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Rochester Institute of Technology

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
The College of Imaging Arts and Sciences
In Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Fine Arts

Discovering the Mill

By

Jacob Roesch

3/31/2000

Approvals

Chief Advisor : Ed Miller

Date:

4. 6. 00

Associate Advisor: Dave Dickinson

Date:

4/25/00

Associate Advisor: Tom Lightfoot

Date:

4/20/00

Department Chairperson: Tom Lightfoot

Date:

4/20/00

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I) Introduction

Having just completed a body of work that has been the largest and most important jump in the development of my art career, it's difficult to conjure up a language to describe it. The most logical progression was to look to the past, and decide how I was able to get to the point I am at today. How a person who was so obsessed with intricate folds of drapery and graceful seamless blending of pigment, was able to produce a raw expressionistic body of work? How early inspiration which was drawn from the muted works of early Van Gogh and Surrealism, produced paintings with obvious fauvist and symbolist influence? How the easily read narratives of the older paintings, turned to enigmatic situations that offer more questions than answers? How the simple icons of older works were able to evolve into a series based upon a single symbol? Further thought on the subject led me to believe that there may in fact be no one answer to these questions. There may be no answers at all. But I hope in this document to report on the development of my thesis, and the effect it's had upon my work and my life.

I never picked up a paint brush until I was a sophomore in college. I'd always been influenced by comic book artists like Mcfairlane and Larson, copying their drawing styles throughout high school. I think even now, since I really did learn to draw from comics, there are elements of it's influence in my work. When I talked with other painters and illustrators my age, I began to realize I was in the vast majority of kids that were influenced by the artists of this genre. All throughout my undergraduate work I strove to rid myself of this influence, but now I feel it's something to be embraced. My early paintings were incredibly weak, possessing muddy mixes of color, and no interest in composition. At the time they were the best I could do, and pride is a word I'd use to describe my sentiments towards them. As with other artist's early works, there was an underlying immaturity present in the bulk of the paintings. They are simply seen as stepping stones, thus possessing that importance in my development. The first paintings that I would even consider talking about were not executed until my senior year of college, soon after I returned from Europe. My sophomore and junior years were spent trying to become a surrealist painter. I was interested in Salvador Dali at the time, and was fascinated by the subconscious. Many of the works were based on dreams, trying to break into the subconscious world. I feel

this subconscious world is still important in my work today, but I strive to achieve the effect in an entirely different manner than through dreams. The summer of my junior year I went off to London to study at the Royal College of Art. It was there that I began to breakthrough the confines of Surrealism, and begin sketches dealing with the personal experiences in my life. I looked at the works of Munch and Beckman for the first time in London, not realizing then that their art would effect the way I painted in the future. That one day my work would move away from Surrealism, into a much more expressive and personal style. A Surrealist style will never be lost in my work, for even today I see elements woven within it. I feel it would be impossible to shed all ties I have had with Surrealism, no matter how I try.

The first piece which I feel led me away from surrealism occurred during my senior year of college, with the work "Alone at Eighty" (fig 1). This is not to say that the work doesn't contain blatant surrealist imagery in it, but there is an underlying psychological element that begins to pry it's way into the work. This psychological element would eventually lead me to the work I'm doing today. In this work we are faced with the image of a lonely man, who in his seclusion, has imagined the objects on his dinner table are alive and keeping him company. Candlesticks become hands, meals become faces, and bottles grow lips. This loneliness and separation has been a recurrent theme throughout my work since this painting. The disconnected and misunderstood lives of humans is one of the main concepts of my thesis work. I was beginning early on to explore these ideas in works like "Alone at Eighty". Another interesting correlation occurs in the space the figure of the old man occupies in the painting. It's still a very stagnant composition, with the space providing the figure and area to occupy. But the floor is treated vibrantly and begins to take on a life of it's own. It becomes as important as the figure of the old man, making it not just space, but a narrative element. This idea is carried throughout all the works of my thesis. Space becomes just as important as the figures that occupy them, causing a change in the way I think about interiors. Some of these elements are seen in other works produced that year, but never as clearly as in "Alone at Eighty".

And that is where I was when I made my way across the country to RIT. I was fairly confused about my work and it's importance in my life. I feel, in a way, I still am confused, most likely feeling lost for the rest of my life. Reflecting back on my thesis works, however, has allowed me to discover a little more about myself, and my

