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SUPERIOR MIRAGE

{Aesthetic Recollections of the Great Lakes}

By S. Caswell
December 2014

A Thesis Submitted in Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Fine Arts-Fine Arts Studio

School of Art
College of Imaging Arts and Sciences
Rochester Institute of Technology
Rochester, N.Y.

THESIS APPROVAL

SUPERIOR MIRAGE

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ABSTRACT

Superior Mirage is a body of work that speaks of my deep connection to place of origin and how it has shaped the way I see, think, and create art in object or written (spoken word) forms. The Great lakes area has inspired my muse for its rugged beauty and hardy souls who live, work, and, play amongst the dichotomy of nature and industry. This rugged aesthetic carries over to both the industrial giant that built this nation and the natural world of a fragile ecosystem that is in constant flux with invasive species and climate change. The balance between the economic and the environmental is very delicate because we as humans need to find viable solutions for our future generations to prosper.

This dichotomy is the catalyst for the methods of how and why I create with materials/objects of both the natural and the manufactured as I believe that they need to live in harmony with each other. This body of work is a representation of what I have experienced as a rural lake dweller that appreciates the breathtaking beauty of the natural and the power of industry.

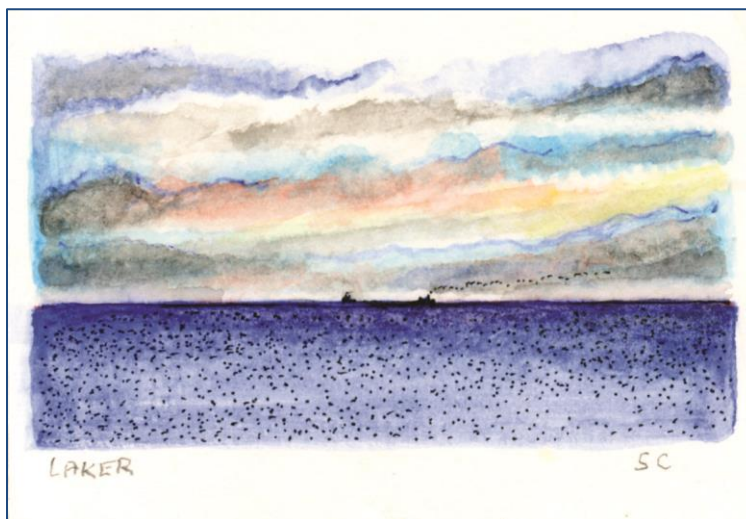


Figure 1

Laker (Study)

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Ontario {Her Sights, Her Sounds, Her Seasons}

Steely blue stratocumulus of October driven by a stiff northwest wind, cold crisp Canadian air nips the skin of my face and hands, a constant reminder that we are under the umbrella of a Great Lakes sky. The big lake, brown nearly to the horizon, whitecaps crown her surface like moving brushstrokes of heavy medium paints. One lone steamer, a Laker riding low slogs her way through the waves of dark grey-blue on the jagged horizon line. Heading east, bound for an upper St. Lawrence River port, she carries the grains sowed and harvested in the vast prairies of North America. That was a common sight, especially during the mid-late 20th century for many lake dwellers after the Seaway locks were opened on the Welland Canal and St. Lawrence River in 1959.

Three long deep tones sounding from a thick bank of fog on a May morning, a light south breeze holds the fog nearer to the horizon, a sign of the perils of fair weather navigation in the springtime. Dense fog all too common in cooler marine climates can creep up on a vessel and may last for hours especially in spring when the lakes are relatively cold. Coaxed by the light winds of a high-pressure system these fogs can drift back and forth or in and out along the shore. Spring and early summer fogs have been cursed by many fisherman, as well as inland dwellers seeking a day at the lake. One can witness fog so thick the lake becomes invisible from the shore while the sun may be shining less than a quarter of a mile away from the water. Summer brings warmth to the lakes along with the familiar call of a Redwing Blackbird as he stakes his territory on a cattail. The buzz of a small outboard engine breaks the stillness as a fisher returns to a cottage with a limit of smallmouth bass in the creel.

The sound of a foghorn out on the lake on a calm day was as romantic an auditory experience for lake residents as a train whistle is for rural inland dwellers. Now silent is the classic foghorn's deep resonance, as now the ships sail through fog by sophisticated electronic navigation developed in the 1970's. Although the sounds along the lake have changed from foghorns to personal watercraft, and sightings of

classic Lakers have diminished in recent years, those fond memories continue to inspire me as subjects in art.

