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### Invisible force

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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

INVISIBLE FORCE

By

Sharon L. Lockwood

October, 1994

## Approvals

Adviser: Philip W. Bornarth

Date: 10/27/94

Associate Adviser: Lawrence Williams

Date: 1 Nov 94

Associate Adviser: Robert Heischman

Date: 11 Dec 94

Department Chairperson: Luvon Sheppard

Date: 12/6/94

I, Sharon L. Lockwood, \_\_\_\_\_, prefer to be contacted each time a request for production is made. I can be reached at the following address:

14 Inverness Circle  
Fairport, New York 14450

For Bob, Dan and Pat

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**PHILOSOPHY**

**The Real World consists in a balanced adjustment of opposing tendencies. Behind the strife between opposites there lies a hidden harmony or attunement which is the world. (Heraclitus, Rogers 1987, 113).**

Harmony and unity are primary goals of the creative process and artists often achieve such congruity by creating conflicting tensions or playing on opposites. My thesis paintings represent a deep search for such harmony by attempting unity or integration of feminine (yin) and masculine (yang) energies. Female energy is receptive, intuitive and creative; while male energy is active; bringing form into motion. The soft organic yin shapes of the facial features of my large portraits are purposely juxtaposed against the more yang linear geometric patterns borrowed from Amish quilts. The quilt image is both feminine in its comforting nurturing quality and masculine in its linear rational division of space.

I believe each human, whether male or female possesses energies of the opposite sex. These opposite energies are much like an invisible force that often appears a bit uncomfortable, foreign or threatening when initially realized or confronted.

Uniting our male and female sides is much like fully employing both hemispheres of the human brain. The left hemisphere seems to house the yang qualities of analysis, logic and rational thought. It is

sequential, linear, temporal and excels in verbal skills and symbolic abstractions. The orderly geometric shapes of my paintings arise from the left hemisphere's need to create order and sequence. These rational lines and shapes seem to ground the paintings and anchor them securely to earth. The contrasting right yin hemisphere is intuitive, spatial, perceptive, holistic and timeless. It seeks patterns, analogies and relationships. It simultaneously processes information in a non-linear and non-sequential manner, and excels in music, art and humor (Edwards 1986, 12).

Male energy is a highly focused energy and tends to view things in a precise and definitive manner. It is earthy, productive, specific and goal oriented. It excels in details and repetitive tasks. Female energy is lighter and more effervescent. It is creative, chaotic and nonfocused. Its timeless quality enables one to tap into universal ideas for great inspiration and vision.

In the real or material world, matter is considered positive or masculine, while consciousness is considered negative or feminine. Empty space or negative space is regarded as feminine and receptive, while the actual creation of things is aggressive, initiating, positive and considered masculine (Judith 1987, 425). Our feminine side is like cosmic knowing energy, while our male side is more like earthly doing energy. It is as if our creative feminine cosmic side of prolific ideas would never be brought into fruition without our earthly male side



initiating action. Great art and inventions would never be created without uniting our masculine and feminine halves of knowing and doing.

Our feminine side is not only creative, cosmic and timeless, it is also receptive, soft, warm, emotional and nurturing. Female energy does not stand alone or foster separation. Through the birthing process, it connects humans with each other and the universe. It seems to intuit an immortality of consciousness. It is a merging surrendering force that hungers for human relationships and communication (Griscom 1991, 146). Its male counterpart is more solid, strong, aggressive, assertive and protective. Yang energy is highly independent, individualistic and full of adventure and risk taking. It loves creating structure in the external world.

The opposite sex is often our mirror. We project on our mate or the significant male or female in our lives all the attributes or faults that we are lacking or are unaware of in ourselves. Sometimes we view these attributes as polarities or differences that are unattainable rather than just untapped or undeveloped aspects of ourselves (Griscom 1991, 43). When we marry or merge our dual essences of male and female we recognize the intuitive goddess life-bringing sensitive portion of ourselves as well as the portion of ourselves that is powerful, rational and intellectual. One is of the earth and the other of the spirit (Marciniak 1992, 208).

