

Rochester Institute of Technology

## RIT Digital Institutional Repository

---

Theses

---

5-11-1986

### Moody atmosphere of the self

Kurt Ruff

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.rit.edu/theses>

---

#### Recommended Citation

Ruff, Kurt, "Moody atmosphere of the self" (1986). Thesis. Rochester Institute of Technology. Accessed from

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the RIT Libraries. For more information, please contact [repository@rit.edu](mailto:repository@rit.edu).

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

MOODY ATMOSPHERE OF THE SELF

By

KURT RUFF

May 11, 1986

APPROVALS

Adviser: Phillip Bornarth / Philip W. Bornarth

Date: 5/21/86

Associate Adviser: David Dickinson / David C. Dickinson

Date: May 15, 1986

Special Assistant to the  
Dean for Graduate Affairs: Phillip Bornarth / Philip W. Bornarth

Date: 5/21/86

Dean, College of  
Fine and Applied Arts: Dr. Robert Johnston / Robert H. Johnston Ph.D.

Date: 5/23/86

I, Kurt Ruff, prefer to be contacted each time a request for reproduction is made. I can be reached at the following address.

Date; 5/ 11/ 86

This seems like an ideal time to write. To gather up some accumulated information and to translate it into meaningful words. I have worried about writing my thesis, about writing in general. It is difficult to express my thoughts, my emotions, my viewpoints on life into words that will effectively capture the true essence of their reality.

I stare into the aqua sky, into the photograph on my wall of a wooded lane in spring, into the small oil painting of water and clouds and try to become transfixed by their apparent peace. Escaping into their serenity, I concentrate on words and phrases which could appropriately tell about my paintings, my philosophy, my psychology.

Where can I start? Perhaps the beginning would be a good place, but it becomes difficult to pinpoint only the valuable information which has affected me to become the artist I am. Everything seems so valuable and influential. Can I divulge the personal and sacred to you, the listener? Do I want to dwell on the past and accept its events again with gratitude? I'll see what I can do.

I must appreciate the history of my life. Through pleasure there is euphoria, through pain there is understanding. I become overwhelmed and grow unhumored by this learning procedure. Every-day there is a new experience that will try on my patience, on my sensitivities. But blessed am I to be sensitive that I feel deep within myself a movement that transforms my self into a more spiritual mass. Can I control my catipulating moods and balance out

my emotions to achieve an eternal sense of peace? I think not. I do not take my experiences with others lightly. Through my search for a higher plateau of self awareness, I want to be swayed emotionally or intellectually with those I find endearing.

One must go through life, be it red or blue, stark  
naked and accompanied by the music of a subtle  
fisherman, prepared at all times for a celebration.

Francis Picabia

There isn't a reason why I should paint, I do so because I want to. I want to gain a better understanding of my self and find liberation through the freedom of painting. Within my self, there is a continual urgency, high anticipation. Painting allows me to set loose and make explicit that energy which thrives inside my walls.

Through liberation I am more at ease and more confident. I want to hold onto optimism and use its positive energy in creative processes, and for enriching a healthy attitude. I try to come to terms with what I find distressing and rid myself of an ill feeling. These jolts tend to show up in my work. It is like vomiting up that sour acid or trying to breathe a clean breath of air.

I can not disregard emotion or physical restraints from the outside. These sources give me inspiration. They affect my overall mood or my daily outlook. If I grow depressed, I will paint either in a depressed manner or compliment my depression and alleviate my spirits by painting in an air of lightheartedness.

I like the feeling when the paint flows out of me. It's like a life fluid. The color reflects my mood, my temperament. The brush is an extension of my body, like an arm or hand. The paper is also like my body for it is the receptacle of the paint or my psyche; the inner spirit which is like a warm, red sea, rising and falling.

Somehow my mood is transformed into the paint and I grow less anxious and tense. I feel only like a painting body whose

spirit has entered into the shapes and colors through the extension of my matter. The images mirror the variances of the psyche and make borne an understanding of my consciousness.

