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ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
The College of Fine and Applied Arts
in Candidacy for the Degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

DIVERSE REALITIES

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PREFACE

In this thesis project, I employed printmaking media to explore the evolution and extension of drawing style in my work. I wanted to use a wide variety of drawn marks to evolve a series of images which would extend reality into imagination or abstraction. "Drawn mark" was defined in the widest possible sense.

Artists filter and define reality in visual statements. The language is visual, as the language of fiction is verbal and the language of music is auditory. What makes each artist's work unique is his use of visual language--his shaping of it to his own ends.

As a springboard for examining the development of my own visual language, I researched the development of visual language in children.

I am thankful for the help and fine teaching of Phil Bornarth, David Dickinson and Judd Williams, the generous support of my parents, and the love and cooperation of my husband and children. Without these diverse realities, this thesis project would not have been possible.

I. IDEAS

Art has a tradition, but it is a visual heritage. The artist's language is the memory from sight. Art is made from dreams and visions and things not known and least of all from things that can be said. It comes from the inside of who you are, when you face yourself. It is an inner declaration of purpose.¹

David Smith

¹David Smith, David Smith by David Smith, ed. Cleve Gray (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), p. 137.

I used to think that art was made by a direct transcription of an idea from the mind to the visible surface. I was frustrated by my inability to exactly transfer my idea to paper. At that point I was more closely tied to verbal images. I could say how I wanted work to look, but the visual manifestation did not satisfy me.

Often students say "I didn't have a good idea for this project, that's why it didn't work out." Each new drawing or print seems to need a new idea, when in fact all that is needed is one idea which will support a series of experiments. The idea is "no more than the motivation, then process takes over."² It is the working process which tests the idea, magnifies it, makes it visible and alters it. Eventually, the same process leads to the next idea.

Process is defined as "a specific, continuous action, operation, or series of changes."³ By process, I mean the way an idea changes as it is drawn and re-drawn and transformed by various media.

What is needed to engage in artistic process is to re-learn visual language. This is a language of gestalts and

²Comment from critique with Judd Williams, January 1985.

³Jess Stein, ed., The Random House College Dictionary (New York: Random House, 1975), p. 1055.

images, not one of words and phrases. "In childhood we have been raped by word pictures. We must revolt against all word authority. Our only language is vision."⁴ Word pictures are "traps which lure laymen into cliché thinking."⁵

The ease with which we accept verbal images over visual ones is reinforced by schools, which emphasize verbal systems. The type of thinking required for visual language development is rarely taught.

Research into brain functioning suggests that verbal, analytical skills are controlled by the left hemisphere of the brain while holistic, gestalt-involved tasks are handled by the right hemisphere.⁶ This would mean that visual language would be a right-hemisphere function, separate from verbal language. Although these ideas are still controversial, I find that for me analytical, verbal functioning and visual, intuitive functioning conflict.

As I have strengthened my visual mode, my verbal mode has changed. It is easier for me to visualize than to verbalize. When I am working, I find that I use both intuitive and analytical modes of thinking, but not simultaneously. The importance of the intuitive to production seems greater. The analytical function, criticism, is needed after production to

⁴Smith, p. 137.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Linda Verlee Williams, Teaching for the Two Sided Mind (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1985), pp. 14-38.

evaluate the work. If evaluation happens too soon in the working process, it shuts off the flow of images and marks.

Seeing is dynamic. To a visually attuned person, the world appears constantly different. The search for ideas begins in seeing and becomes a search for personal visual preferences. "Idea" needs to be something observed or imagined, not a word picture, but a visual notion. A visual world exists which can only be seen or envisioned, like the auditory world of sound and music which can only be heard. The visual experience can be described, discussed, reinterpreted or remembered through art.

You have experiences that are profound, but you don't act in the right way, and they seem unresolved. The great thing about art is that when you re-experience⁷ something you have the chance to resolve it

⁷Douglas C. McGill, "Eric Fischl," New York Times, 2 March 1986, sec. 2, p. 1.

II. DEVELOPMENT

Oh that I were where I would be,
Then I would be where I am not,
But where I am there I must be,
And where I would be I can not.

Old rhyme

As children we were once all artists together.⁸

⁸Miriam Lindstrom, Children's Art (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), p. 2.

Erik Erikson, in Childhood and Society, defines a progression of developmental tasks which apply throughout life. For each task there is a positive and a negative resolution. Erikson feels that emotional progress is possible only if a developmental task is mastered, but if the negative state exists, no further progress can be made.⁹

Development in any area depends on previous experience. This is how learning takes place. I wanted to become familiar with the stages of drawing development to increase my understanding of the drawing process. Children's drawing particularly fascinates me, as I have watched my own children learn to express their visual ideas.

Children do not draw because they are creating consciously. They are drawing to explore, to understand, to symbolize. It is the excitement of exploration that makes children's drawing interesting. The images are of secondary importance.

All children begin to draw by scribbling. They then use their scribbled marks to form shapes. There is much debate about why children draw, what purpose it serves for them, and what their drawings mean. Nonetheless, most humans draw when

⁹Erik H. Erikson, Childhood and Society, 2nd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1963), pp. 247-74.

they are young, creating drawings that are exciting and visually pleasing. Most cease drawing before they are adult.