interests in the art world. Arriving at RIT caused more confusion and feelings of uncertainty about what I should paint. As always when I'm lost, I turned to my sketch pad in hopes of direction. I was able to finish up one painting left over from my previous undergraduate summer my first week here, but after that I was without a clue as to what to produce. I was quite home sick at the time, missing all my friends and band mates from my undergraduate days at Hope College in Holland Michigan. Thus, in hopes of coping with my frustration, I began a sketch of my band from Michigan. I found it incredibly therapeutic to draw my friends, and use them in my work. When drawing them, I simply imagined the person, and tried to transpose that image to paper. What came out was a distortion in the features of the figures. At times this distortion was further played upon to achieve a more interesting figure, but more and more they became "happy accidents". It was not that I couldn't draw the figures realistically. Given a photograph, I could have copied their likeness without distortion to paper. But I found that this bored me, and that distorted figures conjured up more interest for me. It caused a sort of personality to begin to poke through the surfaces of the otherwise kind and happy faces I saw in my mind. It was not that I held ill feelings for any of my band mates that I painted in that first picture here. They were and are some of my favorite people in the world. But it became apparent to me that through the distortion and manipulation of their features, expressions, and appendages, a deeper meaning could be decoded. In a strange way, by making features distorted and even grotesque at times, I was able to make my figures more human. It became a way to cite many of the internal issues I knew, or assumed, about these people and make them external. They were certainly not the only ones to go through this distortion, for I began to alter my appearance as a figure in the works as well. I said earlier that I was able to enter my subconscious in my new work without citing dreams. In an abstract way, this is my method for doing this. By producing drawings out of my head, without reference, I think my subconscious is able to run free in my work. The feelings and issues I'm dealing with at the time, manifest themselves into the psychological portrayals that the figures receive in my painting. A lot of the time I choose to portray a person in the way I truly feel about them. If I know they have a depressed personality, it becomes the underlying feature in my depiction of them. But other times, a figure is distorted simply because it was the way I was feeling at the time. Thus with the figure I am able to express my emotions. This idea is becoming more real with every single

piece I paint.

As my first year of graduate work progressed, my paintings began to cite particular experiences in my life. I've always done this documentation of past experiences in my work, but never as blatant and true as the paintings I produced that year. In fact, as I get to the works of my thesis, it will become apparent that all the work is based on personal experiences. Thus the first year was great preparation for this aspect of my work. Occasionally, I would paint dreams I'd had, but more and more the work began to depict impressions of personal experiences. I began to read a bit about the work of Gustave Corbet, and some of the ideas of his realism. Many of his pieces of everyday life, simply weren't the monumental subjects of Romantics before him. He depicts everyday occurrences, and, in a way, treats them with the importance of an ideological work (Kleiner 966). In many ways I was striving for a similar idea. Several of the pieces I produced depicted ideas that were far from monumental in their intentions. The experiences may hold personal significance to me, but to the casual viewer, they became more of an enigma than anything else. This again is carried out in the thesis work, with depictions of reactions to bee stings, and conversations in bars.

As I pushed on through my first year, the concepts of my work were not the only elements that were changing. Stylistically, my work was changing with each piece I produced. I was always obsessed with smooth blending, and very dull and murky coloration in my work. Even when I attempted to brighten things up, I would push back through with complements and begin to gray up areas again. Figures and objects where in the round, and possessed a dark drawing like quality. Tones looked sickly, and the paint was applied to give the appearance of a smooth glass like finish. No brush or paint information was left after the smooth onslaught of my blending. The pinnacle work of this style came with the painting "Old Man and the Sea" (figure 2). With this piece we're faced with humor, an idea that finds it's way into some of my work. An older man is seen fishing off of a counter into a yellow toilet, which holds cobalt blue water. The composition and space have become huge issues in the work. Everything feels as if it's turned on an angle, causing the whole environment to feel off kilter, and uncomfortable. The ludicrous idea of a man fishing in a toilet is supported by the uncomfortable setting. The colors for the first time have a unified feeling. There is still my obsession with smooth blends and muted color, but everything in the work feels like it relates. After doing this work, I knew I was ready for a severe shift in style

and treatment of my paintings. I had taken the older ideas as far as I had wished for the time being. I knew it was time to begin to try and explore some new territory. This would have to come in the form of works with simpler and more interesting compositions. The new style would also have to be looser and more spontaneous, with a different take on color.

The painting immediately following "The Old Man and the Sea", was not the breakthrough I was looking for. I found it quite difficult while producing this next painting, to stray away from my old habits. As I got into the work, my smooth blends and anal methods, became defined throughout the piece. I would spend hours trying to smooth out the lines, and control color and form that didn't want to be controlled. I spent three weeks on the piece, and was incredibly unsatisfied with it's outcome. I felt like I would never be able to break out of my old style. For a week I could think of nothing to paint, an experience that has never happened to me before. I did a lot of meticulous drawings from photographs in my sketchbooks, and thought of doing some still lifes in hopes of sparking interest in art again. Then, while standing in line at the bursars office, the wind swept up a curtain and blew it across my body. In that split second, I realized a body of work that would take me away from stagnation. It would come in the form of a series of works painted on plywood, all dealing with parts of humans covered by cloth. The work ended up having unorthodox color, simple compositions, and differing surface treatments. Several of the figures were painted with an impasto style using a palette knife. Backgrounds ended up being solid fields composed of variations of one color. The tapestry that covered the figure was always treated in the older style, juxtaposed against the roughly painted figure and ground. None of the figures were comfortable. An intense psychological aura surrounded all of them. The works were becoming uncomfortable to look at. Some figures were thick colors of green and blue, while others looked like their flesh had been removed, exposing the muscle structure underneath. There were two successes out of the five works, but simply being able to paint them put my mind in a different mode. I realized I was becoming less scared and conformist in my painting. With each piece, I began to feel more comfortable with color and space experiments. The work became more spontaneous, allowing me to free up my mind while painting. I could produce a piece in a matter days, forcing me to expand upon my ideas. What occurred was a loosening of style that would become the inspiration for my thesis work. Because I

was finally able to loosen myself up, a new expression was breaking through in my work.

