



ALI'S AIR
&
SIMPLE GIFTS

PUCKER GALLERY
BOSTON



Grand Canyon X • Cloth Painting • 38 x 48" • AC283

CREDITS:
Design: Leslie Anne Feagley
Editors: Destiny M. Barletta and Justine H. Choi
Photography: Keith McWilliams and John Kennard

© 2009, Pucker Gallery
Printed in China by Cross Blue Overseas Printing Company

ALI'S AIR & SIMPLE GIFTS

Ali's paintings have delighted and moved me since 1976, when our shadows crossed paths at what is now Pucker Gallery. I was such a literalist that what first engaged me was the subject matter upon which her early works drew—a series of circus scenes that awoke a welcome sense of playfulness and joy. Only later did I begin to understand that, for Ali, these (and subsequent scenes of parking lots and old fair grounds) were vehicles through which to explore her fascination with space and light.

In those days, as a financially challenged graduate student, I was unwilling to let the Gallery have my contact details, or even my name, out of some irrational fear that they might track me down and lure me into spending money I did not have. Nonetheless, I found myself frequenting this particular locale on Newbury Street, feeling nourished on each occasion, and particularly delighted if a new Ali painting had appeared. Despite these recurring visits, I somehow missed *Night Tent*, 1978 (above), when it first arrived, only encountering it upon its return to the Gallery, for a show of Ali's work, some eight years later.

I remain amazed that I got to that show; I was in the midst of a twelve-month stint of commuting every other week between Boston and London. *Night Tent* stopped me in my tracks. This painting gave me the uncanny sense that Ali had somehow known, and here depicted, the current state of my interior world. It was as if she had looked right into my soul, and translated it into this visual image.

Part of Ali's magic is in her use of fabrics and thread; she creates her paintings with cloth. As a youngster, I recall learning to appreciate Van Gogh's work by walking right up to each painting, to examine the thickly applied, powerful swirls and strokes of paint



Night Tent • Cloth Painting • 19 x 18 ¾" • AC133

through which the artist's intensity was so palpable that it almost forced me to step back, and further back, to a distance from which the whole picture came into focus. With Ali's work, I find that I am first engaged by the whole, and then drawn in, to discover the secrets of the extraordinary craft through which she has created it.

In *Night Tent*, a red and white striped tent inexplicably stands on a flat, barren, landscape so dark that it is barely distinguishable from a starless, midnight sky. Within the tent, a lone juggler practices under a spotlight from an unseen source. The juggler's head is minuscule—not intellect, but physical presence keeps these rings

and batons in the air. Slivers of light escape from the tent's bottom edges, drawing the observer—and perhaps, too, the shadowy figure outside the tent—toward the warmth of that inner space. Closer scrutiny reveals that these slivers have been created with stitches of thread; simply ingenious!

When I relocated from Boston to London—initially on a trial basis—most of my possessions went into storage, but *Night Tent* accompanied me. Many years later I came to understand that I had instinctively participated in an ancient tradition; in Hebrew, the word for tent can also mean dwelling place in exile. The desolate landscape, which recurs in many of Ali's paintings, then took on a new meaning. I have continued to live with and learn from *Night Tent* for more than 20 years.

My pilgrimages persisted; indeed, trips to Boston came to feel incomplete unless I called in at Pucker Gallery. So, at a time when I was soldiering on with my life while privately carrying grief too raw to touch, from my brother's sudden death, I found myself standing in front of another of Ali's cloth paintings, *Dress*, 1999 (page 4).

Solid fabric and gauzes, all in shades of white, have been transformed into a portion of an interior wall and doorway. A little girl's white frock hangs suspended from a hook on the door. Through this partly closed or partly open door, the only colors to be seen are the dull brass of the doorknob, which stands out in its ordinariness, and beyond the doorway, the dried earth tones of a bleak, otherworldly landscape.

My loss was right here, in this painting: the exquisite, little dress—an *actual* child's dress—full of innocence and ruffles, never again to be worn; the chair that, now empty, was not present, only part of its shadow in view; the disorienting patterns of light and shadow (from without? from within?). Often, Ali uses small figures to establish scale, emphasizing the vast emptiness of her landscapes and, perhaps, the relative insignificance of their few inhabitants. In *Dress*, two distant figures might once have been on the same path, but even if so, are no longer traversing it together. Ali had sewn her own experience of loss into this painting and, through it, revealed mine to me.

Six years later, Ali began her Grand Canyon series.

In these, enormous scale is inherent in the subject matter, and one senses the artist revelling in the task of capturing and revealing the many faces of these magnificent natural monuments. These paintings were precipitated by Ali's spontaneous acceptance of a last-minute invitation to join a white water rafting excursion; this series now seems an inevitable crescendo in her long exploration of space, shadow and light.

In *Grand Canyon X* (page 2), Ali brings us to the base of a crevice far beneath the surface of the earth. There is no point in craning our necks to try for sight of the skyline; instead, she works on a canvas of greater width than height, offering us a panoramic view of this scene. Although we are deep within an immense primordial chasm, there is no sense of menace or imprisonment. Instead, we find sunlight running through a torrent of water that pours into a wide, clear stream. Sunlight nurtures the green ferns cascading from ancient rock that stands like a giant, protective guardian over one, tiny figure at the water's edge. A wide swath of sunlight warms the

ground near her feet, illuminates the water before her, and dapples the vast rock wall opposite. There are dark caves in these rocks, to be sure, but here—in this timeless moment—light and life have found their way, and one feels an almost reverential sense of peace.