In an attempt to understand the polarities of masculine and feminine natures, I purposely decided against using Carl Jung's popular intellectual model of the "anima" and "animus". Jung believes that every man carries a woman within himself, which he calls the anima and vice versa every woman carries a man inside herself called the animus. The anima is a personification of all feminine psychological tendencies in a man's psyche, such as feelings, emotions, prophetic hunches, intuitions, the capacity for love, the appreciation of nature and his relation to the unconscious (Jung 1964, 186). Likewise the animus is the embodiment of all the psychological masculine proclivities in a woman's psyche, such as initiative, courage, enterprising spirit, objectivity and spiritual wisdom (Jung 1964, 206). Jung believes that the anima and the animus have both positive benevolent and negative malefic aspects. He postulates that these negative aspects of the anima and animus are buried deeply in our subconscious and greatly color our behavior and effectiveness.

Carl Jung and his teacher, Sigmund Freud, view man as a flawed species, in which individual life rests precariously at the beck and call of our needs, with survival as the primary goal a kind of survival without meaning. This Darwinian view leaves us without a sense of belonging to nature. We seem to survive at nature's expense or we are cut off from God and nature. Jung and Freud believe that our greatest dreams, worst fears and the negativity of the anima and animus result from glandular imbalances and neuroses from childhood trauma (Roberts 1981, 158). Modern psychology espouses that the conscious mind is relatively

powerless and that adult experiences are set in the days of infancy. People learn that they should not be aware of subconscious material and that the doors to the inner self are tightly shut. Only lengthy psychoanalysis could or should open these doors. Thus the ordinary individual feels shut off from his core and divorced from his or her reality (Roberts 1974, 18). This leaves man or woman blaming someone else for his or her disconnection from nature and maybe a resulting failure to merge his or her male and female sides.

I believe that just as every artist creates their own works of art, each person creates his or her own reality. Each man and woman is the creator of himself or herself. Our every thought, be it positive or negative, will eventually materialize or manifest itself into our realities. It is as if you see or feel what you expect to see or feel. Our own private worlds are pictures of our expectations. It is, therefore, our personal duty and responsibility to find our lost male or female sides and merge the two into a harmonious whole. The union of feminine and masculine energies within the individual is the basis of all creation (Gawain 1986, 47).

I hold a personal belief that we have other lives or possibly participate in simultaneous realities. This could account for some of our masculine-feminine imbalances as well as life's perceived inequities. By making a spiritual inner journey through meditation or by paying close attention to our dream life or dream landscapes we may be able to

discover or reveal to ourselves some of these masculine-feminine imbalances. As we tap into our inner core through dreams and meditation, we may begin to explore or feel our own creativity and thus discover that we do create our own reality.

Current Western culture focuses on the differences between our masculine and feminine sides thereby fostering separation and estrangement in our personalities as well as that of the world at large. This mode of thinking can be restrictive rather than expansive. We need to unite or integrate our polarities of yin and yang to create a wholeness. The united yin and yang symbolically represents the whole self with its diverse abilities, desires and characteristics. Mankind cannot be one with the cosmos or universe until he is first one with himself or herself or unites his complementary side of opposites.

## METHODOLOGY AND INFLUENCES

As mentioned, I believe that consciousness comes before matter or that we create our own universes or realities through our thoughts or mental states. Before manifesting themselves in reality, my final large scale paintings were conceived first through dreams and mediative states. Artists often use their dream and other altered states of consciousness to enhance and explore their creative worlds. I believe there is an inner landscape of the mind where things happen first, much like the beginning of creation. Dreams tap into this rich feminine inspirational inner order. The symbols in our dreams are often majestic formulations of what we know intuitively.