The most successful of these works came with the largest of the series, "Under the Table" (figure 3). Here were faced with a blue boy hiding under a green cloth, that spreads itself across the width of painting. A bright red leg stands in front of the boy, breaking up his body in relation to the ground it inhabits. There is a lot of play with negative space, which is characteristic of all the works in this series. What makes the piece strange is there is really no way to tell what were looking at. I truly have no idea what my intentions were when painting this piece. It has a sexual quality about it, and possesses an uncomfortable nature. Unlike works of the past, I was citing no particular life experiences in these works. They simply were used as vehicles to explore new ideas and styles. Both of the figurative elements of "Under The Table" are treated with a thick impasto style, while the green cloth was executed with smooth glassy blends. The fields of color behind the figures are uncertain, creating a fuzzy effect around the figures. Again there is a lot of room for speculation on the meaning of this. There is a womb like quality to the space the boy crouches in, which offers up more questions than answers.

So that was where I was the summer before my thesis year; quite confused about my new style, and where it fit into my work. I knew that, though this style opened up new possibilities for me, parts of it that were unappealing to me. It will always be important to use my art as a means of reflection. Citing experiences in my life through art, is incredibly important and therapeutic for me. It is the way I choose to deal with my ideas, interpretations, and problems in life. The previous imagery, though certainly containing personal elements and reflection, didn't hold the kind of content I was striving for. Formally they were a step in the right direction, but that is only part of my work. Without the references to my life, I felt very detached from these paintings. This was not what I was looking for. So during the summer I began a series of ink sketches that would serve as the basis of my thesis. They were very different from any drawing I had done before. There was a controlled looseness to them that enabled me to fuse old and new formal ideas together. I was looking a lot at the drawings of Stanley Spencer and the method of ink wash he used to map out large areas. This appealed to me, thus I used washes and tinted fields to create space. Line weight became more of an issue, I no longer was simply drawing with fine ink pens. I began to use brushes

to produce more expressive line work in the drawings.

One day during that summer, while driving to a friend's house in my undergraduate town of Holland MI, I had a strange vision. It was a windmill. A windmill that didn't work. A functional item without function. It would become the symbol of my thesis.

II) The Work

With the start of my thesis year, I already had completed sketches for most of the pieces I would create. The bulk of the ideas for my thesis were already laid down with the summer ink drawings. The concept was uncertain but the groundwork was laid. I already had sketches of the windmill done, and my original idea was to build a large scale version of it out of barn wood. The circular top portion would be free to spin, and have some sort of image painted upon it. I brought the wood with me to school and thought of how I would construct such a model. But, after looking over some of my summer drawings, I decided it would be more constructive for me to concentrate on these images for my thesis.

As I look over the thesis paintings now, I find it easy to follow my growth as an artist. This new body of work is different from the old paintings, thus many comparisons and contrasts can be made. As I've stated before, I was attempting to move back to a narrative style with my thesis paintings. I was feeling disconnected with the less personal wood paintings, and knew it was time to get back to my roots. Thus, there is a narrative quality with the new thesis work. All the pieces relate to incidents that have occurred in the past two years. Some incidents were incredibly fascinating, and others were chosen because of their unambiguous quality. What is different about these new narratives is their treatment. In past works, all elements of a situation were included. I reasoned that, though these elements may jumble up the painting, it was still important to paint them. This was not how my thesis paintings were conceived. The thesis work is far more cryptic, possessing stripped down situations and no conclusions. More questions are raised than answered. The new idea of formal narrative began working its way into my painting vocabulary. What I mean by formal narrative, is the formal elements of color, space, and composition, help to add atmosphere to the situation being depicted. Colors and spatial manipulations

become just as important as the figures of the paintings.

Style would be a second comparison and contrast to the older works. Though there is a drastic change in color and surface, there are still several stylistic similarities between the thesis and older paintings. The biggest of these similarities is distortion of the figure. Like the past work, all my thesis works are based on ideas from my head. My impressions of the people I depict all started from my perception of them. I used no references in these works, just my interpretation of a situation. Therefore, there are similar figure constructions with the thesis and the older works. There are also similarities with my treatment of surface in these works. The first three works still have many of the smooth blends you would find in an older work. Although there are a lot of stylistic similarities between the old and new work, the new work is far more experimental. A much more expressive color scheme is developed, and throughout the work there are a multitude of different surface treatments. An outlining quality is explored in the works, giving a graphic separation to the elements within the pieces. Thickly painted figures contrast with smooth fields of space, and smudges of expressive texture find their way into the later works.