In some of the paintings in the Grand Canyon series, Ali does give us sight of the sky, glimpsed alongside or through, rather than

above, these majestic rocks. In *Grand Canyon XVI* (page 13), rock walls are hewn from swatches of cloth whose varied shades—near-black, blue-gray, pale green, pink—testify to construction over millions of years. These towering walls rise to frame a rough-cut diamond of vibrant blue sky—a natural Chartres window. Far below, one small figure is fully immersed in the purist of waterfalls; another bears witness.

In *Grand Canyon XXI* (page 14), the deep blue sky casts into relief two colossal faces of an ancient fissure. As close and tender as any loving parents, they keep timeless watch over the pool at their feet. In it, just now, one tiny figure innocently bathes.

Throughout this series, Ali seems to grow ever more fascinated by the water that is, after all, at the heart of

this great canyon. She uses a wealth of fabrics, threads, and stitches to explore its versatility, and its relationship with light. Long, sometimes thin streams of water pour endlessly down a length of rock wall, from above to below where the eye can see, or into deep, vast pools. Waterfalls plunge, or leap from rock to rock, spraying the air. Water churns beneath the surface of a welcoming pool, spattering foam on its otherwise translucent surface.

In the midst of this flow, in *Grand Canyon XVII* (front and back covers), suddenly we are high above a motionless lake. We have only a partial view of this still lake, with its flat rock shoreline at the base of the ravine. Between the water's edge and the rock walls rising behind it, a slightly scattered group of seven small figures can be seen. The water's reflection shows a longer stretch of these walls, separated by a longer slice of sky, than we can see when looking directly at them. But in this natural mirror, there is no visible sign of life. Where are we placed, and how did we come to be here, so far removed from the fellow explorers whom we can and cannot see,



Dress • Cloth Painting • 48 x 40" • AC219

below? This is a perspective that insists upon inward reflection.

In *Ripple Effect I* (page 6), the waterfall has become a mere catalyst. Concentric ripples lap out across an expanse of water. They are an ephemeral replication of the graduating layers of rock that rise from the water's edge as a permanent record of the passage of millennia. Exquisite shades of purple, rust and gold, contained within the rock formation, are luminescent, interwoven with dark fingers of shadow. These colors, already muted by the rippling water, are reflected, mingled with an undulating sky.

In Ali's earlier cloth paintings her craft was contained, the outer edges of her fabrics hidden discreetly beneath clean borders of mattes and frames. Through the Grand Canyon series, the relationship between subject and fabric is transformed. Here, uneven edges of variably textured materials, like the natural elements they represent, remain exposed to view. And, though tiny figures continue to serve as vehicles through which to convey enormous scale, they no longer stand, alienated, on arid ground. Within the deep, enduring, generous spaces of Ali's Grand Canyon, it is possible to engage fully, including with one another. Here, one can be wholly present.

Georgette's Pump (page 7), is from a different genre. The title is a tip of the hat (so to speak) to Rene Magritte, whose wife and surrealist model was called Georgette. In this cloth painting, Ali takes us back to a familiar, parched landscape, where tiny figures and vertical poles are used to establish scale; she also brings us forward to the outer edges of a fabricated work. The cloth she has used to create the illusion of this landscape, and of the cloudy sky above it, is torn, at the bottom, and peeling, at the top, revealing glimpses of some other material or vista, under this one. Behind the sky, one glimpses a still cloudy but brighter sky; behind the dry earth, is that canvas, perhaps, or some other, lighter shade of ground?

In the upper left corner, a sliver of shadow peeks from behind this second sky. Yet another layer revealed? But is this a shadow, or fabric creating the illusion of a shadow? How many layers of whole cloth, one superimposed over the other, actually serve as the backdrop for this single shoe?

And what of the shoe itself? From what material has this lady's

pump been fashioned? Although seemingly solid, it is stitched out of pieces of sky—or rather of fabric that gives the illusion of sky. But this is illusion layered upon illusion, as the fabric attached at the heel of this shoe appears to have been pulled from a layer of fabricated sky!

There is a tempting quality about this painting; one feels the

urge to reach out and peel off that top layer of sky and barren earth, to discover what is underneath. Will there be other, small figures? Will we find a second shoe?

