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**PRESS RELEASE**

REPUBLICATION OFJON SCHUELER’S

*THE SOUND OF SLEAT: A PAINTER’S LIFE*

Edited by Magda Salvesen and Diane Cousineau, Introduction by Russell Banks

**New York, August 2023**:The Jon Schueler Foundation proudly announces its first major project: the republication of *The Sound of Sleat: A Painter’s Life* by Jon Schueler. First published in 1999 by Picador USA, this acclaimed memoir by the American artist has long been out of print. The new 2023 edition is supplemented by an index.

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“It is an amazing, totally peculiar piece of work. It may be the best thing ever written about the workings of a painter’s mind and eye.”

 Phoebe-Lou Adams, *The Atlantic Monthly*,

May 1999

*The Sound of  Sleat* is an intensely personal record of the forces and events that shaped Jon Schueler (1916-1992) as an artist.  At the same time, it evokes with great resonance the various cultural, historical and geographical contexts that informed his life: from pre-war Midwestern America to the Western Highlands of Scotland where, from his studio, he could look across the Sound of Sleat to Skye and the other islands of the Inner Hebrides, a vista that allowed him to strike the delicate balance between observed nature and abstract forms, which is the mystery and power of Schueler’s paintings.

Jon Schueler working on the manuscript of The Sound of Sleat, in Mallaig, 1970

What continuously lures the reader are both the unusual glimpses of the intricate maneuverings of the art scene and the fascinating figure of Schueler himself.  Ironic and irreverent, alternately acerbic, and lyrical, deeply spiritual, and unabashedly erotic, he offers us both humor and moments of revealing psychological insight.

Jon Schueler. Sands of Camusdarach, Scotland, 1970

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***Readers’ Reponses to The Sound of Sleat***

“The greatest benefit of all is that with cumulative power the entries explain the remarkable experience Schueler underwent upon his arrival at the Sound of Sleat, an experience that allowed him to record on canvas his simultaneous sense of rapture in response to the landscape and his apprehension of death.”

 Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, *The New York Times*, February 25, 1999

“As in van Gogh’s letters, here is a search for reality in life and art. But, beyond the torment, Schueler’s writings are also close in spirit to Delacroix’s worldly and romantic journals. This self-portrait is of a remarkably complex, multitalented artist.”

B.H. Friedman, novelist, essayist, biographer. Cover blurb for the first edition, 1999.

“In a beautifully written memoir, Jon Schueler tells how it was to have been an avant-garde painter after World War II, how he felt and thought. *The Sound of Sleat* is a telling account of one artist’s inner life, as well as a window on the world of Pollock, Still, Kline, de Kooning, and others whose work still resonates today.”

 Irving Sandler, art historian and art critic. Cover blurb for the first edition, 1999.

“Running through this material, or rather alongside it, as well as under and above it, was an ongoing paean to the fierce beauty of Mallaig, a fishing village located on the Sound of Sleat in western Scotland. Again and again, Jon’s manuscript returned to this wild, isolated place, ruminating on its austere turbulent light, the sharp winds and storms that kept the skies in constant motion and change.”

Introduction to *The Sound of Sleat* by Russell Banks, pp, xvii- xviii.

**Longer Description of *The Sound of Sleat: A Painter’s Life***

The book recounts Jon Schueler’s dramatic childhood in Milwaukee and traumatic war years in Britain as a B17 navigator; his decision to study painting with Clyfford Still at the California School of Fine Arts; his arrival in New York in 1951 and his introduction to Rothko, Newman and Kline; his turbulent experiences with marriages and women; the necessity of money and the lack of it; and the tremendous need to return continually to Scotland where he found in the Sound of Sleat the images essential to his painting.

Jon Schueler painting in his studio

in Romasaig, Mallaig, Scotland, July 1977. Photo: Archie I. McLellan.