The psychological elements of the thesis works become a third means of comparison and contrast to the old. There has always been a preoccupation with the psychological in my work, and the thesis pieces offer no exception. Psychological undertones become apparent upon immediate viewing of my work. Like works of the past, there is an uncomfortableness to the thesis works. A sense of mystery and the unknown are present in all the thesis paintings. With the thesis works though, the psychological becomes far more intense than it did in the past. I think this has to do with the twisted compositions, expressive color, and further explorations of spatial relationships. Because the spaces the figures inhabit become just as important as the characters themselves, a further feeling of mystery surrounds the work. Not only are the figures uncomfortable in the paintings, but the space itself feels uncomfortable, almost as if it would come alive at any moment, and begin to talk with the figures. All the elements of the paintings work together to help create this psychological mood. Inanimate objects move and flex in patterns as they look on at the figures. The work certainly isn't depressing, but it's not happy either. There is a feeling of loneliness and separation that occurs. Though some of the work has several figures in them, there is a feeling of distance between them. There is no confrontation, or means of

communication existing between any of the figures. They are involved with their thoughts and feelings, and only show their obvious discomfort in their expressions.

The first thesis work I created was the piece "Put Some Mud On It" (figure 4). There is a logical progression in with the growth of the work, and this piece was my starting point. The idea of this painting came very early in the summer through the ink sketches. I was in a field picking strawberries with my mom when this incident occurred. The baskets were beginning to fill up, and the picking was getting slimmer by the minute. We of course wanted our money's worth so mom and I worked hard to fill the baskets to the top. Though the day was sweltering, there were quite a few people picking in the fields. My step dad and mom were picking in one row and I right next to them. During one pass at the vine, my mom cried out that she had been stung by a bee. Never the one for pain she immediately began to complain. It was then that I heard my step dad yell out "put some mud on it". My mom did and the swelling did eventually go down. Later that night I was looking for a way to cite the experience, and decided to paint mom wiping mud on her arm. It just seemed more interesting then the rest of the day, and offered up questions and ideas. In producing the painting, I distinctly remember trying very hard to loosen up on the figures, but was having a hard time. My flesh tones were looking dull and green, and frustration began to rear it's familiar and frustrating head. Then, I looked to Max Beckmann's triptychs done toward the end of his life. The painting "Persus" and it's treatment of flesh inspired me to lighten up my pallet a bit. The skin tones in the work are treated with a white base, loosely built up with shades of cobalt blue, red, and brown. The hair is still a natural human blond, creating a beautiful contrast (Spieler 70). After studying this and several other works, I went back over the flesh tones of the mom figure with pink and violet tones, with white highlights. I stuck with the Beckman "Persus" hair and, and used a vibrant blond to cover the head. I was also looking at some of Millet's work, particularly "The Gleaners". I really just liked the way the two workers were bending over to pick up the pieces of straw (Kleiner 965). I decided to include a Millet like worker next to mom in the painting. He picks at nothing, and his hat looks like a giant brown sunny side up egg on his head. In regards to the field, I had no farther to look then my drawing. I knew I wanted a very loose background that captured a calligraphic feel. I wanted it to look like my sketch, therefore, I painted a light turquoise wash and divided up the space with cobalt blue lines.

This background treatment was a very drastic change for me and my work. First, due to my fascination with interiors, it's very rare that I choose to paint an outdoor experience. Second, this lined background was quite a change for me, even when looking back to the cloth works on board. I was moving into new territory and I was beginning to like it. Being able to loosen up my painting made something I've always enjoyed even more exciting. This line of ideas would appear in all of my thesis works in some form, giving a cohesive element to bind the pieces together. Another element, which was the last portion to be painted on "Put Some Mud On It", would appear in all the rest of the thesis works. At the point I painted this piece I was still intending to build a windmill. I had all the wood, and had already talked to my friend Mark Grimm about help in constructing it. But during this work, toward the end, I decided I wanted to focus purely on painting, and not worry about making a full size mill. It was a symbol I was becoming more and more obsessed with and thus I decided to put it in all of the thesis paintings. It would act as a unifying symbol, a simple shape appearing in all of the work. At this point however, I knew it had importance, but I could not figure out why. So, in the touching up stage of "Put Some Mud On It", I painted the wind mill in the back of the field. It floats back there, out of place, and lost in its own bizarre existence. "Put Some Mud On It" was a good experience, and just the work I needed to offer insight into further possibilities. The new ideas of line, stripped down space, and bright unconventional color, became the first steps in the thesis journey.

