New York City Piers</i> c. 1956 - 57, <i>Symphony Orchestra Abstraction</i> . c. 1957
January 1958- December 1958	Paints <i>New York Tenements</i> and <i>Second Mountain View</i> c. 1958
March 1, 1959	JHS 89 becomes JHS 117. Paints <i>New York Back Yards</i> c. 1959
March 16, 1959	Turns down Teachers license because of lack of a birth certificate in his adopted name
May 26, 1960	Paints <i>Hackensack Valley</i> 1959 - 60
9/1/1960- 1/31/61	Takes last course for Ed. D. in 60 - 61 winter term
February 1961 - February 1962	After completing 90 points past the masters, He decides to abandon his thesis when his feels that his principle advisor seeks to purloin his original work in art therapy. Paints <i>Exurbia</i> c. 1961 - 62

August 3, 1963	Purchases in Seven acres of land in Hunterdon Co. N.J. Dreams of a private studio are a comfort in his academic loss.
March 8, 1965	Hugh Pratt (Father) dies
September 1, 1965	A change in administration cause problems for him at JHS 117
April 16, 1966	Beth-Pratt Inc. a family corporation is formed. Land transferred. David's Studio to be part of Corporation.
June - July 1966	Paints <i>Parisian View</i> from Year book sketch
1966 -1967	Paints <i>Old Westhaven Park & East River Drive</i> c. 1966 - 67
June 16, 1967	Requests reassignment to Eleanor Roosevelt JHS. Paints <i>Coney Island Summer</i> c. 1967 - 68
September 1, 1967	Starts at Eleanor Roosevelt JHS. It will be another bad year under poor administration. Paints <i>Venetian Fantasy</i> c. 1967 - 68
June 11, 1968	Offer to leave Eleanor Roosevelt JHS accepted
September 4, 1968	Assigned to JHS 164. A more understanding administration will make for a happier and productive next 6 years. Paints <i>Bridgeport Fantasy</i> c. 1968 - 69
10/25 to November 2, 1969	Seventh Ave Armory show opens as part of the annual Arts & Antiques Show. All seven major works from 1960 to 1969 shown except for <i>Venetian Fantasy</i> .

late 1969	Lack of interest in David's work at Armory show indicates that a career is not about to start
1970 -1972	Paints <i>Boats in Harbor</i> series c. 1970 - 1972
1973 -1974	Paints <i>Study for New York Fantasy</i> c. 1973 & <i>New York Fantasy</i> c. 1973 -74
June 1, 1974	Leaves JHS 164 after 6 years. Transfers to P.S. 9/79
June 30, 1975	Leaves P.S. 9/79 after 1 year. The city is in financial straights and the bank refuses to cash his paycheck from the city. He knows that his time is limited
September 3, 1975	Excessed from NYC School System after 21 years
1975 - 1980	Teaches private classes in oil painting at a local framing and art supply store. His output begins to decline. He continues flea markets and tries to sell watered down art that he produces but does not sign or signs under an alias. He begins to sink into a slump, losing much of his skill in painting. It will take almost eight years to leave this period behind. Only sketching in graphite and ink appeal to him at this time.
January 1980 - December 1980	Paints <i>Geometric Abstraction</i> c. 1980 (He is looking for a lower cost and more readily acceptable forms of expression to sell.

January 19, 1981	David's mother dies. After grieving for several weeks, He leaves teaching and begins life on his own working for local florist doing plant delivery and service. All artistic activity has stopped.
January 1981 - December 1983	Continues to earn income by flea markets, scrap metal, and the local florist.
January 1984 - December 1984	Paints Floral Arrangement c. 1984 - 85 (inspired by blue Flag Iris painting on Madison Ave after visit Guggenheim show "Degas to Calder" in Winter 1984 given as Gift Christmas 1985)
January 1985 - December 1985	Completes <i>Shanty Town</i> (Pen and Ink)
January 1986 - December 1986	Paints <i>New York Skyline</i> from Hudson River Blvd.
January 1988 - December 1988	Paints <i>New York Skyline at Sunset</i> c. 1988 - 89 (From an earlier painting now missing)
December 29, 1994	Marries an old acquaintance of 1948 in Tampa, Fla. After year long courtship over the phone.
January 1996 - December 1996	Paints second <i>Floral Arrangement</i>
January 1997 - December 2008	Continues painting and sketching in Florida in a peaceful old age.
June 9, 2008	Dies in Tampa General Hospital, Fla.