The Great Lakes area is what I truly know, deeply love, and became the spirit generator for most of my artistic activity. I often believe that God had his best day when the Lakes were created, as the Great Lakes basin could be the Eden of North America. Ample rainfall for crops, and the fact that they hold one fifth of the worlds freshwater attest to their bounty. Sheer beauty is abundant along the lake in every season from the peaceful austerity of sea smoke on an extremely cold calm winter morning. Spring sings of awakening buds of white in an apple orchard in early May, the flash of color in the trees as the warbler migration peaks. Summertime features rich varied hues of the festive sunsets, or the majestic blue water augmented by the geometry of billowing spinnakers of every hue in a regatta. Autumn brings the bounty of harvest along the lakes from the orchards and fields of plenty while the cottages get shuttered and the pleasure craft give the lake back to the birds. This is also the season of more frequent ship sightings as they make their last hauls before the closing of the locks due to the onset of winter. These seasonal rhythms are a constant source of contemplation that accumulates into my deep connection to place. Those sights and sounds gathered from living life along the lake have and will inspire the majority of my artworks past, current and future.

Great Lakes Mirages {Superior and Inferior}

The sky acting as a mirror reflects a vessel sailing on the horizon and a mirror image of the ship upside down above the actual ship. This is a classic superior mirage that in reality is the vessel beyond the horizon. A superior mirage is a distorted reflection of an object above created by the temperature inversion between warmer air currents moving over the cold lake water. One can observe the inversion band between the horizon and the sky especially in the spring as a darker tone of blue/gray area that is often mistaken for fog or a distant cloud formation. There are differing types of superior mirages that include the looming, inverted, and towering. An inverted mirage features the object and its' mirror image above upside down

floating through the atmosphere. In the looming type an object appears to float above the horizon upright as in the mythological *Flying Dutchman*. Many scientists believe that this ancient maritime myth was actually a superior mirage. The towering type distorts the object's physical proportions in which the object/s features often appear to be extremely exaggerated in height. The aforementioned inverted, looming, towering, and the Fata Morgana are the most frequent types of superior mirages observed by lake dwellers. A Fata Morgana is the most complex of these mirages as a combination of more than one or all of these types of mirages. They can be inverted and towering or looming and towering at the same time or change in shape and size temporally¹.

The inferior mirage is also seen on the lakes in which an object is reflected below the actual object. Inferior mirages are commonly known as the desert mirage as they reflect the sky in the sand that takes on the appearance of water. The inferior mirage is the complete opposite of the superior mirage as they are caused by the cooler air currents above the hot surface temperature. On the lakes a sinking type of inferior mirage is often seen in summer months. This type can distort a ship's appearance to look as though it is stretched in length and squashed in height as the ship looks as though it is lower in the water than in reality².

Artistic Philosophies and Practices {Blue collar academia, Composition, and Craft}

The first premise of this art making intent is to reflect and share my lifelong recollections of place and the deeply rooted connections to location that inform the majority of my visual ideas. The second premise is to intersect the intellectual and the blue collar world through the act of making art, because the act of alienating either demographic would be a disservice to the art world as a whole. Inclusion is very important, even though the subject matter is derived from a place that is very specific. As artists, we have to make what we know, just as the poet has to write

¹ Young, Andrew T., An Introduction to Mirages
Mintaka.sdsu.edu/GF/mirages.mirintro.html, 1999-2012

² Young, Andrew T., An Introduction to Mirages
Mintaka.sdsu.edu/GF/mirages.mirintro.html, 1999-2012

what they know in order to maintain a deeper sense of honesty in that our artworks will ultimately reveal a genuine authenticity gained by real experiences. My artistic intentions are never meant to turn people off or to shock the individuals through mindless rebellion in order to gain attention. By maintaining an ultimate sense of philosophy through ethical integrity is extremely important to me as an artist. As a practicing visual artist, it is my belief that creating art that transcends aesthetic beauty should raise the quality of life for the viewer/s. Aesthetic beauty alone cannot always provoke thought within the audience as the content of a work of art must be as important as physical beauty. Intentions and aesthetics are to become a whole through the contents of a body of work that is a reflection of the artist's personal practice and philosophy.