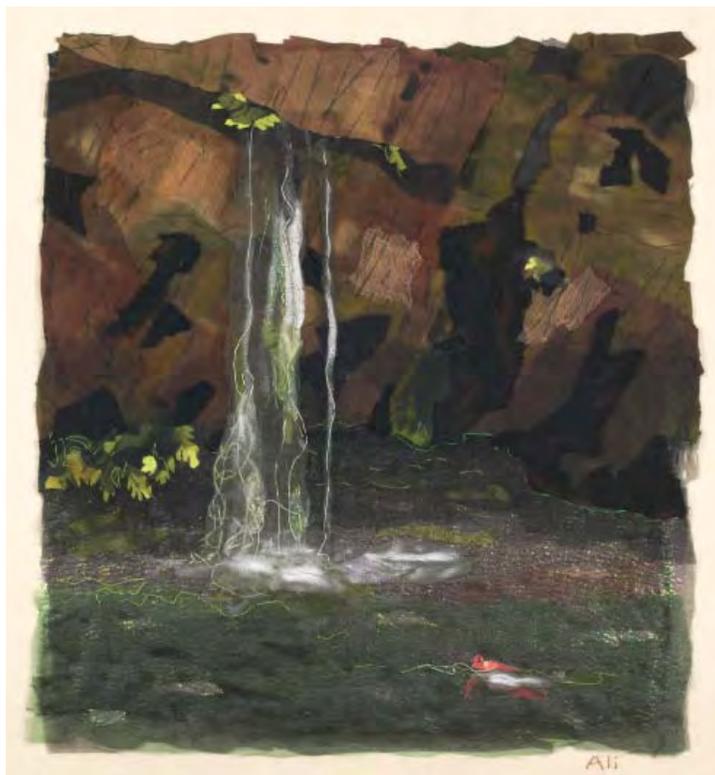
Boston is home to the Longwood Symphony Orchestra, made up of health caregivers who play music at a professional level, performing concerts to raise awareness and funds for medical causes. Through 'LSO Musicians on Call', they have also begun to go directly into health care facilities and assisted living residences, offering live music to those who might not otherwise be able to access it. This new initiative is being funded in part by a project in which invited artists use unvarnished violins to create art for healing,

which are then auctioned. In late November, 2008, while she was still working on Grand Canyon vistas, Ali was invited to participate in this project; she responded with characteristic spontaneity and ingenuity, creating what became her own *Air & Simple Gifts* (page 8).

There are no tiny figures, here; the scale has been inverted. Now familiar, gigantic, craggy faces appraise an instrument of the gods. Will one of these giants reach out to grasp this violin and tuck it under his chin? Or are these ancients content simply being the audience for this primordial concert?

A waterfall cascades down the violin, intertwining with authentic strings that Ali has procured. The instrument itself—no illusion, this time, but an actual violin—both merges into and emerges from the organic elements of an ancient gorge. What sounds must come from this magnificent instrument; as sweet as Itzak Perlman's; deeper even than Yo Yo Ma's cello. What a privilege it is to savor the joyful visual orchestration of Ali's recent creations, from the Grand Canyon series and beyond.