The reader is drawn in through the immediacy of the journal entries; the quality of his longer reflections on memory, the past, and the act of painting; and the evocative power of his descriptions of the sea and the sky.  Equally compelling are the extraordinary series of letters to lovers and art dealers (Leo Castelli, Ben Heller) that reveal the verve and intelligence with which Schueler engages others and the depth of his engagement. What is perhaps most striking throughout is the urgency to tell the story, to search out a truth that is always difficult, often painful, and sometimes damning in its evidence of failure.

Although Schueler was first and foremost an artist, he devoted himself to his writing with the same passion, sense of struggle and drive towards experimentation that he brought to his painting.  Rather than beginning in childhood and then proceeding onwards in a conventional way, the book’s chronology is based on the moment of writing, so events may be presented once, or they may be divulged piecemeal as the years go by.  This technique adds an element of suspense to the narrative-- as in his efforts to come to terms with his almost unbearable air force experiences, his search for a woman loved during World War II, and his attempt to discover the mother who died just after he was born.

**Biographies**

**The Author: Jon Schueler** was born in Milwaukee, WI in 1916. After obtaining a BA and MA at the University of Wisconsin, he volunteered for the Air Force and was sent to England in 1942-- flying missions over France and Germany. Taking advantage of the GI Bill, he attended the California School of Fine Arts (later the SFAI) from 1948-1951 where he studied under the now legendary artists Clyfford Still, Richard Diebenkorn, Elmer Bischoff, David Park and Hassel Smith.

Schueler moved to New York in 1951 and was quickly introduced by Still to other members of the first generation of American abstract painters. The bold, thickly painted abstractions of his work at this period gradually became more informed by nature. In the winter of 1957 in Scotland, Schueler found in those northern skies the dramatic play of light and changing weather which were to inform his work for the rest of his life. With his switch to brushes rather than a palette knife, the paint became more luminous, and images of the sun are often present, either as a glowing force or as a veiled presence.

After five prolific years in Scotland from 1970 to 1975, he realized his ambition of maintaining studios in both Scotland and New York. The later paintings show a return to more vibrant color and more pronounced brushwork, always continuing to strike a delicate balance between abstraction and observation. As Jack Baur, director of the Whitney Museum wrote in 1975 on the occasion of Schueler’s exhibition, “We see his paintings one minute as clouds and sea and islands, the next as swirling arrangements of pure color and light.”

Jon Schueler showed in The Stable Gallery in New York (1954, 1961, 1963) and had the first one man show at Leo Castelli’s New York gallery (1957). After the 1975 Whitney exhibition, *Landscapes, Interior and Exterior: Avery, Rothko and Schueler* at the Cleveland Museum of Art in 1976, his paintings were regularly shown in New York, Minneapolis, Kansas City and in Scotland. Schueler died in 1992. His work is cared for by the Jon Schueler Foundation, and is represented by Waterhouse & Dodd, London and New York.

**Introductory essayist: Russell Banks** (1940-2023) is the author of some 14 works of fiction, including *Continental Drift* (1985), *Affliction*  (1989), *The Sweet Hereafter* (1991), *The Rule of the Bone* (1995) *Cloudsplitter* [John Brown], 1998, and the latest, *Foregone* (2021). There are film versions of *Affliction* and *The Sweet* *Hereafter.*  He read the unedited 2000-page manuscript of *The Sound of Sleat* in 1982 when it was housed in a large cardboard box in Schueler’s loft, and immediately recommended that it should be edited and published.

**Co-editor: Magda Salvesen** was brought up in Scotland. She has an MA (1966) from the University of St Andrews, Scotland and the Courtauld Institute, London (1968). Her publications include *Artists' Estates: Reputations in Trust*, Rutgers University Press, 2005 (republished 2022), *The Sound of Sleat: A Painter's Life* by Jon Schueler, Picador USA, 1999 (republished 2023), both co-edited with Diane Cousineau; and *Exploring Gardens and Green Spaces: From Connecticut to the Delaware Valley*, WW Norton, 2011.