The assurance, expressiveness and spontaneity of children's drawing has often been compared to the drawing of artists. Artists themselves have noted this link. Saul Steinberg called his drawing "a way of writing from my illiterate days"¹⁰ and Picasso commented "It has taken me a whole lifetime to learn to draw like children."¹¹

The fact that children's drawings from all over the world appear to use the same forms seems to support a theory of universal drawing development. Even children who have never drawn, when given materials, tend to create similar shapes. "What children do . . . is play with form and let the process take them where it will."¹²

These universal stages of drawing development relate to developmental progress as a whole. Howard Gardner offers this overall progression for drawing concerns in children.¹³

¹⁰Howard Gardner, Artful Scribbles: The Significance of Children's Drawing (New York: Basic Books, 1980), p. 266.

¹¹Gardner, p. 8.

¹²Alexander Alland, Jr., Playing with Form: Children Draw in Six Cultures (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 1.

¹³Gardner, p. 14.

<u>Age</u>	<u>Developmental Task</u>
scribbler	learning tool use
toddler	learning basic categories, object classes
pre-school	use of symbolic play, imagination
school child	use of dogged realism importance of peer pressure rejection of deviation
adolescent	interest in pure design rendering concentration on human figure rejection of works that do not meet standards

Lowenfeld describes the stages in a much more direct way:¹⁴

<u>Age</u>	<u>Stage of Drawing Development</u>
to 4 years	scribbling
4 - 6 years	pre-schematic
7 - 9 years	schematic
9 - 11 years	realistic
11 - 13 years	pseudo-realistic

Miriam Lindstrom gives a detailed account of children's drawing interests at various ages.¹⁵

¹⁴Rhoda Kellogg, Analyzing Children's Art (Palo Alto: Mayfield Publishing, 1970), p. 148.

¹⁵Lindstrom, pp. 18-64.

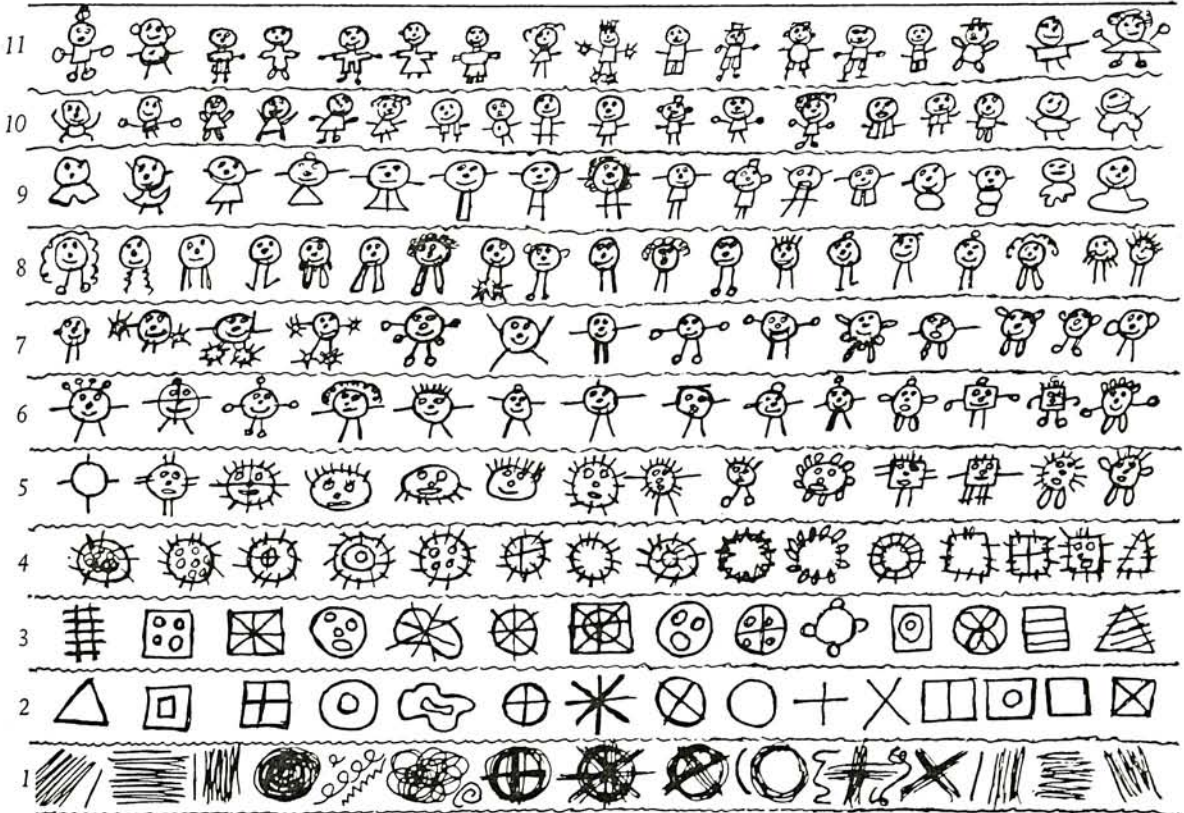
<u>Age</u>	<u>Characteristics of Drawing</u>
2 - 5 years	scribble and chance forms controlled marks basic forms first schematic formula
4 - 6 years	use of repertory for developing formula
5 - 8 years	whatever can be thought of can be pictured
7 - 10 years	development of possibilities within the schematic mode
8 - 12 years	dissatisfaction with limitation of schematic mode drawing from observation juvenile idealism boy/girl differences perspective concerns aesthetic interest at low ebb drawing from memory contrasts with drawing from observation

The above diagram shows most clearly how stages of drawing development are built on previous experience as well as age-typical characteristics. The progression from stage to stage is clear.