Each day when I begin to work, I find myself changed from the day before. Some long term goals, thoughts and feelings remain intact, but each day I am faced with a new set of priorities and experiences. People come and go, leaving with me an intense memory of my interaction with them. It is through these experiences that I learn about the person I am.

I tend to choose my friends most discriminately. Since I am a rather sensitive person, I must be careful with whom I reveal my sensitivities to. As a painter, I find myself alone with my thoughts much of the time, feeling that my ideals are so different from those around me in popular society. I find myself ridding a reappearing loneliness. Out of the sad sepia inks appear symbols of hope and positive realization. I break a muggy fog and smell the freshness of the clearing winds.

I have few close friends. They are integral parts of my existence. They enlighten me, they humor me, they hurt me and I love them. Through their friendship and communication, I see a clearer picture of myself. What I divulge to them is the meat of my character, and what I learn with them helps clear my vision of what is good.

I have existed through two major losses in the past nine months. Ripped away/ripped out. I do not take these losses lightly. First my lover left, then my teacher. As the skin is torn away, one can see the nerves pulsating rapidly. They jump from the shock. They shock themselves as they stretch across my aching heart.



I grow sad and tired thinking about them so often. I hold onto that exciting creative spirit but grow angry as I find myself focusing in on these losses too much of the time. My thoughts linger like a sore throat or garlic breath. Everyday something reminds me, something trying to prompt melancholy. I must fight that icy bite with the warm spirit of optimism. I will recall the valuable experiences with them and feel a sense of enlightenment from the gain. I must step graciously into the next day and work effectively with it. Press Push Up.

My work is a diary. I hold events or moods by using personal symbols and color choices to convey their most intrinsic qualities. The subjects from which the imagery has been derived are those which tend to envelope my concentration.

The paintings I find most exciting or successful now are the ones I had done at extremely moody periods. The paintings were completed in 1985 during the two changes in relationships I have mentioned. The valuable, when lost, echo remembrances that penetrate delicate nerves. Their replacement can not be found, but other experiences, other relationships must fill in the void. Love for the lost must be given to others, but most importantly, to one's self.

The sepia paintings came first in the series of paintings executed from May to November. After studying for two quarters, I felt the new spring brought with it a new sense of optimism. I was more acquainted with the processes of painting and desired to make explicit a spiritual awakening by using painting as a means.

The opaque clouds slit open to let me see the light. From the somber brown seas at dawn I arose, almost floating, up and out, to ride on top of the wave's soft edge. Clean and feeling more responsible, I lifted myself up to walk alone along the shore. I saw shells interlaced with sand; abandoned objects of protection or disguise. Spirits were dancing, moving about in the wet and subtly lit environment. I took my time to wander and notice what was in this fresh landscape. I found a friend and we walked along the warm ocean-side, breathing in the spring air.

As the sun rose higher, it warmed my palette. The paintings became bathed by rich siennas and burnt oranges. The summer came and I painted with more ease.

Up on the roof we landed to rest on the warm tar. The sky was a complete bright aqua, allowing everything to be drenched with direct sunlight. The shapes and curves in the architecture were most interesting at this height. The roof adornments reminded me of happy teeth, a generous smile which, per chance, may have opened up and said, "ah, what a lovely day." As I painted, we smiled ourselves and reached out to hold hands happily.

After reaching a high level of personal satisfaction, I could not accept the fall from the roof, into the gnarling teeth. I

felt them as I painted them. They nibbled at me with their broken and jagged incisors, trying to suck out of me my strength, my heart. The sun boiled everything into a sea of hot, red inks that scorched my skin and my delicate inner walls. I was stuck in its mire of discontent. Now that path seemed so long and hazardous to that passage-way up and out. The sepia seas were gone and only the waves existed to crash upon my tender backbone. Through suffering there is understanding and through painting and time, I have grown to realize that I am a stronger person after the fall.

When I arrived back to school in autumn, I painted with blues and greys. As I painted, I dipped into the tepid waters splashed with ultramarine. My burns were seduced by the soft water and my inner suffering had subsided. However, I had to be aware of the rocky intrusions, churning currents and cold fronts that had a tendency to make an unexpected entrance.

