

LARGE GRAPHITE DRAWINGS  
ON GESSOED SURFACES

PROBLEM IN LIEU OF THESIS

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

I have been doing graphite drawings of the people around me for as long as I can remember. During the fall of 1973, I was required to produce a series of drawings based on a theme. In finding a solution to the assignment, my wife and children, who were available and plentiful subjects, became the theme for a series of drawings in graphite. I became more aware of the many possible ways of using the graphite medium and eraser on paper as well as gessoed surfaces.

During the summer of 1974 I began doing large drawings of the human figure. I found that the use of photographs in combination with the opaque projector "saved" time in transferring the image to a large surface, particularly where proportion was concerned. With a camera I was able to stop the action and increase the complexity of the compositions. My family continued to be my subjects for drawing.

Part of my problem at this stage was simply to discover a large paper surface that was not overly expensive and would be adequate for the pencil medium. I found a wood pulp backdrop paper used in photography studios that was large but would eventually discolor and disintegrate. The drawings, in excess of three feet, were difficult to protect

and present in the traditional manner. The drawings were too large to be matted, glass could not be used because of the excessive weight, and plexiglass was too expensive. The problem of presentation was solved by laminating the paper on board and mounting it on a 1" x 2" wooden frame. Protection of the paper surface was solved by applying polymer matte varnish over the entire face of the drawing, thus eliminating the need of glass or plexiglass. I was, however, still not satisfied with the drawing surface itself.

#### The Problem

As a result of my drawing experiences, the problem for the project emerged threefold: (1) to further explore the uses of the graphite medium including the possible integration of wet media and color on large surfaces, (2) to use the human figure as subject matter, and (3) to explore gessoed drawing surfaces of masonite and paper. Since I was interested in drawing life-size human figures, a large surface was required. No limitations were placed on the size of the surface, but the figures were to be life-size or larger when used in the foreground. At least six (6) drawings using the graphite medium were to be produced and analyzed.

As one of the restrictions I limited the choice of models to those immediately available--the members of my family. Although obviously I could not be objective toward my subjects, I believed that the more technical problems could be

directly attacked if I dealt with familiar figures. The analysis was to be, therefore, additionally limited to those technical aspects central to my investigation.

### Procedure

The preparation of the surface for each drawing was a major concern. Gesso was either sprayed or brushed on the surface before beginning the drawing. The gesso surface was chosen because it was receptive to all media.

From the beginning of the investigation interesting imagery were photographically recorded on film. The negatives were evaluated and those showing compositional possibilities were enlarged to an eight by ten print. After careful consideration, one of a series of photographs was selected to be projected to a large scale. The photograph was used only as a departure point and emphasis was placed on maintaining the spontaneity and character of the drawing process. A tape recorded diary was kept during the production of the six drawings along with slides of the drawings in process. These two sources, along with the finished products, provided the data for the investigation. Data were transferred to paper and edited for use in the commentary.

## CHAPTER II

### COMMENTARY ON DRAWINGS

I decided to use masonite mounted on a 1" x 2" wooden frame for the first drawings. The smooth side of the masonite was selected for preparation. The surface was sanded, gessoed, sanded between each coat of gesso and sanded finally before the drawings were begun.

#### A. Drawing #1 Slides 1A, 1B, 1C

Title: "Despues del bano" "After Bathing"  
Medium: Graphite pencil  
Surface: Gessoed masonite  
Dimensions: 47" x 31"  
Date: Fall, 1974

After I had prepared the first panel, the completed surface began to show yellow spots. The spots might have been oil or grease stains which were undetected before the process of preparation had begun. The spots were concentrated in one area and kept bleeding through the white gesso. The surface was sprayed with several light coats of polymer varnish and re-gessoed, but this did not stop the spots from reappearing. After I had made inquiries, a local paint store manager suggested using a mixture of 1/3 solvent to 2/3 shellac to seal the surface. The shellac mixture was sprayed over the surface,

which was again gessoed and sanded. The coat of shellac effectively solved the problem and became a preliminary step in subsequent masonite preparations.

The first drawing dealt primarily with the use of line which was not new to me, but the line on the stiff, hard gessoed masonite surface was a new experience. When one is working on paper the surface will tear before developing a dark black as deep as could be developed on the masonite surface. This was especially helpful in creating the dark black effect of the emphasis area on the hair. Very little pressure was needed to make a mark on the hard surface.