Rhoda Kellogg, who has worked extensively with young children's drawings, has systematized the forms they contain and has demonstrated how these basic forms become more complex and varied. She, too, believes that drawing development in the pre-school child is a natural part of total development.

In Kellogg's system, the marks that children make are categorized. There are twenty basic scribbles which lead to six "diagrams." These are $+$, \square , \bigcirc , \triangle , \heartsuit , and \times . "Combines" are the joining of two of these shapes and

"aggregates" are the joining of three or more. The following chart¹⁶ demonstrates how these simple forms build up to form more complex ones.



Going from bottom to top, these Gestalts represent the probable evolution of Humans from earlier scribbling. The Basic Scribbles at the bottom lead to (2) Diagrams and Combines; (3) Aggregates; (4) Suns; (5) Sun faces and figures; (6) Humans with head-top markings and with arms attached to the head; (7) Humans without head-top markings; (8) armless Humans; (9) Humans with varied torsos; (10) Humans with arms attached to the torso; and (11) relatively complete Human images (author's sketches)

Not all of these evolutionary steps may appear in the work of every child. Each drawing made by the child over a three-year period would be needed to determine the point. However, the steps apply well to large quantities of work by many children. Similar steps apply to the evolution of other pictorial items

Source: Kellogg, p. 109.

¹⁶Kellogg, p. 109.

This shows the way that a repertoire of marks is built up and then used as graphic language. Kellogg feels that children's art is aesthetically motivated and should not be used to test children's ideas of reality or their emotional state. "Art is and should be the free use of lines for gestalt-making."¹⁷

Children's drawing loses a lot of its spontaneity at the same time as a whole new group of developmental concerns are becoming important. Concern with peer group, conformity and rules, and realism cause the expressiveness and assurance to be replaced by tentativeness and adherence to perceived rules.

As children arrive at adolescence, they reach an age when they cannot produce drawings that meet their own high standards. Many cease drawing. For some, cartooning "represents a compromise between a desire to draw really well . . . and the anxiety lest they fail to render something in a convincing manner."¹⁸ This is a point when technical instruction can facilitate the drawing process.

Initially, people teach themselves to draw as they are involved in mark-making in the pre-school years. As they enter school, their self-education is cut off by the needs of the school and by their own developmental tasks which vary from the aesthetic needs of drawing.

¹⁷Kellogg, p. 143.

¹⁸Gardner, p. 192.

I remember clearly the point at which I stopped drawing. I remember the frustration at my lack of technical ability. I sought out other media, such as cut paper and collage, which did not make such demands. By constructing this developmental schema, I was able to see the point in the developmental progression where I had stopped and I made a conscious effort to go back and work through that stage.

When I was in elementary school, the "artists" were the ones who could draw things the way they looked, or the way the teacher wanted them to look. This left the rest of us unconfident in our own particular vision of the world. It would not have occurred to us to challenge the commonly-held knowledge that artists had to draw things the way they looked. We certainly were not encouraged to continue our own drawing experiments.

Consequently, my view of drawing throughout my school years was very narrow. Drawing is much more than the ability to accurately represent reality with marks. In 1983, after two years of study at RIT, I wrote the following:

Drawing - All of the Definitions

Rendering - photographic realism
attempt to reproduce image of object
exactly
tonal technique

Contour - following edges and contours with line

Gesture - suggestion of movement
conformation of line describes shape

Drawing - All of the Definitions (con't.)

Automatic - spontaneous arrangement of lines/tones
into pleasing composition

Tonal - suggests objects using shading

Drawing - Uses and Purposes

- method of studying form
- recording process
- method of creating illusion of three-dimensional
dimensionality on a flat surface
- method of training the hand/eye
- expressive graphic language
- exploratory process of design
- rearrangement of ideas
- play, experimentation
- invention, fantasy

Drawing instruction books take each of these categories and deal with it in isolation, giving specific exercises to improve each technique. An exception is The Art of Drawing, by Bernard Chaet, which attempts to synthesize these ideas. The real task of learning to draw is combining techniques into a personal graphic language.

Many non-artists still define drawing as the making of a realistic picture of something. The farther the person is from the art-making process, the more realistic he will prefer the picture to be. Drawings function as talismans: the person likes horses, trees, barns, whatever, and wants to possess an image of one. His judgment of the work is divorced from the process of the work. It is unfortunate that this is the case.

Good drawing begins in accurate observation. This initiates the drawing process which is supported by imagination and thought and memory. Once an artist steps from depiction of an object to visual exploration of an idea, a step is taken toward using drawing as a tool of personal expression. Just as a composer must develop a palette of sounds, or a poet a particular verbal style, an artist must put together a language of marks.