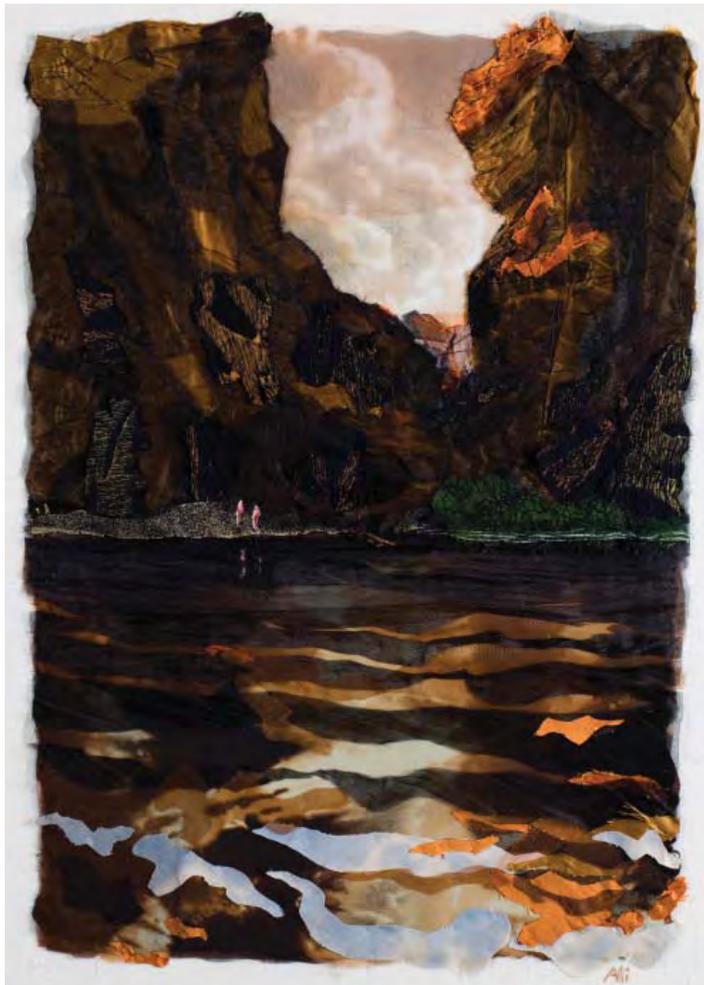
—BETH NEUSTADT, 2009



Grand Canyon XII • Cloth Painting • 15 ½ x 14 ½" • AC286



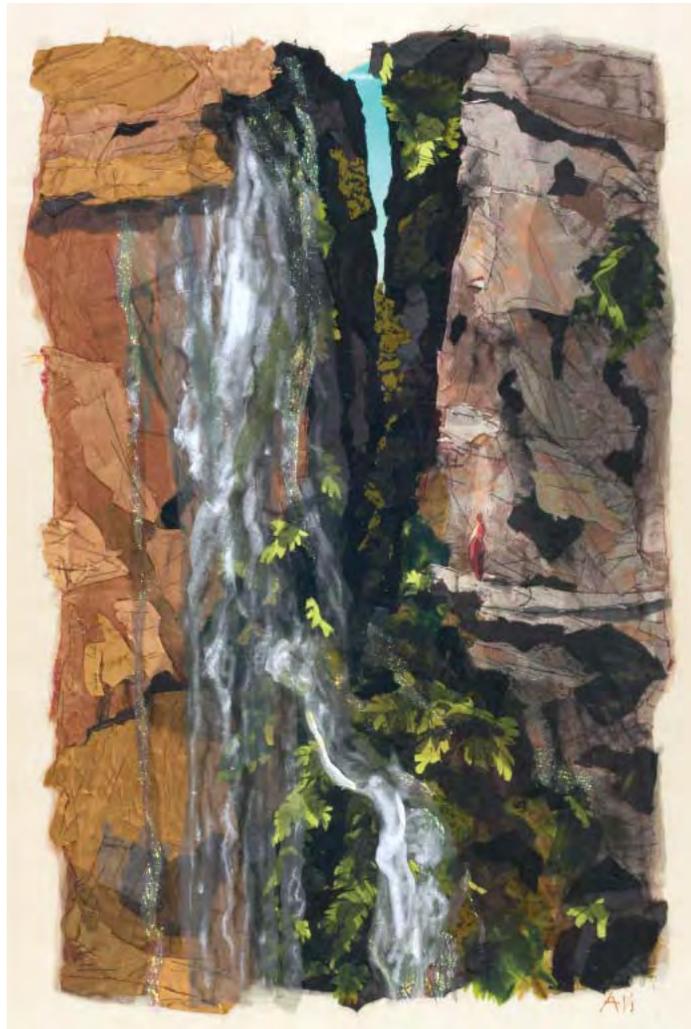
Ripple Effect I • Cloth Painting • 16 x 15" • AC298



The Ripple Effect II • Cloth Painting • 20 x 13 ¾" • AC299



Georgette's Pump • Cloth Painting • 20 ½ x 28 ¾" • AC300



Grand Canyon XI • Cloth Painting • 22 ½ x 15" • AC285



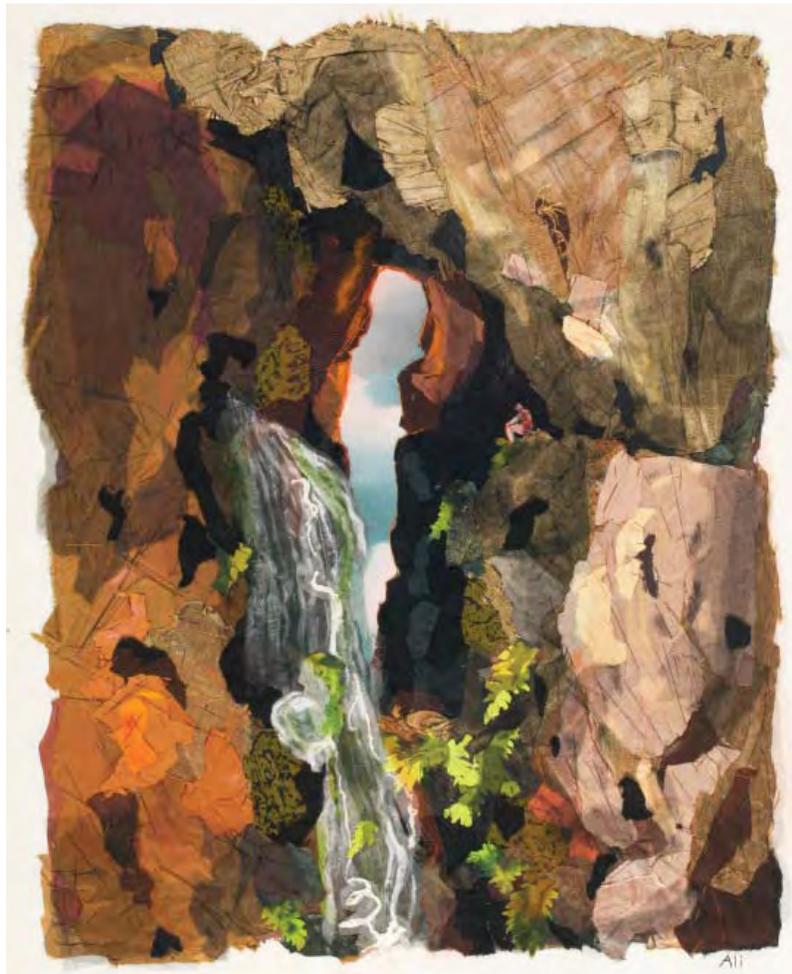
Air & Simple Gifts • Mixed Media • 26 x 14 x 4" • AC302