My approach to making art could be described as blue collar meets academia. I believe that the secret in capturing the interest of the working class folks in my work is through the heart and soul of the objects and their origin. I frequently incorporate vintage auto or boat parts, tools, fishing reels and other various fittings into my pieces. These objects can appeal to the people that worked in industries that originally made those products or the fact that they simply used them for their recreational uses.

The Processes {from the Heart, through the Mind to the Hands}

Truth, honesty, and human integrity are of the utmost importance when I create with any artistic media, style, or the written word. It is very important for me to bring an honest approach to creating art in representational or abstract forms. These ideals have always and will continue to hold a hierarchy in how the object/s, material, and medium are treated, massaged, and arranged. Because of my interest in personal and geographical history, the object/s that inhabit an artwork sometimes require minimal or no modifications before taking their place in a composition while others are completely modified such as the carved wood of *Split Rock Light*. The natural patinas are authentic to a vintage object, therefore revealing a history of ambiguous origin that can be as interesting as its' visual beauty. It is the

aesthetic beauty of a richly acquired patina that initially sparks an interest in the objects visual properties. Having observed an object over time, the numerous possible scenarios of the objects history become alive through human imagination and perception.



Figure 2

Split Rock Light

A lifelong attachment to classic or vintage objects is celebrated by keeping the honesty of the object's past, even when placed in a context that differs from the object's original intent. This philosophy of maintaining integrity enters into how I finish wood products from organic or manufactured origin, as I sand and polish the wood to a satiny sheen without the incorporation of synthetic products. Polishing wood reveals the truth in the materials subtle properties such as color tone is taken from an old Japanese architectural practice that was used in their ceremonial rooms of their teahouses. The aesthetic philosophy of the Japanese teahouse is to create an interior atmosphere that would compliment the surrounding natural foliage. When

the screens are opened the interior space becomes harmonious with the trees and landscape of the outside. Those craftsmen painstakingly polished the exposed structural elements such as posts, beams, and rafters with fine white sand and straw rope. Although the tools of wood finishing today differ from that of the 18 and 19th centuries, the aesthetic ideals remain constant throughout time, as there is no other treatment that holds the natural integrity of the visual qualities of wood while offering a protective sheen³. Woods finished in this manner only need to be maintained by the occasional polish from a worn fine grit (400-600) sanding sponge that has almost no abrasion left.

{Matisse on composition, proportions, and limitations}

When in the act of making, I often feel a sense of absolute liberation that can only be bound by the physical matter of media, materials, and objects. Matisse's essay *Notes of a Painter* from 1908 has had a profound effect on how I think about arrangement, negative space, and the expressive qualities of the composition as a whole. Here Matisse speaks of how the whole works as an expression of the artists' overall intentions. "The entire arrangement of my picture is expressive: the place occupied by the figures, the empty space around them, the proportions, everything has its share".⁴ Matisse's philosophies of painting became a staple for the thought process that I have adapted in creating all of my recent sculptural artworks. The artist also states the importance of keeping what is needed and subtracting what is not necessary for the success of an artwork. His statement on completeness of an artwork and how expression is conveyed as follows, "In a picture every part will be visible and will play its appointed role, whether it be principal or secondary. Everything that is not useful in the picture is, it follows, harmful. A work of art must be harmonious in its entirety; any superfluous detail would replace some other

³ Itoh, Teiji "The Elegant Japanese House", Traditional Sukiya Architecture Walker, Weatherhill, N.Y., N.Y., 1969

⁴ Flam, Jack D. "Matisse on Art" Notes of a Painter E. P. Dutton, N.Y., N.Y., 1978

essential detail in the mind of the spectator”⁵. Negative space is one of the most important elements in creating minimal works as it brings a sense of harmony and balance in a composition. By deliberately holding on to these values, creating artworks in a minimalist manner, the work must have what it needs and nothing that it does not need in order for it to be truly successful.

Some limitations can be more than material/medium, because in reality the majority of my limitations initially begin with economic or logistical problems. Those practical hurdles propel me to think about making art in a manageable proportion and scale. Because this is, I have developed an appreciation for works that require very close inspection to take in all the subtleties that smaller works have to offer. I often make an artwork with the intent to reward the viewer for taking the time to look closely at the finer details such as a hidden piece that requires a closer inspection. Through this practice, I have developed a deeper sensitivity toward all the elements and how they interact together and are presented as a whole.