The visual language must contain a wide repertoire of marks. All possibilities must be tried and tested. Nothing should be prejudged. The artist must be secure enough to take risks, and in the process must develop sensitivity and intuitive visual judgement. Then he must learn to trust his judgments and act on them with assurance.

Drawing becomes an act of expression and interpretation rather than depiction. The personal nature of a drawing comes from the calligraphic language used by the artist, which is a combination of technique, instrumentation, medium and exploration.

III. ARTISTS

Only artists understand art, possibly because one artist can go along with another artist the path he followed in creating it.¹⁹

David Smith

Few people recognize what artists happen to do for others. The artist provides a mental garden for people to think, live, work and invent in.²⁰

James Rosenquist

¹⁹Smith, p. 60.

²⁰James Rosenquist, "If You Had Your Fondest Wishes for the Arts," New York Times, 1 January 1984, sec. 2, p. 1

My interest in drawing originated in my dissatisfaction with my own work. When I began to understand drawing as a language rather than an armamentarium of techniques, I could begin to understand its potential for me. It wasn't until I began to explore and re-explore the same image, combining observation and imagination and thought, that I began to see the possible dimensions of drawing.

I became intrigued with the work of Jennifer Bartlett through her In the Garden series--two hundred drawings in various media of a single garden scene. What especially caught my interest was the enormous variation in drawn language, style and presentation. Paging through In the Garden allows a viewer to travel through a drawing process in its varied states. The image is not important here, the imagination is.

The idea has been proposed that Bartlett was teaching herself to draw in this series of work. She has said "I never had the kind of talent that lets you draw portraits or horses" ²¹ She has also noted that at first writing was easier than painting and that her own best ideas came out of the process of working. ²²

²¹ Calvin Tomkins, "Drawing and Painting," in Jennifer Bartlett (New York: Abbeville Press, 1985), p. 10.

²² Tomkins, p. 14.

The process of Bartlett's work has at times involved the use of many techniques to achieve variation. An earlier work, "Rhapsody," was an enormous, room-sized mosaic of 12" by 12" steel tiles painted in a number of styles. The totality of this work is tightly regulated and it occurs like a piece of music, over time. The images appear and reappear like themes in a sonata. The main ideas are linked to color and symbol.

It is too easy to generalize from a particular sequence of an artist's work to her total oeuvre. When I saw Bartlett's retrospective in Brooklyn in December, I realized how limited I had been in my consideration of her work. Theme and variation is certainly a strong element in her process, but there are other concerns which are more central such as sequence, progression and two-dimensional/three-dimensional interplay.

In the Garden was a springboard for my own experiments in varying a single image. That is the value in knowing the work of other people--in discovering those "resonances" that add to your own motivation and thinking.

Working artists serve as inspirational role models for students. Reading biographies of other artists has increased my awareness of the enormous variety of concerns that different artists address, and the variety of life patterns in which artists work. There is no one life pattern for artists, just as there is no one definition for drawing. It is an easy trap to think that there is.

When I began studying art, I did so with the perspective of a musician and an elementary teacher. There have been times when the role of artist has not seemed to fit with the other things that I do. The wider question becomes one of self-definition, because identity is crucial to an artist.

It is identity, and not that overrated quality called ability, which determines the artist's finished work. Ability is but one of the attributes and acts only in degree. Ability may produce a work, but identity produces the works before and after. Ability may make the successful work in the eyes of the connoisseur, but identity can make the failures which are most important to the artist. What the critics term the failures are apt to be unresolved but of greatest projection. They had to be done, they held the promise. The promise, the hint of new vista, the unresolved, the misty dream, the artist should love even more than the resolved,²³ for here is the fluid force, the promise and the search.

When I began this study five years ago, I had been making art for many years, but did not call myself an artist. I have come to an understanding of what it is that artists work at. Because art is so closely identified with the artist, it forces you to confront what you believe, what you are, and what you can and cannot do.

I would liken artists to philosophers. The study of art, like the study of philosophy, does not seem practical to many people. The activities of the artist, like those of the philosopher, are poorly understood except by other artists and people who are particularly interested.

²³Smith, p. 166.

To be an artist, a person must come to an increased self-awareness and then must confront ideals and beliefs. Studying art, like studying philosophy, focuses these beliefs.

It was very important for me to merit the role of artist. I did not grow up labeled an artist. How I live with that label and those concerns now depends solely on my determination to do so.

There are conflicts between the process of making art and the process of daily life. It can be a struggle to transition from one reality to another. Daily life sometimes seems like an interruption to the inner dialogue necessary to art production, an interruption to the compulsion to produce that art process involves. At other times, routines are a relief and a chance to regain perspective. Life as an artist hopefully does not necessitate a cloistered existence.

IV. DIVERSE REALITIES

We are all probing the same mysteries.
Who am I?
Where am I?
What am I doing?
Is it right?²⁴

Ellen Gilchrist, from her dairy
National Public Radio,
Morning Edition

. . . And immediately

Rather than words comes the thought of high windows:
The sun-comprehending glass
And beyond it, the deep blue air, that shows²⁵
Nothing, and is nowhere, and is endless.

