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The University of Montana

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ED IO NON SO CHI VA E CHI RESTA
(AND I DON'T KNOW WHO GOES AND WHO STAYS)

by

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B.A., Portland State University, 1982

A Professional Paper Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the
Degree of Master of Arts

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

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The focus of this paper is to examine my development as an artist while at the University of Montana as represented by my thesis exhibit, "Ed io non so chi va e chi resta (And I don't know who goes and who stays.)." This examination will cover the influences on my art, the thesis concept of the series, the formal concerns and some technical aspects of lithography.

My bibliography is an abbreviated listing of my readings over the last two years which have influenced my philosophical thoughts and formal understanding about art. At the end of this paper, reproductions (in chronological order) of the pieces in the show are located for visual reference.

For a more complete understanding of an artist's work the viewer should have some knowledge about the influences upon and the preferences of that artist. These philosophical concerns and influences play a valuable role in the growth of an artist.

My work over the last two years has been influenced by Edward Hopper and Giorgio deChirico. These two are the artists whom I have studied the most and whose art I find the most enjoyable and meaningful. What I find most attractive about their art is the contemplative aspect of melancholia, the structure and orderliness, and the use of light to define objects and as an object itself.

A common quality among deChirico and Hopper is a sense of mystery in their work, with Hopper being more subtle. The

sense of mystery is a quality associated with metaphysical art. There are other metaphysical aspects to Hopper's work such as the suggestion of an alternate reality and an interest in ordinary objects. While I work in the realist tradition of Hopper, I feel a certain kinship with the metaphysical concepts of Carlo Carra and deChirico.

Both Hopper and deChirico created the sensations of stillness, silence and timelessness in their works. With Hopper the general critical assessment has been to label his work as being lonely or alienated and with deChirico, because of his writings, his works are said to express melancholia. I find them also to be reflective through their silence and stillness, allowing the viewer to transpose his emotions into the work.

The strength and structure of the compositions of these two artists are other features of their work that I am drawn to. Order based upon simple mathematics and geometry is a concern and preference of mine as far back as I can remember. During my undergraduate studies, the art of such artists as Edgar Degas and James Whistler attracted me. All four artists never lost their concern with composition for effect's sake. Even in Whistler's Nocturnes he did not forsake design for color as some of his Impressionist contemporaries did.

Long before I became interested in art as a career, my interests were in mathematics and sciences. I have no doubts that my interests in the measurable, the calculable and the order found in mathematics has transferred into my art.

All four artists work in a realist manner even though

Degas and Whistler are commonly associated with Impressionism and deChirico with metaphysics. Certainly deChirico's paintings are not real in the perceptual sense. But each object is recognizable and its placement is clear. This is what I mean by realism, recognizability of the object, not the "social realism" of Courbet. I find myself looking for an identifiable object when looking at abstracted imagery. This concern with the recognizable is part of my desire for a sense of order and measure as well as a personal aesthetic preference.

Definition of objects through light is a strong element in the works of Hopper and deChirico. Rarely are objects obscured because of shadows. Each object receives enough light to define its form. With both artists, light and shadows create shapes, giving light a sense of solidity and presence.

In contrast to the strong use of light in Hopper and deChirico are the subtleties of values and colors in Whistler's Arrangements in Greys and Symphonies in White. The way that Whistler balanced the subtleties of values and color against the geometrically-based composition is his strength. The merging of formalist compositional concerns with sensitive handling raises his works above being merely good designs or delicate renderings.

My undergraduate studies at Portland State University were concentrated in drawing. The curriculum at PSU emphasized skill development, and the professor with whom I chose to work the most had a neo-academic approach. I studied under several instructors, and I would consider my experience to have been eclectic. My art developed along the realist lines of Degas

and Whistler, and the pencil became my favorite tool because of its versatility and controllability. During my senior year, I began printmaking as a means of producing multiple images of my drawings.

Making multiple images interests me because of the accessibility of the general public and for private enjoyment. The single image has limited access to individuals unless it appears in a public space. The socially shared experience of a public display alters the individual's experience unless he happens into the space while there are a few or no other people around. Quite often, someone will comment on going back to see a show when no one else is there so that he can "really see the show." The gallery-type setting causes a completely different reaction from the responses evoked by art within a personal living space. The more private settings of the home or office space are the desired resting places for my work.

