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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

COLLAGE, AND TRANSPOSING SPACE

By
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Dated: May 21, 1986

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THESIS PROPOSAL

The purpose of this thesis is to become visually familiar with environments I encounter regularly. To do so, I will explore my environment through drawings and paintings. I will then transfer those drawings and/or paintings to some printmaking process, such as litho or intaglio. In that transfer I plan to work quickly and directly in a gestural manner. That procedure will define the style (character) of interpretation and expression of my environment. Complexities of the printing processes of litho or intaglio will be developed with a specific concern for multiple printing and the uses of space. As a result of all the above I hope to gain a body of work that will maintain a similar character of style. That is, the viewer will perceive a pattern in my vision of my environment.

-PROLOGUE-

Time/Circumstances (Fate)

The following is a description of my experiences as I attempted to develop the basic intentions of my proposal and how gradually those intentions evolved, for a variety of reasons, into something I had not originally anticipated.

-STATEMENT-

My five senses provide me with the means to collect and then record in my mind what I have encountered. I am an artist. My artwork is a discovery and examination of those encounters. Time, circumstances and reflection determine my preferences and the directions I choose to emphasize through those encounters.

-VISIONS-

It is 1:00 a.m. in the morning, I am just drifting off to sleep and suddenly I begin to visualize an idea for an etching. I can see the print is made up of overlapping layers, shapes, big brush strokes and spatters of bright colors. I can hardly move, but I am anxious and excited about making this idea reality. I force myself to reach for my notebook. I quickly think through how I would create such an image. As I write down or sketch the idea my mind suddenly becomes flooded with variations of the original. I quickly jot down the variations and as my mind calms down I once again begin drifting off to sleep.

Most often these nocturnal inspirations seem to be generated by repeated waking encounters with familiar situations, environments, objects, and investigations of different mediums. I react to these nocturnal and waking circumstances intellectually and begin to interpret them into my artwork. Picasso expressed this situation as a state of fullness and then evacuation.¹ An artist must create to unload himself of feelings and visions.²

¹ Robert Goldwater and Marco Theves, Artist on Art (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), Pg. 421.

² Ibid., Pg. 421.

This sort of reaction-evacuation-discover-create approach to making art generates a great deal of excitement for me. However, it also produces a rather inconsistent body of artwork because each vision is random, each piece seems to represent an independent vision with little apparent relationship to another.

This becomes the cause of a great deal of frustration. On the other hand, working in a variety of directions stimulates my creative processes.

-FUNDAMENTAL-

For the most part, my creative activities involve an investigation of materials and processes, and the application of these investigations to my visions and then finally the visual object. As I shape the object I am preoccupied with concepts of space, form, shape, color and their relationship to the expression of a representative evocative visual statement. Space is a major consideration in my work, and, for the most part, evolves as I introduce forms, shapes, colors.

Space, in part, is the material in which I create the image. It is also the surface on which the image is created. And it too, in part, is the subject of the image.

Space is made as the visual object evolves (or begins to take shape). Space is broken up. Background, foreground, midground, and all spaces in between begin to appear.

The space I work in has a very formal structure. The shapes and forms and their placement are the key to that structure. When I create a visual object, I like to manipulate space, form, shape, and color to generate a sense of movement and flow. Layers of space, depth, and form against form, generate movement through a piece. In dealing with shapes and space, I can add excitement by creating ambiguous forms out of those shapes within that space.

As I manipulate these abstract elements in space they begin to suggest the idea of creating an additional element of interest. I begin to consider representational forms such as the figure, my dog, or even the furniture in the actual space of my living room, as potential shapes.

The living room of my house became a series of compositions. The arrangement of the furniture within the room presents itself as a formal structuring of that space. It is, so to speak, a readily available and actual space waiting to be transposed into a unique composition.

Again, the use of the familiar, transposed into an artwork, was not of primary importance. The excitement was provided by the opportunity I had to convert the familiar into the abstract.

In summary, these are some of the basic elements I use in my artwork. However, though they are the foundation, there are also other ingredients--process and material. Their purpose is to add another dimension of depth and complexity to the statement. Their presence is significant, so I avoid hiding or disguising evidence of either of them. They are important to the dynamics of creation and the character of the final visual statement I make. They also tend to produce new discoveries and inspire new directions.