Upon completion of "Put Some Mud On It" I was ready to tackle a new work immediately. I looked to my sketch book and chose an early drawing I did of my brother in a bar. A strong wood floor took up most of the space, which I knew was perfect for my new stripped down line style. I began to construct a large canvas, and was immediately plagued with problems. I took a whole day to build and stretch it, but after all the work I was content. I left it on the floor of my studio, and headed home with the idea of painting first thing in the morning. When I returned, I found hole in the center of the canvas. It seemed a plywood painting had fallen off the wall overnight, creating a gouge in the canvas. After several minutes of profanities, I decided to talk with my teacher, who assured me this was common and not all that hard to fix. I tell this story not to waste time, but to raise the point that a new style and ideas were not the only thing I learned producing my thesis works. By the end I had developed and entirely new system of stretcher construction that was faster and cheaper. I was more

confident about working with wood, and building large canvases made to last. In many ways this discovery was almost as important as the new style. I take great pride in building my canvases, and I think this helps me care for the work before I even begin painting.

The second thesis work I produced was the largest of the group, and is called "The Bar" (figure 5). This work was inspired by an incident that occurred two years ago when my brother and I were visiting Europe. We were in Geneva Switzerland at a vacant, run down English Pub. He and I were the only customers in the seedy bar, and save the bar keep, the only humans. It was quite dark with stained walls, and a hard wood floor. I remember we consumed quite a bit of beer that night, and got into a very large fight. The particulars are of no concern, but the experience was memorable enough for me to produce a work from it. In the painting, my brother Ben sits right in front of the viewer, staring blankly and looking displeased. Ben has a thick curly brown hair, which I chose to exaggerate and give a cobalt blue color. His skin is a mixture of various shades of green with Naples Yellow highlights. His hands rest on a circular table, an object that appears in many of the paintings, and close to his right fist is a glass of beer. He looks very tense, like he's about to punch the glass, and knock it from the table. Behind him is a bright yellow bar, with the violet shadow of a bar maid pouring drinks. He, the bar, and the bar tender dominate the left edge of the work, leaving the bulk of space for the vibrant bar floor. The floor is treated with purple washes, with strong sienna lines to emulate the grains of hard wood. The floor is off kilter from the rest of the work, and throws the balance of the painting off. Because of it's treatment, Ben looks almost as if he's floating above the floor of the bar.

I took some of my new stylistic ideas one step further in this work. Everything is still treated with smooth blends, but the color is becoming more unconventional and expressive. The work is certainly not a happy piece, but because of the circus like color, it's hard to tell. This sharp contrast of almost depressing psychological narrative, and vibrant happy color is something that appears in most of my thesis works. It again offers up more questions than answers, and leaves the viewer questioning it's meaning. This contrast between depressing psychological situations, and bright boisterous color is not unlike life. Throughout life there is good and bad. On the same day you fall in love, someone else falls out. At the same time your child is born, someone else's dies. It's the cycle of life where, with the happy, we must also face

sad. I think, subconsciously, this is occurring in these thesis works.

The third work came about shortly after the second, and was painted at a very quick pace. As I became more comfortable with my new style, paintings started to be produced in a faster more inspired pace. With the third painting, "China and I" (figure 6), I began to dive into more recent and personal issues. During the summer I got a dog, China, and immediately became obsessed with her. She's almost like a child to me, and I was looking to cite some of that bond in this work. At the same time, I broke my foot this summer, and having never had a cast before, I found it very debilitating. I live alone, and being forced to walk with crutches, and try to train a puppy, left me quite emotional and lonely at times. In this work, I'm reading a book with little China sitting under my arm. I tried to give her a mischievous look upon her face, while I sit pensively reading my novel. I was trying to produce a work that both expressed my love for China but, at the same time, showed my feelings of disconnection with the world during my ordeal.

This was the last of the smoothly painted thesis works. I used a lot of glazing techniques with this work, trying to get color to shimmer and jump out of the painting. This was the first painting of the thesis where I felt the color combinations were truly successful. I painted it at such a mad pace, but everything seemed to relate when I was finished. I played with temperature quite a bit in this work, putting warm and cold contrasts in the color of my skin. The big change in this work was again space, and a new idea of varying surface treatments. The figures and couch are painted in the round, all possessing shadows and depth. The night stand and lamp in the work are just simple washes of color that are outlined. The windmill has been reduced one more step in this painting, lying next to me as a loose drawing in a sketch book. I began to play with some modeling techniques in the walls of the piece. There is a successful contrast of a blue green and purple that occurs on one of the walls. I felt a sense of accomplishment when I finished this work. The concept remained strong throughout, and was backed by the powerful color combinations in the work. I feel the psychological elements of the work were also quite successful. I used several of my past psychological obsessions with the obscuring of the figure, and the folds in cloth. New ideas of space distortion and varying surface treatments helped to make the psychological narrative more potent than before.