Phillip Larkin

²⁴Interview with Ellen Gilchrist, NPR Morning Edition, November 1985.

²⁵Phillip Larkin, High Windows (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974), p. 17.

This thesis work arose out of a concern to explore drawn language in drawings and prints. I wanted to expand my repertoire of marks and use contrasting print media to present a single formal image.

I find windows fascinating as formal structures, as well as openings from one reality to another. They were a particularly powerful childhood memory, and they entered the drawings (which were initially landscapes) almost unconsciously. I tried to recreate remembered "childhood landscapes" in a series of graphite stick drawings. At the same time, I was exploring a set of imagined window images using the Macintosh computer. I found the extreme freedom of both drawing media allowed my ideas to flow freely. The graphite drawings were large (22" x 30") and I used my whole arm to make the marks. The computer drawings, on the other hand, were small. There, the freedom came from my ability to alter tone, line and shape so easily. Because the drawing did not exist until it was printed out, there was no risk involved in experimenting with a wide variety of ideas.

In the first graphite drawings are the New Jersey winter hills, tree tops like wheat stubble or shorn hair. The windows I used to look through as a child had 200-year-old glass in them that distorted the view and split the light. The

curtains were translucent, and there were two shades in each window: a black-out shade and a white one. The windows of that house are the same but the landscape is not. The visual idea in memory seems powerful.

I attached emotional importance to using a landscape remembered from childhood. It is not crucial to the finished work, but to the initial motivation. The landscape that I attempted to draw so often as an adolescent no longer exists. It has been altered from rural to suburban.

Many ideas were explored in this series of drawings, but the vertical window format with a shade and sill was the format that became more and more important. It seemed more ambiguous and open, thus allowing for more imagination within any drawing.

Although the windows were initially very important psychologically to me, formal concerns were ultimately more important.

The form of a work of art has meaning of its own and the contemplation of the form . . . gives rise in some people to a special emotion which does not depend upon the association of the form with anything else whatever.²⁶

When I would redraw the vertical space, it would alter and new visual elements would become important within it. In some cases the shade became flames, or human forms. In other cases the window frame and the shade became tree-like. In one

²⁶Roger Fry quoted in Gardner, p. 222.

case, the window opening became a landscape with a straight road, and the shade became sky.

I tried to keep the drawing process very open throughout the series of prints. I did not attempt to reproduce drawings as prints, but rather use the drawn ideas to initiate the drawing process on the plates and stones.

Of the work produced, six prints were shown. The two etchings, one woodcut and three lithographs have an interaction with each other that is strengthened by the fact that they contain a single image. The various print media allowed me to experiment with many kinds of drawn marks. If I had continued the process, I would have begun to overlap the images from the different print media, because that yielded an even richer surface characteristic.

Layering has been a visual concern of mine, especially in color printing. I like the richness and ambiguity of overprinted color. Another visual element that is possible with many layers of color is the highlighting that occurs when a small remnant of color survives at the edge of an overprinted area.

Of the works shown, the black and white works deal most closely with the proposition of the thesis. A drawn language which is both expressive and personal evolved from the process of working.

In the drawings and prints I tried to employ a wide range of marks. When the drawing was transformed by the print

processes, the repertoire of marks expanded even more. Print-making techniques allow build-up of layers of drawing. A sequence of drawings is thus built into one print because of the changes that are made on the plate or stone. Even the simplest print transforms a drawing and gives it other qualities. These are lost if the printmaker has an inflexible attitude about the print in process. Etching the stone, biting the plate, altering the original image--each of these changes the outcome.

Most education is a personal Odyssey of some sort. This document traces my journey toward being an artist. I have had to examine previous experiences, change my attitudes about myself and my work. I have learned to be more intuitive and less intellectual. I have gained technical skill and aesthetic insight.

Creative expression occurs first in childhood. Artists channel the same creative energy in adulthood--but with a much more conscious process. A knowledge of the development of drawing in children serves to deepen understanding of the process all artists pass through and remember, but most other adults forget. For me, this developmental knowledge was a key to better understanding of my own art-making process.

I now think of drawing as a visual language of its own. Drawing technique can be taught and mastered, but the drawing process must be self-taught and self-explored. The artist must evolve his language alone through the process of art-making.

Art is a synthesis of thinking and feeling--they cannot be separated out. It is thought and response that give fine art direction and vitality.

The process of art-making engages me. The works in the thesis show already seem a little detached from my reality. What seems important now is to learn what is beyond those works. They are beginnings rather than ends. "The journey is the destination."²⁷

²⁷Zen saying.

