

Artists Statement: Industry and Oil

The work based on natural and manmade disasters evolved into a series of paintings that depicted the Gulf Oil Spill, which took place at a depth where human intervention in nature was limited. Trespassing where humans rarely tread created a disaster of superhuman proportions. In 1977 scientists discovered an entire ecosystem that centered around hydrothermal vents in the ocean floor. These vents emit scalding hot water containing gases that would be toxic to life on the ocean's surface but provide nourishment for deep sea organisms living beyond the reaches of sunlight. Under conditions of extreme pressure, in the absence of sunlight, and with temperature changes fluctuating from boiling to frigid, these organisms developed a mechanism to turn the mineral laden waters into energy thus explaining how life began where photosynthesis was impossible. The process is called chemosynthesis and it changed the way scientists understood the origin of life on the planet. Thirty years later when B.P. decided to drill into the ocean floor they drilled deeper than where we believe life originated. On the surface, gas and oil are necessary for our survival but at these depths the gas became toxic to an entire ecosystem. Many of the gases present in hydrothermal vents, or methane seeps, are essential to the sustenance of our ecosystem but released on the surface would be toxic to us. It is only after this disaster that the impact of the growing practices of oil and gas extraction, seabed mining and bottom trawling on this fragile and vital ecosystem were revealed. There have been few disasters that have so starkly exposed the impact of human pride and greed on creation itself, demanding that human beings find a way to live in accordance with the laws of nature. Schuster's work grasped and addressed this dilemma between progress and destruction. These paintings depict the effects of industrial manufacturing and oil and its effects on the ocean floor and the surface.