PROCESS AND MATERIAL

Printmaking:

etching, sugar lift, open biting, aquatint, multiple printing, transfers black and white and color, lithography, tusche wash, line work, stenciling, multiple printing, texture transfer, reduction, monoprints.

Painting:

acrylics, glazes, washes, watercolor, gesso, clorox, oils.

Graphite:

dusting, smudging, line work, build up, masking tape, rubbings from old etching plates, etc., crayons, colored pencils, pastels, oil pastels.

Photo:

xerox black and white and color xerox, old photos, xerox transfers.

-FRUSTRATION-

A problem arose. Everything I have attempted to articulate up to this point merely described a potential. It was beautiful in my head, but as I attempted to transpose it into visual statements, works of art, I was disappointed with what happened (or, "what I saw").

-THOUGHT-

"The human mind is a slide projector with an infinite number of slides stored in its library, an instant retrieval system and an endlessly cross-referenced subject catalog. As your eyes read these words you can easily see your bedroom in your mind, go to your bed and turn back the covers. In another instant you can sit behind the wheel of your car in traffic. Then you can be in your office looking through a file drawer. And now in a supermarket pushing a shopping cart up to the checkout stand; finally walking down a wind swept, deserted beach last summer. You can move from image to image as rapidly as you

read. You can see any part of your life
effortlessly as often as it is suggested to
you."³

³ Mike Samuels M.D., and Nancy Samuels, Seeing With the Mind's Eye (New York: Random House Inc., The Bookworks, Berkley, California), Pg. xi.

-THE STUDIO-

Where do I go from here? What next? What a dilemma.

What a terrible thought. I have to get up. It is quarter till eight and my ride leaves at quarter past eight. Just a few more minutes of sleep, I need it, I only got six hours of sleep last night. Be realistic, what will a few more minutes do for me anyway? Get up, I have to get up. Besides, I have plenty of work to do in Printmaking, so I should get with it so I will be prompt for school.

I should anticipate what I will be doing in Printmaking today, I am signed up to use a litho press. Just get all the equipment together and make as few trips as possible . . . I'm so tired. It's the same thing; I get there and I have to go up those three floors, what a pain, but I get there. The doors to Printmaking wait for me. The first thing I see is the press area . . . work, it's going to be a long day. Then there is the studio area, finally my desk. I'm tired, I feel lazy, but I force myself, besides I have got a new litho started and I'm anxious to see it printed.

Anticipation, I smell the studio, it's poisonous I'm sure but it's a good smell. It's almost inspiring, it has energy, just like the smell of a painting studio. It's a characteristic that gives me energy, I work with a pleasure now. The

noises of the presses being operated, the sound of ink rolling on the palette, I am awake and inspired. The studio is exciting; I'm not tired at all now and time is flying by so fast.

There is a quality or essence that the studio evokes in and of me, it has character that demands a response.

-NEW IDEA-DIRECTION-

PAPERMAKING

A deckle box, some variety of paper pulp, and I can make some real nice sheets of handmade paper. But I want to do something more when making paper than just talk about how nice the quality is. How can I get beyond that preciousness of that handcrafted piece of paper. The craft is so much a part of the process of making a sheet of paper. What about considering that paper pulp, or sheets of paper, as a medium to create in, or with? Go beyond the fact that it's beautiful handmade paper. Papermaking starting from scratch; creating the surface or space I would create an image on it, or in it, or both.

So what can I do with this process? Build a sheet of paper. I started by mixing color acrylic paints with paper pulp and began arranging the surface of that paper using color and a formal compositional breakup of space. Sort of a blueprint or foundation to start a real idea. Not enough, not satisfied with that idea . . . I have to take it further.

Sandwich! Make a sheet of paper with bright colors--keep it wet; lay in other pieces of paper, how about placing some cheesecloth, wood veneer or even pictures, anything flat, or fairly flat. Arrange a composition. Then cover that up with another sheet of handmade paper. Wet paper conforms around the

objects nicely. Let it dry and begin to tear back the paper to reveal those hidden objects. I'm inspired! A whole new dimension. I begin to develop another strata of space and depth with this idea. Now the ideas begin to flood in.

Dimensional, depth, form, space. I like form so much, why not make it instead of imitating it? Make forms from the paper pulp. How?

I remember the wet paper sheets conform to dimensional forms nicely. What forms do I use? What familiar forms was I using in my drawings and prints? The human form, dogs, and my tools that I create with. Do it!