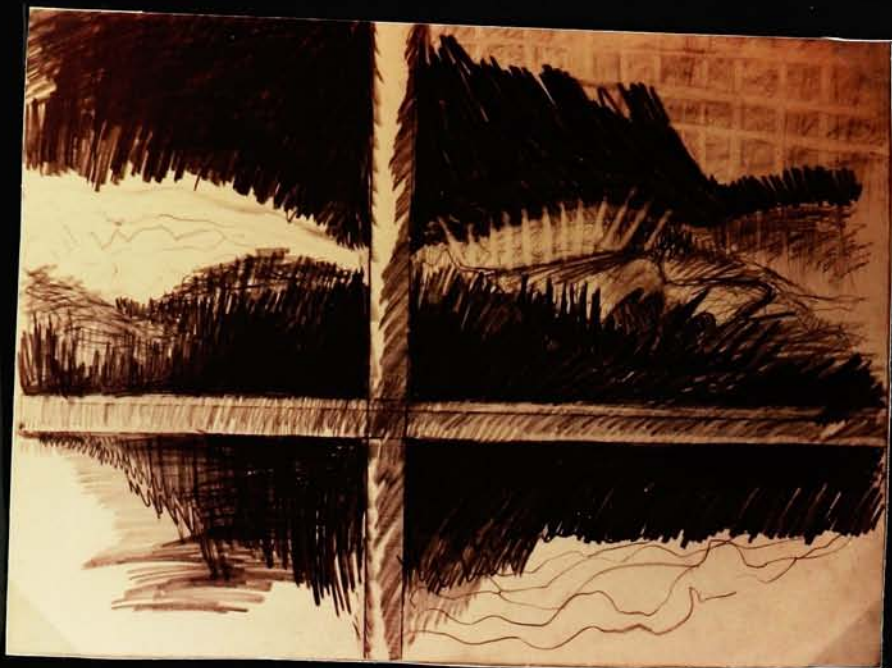


Fig. 1
Untitled #1
Graphite Drawing

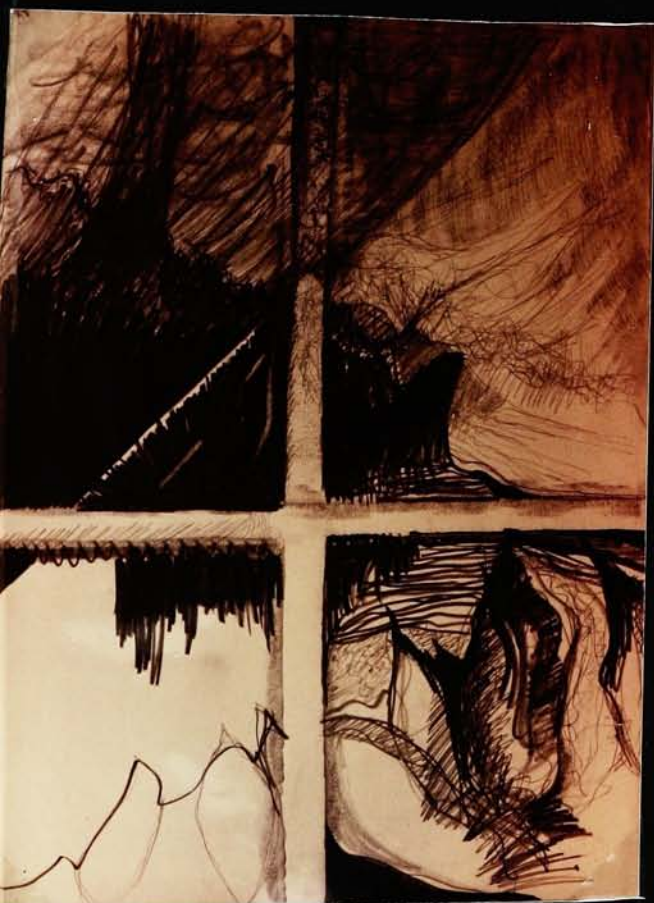


Fig. 2
Untitled #2
Graphite Drawing



Fig. 3
Untitled #3
Graphite Drawing

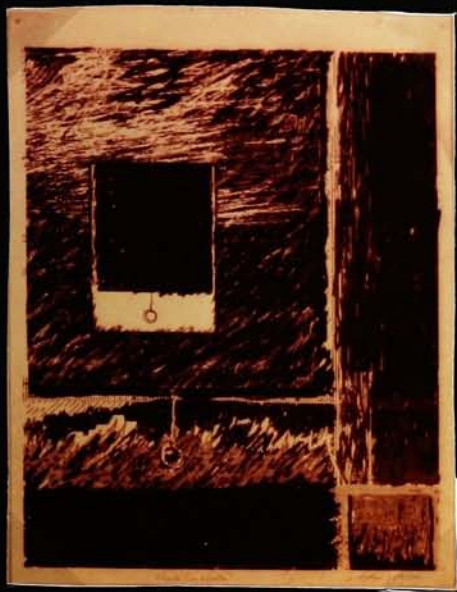


Fig. 4
Shade #1
Macintosh Image

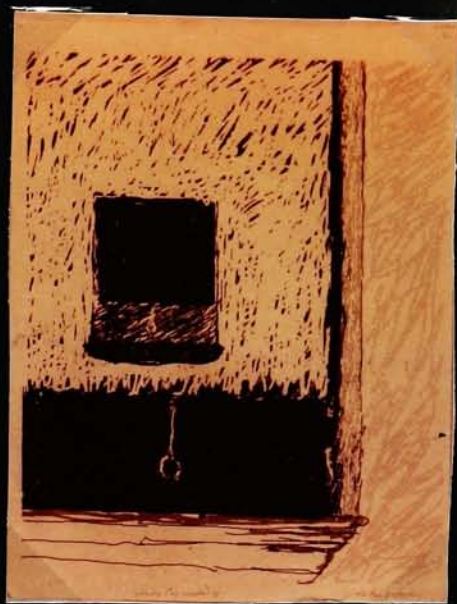


Fig. 5
Shade #2
Macintosh Image