Of the various print media, I have found lithography the best suited in capturing the feel of a pencil drawing. By manipulating the litho crayon on the stone, I can create the feel of a pencil drawing with its subtle value changes.

The beginning of this series was inspired by scenes created by a person as he enters a room, hangs up a jacket and leaves a coffee cup on a table. An aspect of the arrangement of common objects is the sensation or suggestion of the presence/absence of the person who created the arrangements. Through the use of the ordinary scenes, I chose to explore the feeling of absence/presence of people.

For the title of my thesis exhibit I chose "Ed to non so chi va e chi resta (And I don't know who goes and who stays.)." This is the last line of the poem, "La Casa Dei Doganieri" (pages 11&12) by Eugino Montale. Not knowing who goes and who stays captures the essence of the show. I want the viewer to contemplate who has left the jacket or who may be behind the window, raising the possibility of visitation by that person.

By keeping the person off-stage and limiting the information within the print, I imply a narrative. I want the viewer to contemplate the scene and create his own story. To help the viewer with his contemplation, I use a quiet scene. The silence allows the viewer to free his thoughts and transpose his emotions into the print.

Silence in the plastic arts results from the lack of movement; for without movement no sound is inferred according to Dr. Jean Gillies in her article, "The Timeless Space of Edward Hopper," (Art Journal, Summer 1972, pp. 404-12). Movement exists in time and space, and only space can be expressed in the plastic arts. The manner in which space is represented affects the nature of the experience of time and sound. Space is represented by the use of linear perspective and light.

I add to Dr. Gillies's description of the limitation of movement and sound to include the placement of objects within the composition. By carefully arranging objects on a grid and fixing them in space, the artist establishes the sensation that the objects cannot move as well as limiting the speed of eye

movement of the viewer. The Death of Socrates by Jacque Louis David shows how silence, time and movement can be limited in a painting which uses deep space.

I created a scene of limited depth by avoiding linear perspective and by drawing all the objects with the same clarity. When objects in the background and foreground are seen in equal focus, space is condensed; those objects known to be farther away appear to be on the same plane as those in the foreground.

I used mainly an interior scene for the first part of my studies and remained inside until the print "Alicia." I was curious to discover if I could capture the feeling presence/absence while including the figure. I was not completely satisfied with the mood of the print and received discouraging comments about using the figure. I have experimented with the figure since that print of February, 1984, but not to my satisfaction. The inclusion of the figure into my theme seems to be a natural expansion of subject matter. I have included "Alicia" in the exhibit as an example of a direction that I want to take my work.

The major contribution of "Alicia" was to move my scenes outdoors. As people often overlook an arrangement on a table-top, they fail to notice designs along rooflines.

I decided to use the focusing-in approach of the interior prints, creating a visually consistent series. The focusing-in along with the clarity of the individual objects suggested long and strong observation. This feeling of concentration

helped with the reflective and contemplative mood. To assist with suggesting a presence, I used a window which can be seen into, establishing the possibility for visitation. By opening a window or pulling back a shade, I reinforce the suggestion of a presence.

The move to the exterior scene affected the use of light in my work. "BHSF" and "L'Orizzonte" began my move to a stronger light source. Light began to take on a presence in itself. This helped with the suggestion of presence in the exterior scenes and heightened that feeling in the interior scenes. "Amici" and "Cena" were the first two interior scenes after "L'Orizzonte."

While using a more forceful light, I did not want to lose subtle value changes. The balancing of strong compositional elements, a clear light and subtle values within a casual scene along with the implied narrative elevate these prints above the illustrational.

Besides exploring the interior settings for these prints, I have experimented with scale, format size and how many objects where need in the scene. The smaller format of 7"x10" to 8"x12" seemed best suited for the interior scenes unless that scene is expanded as with "Ristoraute." Exterior architecture lends itself to a larger format (10.5"x15") more easily than the interior scenes while maintaining an intimate feel.

I decided to use handcoloring as a means of enhancing the prints. Compositionally, a small shape with color can have as much visual weight as a larger black and white shape. Yet I did not want to bombard the viewer with too much color and

action, so I restricted the color to key elements and subdued hues.