Christmas break occurred right after the completion of this work and I was

separated from painting for several weeks. As I sat at home, the works were constantly on my mind. I continued to sketch and to look to older drawings and ideas for inspiration. It was during this break that I came up with the idea for my fourth thesis work and upon returning I was able to get right back to work. The fourth work, "The Round Table" (figure 7), deals with a situation that happened over my Christmas break. It was a late night and my brother, my best friend ray, my father, and I, all were sitting around our kitchen table. An intense and fascinating conversation began to ensue which lasted well into the night. It was a very good experience, one that will remain in mind for awhile. But when I went to draw it on paper, I found my subconscious turning the idea into an uncomfortable situation. All the figures became disconnected. It was quite the opposite of what I had intended to paint, but it seemed to work. The faces became distorted and my thoughts of inner personality came out in the figure's expressions. I knew I wasn't slandering the atmosphere of that night, but was rather transforming a concept into a more interesting painting. I see no problem with this in my work, and I've certainly been known to alter a situation to make it more interesting. The fact that it still stems from an actual occurrence is what is important to the thesis body of work.

There were several stylistic changes made in this painting. I knew I wanted to have a bit of a different approach with the last three paintings, and those changes began to happen with this work. The first of these changes came with my under painting. In the past, I laid out many of the colors with a thin wash of oil paint before I began to work. This involves waiting several days for the pigment to dry before application of further layers. With this work I laid out one solid color of acrylic based paint, raw sienna. This allowed me to think about color in a very different way, for it was not all laid out in front of me. Something as simple as a single field of color allowed me to loosen up even more, and think abstractly about color combinations. Not only this, but because of the acrylic under painting, the drying time was greatly increased, which allowed me to immediately be able to go in and paint. When beginning this painting, I had no idea what colors to use or what direction I was planning to take. It was a blank slate, so to speak, allowing me to push myself in new directions. This fourth work, "The Round Table" started as the drawing of one of the figures with paint. I fleshed all the figure's faces in quite loosely, and then went in with a pallet knife to add the new element of texture to the work. This was not the first time I

had applied paint with a knife, but it was certainly not a method I was proficient with. I found it to be conducive to my style, and I made breakthroughs in my approach with knife application quickly. It was a challenge painting random areas with color, and attempting to find ways to relate the whole work together as a single unit. I decided to paint a monochromatic background of turquoise with cobalt outlines as a way of bringing all the elements together. I was a little apprehensive about the idea, but in the end it turned out to be quite successful. It caused the figures to be pushed forward in the work, and the concentration to be focused on them. To cause even more of a push-pull effect, the figures were treated with an impasto application of paint, while the background was smooth and flat. The windmill has been quite reduced in this painting. It appears now as just a simple shadow in the rear portion of the work, looking more like a key hole than a windmill.

The fifth painting, "Flizamabopper" (figure 8) was a direct reflection of the ideas that came from "The Round Table". The idea stemmed from an incident that occurred this summer with some friends in Michigan. It was quite a strange night where vast amount of liquor were consumed, and several harsh remarks were made. There was nothing incredibly special about that particular night but the next day I did an interesting sketch to cite the evening and found it to be a fine composition. My friend, Ice, is seen in the foreground drinking a large beer, while several friends are passed out and complacent in the background. It seemed like a very interesting painting to do and I felt, at the time, like I needed an idea I was detached from. It's not to say that this drawing did not hold importance and meaning to me, it was just a situation I wasn't emotionally involved with.

The work "Flizamabopper" came about very quickly and smoothly. Having just come off the the "Round Table", I was feeling confident with the pallet knife and, again, went right in on the main figure against a field of raw sienna. Again, I had very little idea of how to approach the work and let my artistic ideas mature while I painted. It's much more interesting to paint this way, exploring the unknown potential of a work. Having no "battle plan" stylistically, allowed me to free myself up even further, and helped create interesting paintings. Of course, I always had a sketch to rely on. I wasn't going into these works blind but, at the same time, I was allowing myself the chance to loosen up and explore new ideas in the work. Again, there are varying surface treatments on this work, and a very interesting color scheme. Several

acquaintances have commented that they feel this was the best piece I did for the show. I would have to disagree but it suggests it's strength. The treatment of the floor in this work was a new direction. It has a very loose fuzzy feel to it, almost as if it's out of focus. It allows the figures and furniture to pop out even more and gives them the strength they deserve. The furniture in this work, I feel, is just as important as the figures. They possess a strong coloration allowing them to carry a similar significance as the figures. The windmill is again stripped down in this work, and appears in it's shadowed key hole state, on the label of the bottle.