The design for the Amish influenced quilt shapes or the geometric shapes of the first two paintings came from a dream state approximately six weeks before the series was started. In the dream I walked into an empty painting studio and viewed a huge Amish-like quilt pattern, half sewn like a quilt and half stretched like a canvas. The center diamond quilt shapes on the first two thesis paintings are almost identical to this dream image (Fig. 6 and Fig. 7).

My conscious rational male side later mentally juxtaposed large portraits over the dream quilt image. These monumental images were influenced by Chuck Close. It was not his early nineteen sixties Photo Realism formula style paintings that influenced my work, but his later flatter looser lusciously hued dot portraits. I was more influenced by Close's 1986 Self Portrait where his facial features are composed of vague

multicolored daubs of paint on a grid, than his earlier intense confrontational images.

Before marrying the masculine geometric quilt shapes and the soft facial images in my thesis paintings, I designed and created two contemporary geometric linear optical fabric quilts (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2). These illusionary quilts and my thesis paintings were greatly influenced by the austere Amish minimalist quilts of the late nineteenth through mid twentieth century. The Amish women formed these quilts by using simple geometric shapes and a limited palette of color. They relied on deep solid saturated colors in exquisitely odd color combinations. My dream quilt image is an interpretation of one of their oldest and plainest quilt patterns, the center diamond, or diamond in a square, found almost exclusively in Lancaster County (Fig. 3). The Amish softened these spartan quilts by using feathery organic shapes in their miniscule quilting stitches. The relationship in the quilts of the individual parts to the whole and the way the inner and outer borders reacted to each other were balancing acts between tension and harmony, calm and intensity, simplicity and drama and the male and the female (Plain and Simple, p.3).

Also before executing the large serial paintings, I spent innumerable hours drawing and painting the human figure. Trial and error eventually produced several pleasing volumetric sculptural figurative paintings. The first of these successful figurative paintings

conquered my battle with the acrylic medium. This painting also unified or integrated the painting surface and developed a tension between the impasto and the transparent glazes (Fig. 4). The final large scale paintings with their drippy washes and opaque shapes came about after many experiments in combining and recombining line, space, shape, mass, texture, pattern and color. I kept experimenting with the above elements or ingredients according to the principles of balance, emphasis, rhythm, proportion and scale until an aesthetically pleasing recipe for the large scale paintings emerged. This process led to another successful painting that combined figurative plastic elements with transparent dissecting geometric cube shapes in deep rich Amish-like colors (Fig. 5).

After much deliberation, I decided to use photographs of my sons for the large overlay images. I concluded like Chuck Close,

If you are going to spend several months painting a face, it makes the job easier and infinitely more important if it belongs to someone you care about (Close 1987, 28).

Not only did the photographs represent a frozen, poem-like moment in time, they represented a fixed moment in each child's life. I realized after starting on Figure 8 that each photograph was taken at about eighteen years old or at the time when my sons were literally and symbolically departing from home. The void or loss of their presence was preserved as permanent memories in these paintings. There was much personal joy and excitement in the creation of each of the



colossal images. Great feelings, emotions and conscious and unconscious knowledge of the subject's personalities evidenced themselves in the shapes and colors of the portraits. It was as if I psychically could feel and then represent on canvas their auras or the colors of their personalities. This drew on the core of my feminine energy and the paintings were like soliloquies of my son's souls.

I felt like I was breaking personal limits or boundaries when I painted the first huge facial image over the pencilled quilt lines. The paintings were six by six feet and the vastness of the scale was powerful and masculine. Yet the act of painting the soft anatomical forms put me in an unearthly feminine "flow state" where concentration seemed effortless and time was altered. The painting process was passionate, aggressive and energetic. I let the drippy washes form spontaneous vertical overlays tying the face to the quilt lines. The first canvas had an underpainting quality with its translucent washy luminous pastel palette. It was a challenge and an experiment in proportion and scale (Fig. 6).