A prime function of my art is to make felt the prime tensions of life. A way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion. As an artist, objects and episodes in life, whether the life of everyday or of the mind, produce upon me what seems a deeper and more precise impression than they do upon ordinary man. I hope that out of my vivid perception with emotional accompaniments, I find a broader understanding of the diversified properties of life.

I remember the quality of emotional value that events, sounds or sights have had. The rhythms that they let me sense are projected into sensible and personal forms. My emotions, reinforcing and balancing out each other form in me a habit of emotion. Through familiarity, I begin to understand their capabilities and try to use each in an effective and rational manner.

There may be many reasons why I want to realize and make explicit the variances of emotion in painting. A feeling may preoccupy me, so I have to justify and face it. It may merely intrigue me because I but partly know it.

My teacher left when I took him for granted. I expected him to stick around a little longer and teach me a few more things. But I can't make these long term expectations for myself. Besides, I wouldn't want him to harbour forever on Earth and breathe this smoggy air.

I held onto his creative spirit and use it while I paint. My respect for him has allowed me to feel an energy existing in the studio which continued after he went. I will think of him as I grow older and will consider him a fine example of an artist and gentleman.

I have enjoyed working in my studio and appreciate it the most when it is quiet. I like feeling as if I am in my own world where I can concentrate in peace. The studio has been a temple. A place where devotion and hard work become vehicles for a harmonious and rewarding existence. I learn to breathe more deeply and to prosper from the soft sounds and the gentle breezes.

I like to paint where I have a good view; a nice big window to look out of, or a rooftop. I like to use bits of architecture as inspirational forms. It is nice to see far in the distance, the clouds way up high and the hills far away.

When I paint the moody atmospheres, I like the images to be direct and intriguing. If I am excited about the work, then I know it will be inviting to the interested spectator who wants to look and interact. I want the viewer's senses to be actively involved.

The black india ink glides on so nicely. The thick paint makes sharp, contrasting edges when used against the empty, white surface. The objects seem to move and crackle even after I have stopped them in time. Because of the dense quality of the dried ink, I imagine the shapes painted with lacquer or tar.

When I started using the Italian inks, it seemed so natural. For the most part, it was a pleasure watching the colors move and bleed as I dropped them on the wet surface surrounding, or incorporated in, the india ink image. They glistened irridesciently when they dried and produced incredibly rich tones. They made an environment/landscape for the black images to exist in.



When I look at the images that are painted, they seem a separate world apart from immediate reality. They speak of myself to myself as I travel in through one of the holes or openings. I feel good that I made these images. They come from the most honest part of me. Because they are spontaneous and genuine, I feel successful that I did not have to belabor over them, force, or overwork areas.

The heated paintings are the most tempermental. They incorporate the warm tones and contain the energy which has been stored inside, wanting to hemorrhage. By combining reds, siennas, and oranges, the heat seems to go beyond the boiling point. You can sense a churning motion or a vibration.

The blues, greens and greys subdue me. I take a dive into the seas to cleanse and cool. As I surface, I can smell the fresh air coming off the water. I lay in the dark sands as the waves tiptoe on top of me, dousing my heated spirit. I can make out another landscape at an aerial perspective as I fly up and around in the unscented breeze.

I consider the teeth the most aggressive shapes. They pierce their environments as they want to take control. Insensitive forms, dancing in and chewing it up like a cancerous tumor. They are aggravated and speckled with decay. I have to counterattack their bite and grow to feel immune.

Often there are obvious or vague faces within the compositions. Most of the time they are self portraits. At times, I go back and look into a painting, trying to find a face that I may have failed to notice. I like to be surprised when one does pop into sight to frighten or humor me.

The compositions must be balanced in a reasonable way. I like to keep them just busy enough, using the right amount of line and color. I push my edges and try new structuring ideas. I balance active with calm, hot with cold, strong with sensitive, negative with positive.

How nice it is to sense balance in nature and man. By walking down (or up) a wooded lane in spring, one can sense true harmony. Let us rest a minute to ponder over a tiny leaf or a dewdrop. Can you sense the poetry by just looking at and listening to the life around you?