Because I was able to produce the last three works at such a rapid rate, I knew I would be able to paint a sixth. This was a goal I didn't think was that obtainable with the time allotment we had. I didn't have any sketches made that I thought were impressive enough to use for this work. I knew I needed something special for this last painting. My mom lives about three hours from Rochester, and while visiting one weekend I was given the perfect story for my last painting. My mom's grandma died several years ago and we were talking about her funeral during my visit home. Mom began telling one of the most fascinating stories and it became the basis of this last painting. Her grandmother had this amazing tie with Saint Anthony, who was the patron saint of lost objects. Throughout my life I've been hearing stories of how objects were lost and miraculously found thanks to my great grandmothers prayers to Saint Anthony. Before my great grandmother died, my mom was given a locket by her mother, my great grandmother's daughter. My mom is always losing things, so her mother told her when she gave her the locket to get a chain. Well mom, being the person she is, lost the locket soon after, causing a feeling guilt for quite sometime. A year later, my great grandmother died, and my mom was one of the speakers at the funeral. It was an emotional time and moms speech was very inspiring. When she returned home from the funeral, she began to unpack her suitcase. She had used this case on every trip she took and always unpacked it when she got home. This time was no different but, when she got to the bottom of the case, there was the locket with a chain affixed around it. This is the basis for my last painting, "Remember to Get a Chain" (figure 9).

I feel this was the most successful of the works I produced. It seems silly to say that I saved the best for last but in this case I think I did. The composition, the treatment of surface, the color, all stand out in this work. Again, it started as a simple field of

acrylic raw sienna with little to no idea about it's outcome. Here we see my mom clutching a bookshelf for balance when she is shocked to find the locket with chain in her suitcase. In this case I used the windmill as the shape of the locket. It sits mysteriously at the bottom of the suitcase offering up more questions than answers. The space plays a very large role in this stripped down composition. The bed, the suitcase, the book shelf, even the walls and floor are as important as the shocked figure of my mom. I chose to paint my mom with a vibrant impasto shirt. Possessing striking color and texture, it is one of the more interesting surface treatments of the thesis. I particularly like the contrast of the cobalt blue suitcase and it's yellow green outline. A color combination I never would have chosen in the past, now has become an interesting element to me. I think that says a lot about my growth as an artist throughout the entire thesis process.

I've found it to be interesting to reflect upon the thesis body of work and think about its creation. Many impressions have been formed about this body of work, and my growth as an artist. I've been done with the works for several months and have continued to paint new pieces in a similar style. It was such a massive change for me to get to the point I am now, but the future of my work is unclear. I decided to push away from the windmill shape in the new works. I have no doubt that the shape will appear again in future works, but for now it's been laid to rest with the thesis paintings. The elements that changed in my work continue to be carried out and explored. The varying use of texture, outlining, vibrant color, and warped compositions will be concepts I will be playing with in the years to come. No longer has the direct narrative become the important part of my work. My work has evolved to use my experiences as the ground work to uncover subconscious thoughts. Indecisive explanations are becoming more common when I'm asked about my work, for even I'm unsure, most of the time, what I'm doing. For some reason, certain experiences stimulate a part of me that wishes to explore them on canvas. Most of the time the original intention is not developed. In it's place is a warped view of reality, that is all at once disturbing and inviting.

Post thesis works have been a way for me to work out of my thesis mode. The new works are much smaller in size with less attention paid to my old obsessions of smooth surface and detail. They have helped me loosen up further and escape the confines of the windmill icon. Several of them possess no figures at all, acting more as

terrain from memory that contain deeply personal meaning. This is not apparent to the viewers but that is becoming less of an issue as I continue to paint. Everyone sees the work as something different. I like that idea a lot. The absence of the figure in the works is theme I hope to explore further this summer with a series of psychological landscapes. Experiences will still be cited but in a much more personal and expressive way. My color continues to change in these new work and the element of depression is not as apparent. After the thesis I've had the urge to create works that are attempting to be beautiful. The grotesque has been on my mind for so long now, I need to step away and search for interesting ways to create personally beautiful images. This is not to say that I'm stepping away from psychological avenues, I'm just on a side path for a little while.

III) Mill

I've mentioned the windmill throughout this report, but have done little to explain it's meaning. It appears in all of the thesis works, but holds different levels of significance in each piece. I think maybe the biggest reason it hasn't been discussed until now, is that my full understanding of it's purpose is still uncertain. I knew after thinking of the shape that it was important, and that it carried some personal significance. I became obsessed with the shape throughout that summer and well into the school year. It appealed to me in a strange way and managed to reach deep inside of me on some different level.

The first thing that can be said about the windmill is that it would never work. It's a function less version of a machine that serves a major purpose. Thus, the non functioning mill already has a strong psychological tie to my figures. It's disconnected from it's other mill brothers in that it does not work. It's purpose is an aesthetic one, for it sits in the field all day, unmoving and unchanging. It's strength lies in it's beautiful shape and simple curves. I think one possible reason I was so drawn to the idea of a windmill had to do with my undergraduate education. I went to Hope College in Holland Michigan and was bombarded for four years with images of windmills. Holland was settled by a large Dutch population, thus, windmill images were scattered throughout the town. There was a small mock windmill within walking distance of my house there. I think I associate the windmill with my undergraduate education and the many experiences I had there. Through the good and bad, the windmill is always

there, unmoving and unchanging.