The second painting pushed the limits of color and line. I was attempting to create a tension between flat geometric patterned space and pictorial organic space or to create a true tension of opposites. Its saturated red, magentas, oranges, and cyans echoed my long admired Amish quilts. When the bold facial image dissected the quilt shapes, it took on a harlequin look reminiscent of Picasso's Three Musicians 1921.

The colors bounced from the rectangular piano key shapes at the bottom of the painting to the diamond and triangular shapes like musical notes creating a melody (Fig. 7).

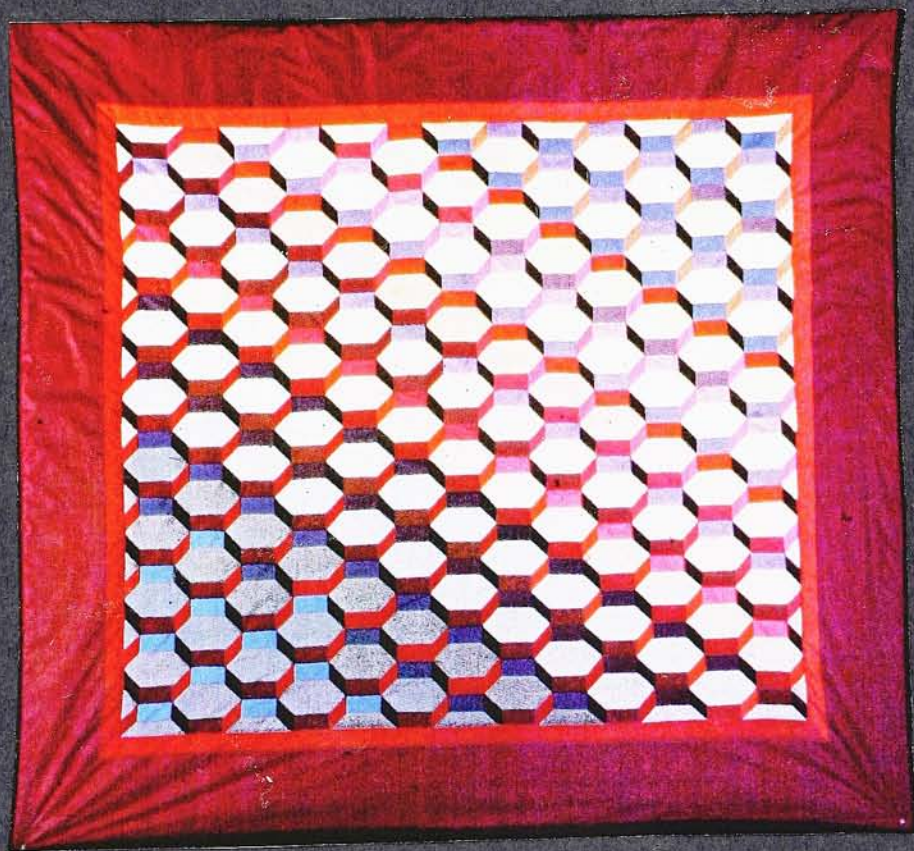
A combination of the center diamond pattern and an Islamic floor pattern created a different spatial order in the third large scale painting. Diamonds radiating out of squares created a rippling effect like stones thrown in a pond. Only the edges of the canvas stopped these shapes from continuing on infinitely. This third portrait was painted at an oblique angle and the intensity of the facial gaze was matched by the intensity of the deep purples, magentas and greens. A dark abstract drippy line down the side of the nose pushed the right cheek back into dark triangular planes. This created a strong contrast between the pale linear shapes on the left side of the canvas and the strong dominate shapes of the organic features. The small red triangle on the left side of the portrait acted as a visual device that pulled our eye back over the neutral flatter areas (Fig. 8).