I try not to think too idealistically because I can not always exist in a stimulating environment. I have to be able to adapt to new people and places and remain flexible enough to bend from imbalance. Without activation, I would grow dull and bored. My paintings would be totally black. I must weigh and ration to find a rhythm.

I feel the search of an artist should be for the richest and fullest of human experiences and that he should look for both the visual manifestations and those transmitted intuitively. The more the artist contacts the inner qualities of people, the more he will understand life and where he fits into it. The more mature he gets in his relationships to other human beings, the more vital will be what he says in print or stone.

Philip Evergood



I do not come to any conclusions about life since events are continually shifting my perspective. I search for a strength that I feel lacking. My spirit seeks higher ground toward a state of spiritual signifigance and self confidence.

When periods of melancholy prevail, I must address them effectively in order for psychic healing to begin. I find an urgency to understand and desire change to incorporate new or hidden strengths for a revitalized self. As I become more aware of my capacities, my abilities to overcome trauma, I may be able to work more efficiently in areas of creative advancement.

## Bibliography

- Ashton, Dore. Artists on Art. New York: Pantheon Books, 1985.
- Jaffe, Aniela. The Myth of Meaning. New York: P.G. Putnam's Sons, 1971.
- Langer, Susanne. Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1967.
- Rose, Barbara. Readings in American Art. New York: Pragers Publishers, Inc., 1975.
- Sharpe, Deborah. The Psychology of Color and Design. Chicago: Nelson-Hall Company, 1978.
- Svoren, Velimir. Conflict and Its Solution. New York: Exposition Press, 1981.



Masked 5/85

Spirits Awaken 5/85



On the Roof 5/85



Cool Cat 6/85



At the Studio 6/85

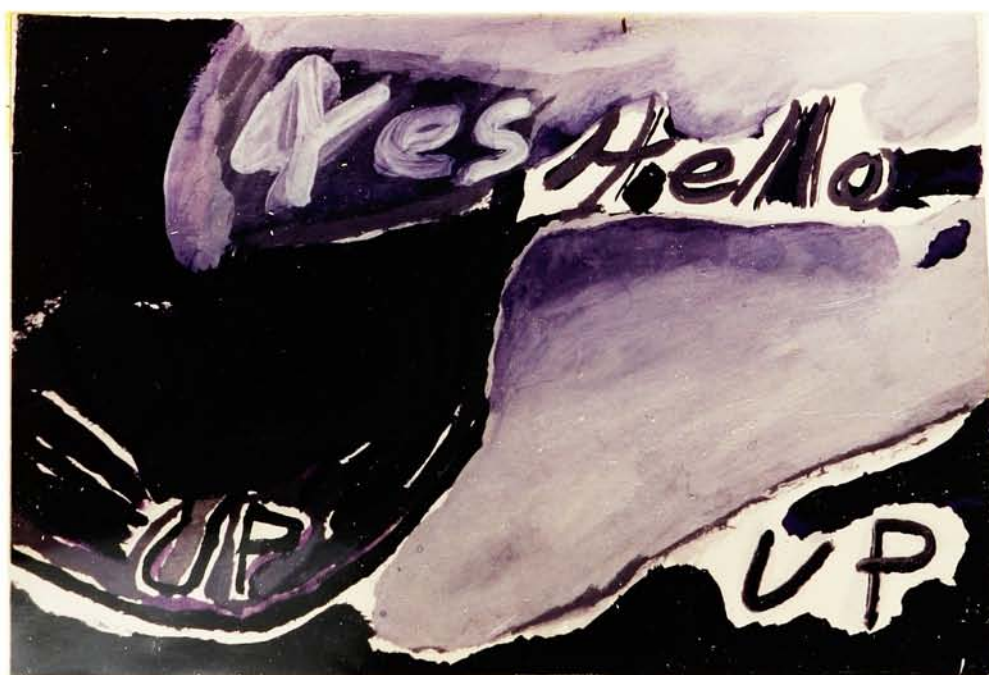
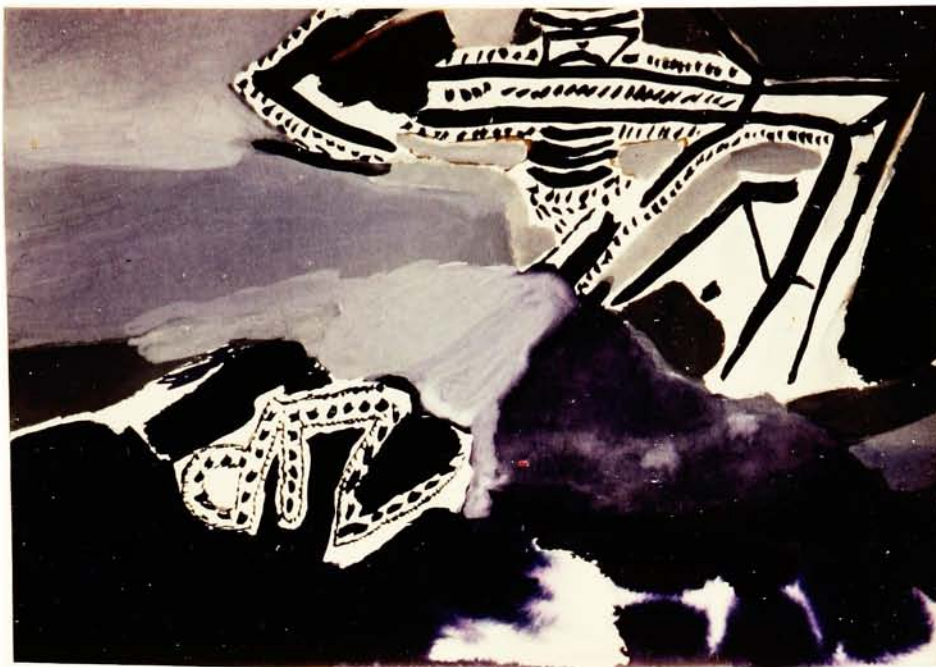
The Road Between Us 7/85





