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ART - A PERSONAL ANALYSIS

by

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STATEMENT OF INTENT

In writing this paper, I will deal mainly with the chronological development of the content and visual aesthetics in my art. I will describe and discuss the technological aspects of this art only when necessary, as many previous graduate students have dealt with the bulk of the media involved quite thoroughly.

These developments that I will discuss span most specifically the years following undergraduate school, 1965, to the present, with a brief description of earlier ideas and values.

The significance of this paper lies in the attempt to clarify the procedures an artist transcends in arriving at particular aesthetic levels.
FORMATIVE DEVELOPMENT

At an early age I found it expedient for a number of reasons and purposes to draw well. Not only did it provide a certain individualism for me in my family unit but it also produced admiration from peers and teachers.

The reception of praise is extremely directive as well as stimulating in nature. It was because of my early experiences in art that I chose the profession.

I remember having the "best" vegetable man in the first grade, the "nicest" turkey in the fifth grade Thanksgiving contest, and selling portraits of Walt Disney's Big Red and the Triple Crown winning racehorse, Citation, for fifty cents each in the sixth grade.

I was fairly certain that art was the profession that I would seek by this time, as I had a great aspiration to paint like Charles M. Russell and Frederick Remington.

While in high school and art editor for the school paper and yearbook, I produced many conservative illustrations and designs. I was convinced that the most perfect art was a landscape painting with trees, a mountain and a lake. (illustration number one)

The surprising thing is that when I began painting, I did not attempt a landscape, but instead Cezanne's "Les Joueurs De Cortes" or card players. This is
No. 1
Favorite Art

significant because it broke with my rigid concept of the landscape as supreme in art. Another interesting fact is that the subject was genre in nature to me, if not to Cezanne, and interesting because of its dealing with life activities of people.

With this experience freshly in mind, I entered college. I still possessed an extremely conservative concept of art and was completely unaware of the fact that there were "mad men" making paintings and sculpture that didn't look recognizable to anything that I had experienced.

As a conservative, I learned as much about technique as I could at that time and began very consciously a development of social comment. I did paint landscapes,
but found most of my pleasure in the representation of specific types of people. Even when a landscape was painted, I would incorporate tale-telling domestic quarters of less obvious images of man's presence, i.e., fences, corralled animals, and tree stumps.

The most direction indicative work that I did at this time was the "Lot Casters" and "Cliff". (Illustrations number two and three)
These works, illustrations two and three are heavy in personal significance. "The Lot Casters" shows a group of "lower" class individuals casting lots for some unseen prize in a dimly lit room. "Cliff" is a personal portrait of a friend, crippled by polio and confined to a wheel chair, who struggles even today to make his own way. Even with these seemingly admirable qualities, I feel that I have captured another aspect of a person in this condition and situation, one of irritability, suspicion, and undesired dependency.

Both of these paintings were attempts to communicate with people outside art as a field of study. They were also points in a continual, pre-meditated plan to understand before moving into a new phase of art. That is to say that by this time, I was aware of "new" styles and techniques but was not ready to duplicate forms or images of these seemingly higher aesthetics without the full understanding of those with which I was dealing.

As a conservative undergraduate, I was influenced greatly by a good artist-teacher, Ben Steele. The painting of the "Lot Casters" is most representative of this influence.

As was pointed out to me at that time, a strong prospective artist would be influenced, as everyone is, but would eventually develop a personal sytle. The painting, "Cliff" is characteristic of this desire for individual style.
For a period of two years following graduation, I worked on abstract, non-objective painting and sculpture in an attempt to unveil myself. I found that it was not the objectivity or lack of it that was my problem, but instead, the manner in which I handled my imagery.

I found that working with the non-objective abstract shapes in a painting, I was endlessly seeing things. This, I felt, was a detriment because of my desire to understand the abstract, and I kept destroying these figures because they wanted to become objective.