Composing from limiting the arrangement down to just two or three objects and making them sing in total harmony as a whole is one of those challenges that always intrigues me. Working with collected objects always presents limitations that have to be thoroughly addressed before the final arrangement becomes a work of art. Because the majority of this work is created in a minimalist manner, the choices of objects that will make a whole have to blend together either in visual relationships such as shape, scale, and orientation or an object becomes a complimentary contrast in material, texture, or color tone. To achieve total harmony in minimal art the work has to be created with flawless attention to detail, because there is nowhere to hide from subpar craftsmanship.

⁵ Flam, Jack D. “Matisse on Art” Notes of a Painter
E. P. Dutton, N.Y., N.Y., 1978

{Formal Elements}

All the formal elements are the foundation of what becomes a work that transcends the content into a context beyond formalism itself. These timeless elements are an important means toward the end product that has a representation or underlying implications of what may lie within or beyond the obvious. *Empty Harbor* and *Superior Mirage* are examples of how the formal elements act as the mechanism that delivers the emotional quality above and below the surface. The simplicity of composition and treatment of the background reveal the starkness of *Empty Harbor* that can lead the viewer to the emotive quality of the melancholy or longing.

My work is generated by the varying sequence of object, concept, and aesthetics. Often I may start with an object that gives me a vision for a metaphor or concept before choosing how to arrange and finish the end product. When the final decision is made in the overall arrangement, then the treatment of the finishing process is determined. This is when the piece truly comes to life. It all begins with a subject in relationship with the object/s and then the formal elements are incorporated to bring fruition to the aesthetics of the subject.

Artistic Influences *{Geographical roots, Artists, and Artworks}*

Creating art for me has always been centered on my deep connection with the sky, lake, and land, as land/seascape is the basis for most of my artistic ambitions. It is because the Great Lakes landscape is so unique and is totally ingrained in my life that the majority of the artists that have been influential are painters. Nearly all of my three-dimensional pieces can be read as landscape, while many become “impressions” of an object that one could see in a Great Lakes land/seascape in an abstracted form.

Currently my work is about returning to my artistic roots by incorporating the two-dimensional into my body of work that could be described as tight impressionism meets loose realism. I have always held a fondness for landscape paintings that featured weather that one could feel or hear. One of my initial artistic interests

begins with drawing from the observation of weather, as all types of cloud formations hold unique visual properties of color tones, shape, mass, and textures. Reading the sky has become a way of life since my youth and holds a great amount of importance to the reasons and ways that I create art. My grandfather and his old fishing cohorts taught me how to read the sky. Those who fish and farm under the constant change and rhythms of seasonal weather along the lakes develop a keen sense for reading the clouds to forecast the upcoming conditions. I knew the all the major and hybrid cloud types before I was ten years old. Growing up along the shore in rural western New York provided me an early invitation to appreciate the sublime nature of her land/seascape's inner beauty in every change of season. Within a distance of a few hundred feet from the shore the landscape may feature open fields of cropland or orchards bordered by scattered creeks, tree groves, and protected areas for wildlife habitation.

For collected object pieces, Pablo Picasso is the main influence for the inclusion of the odd object re contextualized into the composition as metaphoric symbol of what could be observed in real life. His collages and constructs are influential to many of my mixed media works. One great example is *Head of a Bull* in which he takes the handlebars and the saddle of a bicycle and turns them into a bull. Picasso is where abstraction becomes reality as nearly all of his abstract works are grounded in everyday reality. They are depictions of his life and culture and therefor become representational artworks rendered through abstraction. It is the seeing something through visual relationships in objects that fuels my creativity in working with metaphor or simile in an artwork. My ideas are generated when looking at an object and seeing the possibilities of what it could be represented as in a different context or subject. The object itself will say to me what it needs to be re-contextualized into or where it belongs in relation to the other elements physically and formally.

{Painters, Paintings, and Weather}

Vincent Van Gogh and Canadian impressionist painter Tom Thomson are influential because they could paint the illusion of wind in a landscape. Thomson's *West Wind*

was painted along the northern coast of Lake Huron, in which the climate is exactly the same as one would experience along Lake Ontario. I have developed a deeper appreciation for Canadian landscape art as the subjects feature the same trees, wind, and skies that I have witnessed my entire life. Van Gogh's later landscapes reveal the seasonal weather conditions of the French countryside. These two painters truly captured the essence of the direction, and velocity of wind often through the direct observation from plein air painting. *Autumn Grain Run* is about clouds, waves, wind, and the importance of the shipment of grain harvested in the prairies of North America. One could easily dismiss the direction of wind in *Autumn Grain Run* because the wind is coming at the viewer from the Northwest as opposed to the directional flow from the right or left of the painting. My goal in creating the piece is to instill the multi-sensory perception in the sounds one would witness, the rolling breakers, howling gusts of wind, and the smell of the fresh lake water. Van Gogh's landscapes from Auvres during the latter part of his life reveal the artist's inner thoughts of a lonely existence. Stark wheat fields devoid of human activity and the approaching storm speak of the loneliness he experienced throughout much of his life. One similarity between van Gogh's austere landscapes and my seascapes is that the sky and weather often take a dominant role in the composition.