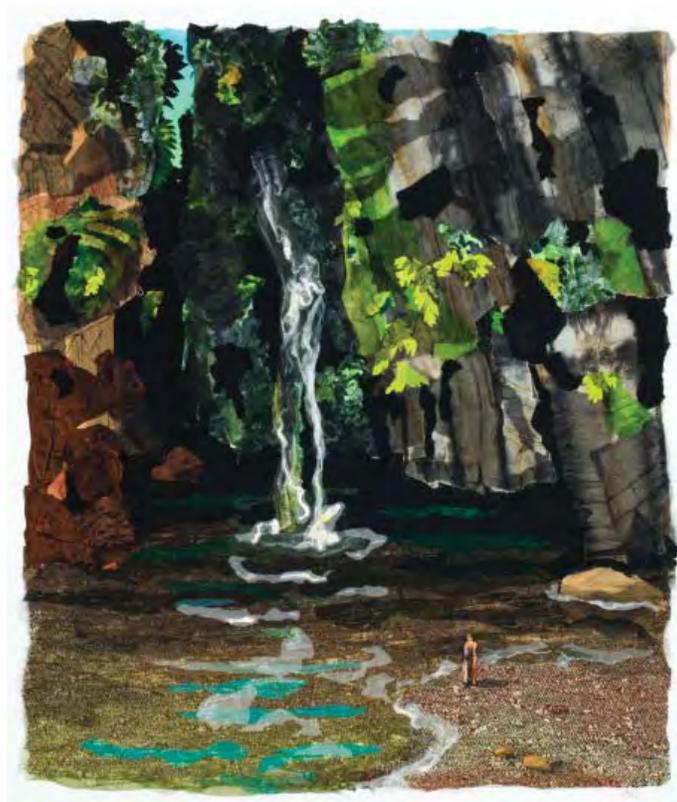
Grand Canyon XIII • Cloth Painting • 53 x 28" • AC287



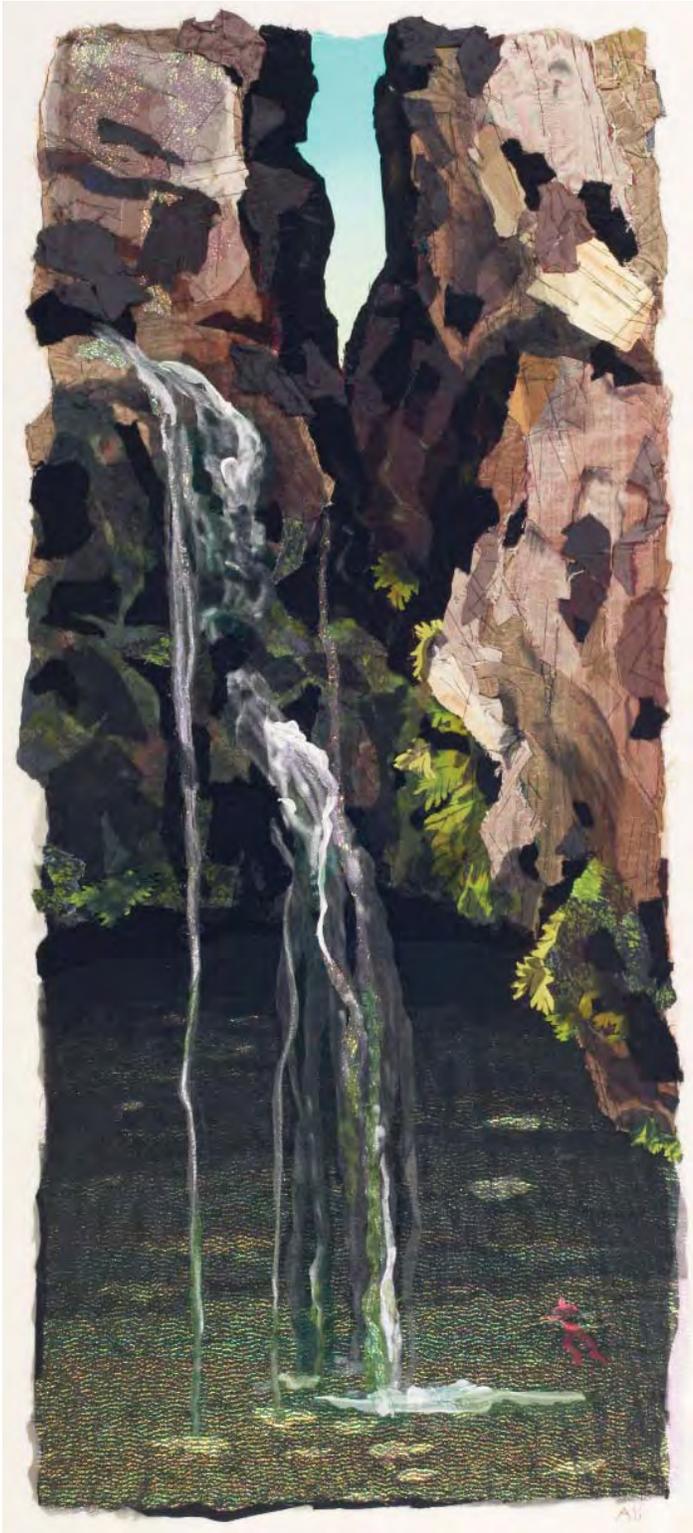
Grand Canyon XXII • Cloth Painting • 79 x 28 ¼" • AC296



