



1986

## Floating Islands Artwork

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### Recommended Citation

(1986) "Floating Islands Artwork," *Inscape*: Vol. 6: No. 3, Article 29.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/inscape/vol6/iss3/29>

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# FLOATING ISLANDS

Scott Hatch

**T**he old man looked over the herd. His count was short. He whistled, and his note laid across the meadow. The two dogs circled up to him. The dogs watched the sheep and goats, then watched him. They were diligent shepherds. They felt shame and did not want to look at him, though the loss was not their fault. It was the goats. Nothing could be done with them.

He left one dog, the male, with the sheep and started down toward the mouth of the canyon, tying his blanket, then his shirt, around his waist and whistling off the other dog to come along.

The old man loped across a last sloping foothill at the mouth of the canyon. The dog ranged ahead to the side, trotting with fastidious economy. A last cedar, stunted by alkali from the dry lake, floated and surged along his field of vision and was gone.

There was no living thing on the dry lake, not even alkali grass. There was not even the finest stone. The bed of the the dry lake was salt, hard, white desert, crusted from the rain season. The salt whispered, sifting from the man's feet, pattering all about the dog's feet in the stillness.

The sun was most gone, sliding away. Still they ran, floating across the dry lake.

And on the dry lake, turquoise—magenta islands lanced up, drifting on a mirage of flat blue fire that flowed with each day's sun and ebbed into each night.



