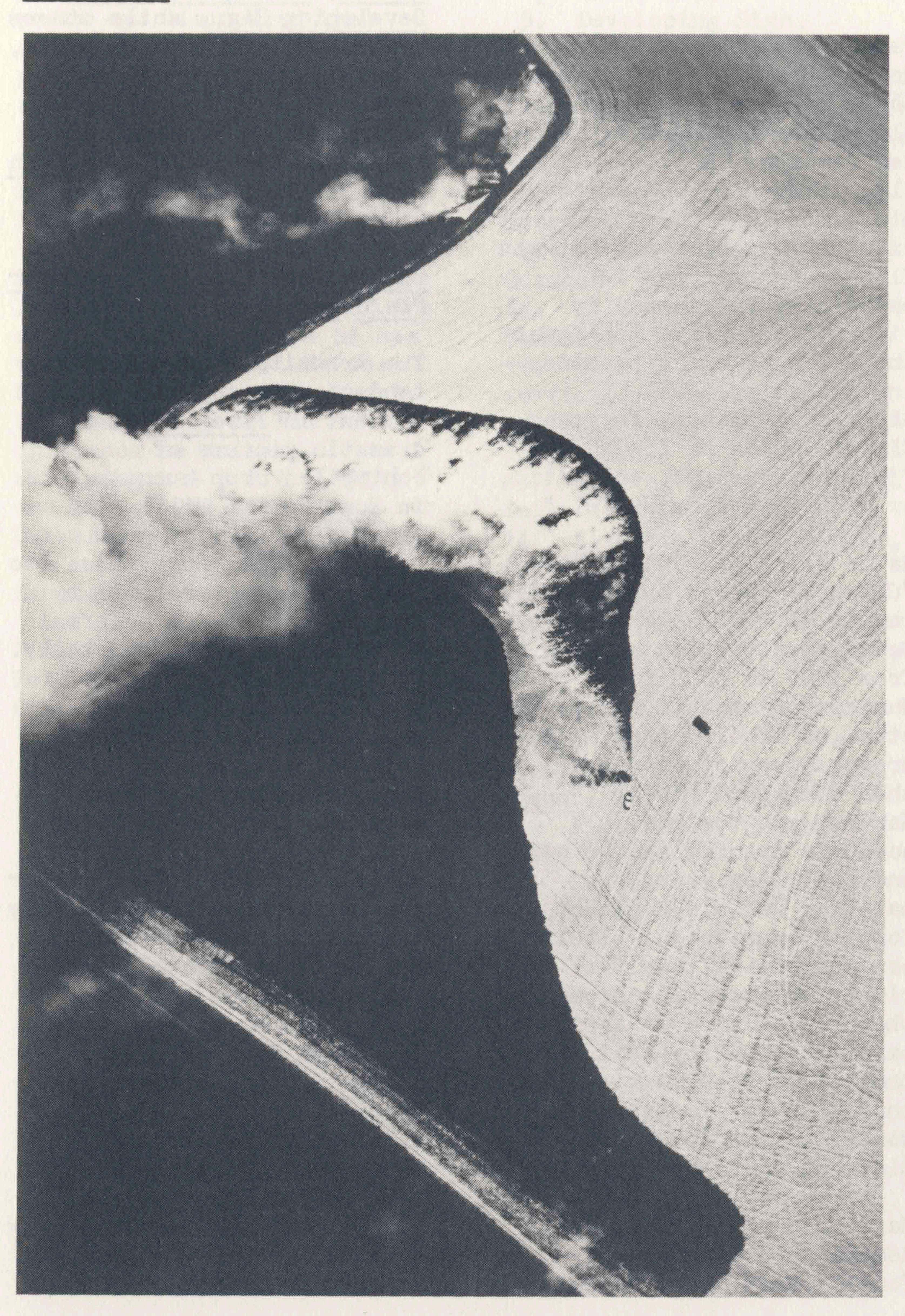
Robert Hartman MATRIX/BERKELEY 99

University Art Museum early August - late September 1986

Fire-Field, September, 1985



For as long as recorded time, the infinite sky has attracted and obsessed mankind. There the gods were thought to have resided and the fortunate to ascend after their life on earth had ceased. Centuries before sky travel came within human grasp, prehistoric peoples made enormous gestures on the earth, drawing figures that could only be seen by their gods.

Painter and photographer Robert Hartman was fortunate to be born in the era of air flight because ever since he can remember, he longed to fly. Even now he describes his earthbound hours as "irritating intervals between flights."* Hartman is especially fascinated by views of the earth that bear the marks of man's presence-irrigation systems, electrical towers, furrowed fields--which he finds "jarring, bizarre, enigmatic, or exquisitely beautiful."

As he flies his 1949 Piper "Clipper" over a hundred-mile radius of the San Francisco Bay from altitudes ranging from 1000 to 7000 feet, Hartman points his camera straight down, capturing the provocative detail rather than the grand vista. Hartman was trained in academic drawing and painting and until ten years ago painting was his dominant form of expression. It is not surprising then that his richly colored Cibachrome photographs have an abstract, painterly quality that sets them apart from most aerial photography. In Hartman's works, we are looking at pictures, not maps.