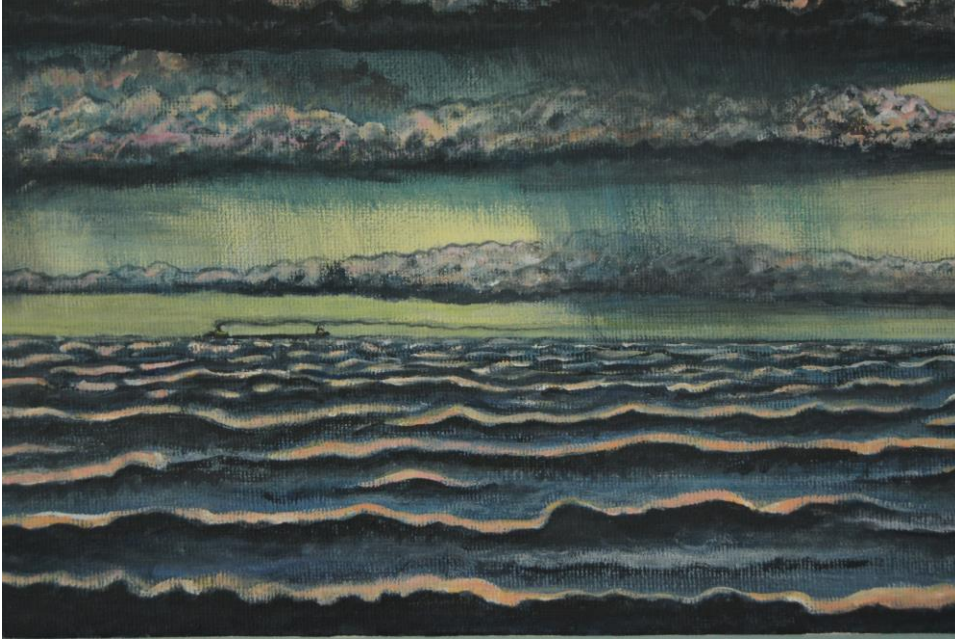


Figure 4

Detail of *Autumn Grain Run*



Figure 5

Wheat Field under a Clouded Sky Vincent Van Gogh (Image Courtesy of ARTstor)

The Works Exhibited {*Landscape, Seascape as Object or Object as Landscape, Seascape*}

Superior Mirage

The “flagship” piece from my exhibition *Superior Mirage* was developed as an experiment to combine the two and three dimensions in one artwork. By incorporating collage and assemblage techniques in the use of materials such as paper scraps, acrylic paint, small pieces of copper and wood, a small twig, and a Christmas bulb into the whole to achieve the illusion of a superior mirage. Scraps of wood with rough edges become clouds along the leading edge of an oncoming spring cold front. The light bulb suggests the light of a harbor jetty. The larger piece of wood represents an inverted type superior mirage of a ship sailing toward inclement weather. This piece is successful as an amalgamation of the two and three dimensions in a piece as a whole, in which the painting and sculptural elements live in equal importance to the composition. For the painting of the atmosphere and water I chose to be loose and expressive as opposed to a tighter style. I believe that a too realistic rendering of the sky would not enhance the overall aesthetic of the immediate nature of combining objects with an impressionistic style painting.



Figure 6

Detail of *Superior Mirage*



Figure 7

Detail of *Superior Mirage*

Contrast is achieved visually through the painting as well as the meting pot of materials by creating the overall mood of the weather. The water is very calm, peaceful like that of a warm spring morning rendered in layers of pinks and blues to bring the yin to the yang. In this case the yang would be the brooding sky administered by the prevailing westerly winds about to engulf the day. The overall meditative quality of this work also carries a darker undertone in the subject as the vessel is steaming toward a potentially violent sea in a matter of a few short hours. Great Lakes storms are very legendary to mariners and shore dwellers alike, as many of folk tales are true stories passed from generation to generation that deal with shipwrecks, shore erosion, huge snowfalls, relentless winds in cold months, strong thunderstorms in warmer seasons, even thunder snow in late fall-early winter. Autumnal cold fronts following warm periods in October and November can be the most fearsome for mariners as waves can reach over 25' (over a duration of time). The gales of November have been feared by mariners as long as there have been ships sailing the lakes. On November 10, 1975, the 730' steamer Edmund Fitzgerald loaded with iron ore encountered a fierce storm with hurricane force winds and 30' waves on Lake Superior and went down in minutes with no survivors.