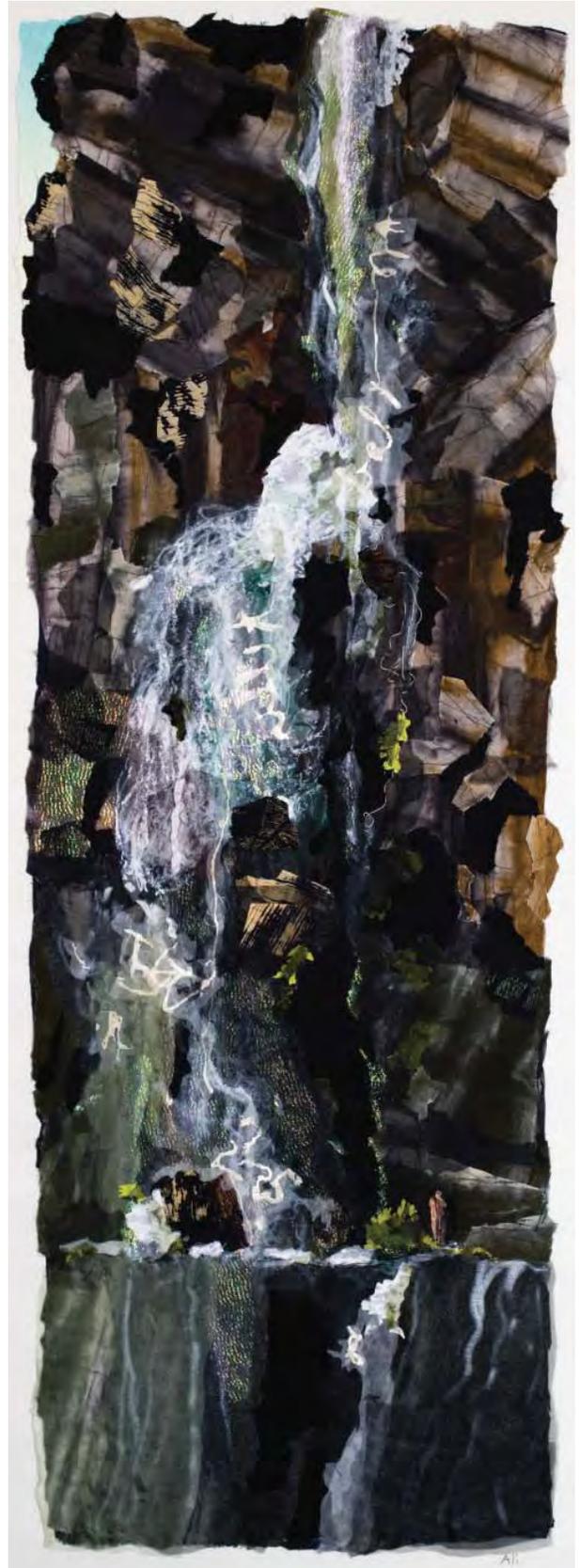
Grand Canyon XV • Cloth Painting • 32 ¼ x 26 ¼" • AC289



Grand Canyon XVIII • Cloth Painting • 24 x 21" • AC292



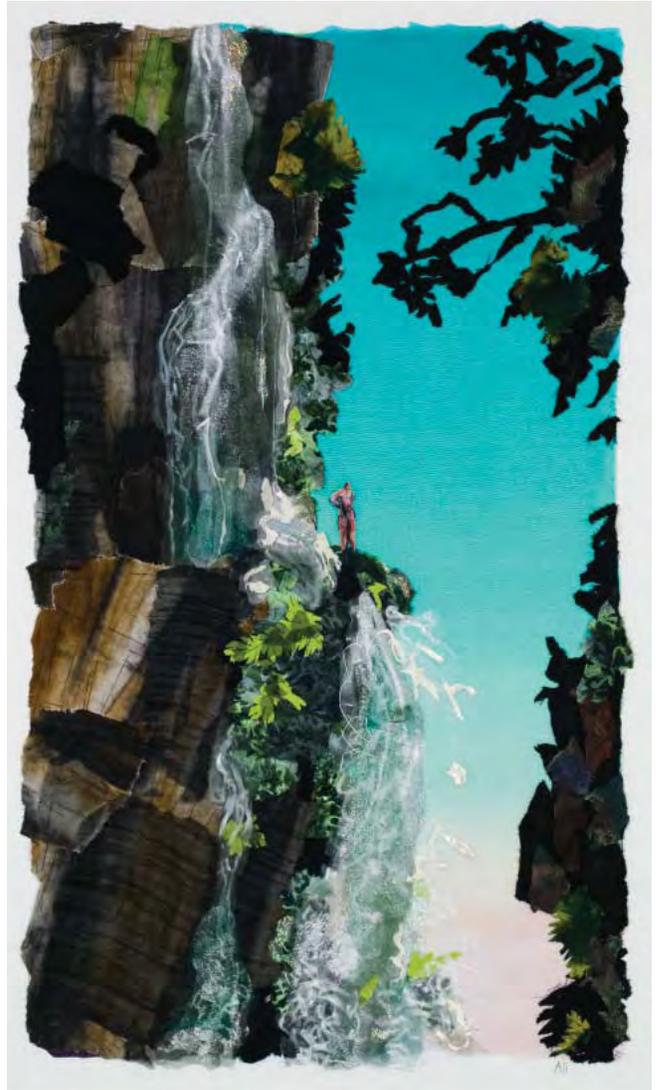
Grand Canyon XIV • Cloth Painting • 40 x 16" • AC288