The fourth painting was composed of triangular shapes that wove across the grid fracturing the surface of the canvas into one hundred and twenty eight units. Shifting patterns of yellows, peaches, aquas and intense cobalts wove through this contemplative repetitive pattern. These sunset-like colors came from a meditative state and gave the painting a lighter more luminous feeling as they interacted with the white negative spaces. Even where its paint densities are heavy there is a

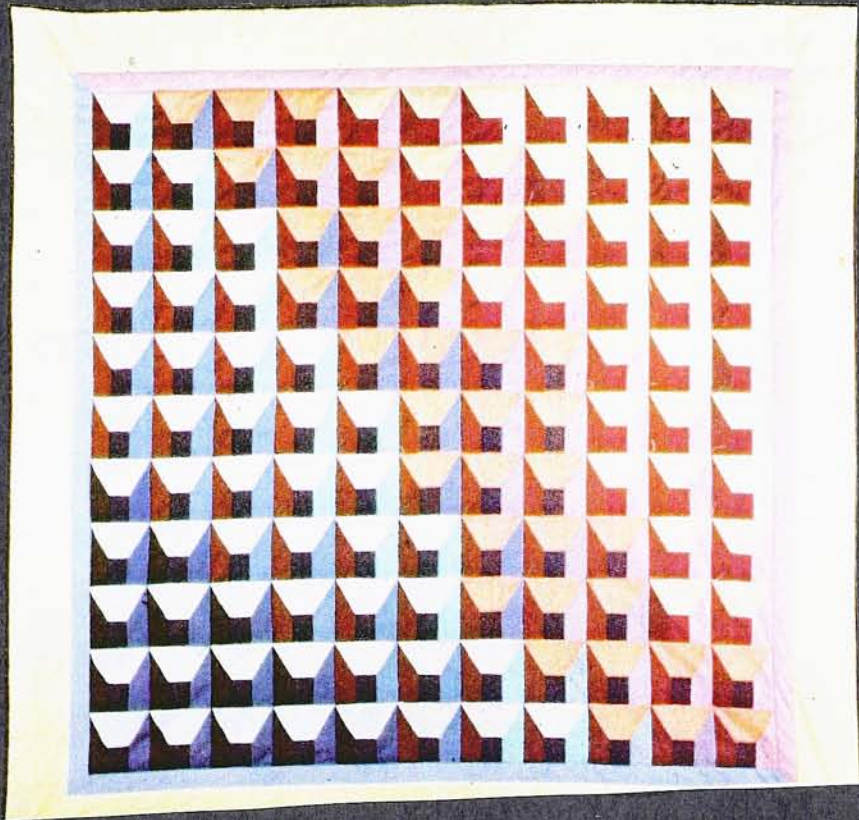
lightness and openness to this work. This painting developed a push and pull through the transparent areas that moves our eye through the composition to resting places in the heavy impasto shapes. The abstract saffron line down the left side of the face created a confusion as to what's in front and what's in back of the left center diamond pattern (Fig. 9).

Working with a grid system, overlaying transparent areas and overscale organic shapes in endlessly changing relationships made these paintings extremely exciting. The interacting triangular shapes in the final two paintings gave the work an architectural Cubist Constructivist feeling reminiscent of Kasimir Malevich's work. While the surface quality of the canvases with their over painted sections, drippy linear improvisations, pencilled lines and varying paint thicknesses resembled Richard Diebenkorn's Ocean Park series of the late nineteen sixties through early nineteen eighties.