The photographic image of Estela, my wife, was projected a little larger than life-size in the first drawing. Estela's face was illuminated by the light coming in through the screen. This produced a series of light and dark-value shape repetitions extending from the left. The emphasis area from the beginning was the dark hair. I proceeded to establish the area of the hair and neck as the darkest area in the composition. The dark area of the hair and neck was in contrast to the light area of the face which re-enforced the emphasis of the dark hair. (Slide 1A)

Working from the photograph made me aware of the difference in the edges of shapes when the camera is in sharp focus and when it is not. By combining sharp clear edges with those that are soft and less distinct (out of focus), attention could be directed at will. Thus, by varying the edges, a



movement was created joining the overall parts of the composition. The lower right half of the picture was brought back almost to a beginning stage by erasing and wiping out with Fantastik, a general household cleanser. The process of wiping created faint, soft and subtle value shapes, as seen in the area of the hands and screen door. (Slide 1B) The otherwise blank areas at the edges of the composition repeated the light pattern originated in the highly illuminated area of the face.

The completed drawing (Slide 1C) was sprayed several times with a workable fixative. Matte polymer medium was then rolled on the surface thus creating a texture which distorted the drawing. Most of the surface was brushed lightly to remove the texture. However, the matte medium yellowed the white surface and some of the more delicate lines were removed or obscured. The entire surface was later sprayed with an acrylic final picture varnish. The drawing was framed with a thin strip of white plexiglass and was ready for presentation.

B. Drawing #2

Title: "Aguilas con esas tijeras!" "Watch it with those Scissors!"  
Medium: Graphite pencil  
Surface: Gessoed masonite  
Dimensions: 48" x 36"  
Date: Fall, 1974

The process for preparing the surface for the next two

drawings was identical because they were prepared at the same time. Shellac was used to seal the surface and several sprayed coats of gesso were applied and sanded. Additional coats of gesso were applied with a paint roller because the weather did not permit the use of the outdoor spraying area. The final sanding produced a surface texture different from the totally sprayed surface of the first drawing.

Once the surface was ready and the image projected, the heads of the two figures became the focal point. (Slide 2A) Values were rendered in much the same way as those of "Despues . . ." After I had applied as much graphite as was desired in each particular area, I used a paper stump to spread the graphite. The paper stump was not an unfamiliar tool. I had used the tool in blending pastels before. The effect of the graphite medium spread by the stump had a new linear quality. It created a different kind of movement, altering the value of the line of the graphite pencil but not its strength.

Movement became very important in the composition and was achieved by manipulating the edges of the forms using the focus technique described earlier. The movement extended from the face at the top right of the composition to the space directly left of the second face in the middle left. The edges of the value shapes were accentuated with lines for emphasis and movement--especially around the hand and the space directly left of the bottom head.

The lower half of the drawing, including the furniture and clothing, became unimportant in the composition. Although an attempt was made to develop the area, it was finally wiped out in the drawing process. (Slides 2B and 2C) The mirror behind the figures also became an important element in unifying the diagonal direction of the movement from the top right edge of the composition toward the two figures. The faint images of the furniture and clothing further directed the movement to the bottom left of the composition. By utilizing the white space on the lower right, the movement was channeled back to the face on the left. (Slide 2D)

C. Drawing #3

Title: "Eduardo con Popo el peluquero" "Eduardo  
with Popo the Barber"  
Medium: pastel, graphite and conte pencils  
Surface: gessoed masonite  
Dimensions: 48" x 36"  
Date: Fall, 1974

The surface for this drawing was prepared at the same time as the previous drawing. The drawing techniques used were basically the same, and the composition was approached again with the heads of the figures as the emphasis areas. (Slides 3A and 3B)

The most difficult thing to accomplish was controlling the movement from the highly illuminated area at the bottom of the picture plane up to the emphasis areas of the heads of the upper part of the composition. The bottom half of

the picture plane contrasted well against the upper half, but for a while it was difficult to make the visual transition from one area to the other. The problem was solved by introducing the medium of pastels to the drawing. The soft, warm, neutral color muted the values directly involved with the highly illuminated area. The head at the center underwent many changes in the drawing process. Color in the two heads on the right served as a contrasting element to the head on the left. (Slide 3B) Line and value dominated the upper half of the picture plane. The lines on the bottom half of the picture plane were erased and smudged to move the eye quickly through the bottom half of the composition. Unfortunately, when the lines were removed, the lower part of the drawing became quite light in value. The resulting composition separated into two parts with the upper half being quite dark. In order to unify the two parts, lines and values were introduced to create parallel diagonal movements which visually bridged the division. Color was also added slightly to the third figure to unify the composition. (Slide 3C)