Grand Canyon XXIII • Cloth Painting • 48 x 16 1/2" • AC297



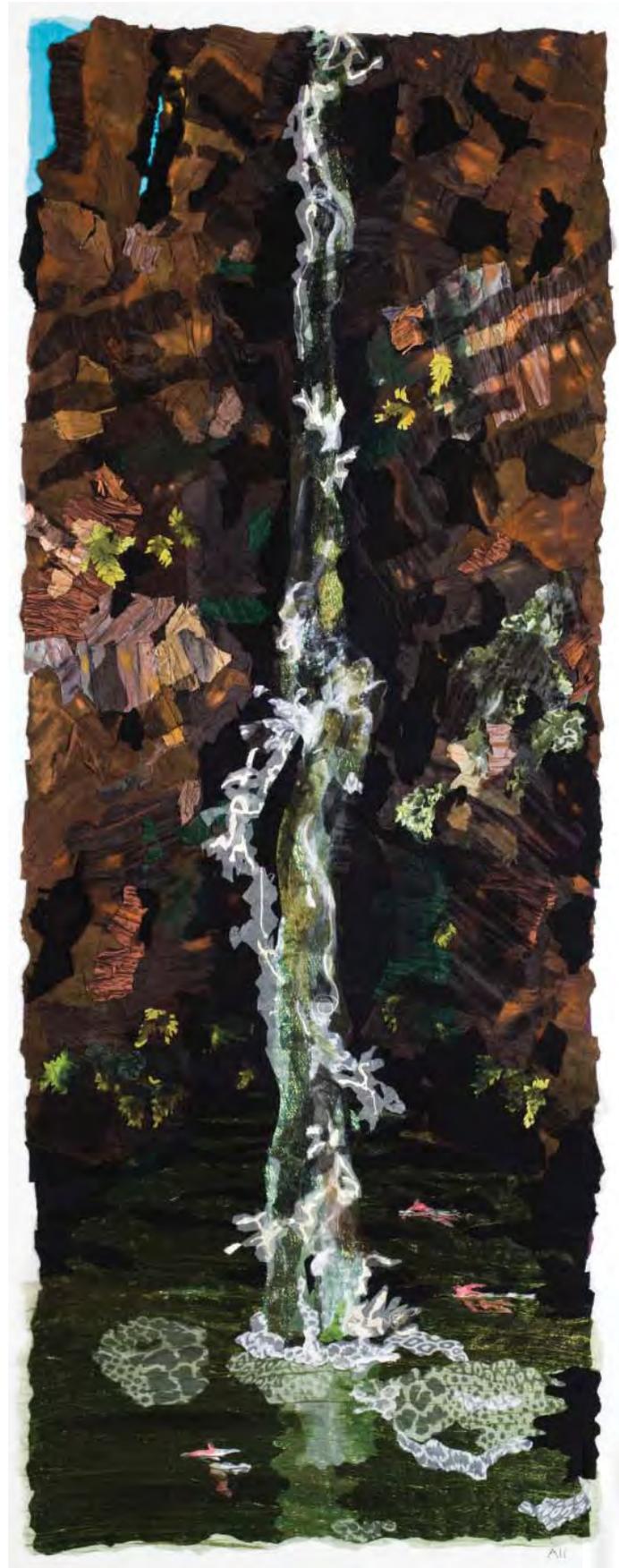
Grand Canyon XVI • Cloth Painting • 38 ½ x 18 ¼" • AC290



Grand Canyon XIX • Cloth Painting • 30 ½ x 18" • AC293



Grand Canyon XXI • Cloth Painting • 48 x 18 ½" • AC295



Grand Canyon XX • Cloth Painting • 56 x 21 ½" • AC294

ALISON CANN-CLIFT BIOGRAPHY

EDUCATION

- 1967-1972 School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA
1968-1971 Tufts University, Medford, MA (B.F.A.)
1979 Artists' Foundation Fellowship

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2009 *Ali's Air & Simple Gifts*, Pucker Gallery, Boston, MA
2007 *Ali's Light: Cloth Paintings 1967-2007*, Fuller Craft Museum, Brockton, MA
2007 *Threads of Light*, Pucker Gallery, Boston, MA
2005 *Layers and Fabrications*, Pucker Gallery, Boston, MA
2001 *Texture of Still Life*, Pucker Gallery, Boston, MA
1998 *Monuments*, Pucker Gallery, Boston, MA
1998 *Day of the Dead II*, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, MA
1995 *Nature Morte - Naturaleza Muerta*, Pucker Gallery, Boston, MA
1993 *Ofrendas - Offerings*, Pucker Gallery, Boston, MA
1991 *Performance Spaces*, Pucker Safrai Gallery, Boston, MA
1988 *Circus, Sand and Sea*, Pucker Safrai Gallery, Boston, MA
1986 *Beyond the Center Ring*, Pucker Safrai Gallery, Boston, MA
1984 *Ali: Monotypes*, Pucker Safrai Gallery, Boston, MA
1982 Traveling exhibition: Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada
Fitchburg Art Museum, Fitchburg, MA
1981 *Views and Viewpoints: Landscapes of the 20th Century*, Pucker Safrai Gallery, Boston, MA
1980 Pucker Safrai Gallery, Boston, MA
1978 *Ali's Circus*, Pucker Safrai Gallery, Boston, MA
1977 Pucker Safrai Gallery, Boston, MA

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2008 Hanoi Contemporary Art Center, Hanoi, Vietnam
2008 Module 7 Gallery, Hanoi, Vietnam
2008 *Fine Choices 2008*, Pucker Gallery, Boston, MA
2007 *Fine Choices 2007: Celebrating 40 Years*, Pucker Gallery, Boston, MA
2006 *Fine Choices: Memories and Dreams*, Pucker Gallery, Boston, MA
2005 *Fine Choices 2005*, Pucker Gallery, Boston, MA
2000 *Fine Choices: Memories Now*, Pucker Gallery, Boston, MA
2000 *Dream Worlds: Neo-Surrealism in the Millennium*, Attleboro Museum, Attleboro, MA
1991 President's Choice Exhibition, South Shore Artists' Association, Cohasset, MA
1991 *The Mind's Eye*, Fitchburg Art Museum, Fitchburg, MA
1985 Boston Arts Festival Invitational, Boston, MA