Hartman's photographs demonstrate a remarkable formal range, from softly impressionistic images such as the Southwest of Rio Vista, which portrays a pale bluegreen field of spring wheat interrupted only by a single electric transmission tower, to images like Blue Rise, in which saturated blue areas of color are contained in geometric strips of land.

Some are complex patterns of color and form, such as Lake Shasta, Shoreline, August and Developing Sign, while others are simple and monochromatic, like Planetary Detail and Field of Activity. Often what is being recorded is ambiguous, as in Yellow-Green Pond or Electric Start, or momentary, as in the cloud shadows of Illuminated Circles and Cloud Shapes Over Field Shapes.

The transitory nature of the landscape is especially evident in Fire-Field, a dramatic picture of controlled crop burning, and in Burning Off Hills, the charred results of such activity. Although these two photographs are related by subject-matter, on a formal level they contrast markedly. Fire-Field is composed of large areas of bright orange and black, while Burning Off Hills shows up as a monochromatic and linear pattern.

Hartman reveals to the viewer the rarely seen and seemingly infinite variety of shapes and patterns created by the meeting of land and water in such pictures as Discovery Bay, Edge San Pablo Bay, Suisun Bay Edge, and Lake Shasta Shoreline, August. Like all of Hartman's photographs, these operate both on the level of reality as observed from the uniquely twentieth-century aerial vantage point and on the

level of abstract composition.

Hartman rarely crops and never alters his prints. Through many years of practice (he has been flying since 1946 and has owned his own airplane since 1970), he is able to compose in the lens instantaneously. At first Hartman used his photographs as sketches for paintings but around fifteen years ago discovered that what he was aiming for in his paintings was to "make something as intensely real as my memories of flying." He found through photography he could combine his passion for flying and painting.

Hartman is a Professor in the Department of Practice of Art at UC Berkeley, where he has taught since 1961. He was born in Sharon, Pennsylvania, but spent most of his childhood in Arizona, receiving his B.F.A. (1951) and M.A. (1952) from the University of Arizona.

Constance Lewallen

* All quotes are from Peter Nabakov, "Flight Patterns." Works in MATRIX (all works are Cibachrome prints, 16 x 20", horizontal, unless otherwise noted; they are lent by the artist, courtesy Bluxome Gallery, S.F.):

- 1. Southwest of Rio Vista, February, 1976.
- 2. From Above, June, 1981.
- 3. Discovery Bay, August, 1981.
- 4. Planetary Detail, September, 1982.
- 5. Developing Sign, February, 1983.
- 6. Cloud Shapes Over Field Shapes, May, 1983, vertical.
 7. Field of Activity, June,
- 1983, vertical.
- 8. Connected Ponds, October, 1983.
- 9. Richmond Essence, October, 1983, vertical.
- 10. Illuminated Circles, December, 1983, vertical.
- 11. Blue Rise, May, 1984, vertical.
- 12. Discovery Bay Morning, July, 1984.
- 13. Edge of San Pablo Bay, July, 1984, vertical.
- 14. Electric Start, August, 1984.
- 15. Burning Off Hills, October, 1984.
- 16. Color Field 1, February, 1985.
- 17. Yellow-Green Pond, April, 1985.
- 18. Lake Shasta Shoreline, August, August, 1985.
- 19. Fire-Field, September, 1985, vertical.
- 20. Suisun Bay Edge, May, 1986, vertical.
- 21. Water Glow, May, 1986.

Selected one-person exhibitions:

Comara Gallery, L.A., '63,
'65; Berkeley Gallery, S.F.,
'66, '67, '68, '71; Santa
Barbara Museum of Art, '73;
Shirley Cerf Gallery, S.F.,
'80; Wesleyan University,
Middletown, CT, '83; San Jose
Museum of Art, CA, '83;
Bluxome Gallery, S.F., '84;
San Francisco International
Airport, '86.

Selected group exhibitions:

Knoedler Galleries, NY, Art

Across America, '65

(catalogue, traveled); San

Francisco Museum of Art, 85th

Annual Exhibition, '66

(catalogue); Whitney Museum

of American Art, NY,

Biennial, '73 (catalogue);

Richmond Art Center, CA, 26th

Annual Exhibition:

Photography, '79; Walnut

Creek Art Center, CA, Images,
'83.

Selected bibliography about the artist (see also catalogues under group exhibitions):

Albright, Thomas. "Dots and Spatters and Pleasant Delta Views," San Francisco Chronicle, Feb. 28, '80.

"Robert Hartman:
Paintings/Aerial
Photographs," San Francisco
Bay Guardian, Feb. 28, '80.

Nabakov, Peter. "Flight
Patterns," Camera Arts, Jan.
'83.

Levi Strauss, David.
"Snap! Photography '85,"
Afterimage (Rochester, NY),
Jan. '86.

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