#### D. Drawing #4

Title: "La piñata" "The Pinata"  
Medium: pastel, graphite and conte pencils  
Surface: gessoed masonite  
Dimensions: 60" x 48"  
Date: Fall, 1974

For the first time in this series of drawings the chamois was introduced as a drawing tool, and the face and piñata

were smudged. (Slide 4A) After I had worked with it for the first time ever, the chamois, like the stump, helped to spread the graphite. It not only altered the value but transformed lines into shapes. The chamois being more absorbent continued making a mark much longer than the stump. The process was utilized extensively on the front figure extending later to most of the other shapes in the composition. (Slide 4B) The chamois continued to be a familiar tool, along with the paper stump, eraser, and cleansing spray. The drawing went smoothly until the upper left side of the panel was erased and wiped to create the desired value. The area was a failure in value contrast. Erasing and wiping with the cleanser did not restore the area suitably. Therefore, the area, particularly the third figure on the left, was regessoed and sanded. The figure image was projected again. (Slide 4C) However, the projection posed a problem because it was difficult to match the new figure with the existing image. A certain amount of compromise was used, and there was very little difference in the overall appearance in the composition. (Slide 4D)

#### E. Drawing #5

Title: "La Abuela Mere" "Grandmother Mary"  
Medium: graphite pencil and acrylic  
Surface: gessoed paper  
Dimensions: 64" x 51"  
Date: Spring, 1975

The preparation of the paper surface was a variation of the process used on the masonite surface. The paper was stapled on the wall securely enough on each side to keep the pull of the wet paper even. This part of the preparation was indeed quite similar to preparing paper for watercolor. Two coats of diluted polymer medium were used to seal the paper followed by two coats of gesso. No sanding was done and the brush strokes were deliberately kept in a vertical position to create an even vertical brush texture.

Three main areas were highly illuminated: the space directly on the left of the figure, the window, and the table and chair. (Slide 5A) The forms not illuminated were drawn using the techniques in the previous four drawings. The emphasis on the face and torso became evident as more specific rendering was utilized. The perspective of the room, although evident, was treated very subtly.

The actual texture of the studio wall under the drawing surface was picked up by the rubbing of the pencil. I was able to control the texture by varying the pressure of the pencil. Consequently, the rubbing resulting from the texture of the wall became a unifying repetition in the composition. The variety of textures achieved in the drawing were: (1) the texture of the wall, (2) the pencil's blending with the chamois, and (3) the brush marks on the gessoed surface and later (4) the blending of the graphite with the polymer medium.

The drawing was treated with matte polymer medium. The graphite dissolved with the liquid medium. To control the blending a workable fixative was sprayed over the drawing and much of the drawing quality of the graphite was preserved. Acrylic color was then applied. The technique transformed the drawing into a painting.

In the overall composition the white shapes directed attention to the face and the torso. Geometric shapes of squares, rectangles, and triangles were repeated around the emphasis area of the face and torso, thus creating other directional clues. The white on the left was extended in the form of a wash over the left shoulder and arm to make a slower transition between the highly illuminated area and the figure. (Slide 5C) Dark pencil accents were used over the acrylic to readjust the movement into the secondary areas at the bottom of the picture plane. (Slide 5D)

F. Drawing #6

Title: "Los padres de mas de cuatro y la gran tataraguella" "The Fathers of More than Four and the Grand Great-great-grandmother"  
 Medium: Graphite and conte pencils and acrylic colors  
 Surface: Gessoed paper  
 Dimensions: 64" x 48"  
 Date: Spring, 1975

The preparation of the surface for the drawing "Los padres . . ." was identical to that of the preceding drawing. The hand in front of the left figure's shoulder became a main focal point from the beginning. The dark value of the

sweater was emphasized by picking up the texture of the studio wall directly behind the paper. The movement of the major dark value was directed downward and across the middle figure's arm, through the waist of the figure on the right, toward the hand on the right. The movement continued across the faces and back to the dark emphasis area of the shoulder.