- 1984 Miami International Print Biennial, Coral Gables, FL
1981-82 *Center Ring: Two Centuries of Circus Art*, Traveling Exhibition: Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee, WI
Ohio Art Museum, Columbus, OH
New York State Museum, Albany, NY
Corcoran Gallery, Washington, DC
1981 25th Annual Print Exhibition, Hunterdon Art Center, Clinton, NJ
1981 12th National Art Exhibit, Second Crossing Gallery, Valley City, ND
1981 Audubon Artists 39th Annual Exhibition, National Arts Club, New York, NY
1979 *Art of the State*, Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA
Provincetown Art Association, Provincetown, MA
1977 *Six Artists*, Pucker Safrai Gallery, Boston, MA
1977 Centennial Exhibition, School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA

PERMANENT COLLECTIONS

- Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Nova Scotia, Canada
Boston Public Library, Boston, MA
Currier Gallery of Art, Manchester, NH
DeCordova Museum and Sculpture Park, Lincoln, MA
Fitchburg Art Museum, Fitchburg, MA
Fogg Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA
Johnson Art Gallery, Middlebury College, VT
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA
Neka Museum, Ubud, Bali, Indonesia
New Britain Museum of American Art, New Britain, CT
Rose Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA
Schick Gallery, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY
Tel Aviv Museum, Tel Aviv, Israel
The Art Gallery, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY
Davis Museum and Cultural Center, Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA
William Rockhill Nelson Museum, Kansas City, MO
Worcester Art Museum, Worcester, MA
Vietnam Fine Arts Association, Hanoi, Vietnam

PUBLICATIONS

- Ali: Paintings of the Last Decade – Still Life*, Pucker Art Publications, Boston, 2001.
Ali: Beyond the Big Top – Cloth Paintings and Graphic Works, Pucker Art Publications, Boston, and David R. Godine Co., Boston, 1988.

FRONT COVER:
Grand Canyon XVII • Cloth Painting • 60 x 33" • AC291

BACK COVER:
Grand Canyon XVII, detail • Cloth Painting • 60 x 33" • AC291

ALI'S AIR & SIMPLE GIFTS

DATES:

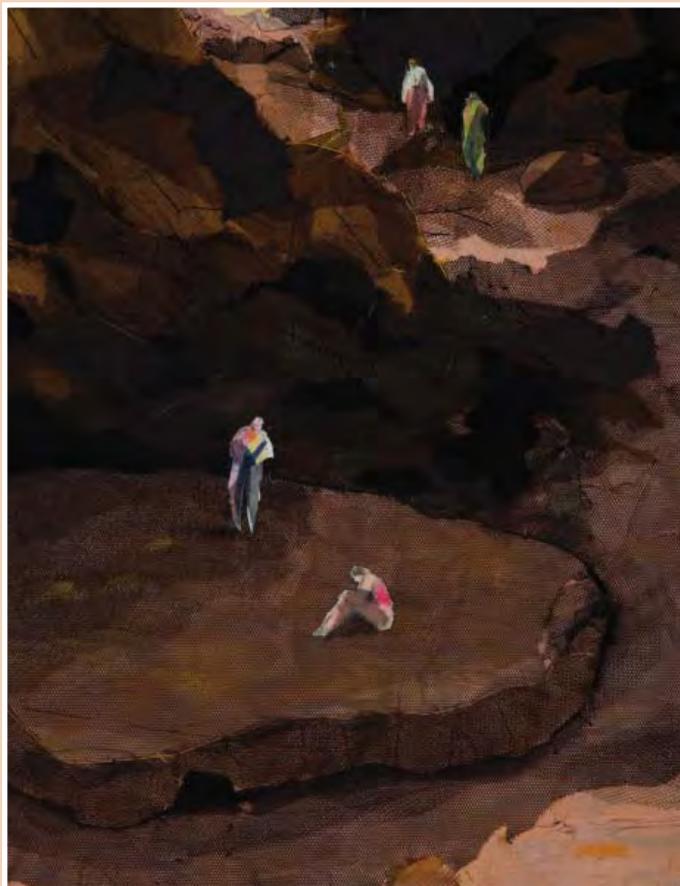
9 May to 8 June 2009

OPENING RECEPTION:

9 May 2009, 3:00 to 6:00 PM

The public is invited to attend.

The artist will be present.



**PUCKER
GALLERY**

ESTABLISHED 1967 BOSTON

PUCKER GALLERY
171 Newbury Street
Boston, MA 02116
Phone: 617.267.9473
Fax: 617.424.9759
E-mail: contactus@puckergallery.com

To view this catalogue and other
Gallery publications and to experience
an audio tour of the exhibition,
please visit www.puckergallery.com.

GALLERY HOURS:
Monday through Saturday
10:00 AM to 5:30 PM
Sunday 10:30 AM to 5:00 PM

Member of the Boston Art Dealers Association.

One hour free validated parking
is available in the lot on the corner
of Newbury and Dartmouth Streets.

Prsrt. Standard
U.S. Postage Paid
Boston, MA 02116
Permit #1906

ADDRESS SERVICES REQUESTED.