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PROPOSAL FOR A PROJECT OF PHOTOGRAPHY ALONG THE NIAGARA RIVER
FROM LAKE ERIE TO LAKE ONTARIO

What I find most interesting about the Niagara River is the way in which the Nineteenth Century is palpably evident under the veneer of present-day reality. Almost every site and viewpoint along its varied thirty-six mile course is laden with history. Painters, sketchers and photographers by the hundreds have discovered, rediscovered and consecrated the most picturesque aspects of the rapids, falls, gorge and shoreline. Thoughts and feelings of the Beautiful, the Awesome and the Sublime are still provoked today, even amidst the proliferation of hydroelectric installations, chemical plants, and tourist facilities.

In recent years, I have been using the art of photography to research the ways in which the pictorial strategies of the Nineteenth Century color the way in which the American landscape is apprehended by today's viewers. I have returned to the sites that so inspired early American artists: the Hudson and Susquehanna Rivers in the East and Canyon de Chelly and Monument Valley in the West, among many others. I have confronted the changes wrought by superhighways, dams, nuclear plants, and urban sprawl, to try and discover how the underlying aesthetic could still reveal itself. Photography, of course, is the perfect medium for the investigation. It can reveal the truth of present day specifics and particularities, while at the same time, by conscious choice of lighting and pictorial structure, suggest the aesthetic legacy of the past.

In the Niagara River project, I propose to use the working methods of Amos W. Sangster (as evidenced in his monumental portfolio of etchings The Niagara River from Lake Erie to Lake Ontario) as my model. I, too, will try to spend my days hiking along the river, exploring with passion its nooks and crannies. I will use his drawings as points of departure for my own art. I will find the places where he stood and discover which aspects of the scene have changed and which have persevered. I will try to recapture his affection for the river and to understand and reinterpret his tender and expressive responses to the scene. And, it seems to me, it will be of utmost importance to be true to the specifics of the river and its shoreline as it exists today.