Skin tones were sprayed with an air brush, but the flat tone was then modeled with conte pencils. The area of the faces in "Los padres" was the only one in which conte pencil was used for modeling. Conte was used, however, on the lower half of the picture plane but only as a color accent. The texture of the pencil strokes was used to create movement in these otherwise bland areas. The padded cloth of the robe was achieved with eraser lines. Acrylic blue color was applied as a glaze using a brush and sponge. The under-drawing remained an important visual element in the bottom half of the composition. Most of the areas remained undeveloped until the last stage when accented dark value shapes were introduced, thereby changing the direction of the dark movements to the bottom half of the composition.

After I had blocked out a border with gesso on this drawing, a frame was suggested which I believed improved the visual impact of the drawing itself. The entire front surface was finished by spraying an acrylic final (matte) picture varnish. The back of the paper was sealed with two coats of clear acrylic medium, and gray ducking tape used for insulation was



taped to the back edges for reinforcement. The use of the tape made it less likely for the drawing to rip. The corners were further reinforced with tape, and grommets were attached to facilitate hanging. This process completed the presentation of the finished paper drawings and further added to their protection.

## CHAPTER III

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The purpose and problem of this project was threefold: (1) to further explore the uses of the graphite medium including the possible integration of wet media and color on large surfaces, (2) to use the human figure as subject matter, and (3) to explore gessoed drawing surfaces of masonite and paper. During the execution of the drawings, a tape recorder was used to record data pertinent to the problem. Slides of the work in progress and of finished drawings were taken for additional information.

The gessoed surface was the determining factor in the successful use of techniques explored in this series of drawings. In the first three drawings, successful compositions were accomplished by the subtractive method, utilizing eraser and wiping techniques to produce dynamic white spaces. The first drawing dealt primarily with the use of line. The deep dark tones achieved in the emphasis area of the hair were made possible by the receptive quality of the hard gessoed masonite surface. In the second and third drawings the stump was introduced to spread the graphite medium. Line was transformed into different values and was introduced as an expres-

sive element in the movement of shapes. In the third drawing color was introduced as an emphatic supportive element.

The chamois was first introduced as a drawing technique in the fourth drawing to change the image of line to shape. Color supported the emphasis area.

In the fifth drawing while the use of graphite as a basic medium was evident, the acrylic color so dominated the composition that the drawing appears more like a painting. The mixing of graphite and wet medium and applying it as "paint" opened up a whole new process for me. The sixth drawing continued the use of acrylic color. In this drawing the use of the air brush was explored with very little success.

The gessoed masonite used in the first four drawings had a nice receptive surface for use with graphite and other media, but because the masonite's surface was slick and stiff the gesso chipped easily. The final protection with the final picture varnish was not adequate over the graphite, conte, and pastel media.

The last two drawings on large paper increased my sensitivity to the prepared surface. I also became more responsive to the texture beneath the paper and utilized, through rubbings, the studio wall surface. Different types of textures became much more important at times than value or line. The prepared paper surface lent itself well also to spraying with the cleansing spray. The surface could not be cleaned thoroughly

white in most cases, but the faint texture achieved was another technique discovered on the prepared paper surface.

Materials, media, and presentation were very important to my investigation. After many hours of researching the problem of impurities bleeding through the masonite, it was a relief to find that shellac would seal the surface. The best protection I found for my drawings was to spray the dry media with a workable fixative to seal most of the pigment and then brush clear acrylic medium over the drawing. Some pigment blended with the medium, but most of the drawing characteristics of the dry media were not destroyed. The blending aspect occurred equally in both masonite and paper surfaces.

The use of acrylic polymer medium to seal the drawing for the overlaying of acrylic color was the most innovative technical achievement in the entire investigation. Even after sealing the surface with medium and applying acrylic color I was able to develop richer and more metallic blacks by further drawing on top of the acrylic medium.

The masonite's weight factor, rigidity, and cost made it considerably less attractive than paper. I was especially pleased with the development of the gessoed paper surface because of the small cost for materials, the versatility of hanging, shipping, and storing of the finished work.

## APPENDIX

Slot 1 Slide 1A	Slot 2 Slide 1B	Slot 3 Slide 1C	Slot 4 Slide 2A
Slot 5 Slide 2B	Slot 6 Slide 2C	Slot 7 Slide 2D	Slot 8 Slide 3A
Slot 9 Slide 3B	Slot 10 Slide 3C	Slot 11 Slide 4A	Slot 12 Slide 4B
Slot 13 Slide 4C	Slot 14 Slide 4D	Slot 15 Slide 5A	Slot 16 Slide 5B
Slot 17 Slide 5C	Slot 18 Slide 5D	Slot 19 Slide 6A	Slot 20 Slide 6B