She and Jon Schueler were married in 1976 and after his death in 1992 she became curator of the Jon Schueler Estate and subsequently the Executive Director (2022) of the newly formed Jon Schueler Foundation. For many years she taught art and also garden history at various univerities and at the NY Botanical Garden. From 2011 to 2022 she was adjunct assistant professor at New York University.  She lives in New York City.

**Co-editor: Diane Cousineau** received a PhD in English (UC Davis, 1975) after completing a thesis on Henry James and Virginia Woolf.  Between 1983 and 2008, she taught literature courses at both American and French Universities and published articles on various women writers and a book length study, "*Letters and Labyrinths: Women Writing/Cultural/Codes*, published in America by the University of Delaware Press, 1997 and in Britain by the Associated University Presses, 1997. She lives in Chestertown, MD.

**Extracts from *The Sound of Sleat: A Painter’s Life* by Jon Schueler**

“What I am trying to do in this book is to write about the man who lives, who suffers, who chooses to paint, who wants to have vision, who suspects more and more that whatever happens, it happens because of forces beyond him as long as he works. He must provide that one force: he must be a man working.” 1978, p.291

“I had wanted to live in the middle of one of my paintings for a year. I wanted to be in one spot and watch the painting change. I saw clouds menacing my mind’s eye, and the rain shafts or the mist obliterating horizons and forming new forms with the clouds and land masses blending with the sea. I chose northern Scotland as my cathedral, because for my needs at that moment, it seemed the only church that would do”. 1959, p.63

“When I speak of nature I’m speaking of the sky, because in many ways the sky became nature to me. And when I think of the sky, I think of the Scottish sky over Mallaig. It isn’t that I think of it that nationally, really, but that I studied the Mallaig Sky so intently, and I found in its convulsive movement and change and drama such a concentration of activity that it became all skies and even the idea of all nature to me.” 1967, p.65

“In the war, my fantasy was that I would live

In reality I must have known that I would die

Living, I felt responsible for each man's death.

Death is a disappearance in the sky

Two minutes before St.Nazaire, the squadron is seven ships. At St. Nazaire it is two.” 1970, p.204

“ The first sky was a night sky. I have a memory, total, absolute, experience so lived and complete that it was devoid of thought or interpretation until the painting itself revealed the sky to me. The memory is that of my mother's death when I was six months old. That sky was the world of my loss, then, and now has become the world of my search.” 1962, p.130

“Last night de Kooning said that his ambition in life was to be a good painte.That was all. I thought about my own drives -- my mystiques, my talk of the North, my desire to have humanness and love in my work, my desire for "The Vision," my wanting to understand Nature, my wanting to touch God, or God and Nature, or God in Nature, my wanting the hand to be an expression of something more than the will. And I wondered if all of this was fantasy. It can sound pretentious, and the words can outshine the painting in importance. When Bill's humility seems profound to me, I wonder if the most plebeian goal doesn't best allow for the greatest spiritual transformation.” 1962, p. 124-125

“When I saw the Turners through the years, it seemed to me that he went further into nature and further into the sensation of nature in paint than any other painter. He, the stylist of incredible facility, did most to break down style, to destroy it, to find the possibility of paint talking as paint, as an extension of the most immediate perception and sensibility, so that it became most like nature. Not a painting of nature, but a painting most like nature. This is what I would like my painting to be.” 1972, p.223

“Why do I write in such apparent disorder? In the first place the disorder is only apparent, or only partially. In the second place I believe in the disorder. I don't know where to find truth except in the disorder. Unless I can weave my way through it, stating, questioning, looking, resolving, breaking apart, forming, destroying, deciding, undeciding, worrying, asserting, (this is the way I paint), I feel that I have lost contact and am creating an artifact. Or not creating.” 1961, p.118

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The next solo exhibition, *Jon Schueler (1916-1992): Sing Blues in Grey* is at Eton College, Windsor, in the Drawing Schools Gallery, Sept. 28-Nov. 5, 2023. Email: drawingschool@etoncollege.org.uk, or the curator of the exhibition, Diana Ewer, dianajaneewer@gmail.com