Realizing that I was more effective with objectivity than non-objectivity, I began painting large flat areas as in the non-objective paintings, coupled with objective but flat figures. This major break-through gave rise to "In God We Trust", "Otto", "The Assassins", "Summer School Registration", and "Brothers Were". All of these paintings have the commonality of flat, unmottled shapes, optical color, and literal content. They were very objective in nature and quite specific. (illustrations number four, five, six, seven, and eight)
No. 4
In God We Trust

No. 5
Otto

No. 6
The Assassins
No. 7
Summer-School Registration

No. 8
Brothers Were
BENEFITS OF A FURTHER UNDERSTANDING

I felt that it was time to begin the masters program because I had my own style and was ready to go. I loved large flat areas and all that beautiful color that I was then using. I felt that this was a proper direction for me because it was a synthesis of my knowledge and ability and was laden with information.

A further understanding helped me realize the faults of isolation were the over-confidence of development, the belief in an unsound "style", and provincial representation of imagery.

The pendulum continued its swing, first from an extremely literal, objective imagery to a completely non-objective imagery, back to a synthesis of literal and non-objective imagery in the flat paintings and further. Further to the over-literal, less non-objective story requiring, paintings of my first two quarters of graduate school.

"American Portrait", the first in a series of graduate paintings was probably the most successful. (illustration number nine) It deals with the American scene in its chaotic condition. The symbols of nationalism are present, but not in a flattering way. Mount Rushmore, a national symbol to be sure, lacks the solidarity of the real mountain, the motivating dollar bill floats above the monument incorporating George Washington as its central
figure, the Statue of Liberty has not only fallen, but has broken in many places depicting a factionalized republic, John Carlos raises his black hand in a universal symbol of repression and racial discrimination, and the three faceless politicians vow with outstretched arms that they will unite us again and stop the war in Southeast Asia.

With so much content and, in my mind, so successful a manner of representation, it seemed logical that I continue in this vein. Little did I know or understand
that there are pitfalls in any direction and one is likely to fall into them if a straight line is pursued. I fell several times, the most obvious being "Earl Duran".

This painting actually does require a story if one is to get the "proper" meaning. The symbols of the dead elk hanging in a cooling position, the dead cow, or the dead men give no clarity to the total. The bearded Duran, with the exception of the rifle, could be any bearded fellow. The entire painting is an accomplishment only in size. (illustration number ten)
Another painting done at this time requires a story or at least knowledge of the motivating situation. "In Cold Blood" (illustration number eleven), represents the killing of the Clutter family as written by Truman Capote. The important aspect of this painting is the eventual change it forced upon my work because of its gruesome content and the manner in which it was visualized.

It was at this time that I decided to continue a social content in my art but with an attempt to make the statement as aesthetically pleasing as possible with a less rigid literal content.
I began experimenting in printmaking and found that it was a fresh, and to me, new approach. It was at this point that the flat qualities of my previous painting method became quite unappealing to me. I began appreciating once again, the beauty of value-change and modeling in an image. The flat areas of earlier works were still used in the prints but in a method of subject enhancement. In the print, "Composition for Military Science", (illustration number twelve), it is observable that literal content is still present, but the large, flat, colored shapes have disappeared with the exception of the negative white area which enhances the figure and provides a workable figure-ground relationship.

The "Composition for Law and Order" (illustration number thirteen) is another example of a figure planted in a broad expanse of white. The "Study for the Effects of War" (illustration number fourteen) possesses many of the undesirable qualities of "In Cold Blood" but in a more successful manner. The decorative aspects of the embossed pattern around the collograph and its particular place in a field of white assist in this more successful piece.