Inferior Mirage

This piece is of a ship seen as an inferior mirage in which the ship's hull is reflected below the actual vessel, thus the flat piece that represents the illusion of the hull distorted in a mirage. For this artwork the parts that make the whole are as varied as the weather on the lakes. Odds and ends are arranged in a Dadaist manner to represent a ship and its mechanicals abstracted by the atmospheric conditions of a mirage. This is a representation of a freighter with a self-unloading swing boom that is common on most of today's Great Lakes bulk carriers. These vessels are designed to be able to discharge bulk cargoes without special dock equipment.



Figure 8

Inferior Mirage

Laker

Geographical location and experiences within this place has been informing my art since my first drawing at the age of four of a Laker. The Laker has always been an important subject matter in my work because they are indigenous to the Great Lakes and they are most often observed alone, distant on the horizon. Most of my work carries the solitary theme of the artist as a loner at a distance from mainstream society through the starkness of minimalism and/or subject. There is a longstanding romance associated with the adventure of taking to the open sea that is akin to the free spirited nature and the creative mind that many artists, poets, songwriters, and musicians possess.

That early drawing has been long gone yet remains in my soul. This type of vessel is known as the classic North American Laker is unique in its' appearance and are seen nowhere else on the earth. They are rapidly disappearing in favor of more current

designs as every year a few of these ships end up at the hands of the breaker's torch. They stand apart from other ships as the pilothouse mounted at the very fore of the ship while the propulsion system, funnel, and crew quarters are at stern. The long flat deck features a series of cargo hatches that bring an appealing visual rhythm to their overall appearance. The primary purpose of these ships is to transport bulk cargos of iron ore to the steel mills of North America's steel industry or grains harvested in the Great Plains that are shipped to overseas nations. Coal, stone, and cement are also transported between ports along the lakes by these vessels. The long low profile gave these vessels a streamlined appearance when loaded. One with a trained eye could spot one by the sight of just two small humps on horizon. The majority of these older ships that are still in service have been converted with conveyor systems, and a swing boom. Although they lose the long elegant minimal line that the flat deck vessels feature, but those conversions have kept many classic Lakers in service. Most of these older ships that have been decommissioned are powered by steam and require more personal and upkeep therefore they cost more to operate than the current diesel power plants in modern vessels. The Lakers played an important role in the history of the lakes and North America as they carried the raw materials that would become the steel that built this nation. These humble vessels played an important part in the war effort of the 1940's as they fed the engine that drove the allied forces on to victory. Many were built during the war to keep up with the high demand for steel production as they carried the coal to fire the plants and the ore that fed the steel mills.

Modern lake vessels feature a much squarer and blockier appearance as the deck structures and pilothouse are mounted at the stern. They are often described as being "six decks of ugly" by many observers of a certain age group who favor the aesthetics of earlier ships as their deck structures features the look of being constructed with Legos. Marine architecture has become so pragmatic that pure aesthetics have been eschewed in favor of cost effectiveness and total pragmatism in design. Many a time honored mariners have lamented over the fact that

contemporary vessels lack the aesthetic nod to the tradition of ship designs of days past.



Figure 9

Classic North American Laker (From Artist's Collection)

The physical elements of this piece consist of marrying a sequence of old tail light bulbs to long narrow piece of driftwood to evoke the essence of a Laker at night. The three lights at the bow represent the pilot house, as larger grouping lights depict the stern. The large light in the center of the stern becomes the smoke stack in which all Great Lakes vessels feature a lighted logo that tells the observer of what firm the ship belongs to. The long deck features a series of smaller bulbs that represent the deck lights that are mandatory on all Great Lakes vessels. These lights have to be placed at least every hundred feet by Maritime law as these ships must navigate through the narrow rivers and harbor channels at ports along the lakes. Seeing a Laker sailing at night is quite a beautiful sight especially if one passes closer to shore within a range of a few miles or less.



