

Painter sketches cohesion of art, environment

By Carol Hull

The past three years have been a "marvelous odyssey" for painter Alan Gussow. The result is *A Sense of Place*, a book of paintings combining Gussow's art and his concern for the environment.

Gussow's odyssey has turned in a new direction. Through a collaboration of the Sheldon and Joslyn Art Galleries, he has become the guest curator for "A Sense of Place," an exhibition of 200 works, some from his book and others by selected artists.

The theme of the exhibition, scheduled for September and October 1973, will be much the same as his book—showing the creative interplay between the artist and the environment in which he lives and works.

"The exhibition will be a truly national collection celebrating the earth. I feel that Nebraska is an ideal place to have 'A Sense of Place' for the simple reason that here we can still see the earth. The wet spring here causes actual concern. In New York it's just another inconvenience, a puddle to avoid," Gussow said.

After the Lincoln and Omaha exhibitions, "A Sense of Place" will become a part of the Mid-America Arts Alliance. Fine Arts and environmental concerns will be taken to small communities in a four-state area. According to director Peter Milstein, the 200 paintings will be divided into four shows travelling with an artist and an environmentalist-in-residence.

Living in New York's Hudson River Valley, an environment publicized by Pete Seeger, Gussow became interested in the harm being done by pollution in the mid-1960s. Since then he has been looking for a way to relate his profession, one often removed from the land, to environmental causes.

"People haven't understood that an artist and a farmer can have a common cause, even though the

artist doesn't make a living directly from the land," Gussow said.

When an artist paints a scene, it is his way of attaching a value to it—his way of harvesting the land, Gussow said. Through the simple act of painting the picture the artist shows that he sees something beautiful to share with others, he added.

In relating each painting in "A Sense of Place" to the environment, Gussow spent time talking with each artist or researching 19th century artists. Never asking them to talk about art, Gussow asked instead that they tell something about the scene in their landscape. Comments in the book relate art as "a by-product of my enthusiasm for nature" and "a part of our lives, not a thing separated apart."

Through his book Gussow said he hopes to show that individuals today are forgetting the land and nature.

"We are in danger of losing our sense of place. It's gotten so a person can't tell where he is in America now," he said.

"When I get on a plane in New York, I could swear someone rolls up the street and flies ahead of me to whatever city I'm going and unrolls the road. All across the country things look the same—Kentucky Fried Chicken, McDonald's and Burger King everywhere," Gussow said.

He said America needs to be strong. "The more things begin to look alike, the more vulnerable we become," he added.

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