"The Dodge Girl", (illustration number fifteen) a statement concerning the importance of sex in our society, is an attempt to bring my painting closer to the aesthetics of printmaking. In this context, I do not feel that I was successful, but in the context of making a statement in a simple, appealing manner, I believe I was. The painting,
No. 12
Composition For Military Science
done in a technique I refer to as commercial realism, pictures the company prostitute in what can be a seductive stimulating position or an extremely real, uninviting pose. At any rate, the torso, arms, forelegs, and feet are visible as chrome metal exposed by the removal of the sensual-inspired garments laying on the tall, comfortable grass blanket beneath the Dodge convertible. Whether one chooses to like the manner in which I have "exposed" the salesgirl or dislike it for what I have "done" to her is not my concern. The important thing is that the sexual motivation in the purchase of an automobile be understood.
No. 14
Study For The Effects Of War
It was in this light that I have increasingly moved to an attempt at a new aesthetic. I am producing images that have content, less literal in many cases than before, that is socially significant in my opinion and at the same time are not demanding of one single interpretation. That is to say that I use those images that I feel are significant to the changes I feel necessary to make this a better place to live and at the same time possess more than one possible interpretation.

The mural, "Family of Man", (illustration number sixteen) at Christ the King Church is of this better place,
with all sorts of people living together in a fantastic landscape. There are many possible interpretations within the confines of one specific meaning.

"The Peacemaker" and "Here She Comes, Miss America" (illustrations number seventeen and eighteen) are the last two done in what I refer to as a changing phase. They are continuous of the "Composition for Military Science" and "Composition for Law and Order" but are more humorous and joyful in nature. They are cut-out collographs basically, but they indicate a more joyful approach to what is to me, a serious social problem. By using the collograph in addition to the color use in the balls being juggled by the "Peacemaker", I am able to set up a combination of interesting shape and color contrast.

It was this technique, one of placing desired color on a plate and blending them together with a brayer, as illustrated below, that opened a door to a new, exciting method of image reproduction.
(The desired ink is placed on the rolling surface a short distance apart, approximately 1" to 2". The brayer is rolled in one direction over the plate so that upon completion of the first run, 3 rings of color (red, white, blue) are evident on the brayer. The brayer is then moved slightly to the right or left and rolled again in the same direction. As this process is continued, the colors will gently blend together giving a red to pink to white to light blue to blue variation on the roller. The ink is then transferred to the printing plate rolling the brayer in one direction only.

I have found that white oil paint with the addition of
a small quantity of stand oil works much better than white oil base block printing ink because it maintains a similar consistancy with the colored inks and a like drying time.

In addition to the gradation roll-up technique, I am thankful for the invention of masonite, a durable, smooth material, the jigsaw, and photo-serigraph. It would have been impossible for me to achieve the detail and precision in my prints without this material, equipment, and technique.

As previously stated, the development of the cut-out collograph coupled with the roll-up color plate opened new aesthetic directions for me. I found that these parts, made from a single piece of masonite and sawed apart by the jigsaw, could produce many desired affects which could at times be enhanced by the addition of photo-serigraph.

For ease in printing and exactness in placement of the pieces it is important to have a pre-determined idea so that change is not necessary. It is difficult to adjust to additions or corrections with good precision after the initial cutting of the shapes is done.

The dangers or less interesting aspects of this combination of methods are that the roll-up and photo-serigraph can be overdone and become uninteresting.

The collograph is important to my prints because of the tremendous flexibility concerning shape, color, content, texture, and other visual qualities that it does
possess. The photo-serigraph as well as the other methods of serigraph, block-out and stencil, are equally important because of the color, shape, and textural possibilities it affords me in addition to imagery.

Although the roll-up has a possibly "tricky" appearance, I find at this point that it serves equally with the collograph and photo-serigraph as an enhancement technique. The embossed affect is also pleasing and enhancing if used properly, which, as in all art, depends on the total desired affects.

As previously mentioned, it is beneficial to have a good concept of what the print will look like before the masonite is cut, but to hold to this rigidly is critical. The illustrations that follow indicate those prints that did not require change and those that did. The explanation of change with each print is basically a formal discussion of obvious compositional knowledge for most graduate students in art. However, it is interesting to witness the changes that occur in some plates before a final edition is run.