Choose Me 8/85

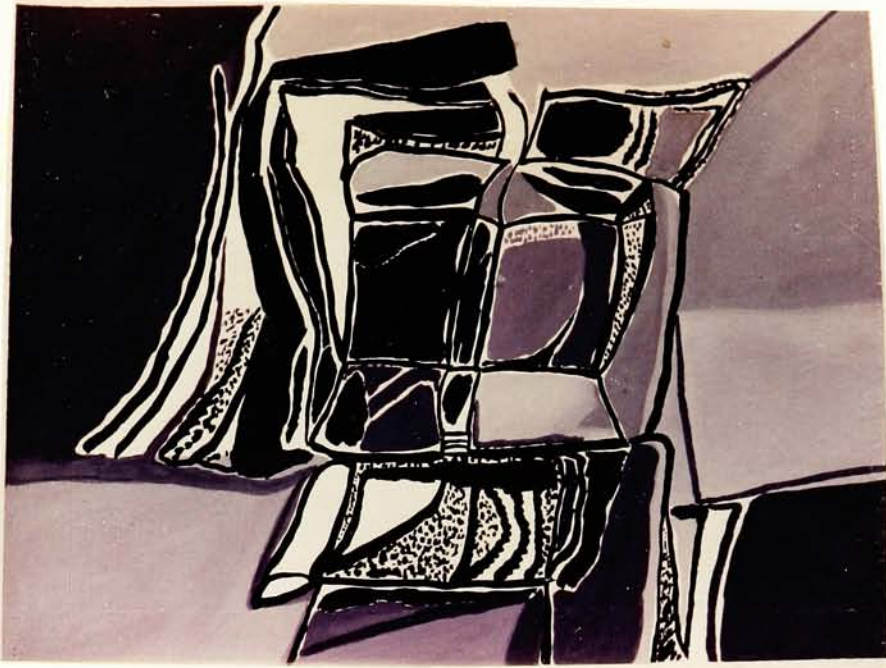
Maximum Disturbance 8/85



Prick 9/85

Yes Hello Up 9/85





Manic Man/Tidepools 10/85

Chewing It Up 11/85





Details: heated and tranquil atmospheres