Figure 10

Laker (stern view)



Figure 11

Laker

Split Rock Light

The Majestic light of Lake Superior is rendered here in the three dimensional realm by attaching a midcentury auto cigarette lighter on a carved piece of fir harvested from an old farmhouse renovation. The clear plastic of the push knob of the lighter becomes the beacon and the wood base is carved to represent toll of weathering throughout time. Long before modern navigation these lights have guided mariners through natural obstacles such as shoals that can tear a large hole in a vessel or marking a harbor in the total darkness of a moonless or thick overcast night. The beacon is often referred to as a symbol of hope or literally a spiritual light in the darkness of life.



Figure 12

Split Rock Light

Five Sisters {Formerly “From the Big Lake”}

These pieces represent each of the Great Lakes individually as they all feature a piece of driftwood found along the shore mounted on a panel of equal height. The reason that these works are mounted in this manner keeps them together as a group as the lakes themselves cannot be separated from each other, yet they hold their individual properties. The driftwood in these artworks has been sanded and polished without synthetics while the maple panels have been treated with a light coat of urethane.



Figure 13

Five Sisters

Empty Harbor {No More Steamers Docking Here}

An old boat light is the dominant object that can lead the viewer/s to the notion of being alone, seeking a place to find stability or attachment. One could also read this

piece as a migration to a place where one may flourish, or the returning to place of origin. Poplar crate wood serves as the background. It is finished by wire brushing in the direction of the grain from course to fine just as one would with sanding blocks. This gives the piece a smoky gray tone that brings a somber connotation of melancholy or a sense of yearning for something not yet discovered or achieved. The boat light represents one's soul traveling through time in search of permanence or security. The red marker is a metaphor for a jetty light at the entrance to a port as a destination not yet reached. The grayness can be read as sailing through the fog or inclement weather toward a safe harbor. Traditional finishing practices would have made this piece appear as a plaque or trophy that would ultimately detract from the desired emotional intent.