Fig. 6
Shade #3
Macintosh Image



Fig. 7
Shade #4
Macintosh Image

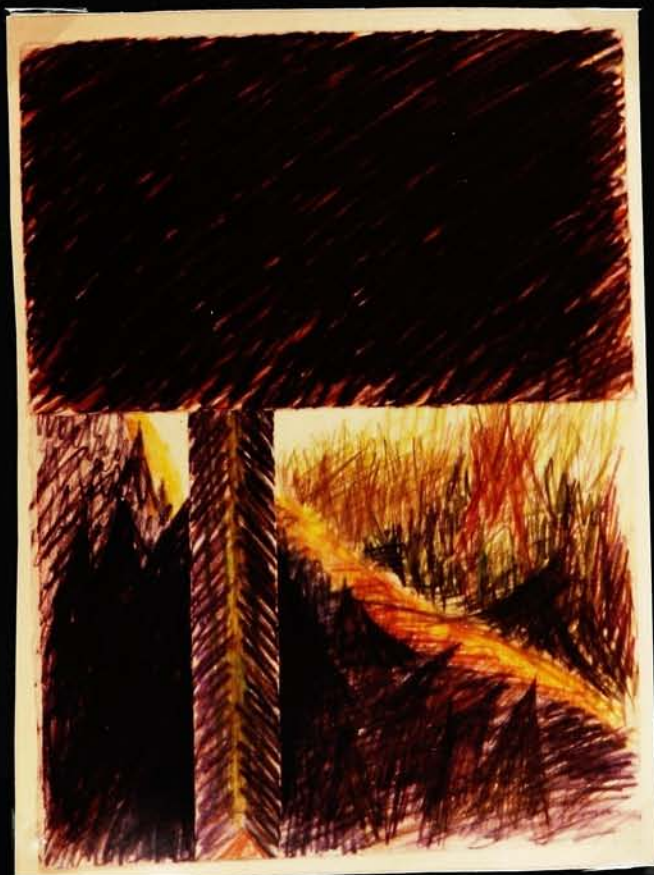


Fig. 8
Vertical Shade
Prismacolor



Fig. 9
Untitled #4
Graphite Drawing



Fig. 10
Untitled #5
Graphite Drawing



Fig. 11
No Shade
Prismacolor



Fig. 12
Window I
Color Lithograph



Fig. 13
Window I (Ghost)
Lithograph



Fig. 14