I will not deliberate as to the meaning of these prints as I believe they are strong enough and the images are obvious enough to visually explain themselves. This is not a rationalization, but an attempt to permit the viewer much more freedom in which to function in viewing my prints.
"Montana Landscape" is a combination of collograph, roll-up, and photo-serigraph techniques. This is one print that was almost entirely pre-conceived before the cutting of the plate. As comparisons of the proofs will show (illustrations number twenty and twenty-one) the landscape did need definition which was added as well as a more textural quality in the foreground and lower corners. An attempt to return to the "decorative" landscape is evident in the composition. The Boeing 727 was a most happy afterthought as was the final gradation producing a cylindrical effect beyond the field of sky and mountains.
Many times the qualities of the plate are more desirable than the prints themselves.

"Miss Liberty" is the product of the salvation of an unworkable collographic plate in conjunction with the roll-up and serigraph techniques. The available plate and proofs (illustrations number twenty-four, twenty-five, and twenty-six) give evidence to the quantity of changes.
I went through in order to arrive at the print (illustration twenty-seven). It started as an Indian figure, changed to General Washington with a red sweatshirt, and finally arrived as the Statue of Liberty with a bare breast. The breast, visible torso, and head and crown were added after the first head and torso were eliminated.

"America's Mother Nature" is also a pre-conceived idea. The plate (illustration number twenty-eight) indicates several pieces which were later eliminated for ease in printing and simplification. The proofs (illustration numbers twenty-nine and thirty) show the process of elimination.
and slight change needed for the finished print (illustration number thirty-one).

The final presentation is exciting after I worked so many hours in the process. The embossed area around the first proof in a rather unsatisfactory state in the end result. A slight change was cut from the side of the character. The second proof was accomplished with the use of light fixtures. All of these affects are visible in the finished print (illustration number thirty-one).

"Wonderland", a most pleasing print, is the culmination of all the other finished works. The plate (illustration number thirty-two) shows only the main image involved in the print and not the previous cloud, floral, or twisted candy-like leg forms. The proofs (illustrations number Thirty three, four, and five) show my first, second,
and third attempts at solving the problems. This print took more time but seems more spontaneous than the others. The final presentation is exciting after I worked so many hours in an attempt to rectify the situation. The embossed area around the central image was first done in a rather careless manner without much thought given to the end result. A later attempt, after seeing that it could work produced a much more pleasing result. This was cut from masonite and placed around the central figure. The second embossed areas at top and bottom were accomplished with the use of the plastic light covers in the fluorescent light fixtures. All of these affects are visible in the finished print. (illustration number thirty-six)

The final print, still un-resolved, is "going for a Ride?". The three proofs (illustrations thirty-seven, eight, and nine) show the continual cutting and adding done to begin to arrive at a solution. The plate (illustration number forty) shows the final stage of the work
No. 32
Wonderland
Inked Plate

No. 33
Wonderland
Proof
No. 36
Wonderland
No. 37
Going For A Ride?
Proof
No. 38
Going For A Ride?
Proof
No. 39
Going For A Ride?
Proof
at this point.

All of the prints that I have resolved during this past year have, in the beginning, had a specific meaning. I have been able to change the best parts for the sake of the print and many times this has reduced the specific to a general interpretation permitting freer viewing of the work.

I have not stated the precise position of my aesthetics at this point as I am not positive as to its place.
on my ultimate aesthetic scale. I have, however, explained both verbally and visually the changes that I, as one artist have gone through in attempting to put images into a device for visual communication. In addition, the work that I have done here will, hopefully, help those interested in realizing some of what goes into a serious work of art.

Technique is important because the idea must be visualized. Secondly, the technique, if not known, will follow if the idea demands it. Thirdly, the imagination is the strongest limiting factor in my future work.

ADDITIONAL WORKS

No. 41
Going To Meat