Blue is the dominant color. The choice of blue was an arbitrary decision for the first print, "Innsbruck Interior." The jacket was blue. Fortuitously, the color blue is associated with contemplation and reflective thought. After blue, the second most-used color was white. I had decided early in the series to use grey paper because of the subtleties of black on grey, but occasionally the print was too subdued. By adding white, I increased the value range slightly and create a flash of light. These flashes of light and color were meant to attract the attention of the viewer but not to overwhelm him with color.

Because of selected hand coloring, the repetition of objects and the use of windows, there is a suggestion of symbolism in the prints. Certainly, some of the objects have symbolic meaning in the art historical context such as the coffee hottle (vessel) could be symbolic of women. Several of these prints have specific symbolic meaning for me, but I do not want to impose my meanings and stories upon the viewer. I want the viewer to be able to create his own stories about the scenes. These prints are meant to be reflective and suggestive, not illustrative.

I decided to use watercolors as my means of introducing colors into the prints because of the time involved in making a multi-run print. The technical problems of registration are easy to handle, but very time consuming. The time involved with

in doing several runs would have limited my exploration of the subject matter.

The only technical problem that I had with the lithographic process was with the processing of aluminum plates. I experimented with plate lithography because the plate offers the chance to work larger (up to 30"x42") than on the few stones at the University of Montana. "JAMW" is the only plate lithograph in the show. After working with six plates, I feel confident of my ability to process the plate, but the smooth and mechanical texture of the plate gives the print a different feel than the organic irregular texture of the stone. If given a choice, I would continue to use the stone.

As I have worked on my thesis project, I have done work of contrasting and complementary natures in a variety of media. I experimented in the more gestural aspects of lithography, etching and collagraphy to increase my knowledge of printmaking and to pursue interests outside of my thesis project. The adaptation and synthesis of these experiences with my thesis project have assisted with the development of the pieces as well as broadening my artistic world.

My concerns with subtleties of values balanced against strong geometric compositions will continue as well as my preferences for quiet suggestive scenes. My work will continue to reflect these interests in the future.

I do not consider this thesis show to be an end result. I have just begun to explore the possibilities of my thesis idea. The inclusion of the figure has yet to be resolved to

my satisfaction. The variety of interior and exterior scenes is endless.

I am beginning to understand better the sensation of the suggestion of a presence and the formal considerations in creating that feeling. I am not certain of where this direction may lead me, but it is a subject which continues to interest me and offers numerous possibilities.

LA CASA DEI DOGANIERI

Tu non ricordi la casa dei doganieri
sul rialzo a strompiombo sulla scogliera:
desolata t'attende dalla sera
in cui v'entró lo sciame dei tuoi pensieri
e vi sostó irrequieto.

Libeccio sferza da anni le vecchie mura
e il suono del tuo riso non è piú lieto:
la bussola va impazzita all 'avventura
e il calolo dei dadi piú non torna.
Tu non ricordi; altro tempo frastorna
la tua memoria; un fil s'addipana.

Ne tengo ancora un capo; ma s'allontana
la casa e in cima al tetto la bonderuola
affumicata gira senza pietá.
Ne tengo un capo; ma tu resti sola
ne qui respiri nell'oscuritá.

Oh l'orizzonte in fuga, dove s'accende
rara la luce della petroliera!
Il varco e qui? (Ripullala il fragente
ancora sulla balza che soscende. . .)
Tu non ricordi la casa di questa
mia sera. Ed io non so chi va e chi resta.

Eurino Montale

THE SHOREWATCHER'S HOUSE

You don't remember the shorewatcher's house
above the rock-reef, sheer, upon the height:
waiting desolately for you from the evening
in which entered us, the swarm of your thoughts
and restlessly paused.

The southwest wind lashed the old walls for years
and your laughter is no longer merry:
the compass goes wildly to the adventure
and the score of the dice add up no longer.
You don't remember; another time disturbs
your memory; a thread winds itself.

I still hold an end of it; but the house recedes
and on the rooftop the weathervane
spins relentlessly.
I hold an end of it, but you stay alone
nor breath here in obscurity.

The horizon in flight, where rarely appears
the light of the oil tankers!
Is the passage here? (Cleansing again the
breaker on the cliff that steeply descends. . .)
You don't remember the house of this
my evening. And I don't know who goes and
who stays.

Translation:
Dr. Frank Vecchio
and Don Daigle

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