Another idea I explored was that the windmill was actually me. Like my windmill, I've certainly felt as if I've had no purpose in life but to just occupying space. I think we all feel that way sometimes, almost like we're on this world so that others can just look at us. It's a very uncomfortable feeling but, then again, so is life. So maybe the mill is me, or just a symbol of my presence in all of these experiences and a way for me to be part of every painting indirectly, looking over the actions of the participants.

The last idea came about from others impressions of what the windmill actually was. Most thought when they first saw the mill, that it was an old fashioned key hole of some sort. I liked the idea and as the mill became simpler and less significant, it began to look more like a key hole. I even did several drawings of the mill with the "the key" written under it. What does a key hole mean? There are hundreds of explanations that tie in with my thesis, but my favorite is that it separates worlds. It serves as a way to tie the actual situations of this world with the subconscious, psychological ideas of my paintings' world. It is the key that allows both to remain connected.

IV) Conclusion:

There has been so much I've learned from thinking about and completing my thesis. Spending two years at graduate school and having been given the time to truly think and develop my work has had a profound effect on my life. Most of my ideas of what I thought art was and how I wanted my work to look have completely changed in my two years here. I think it's a change for the better. The work has become stronger and vibrant, and it's much more enjoyable and therapeutic to create. Loosening up artistically, has allowed me to be free and enjoy my life more. It's almost as if when I stopped being uptight with my work, a correlation occurred with my life. I know now that painting makes me happy and that I'm truly content when I'm emerged in art. I have many new ideas and plans for my work and life and, I think, I owe a lot of that to the production of my thesis. My future, right now, is uncertain but I know I would like to continue producing work and eventually be a college professor. Until that time comes, I'll paint and enjoy what I have around me. There are countless experiences that happen to me everyday. It's just as simple as picking up a brush and recording it.

Works

Figure 1) "Alone at Eighty" 54in / 60in (Oil on Canvas)

Figure 2) "Old Man and the Sea" 48in / 35in (Oil on Canvas)

Figure 3) "Under the Table" 48in / 48in (Oil on Board)

Figure 4) "Put Some Mud On It" 38in / 64in (Oil on Canvas)

Figure 5) "The Bar" 56in / 60in (Oil on Canvas)

Figure 6) "China and Me" 48in / 75in (Oil on Canvas)

Figure 7) "Round Table" 27in / 27in (Oil on Canvas)

Figure 8) "Flizamabopper" 35in / 40in (Oil on Canvas)

Figure 9) "Remember to Get a Chain" 40in / 51in (Oil on Canvas)



Figure 1



Figure 2

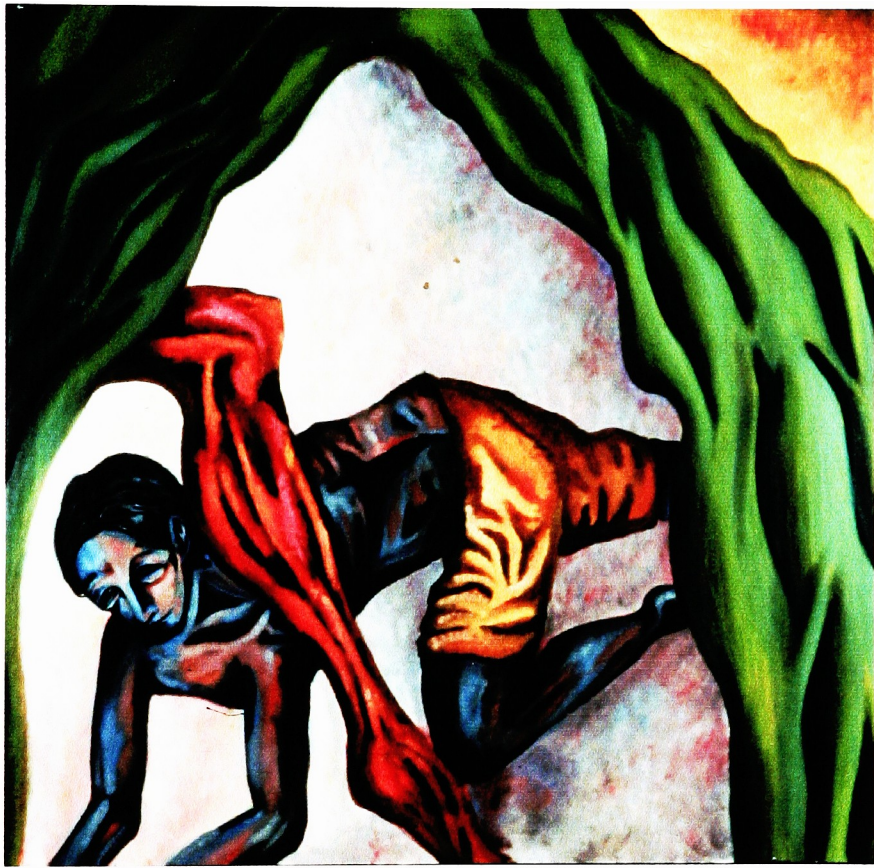


Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9

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