So now I have tried it. I made a variety of cast paper forms: Dog's heads, cast arrangements of tools and cast bones from the human skeleton. Now what?

Ah ha! Here is something else to add to my consciousness (my slide retrieval system). More creative input that I can quickly draw upon. But how can I use this new element with the other materials and processes I am familiar with? Tack it up in my studio space. Tack them up there with the rest of my artwork and work in progress. Look at it on my wall space in my studio and visualize its use.

-BITS AND PIECES-

The walls of my studio space are all bulletin boards. Those walls are a reflection of my current artistic state. They have tacked upon them my artwork in all different stages plus a variety of objects of interest to me. I love to sit in that space, it inspires me!

That's what it is . . . my inspiration.

That studio wall space contains all sorts of directions that I have explored, and ideas that have held my interest. Those art objects, pieces, collectables, they are fragments that have been brought together in a visual space to make up singular works, an orchestration (refer to illustrations).

All those directions I explored previously, now appear. Now they're easy to recall. Now I can orchestrate and apply them to my creative thinking and then to my artwork. The handmade paper forms and constructions, the bulletin boards in my studio, were all catalyst for the inspiration and orchestration into singular visual objects. That studio space represents for me a growing place. That space evolved and developed over a period of time as did my creativity. The space reflects my experience and interests in art. Now I have reached a point where I can

orchestrate many ideas, elements, materials and processes. My mind contains the language of those elements I have explored. My studio space is a visualization of that language.

-THE VISUAL OBJECTS. MY ARTWORK-
HOW THEY WERE DONE

The completed thesis works were assemblages. They were constructed of two and three dimensional cast paper forms, photos, xeroxs, lithos, etchings, gesso, acrylic paint and oil pastels. Each assemblage could be replicated. That means that just like an edition of traditional prints, all the two and three dimensional forms could be repeated.

The beginning stages of the works consisted of the paper structures (the foundation), paper dog muzzle forms, skeleton paper forms and litho or etching prints arranged in a formal composition. This was all tacked up on a bulletin board giving me the option of tacking objects up, taking some away, and arranging them to my desire. When I arrived at an exciting-beginning-composition I fastened down the primary objects in that piece. Other nuances and materials were added to build up the surface, making use of a variety of elements and processes.

My interest in retaining the printmaking process is important to these works and to my creativity. The idea of an edition of prints was important not only to the overall assemblage or collage, but also because each work is made up of several individual pieces. I liked the idea of being able to replicate each of them. So in theory I could make an edition of

these bulletin board collages. However, the primary reason for having duplicate pieces is to be able to work on more than one idea at a time. One idea generates another. If I get stuck on one, I can move to another or even a third, and still have some of the same pieces available in the other two being worked on. Also, since I have a collection of similar pieces to work with, rather than just one of a kind, I don't have to be concerned about the singular importance of a piece, its preciousness, or the fear of putting it in the wrong place. So, for the most part, all the elements in my thesis work can be reproduced, allowing for replication, and for an idea to continue to evolve from one piece into another.

-THOUGHT-

"You've developed a little culture for yourself, like yoghurt; as long as you keep something of the original microbes, the original thing in it will grow out."⁴

"Now I can set out to do it, and then it will be, maybe it will be a painting of something else. Because if you know the

⁴ Harold Rosenberg, DeKooning (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers), Pg. 208.

measure of something--for yourself there's no absolute measure--you can find the size of something. You say now that's just this length and immediately with that length you can paint, well, a cat. If you understand one thing, you can use it for something else. That is the way I work. I get hold of a certain kind of area or measure or size and then I can use it. I mean I have an attitude. I have to have an attitude."⁵

DeKooning

-CONCLUSION-

I made about a dozen pieces inspired by my college/assemblage experience. In 1983, I hung four in the M.F.A. Thesis show at the Bevier Gallery.

Before leaving R.I.T. I took a lot of photographs of my studio with its bulletin board display. It was a record of my aesthetic, conceptual, and personal struggle and achievement. It was also evidence of my realization of my desire to develop a body of art that would provoke and sustain me beyond the original intentions of my thesis proposal. I have hoped for a discovery, an inspiration, that would strengthen me creatively and provide a stimulating influence for many years to come. I felt I had accomplished this.

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