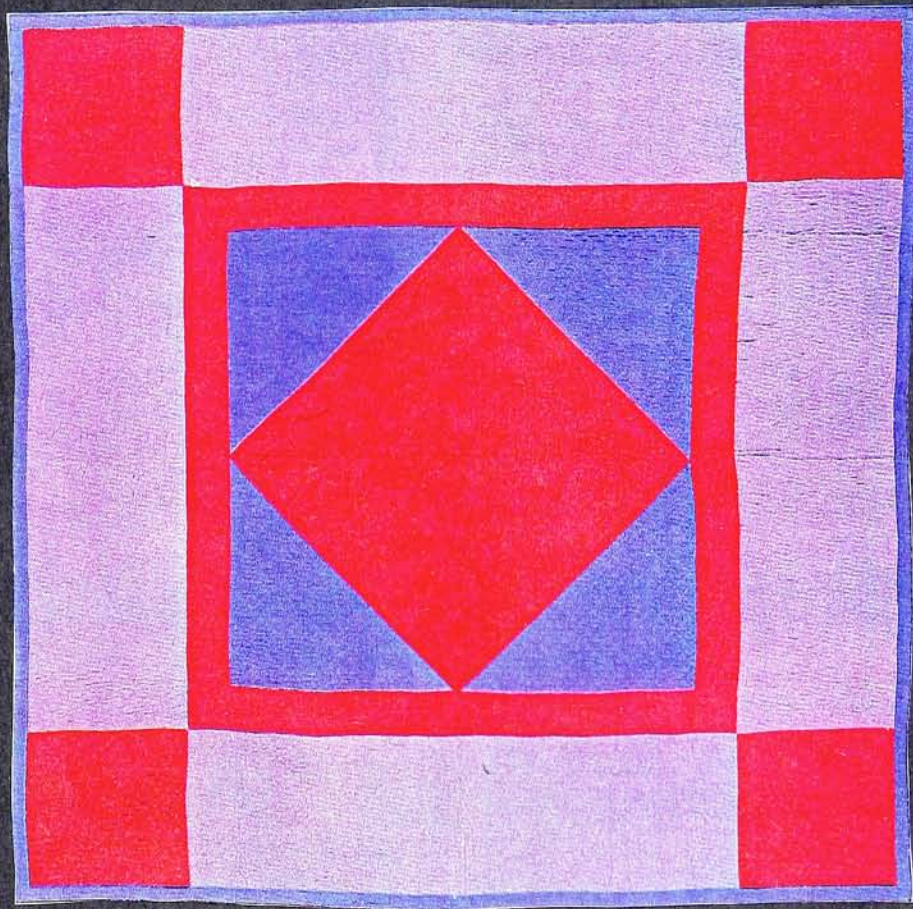
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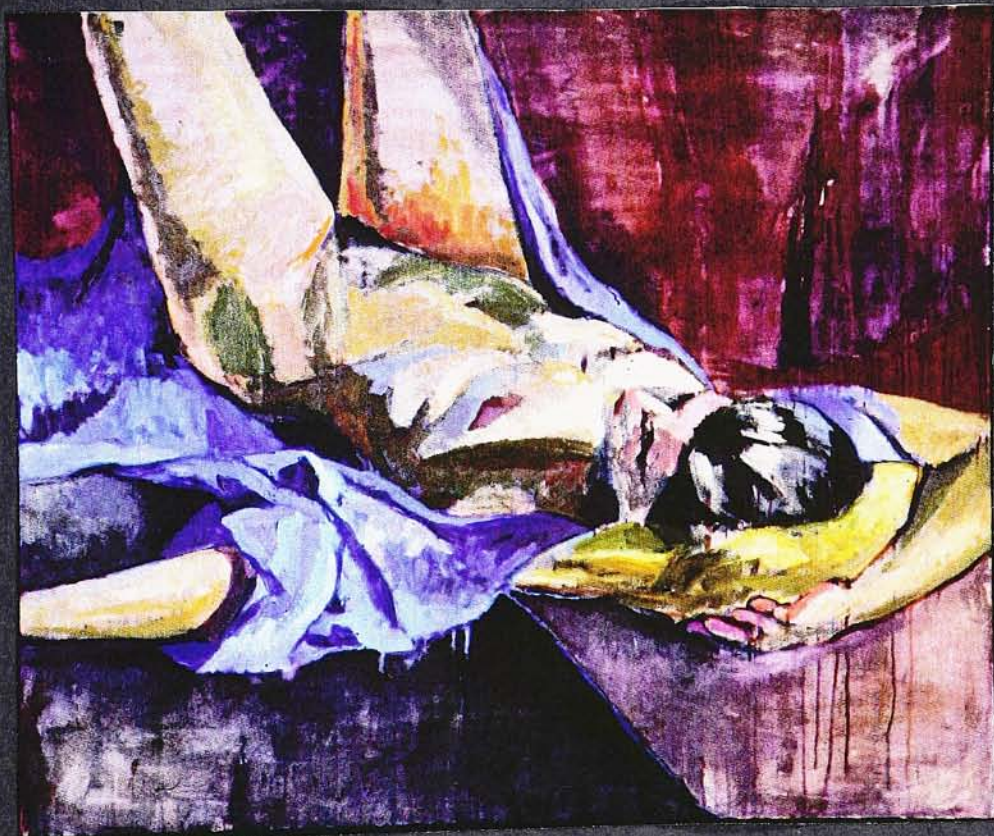
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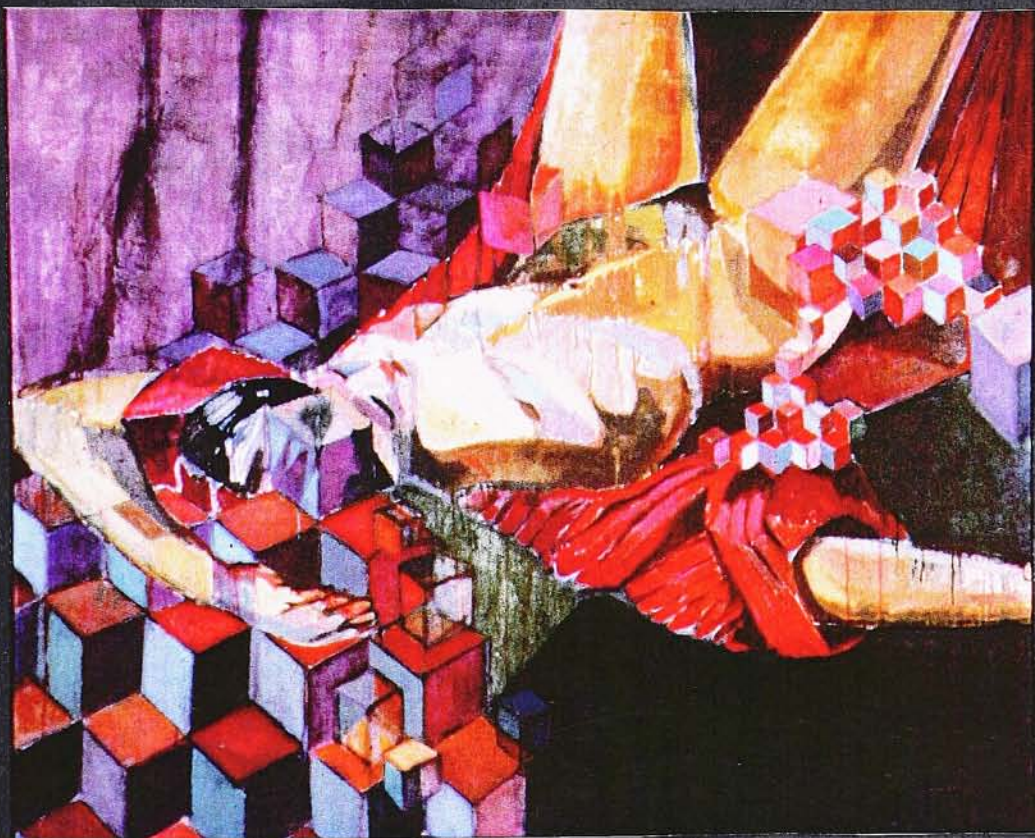
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I am most grateful to my teachers, Philip Bornarth, Judd Williams, Bob Heischaman, Ed Miller and Max Lenderman for their advice, wisdom and enlightenment. Their inspiration truly helped me change the direction of my life. Thanks to their encouragement, I am now a painter.

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