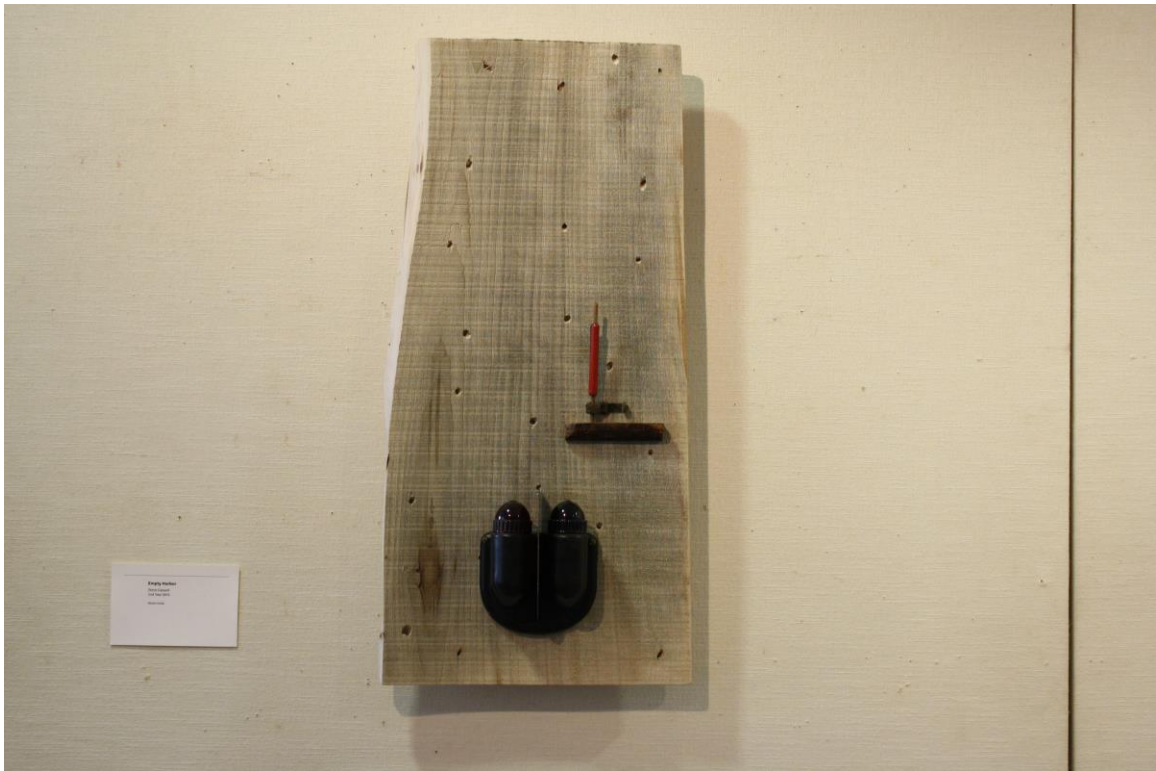


Figure 14

Empty Harbor

“Contemplation Point” *{Halcyon days, Observation, and Fishing*

The days of youth spent on a dock with a can of worms, fishing rod, and binoculars became the environment where observations guided my thoughts and desires. Ships were sighted, fish were caught, birds were spotted, and skies were observed on docks throughout the neighborhood and the Thousand Islands area during summer vacations. Mid spring through early summer and the fall can also be more interesting than the summer because that is when the bird migrations are at their peak and the lake activity is quieter before and after the summer residents have come and gone. As I reached maturity those quieter times have become much more cherished as contemplations became the conduit for creativity and deeper thought.

Contemplation Point was created as an interactive installation piece to give the viewer a look into where place is the spirit and soul of these and nearly all of my artworks. I created the simulation of a dock with plywood panels topped with pallet woods of varying species and widths to resemble the type of docks that was built during the 1960's before treated wood and synthetic products became commonplace. Those docks were created by working class lake dwellers that had to use materials they could purchase for a very low cost. This is the counterpart to *Superior Mirage* in which the vintage opera glasses mounted on the end railing swivel in an observation deck fashion that are to be used to view the wall piece. In order to create the illusion of depth of field one would turn the glasses around to make the image appear to be further in the distance. The viewer could also use them in the correct fashion to look at the details up close as one would a passing vessel. A fishing lure found on the shore is attached to the end railing that adds a touch of authenticity to the dock.



Figure 15

Contemplation Point



Figure 16

Contemplation Point

Those days are past tense as the buzz of a fisherman's outboard have been replaced by the whine of water scooters, the mournful sounding of a foghorn have been silenced by Doppler radar, and the ships no longer emit bituminous smoke from the funnels. The birds continue to migrate though the seasons change and fish still bite despite the rise in year round residency of lake dwellers. It is the days of April when the geese return and the trout begin to feed near the shore and in September when the jet skis give the lake back to the birds are the times that I love the lake the best.

Observations of the sky are still a constant in my everyday life. Anyone who has spent time on the lakes can attest to the varying beauty of the changing color, mass, texture, tone and, timbre of the Great Lakes cloud formations. If I were to relocate to another part of the country, the sight that I would deeply long to see are the clouds generated by the lakes and an old-school Laker slogging her way through the whitecaps of this grand inland sea.

I Know Her Well {*Her Sounds, Her Sights, Her Soul*}

I know Her Well

To my place “Big Lake”

Ontario, beautiful lake

Polis by default

Must now study Iroquois, their place.

Connected to Superior,

Sidetracked to Michigan, up to Huron.

Down the St. Clair Into Erie,

Over Niagara to Ontario

Circulating herself clean

Making clouds to return her

flow into the St. Lawrence,

and finally to Atlantic.

To Iroquois

Your place, Ontara

Ancestry tells me

she should not be mine.

Location by birth,

I know no other place.

I know her well

By years gone by, and years to come.

Her wind, her breath

Her clouds, her skies

Her rains, her storms

Her ice, her snow

Her moon, her sun

Her land, her bounty

Her orchards, her crops

Her trees, her fields

Her fish, her birds

Her bays, her streams

Her ships, her shores

Her mirages, her fogs

Her rocks, her rolls

Her scent, her taste

Her time, her changes

Her soul, her rhythm

S. Caswell, 3/12/2012



Figure 17

I Know Her Well

Conclusion {constant is making, making is constant}

The making of this body of work is a constant lifelong endeavor that will never be completely finished as these works are only a portion of what has been created thus far. There are many more to come in the future for this series. The greater portion of this work was created as experiments with intersecting the two and three dimensional forms, poetry, viewer interaction, and installation that would have

never materialized had not been for the higher education obtained within this institution. All of the dedicated professors and the students that I have been blessed to have studied with have greatly contributed toward my better understanding of art and why we create art to the actual making of art.



Figure 18

Superior Mirage (Installation)

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