Window II
Etching

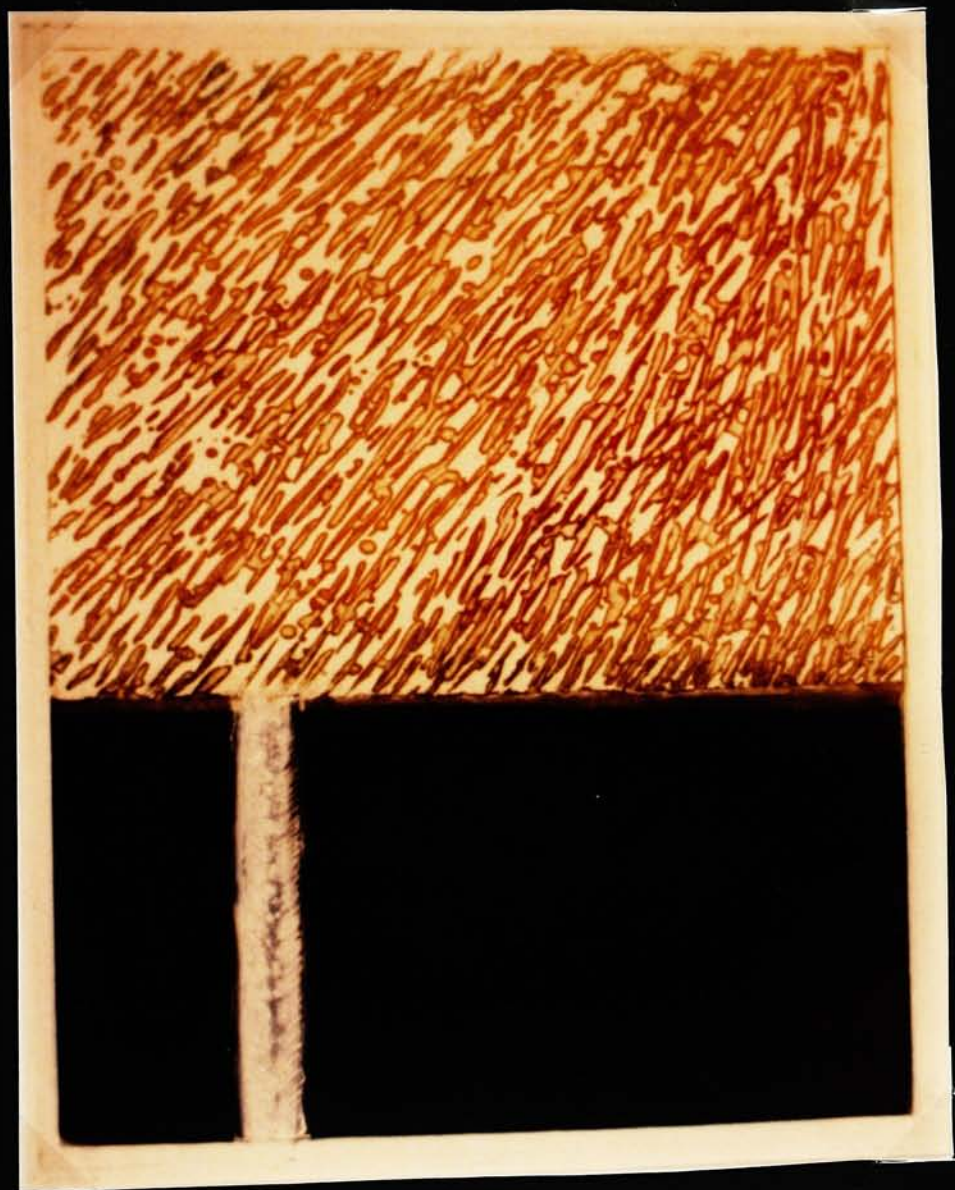


Fig. 15
Window III
Color Etching



Fig. 16
Window IV
Woodcut



Fig. 17
Window V
Offset Lithography

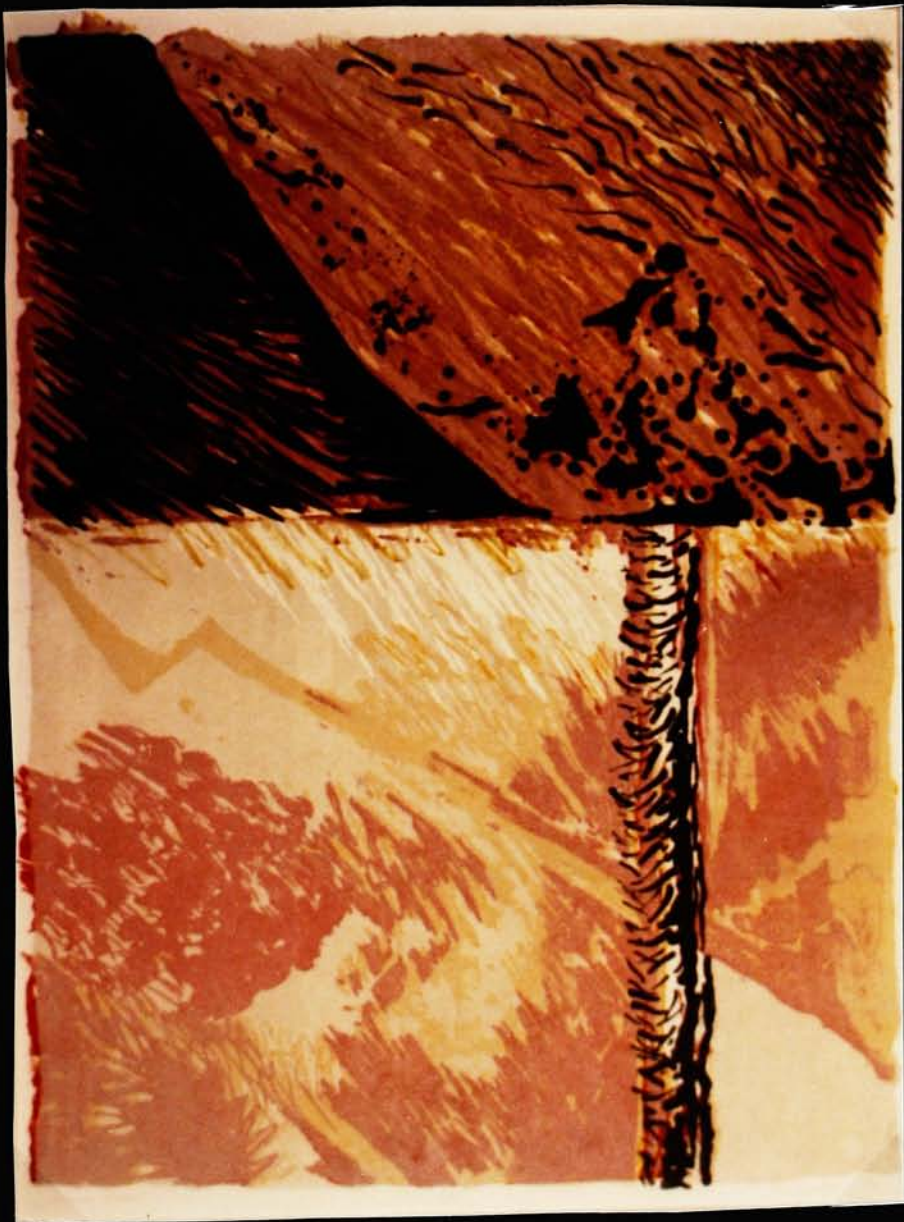


Fig. 18
Calligraphic Window
Color Lithography



Fig. 19
Shifting Window
Color Lithography

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