

CONCEPT VS. INTUITION:

A STUDY INTO THE

PERSONAL

UNDERSTANDING

OF IMAGES

PROBLEM IN LIEU OF THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the

University of North Texas in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

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December, 1990

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I remembered as a child, growing up with an artistic mother, always wanting to draw something. I would continually ask Mother, "What should I draw next?" She would set in front of me some object or tear out a magazine page and tell me to "copy" that. That proved to be the start of a conceptually void way of making art. That continued throughout my childhood and by high school, I had developed a keen sense of sight and a superiority in my draftsmanship. Knowing that I would make a horrible legal secretary, I opted for a college education at the Hartford Art School.

College was to be much of the same. During my freshman foundation year, I studied under many different artists. Knowing I did not want three more years of instruction under David Salle or Jack Goldstein (My God! That might mean thinking conceptually! What would I do?), I chose as my mentors Rudolph Zallinger and Wolfgang Behl, sticking again to the traditional and to those who would help me put to use and develop my draftsmanship.

Now, amidst my graduate school career, I found that the years spent on developing my craft have, in some degree,

retarded my ability to think conceptually. I discovered that I had the most serious of all artistic handicaps: the apparent inability to conceive ideas.

For the past three years I struggled with my imagery. I knew it lacked substance and appeared shallow but I did not know how to improve upon it. Did I lack a creative conceptuality even though my draftsmanship had been perfected? It seemed to be so. Along the way, images appeared in my works; images I thought were important to me though I honestly had no idea why. I worked with these images for a bit and tossed them aside, never really realizing why I had used them. It seemed to be a subconscious decision. Because of this, my work changed quite frequently and appeared to be fragmented. When confronted with the question of why I used certain images, I really had no substantial explanation to support their existence. The works were intuitive rather than conceptual. It did not help matters that I overworked these ideas in my head so much that when it came time to execute them I had already grown tired of them and moved on to other images. This made my fragmented use of imagery seem even more unjustified.

Statement of the Problem

I was curious as to what my work was about and what images were important to me. There had to be a reason why I

was driven to do what I did, whether it was a conscious, conceptual purpose or a subconscious, intuitive reason. The problem of this investigation was to discover which of these I used in the creation of my images or whether I used both.

The study concerned itself with the following questions:

1. What kinds of ideas appeared in my work and what did they hold of importance to me?
2. What patterns were reoccurring in the works?
3. What images and icons appeared in the work and why did they reappear or disappear?
4. Were the conscious, conceptual works (i.e., specific images used to portray specific ideas) or the subconscious, intuitive works (i.e., works created around images of uninvestigated origins) more important to me and, therefore, more justifiable?
5. Were the conscious conceptual works or the subconscious intuitive works more successful?

The investigation of what my work was about and whether it was based on concept or intuition was conducted by executing a series of twenty-five (25) prints and drawings. Detailed notes were kept in journal form on each of the pieces. These notes outlined the development of the ideas and concepts, intuitive choices made for the drawings, and what thoughts, emotions, or moods affected the works. The sources of data were utilized to answer the questions posed.

CHAPTER 2

DESCRIPTION OF THE WORK

I would like to discuss the studio work proposed for this thesis on this occasion. The project consisted of twenty-five (25) prints and drawings but, for the purpose of this discussion, I will concern myself with the ten (10) drawings I find most supportive of the questions posed.

As a similar point of departure for each drawing, I used the same type of paper. The 22 x 30 inch dessin-Ja-arches-france proved to be an appropriate size for my project as it was large enough to allow many options to be taken advantage of but small enough so as not to allow myself to be worried about obsessively filling the page. Because the problem was to discover whether my images came from conscious, conceptual ideas or subconscious, intuitive notions, this paper was a comfortable and uninhibiting work surface.

The first work, Rescue, was the first drawing executed for this project and is considered to be one of the subconscious, intuitive pieces. The composition and visual elements were all unplanned and only came together as I continued to work on it. Upon closer examination, though, the drawing reveals itself as a combination of personal

images. The dog riding the fish is my dog, Fred. The toy fish comes from my gadget collection. Mickey Mouse, an important part of my past, is one of those images that keeps reappearing in my work. As a child, Mickey Mouse found his way into my life via television, books, toys, and clothing and, to this day, he continues to fascinate me. The fishing bobber is another of those reoccurring personal icons. The round form and bright contrast of red and white are what attract me visually. On a deeper level, I am fascinated with how the bobber defies water and floats on top of the waves, reacting to each slight ripple of water that passes beneath it. It is a soothing object for me and, by suspending it from a thread, I have given it the weightless quality it has in its intended function.

My interest in drapery and how it reacts to whatever it is draped over and how it folds and falls when bound by string is another of the personal icons found reappearing in my work. In Rescue, it can be found in the banner and patterned ropes that metamorphose from the fabric.

The fish form, too, is a reoccurring image I find interesting not only because of its shape but because I can pattern its surface with stripes, dots, and designs to satisfy the compulsive patternist in me. The drawing's overall nonsensical mood is tied together by its title which helps to unite the seemingly disjointed drawn elements.

The next work, Escape Routes, came about as a response to the flood of 1990 along the Red River. Due to all the rain in April, one of the stock tanks on my ranch overflowed, the water flow being so strong that it broke through the banks and washed the bass into the pasture below. Many fish were swept away only to be stranded in pools of water created by low spots in the ground. These floundering fish quickly attracted the attention of my two dogs who found some sport in the situation. The drawing is simply a moment's remembrance of these fish and how one of the dogs in particular was consumed by the circumstance. The drawing is not a literal description of the event; the event was merely a point of departure from which to begin. Escape Routes is to be considered a conscious, conceptual work because it was a result of a specific notion.

The next in the series of drawings is It's All Debatable. This whimsical drawing is an intuitive piece, with all the drawn elements coming from my subconscious. No deliberate consideration was given to theme or composition. Just as with Rescue, I began by merely drawing some personal images and combining them unintentionally with new ones. Mickey Mouse, the fish, and the bound ropes reappear in this new drawing. New elements include the crayon, used to indicate an artist's presence, thereby incorporating myself into the drawing. The cactus was a spontaneous choice used to place Mickey Mouse in some peril. Contrary to the

harshness of the cactus is the beauty of the iris; and the eyeglasses hanging from the fish act as a comment to this artist's tired eyes after doing some of the obsessively small detailing in the drawing.

Bad Timing, too, is a drawing whose inception was unplanned and never considered. In all honesty, this drawing has nothing to do with anything. It is simply a juxtaposition of some imagery that I find interesting for one reason or another. The Mickey Mouse pencil is part of my personal vocabulary of images. The graph paper is rendered in consideration to the interest I have in paper and its unique qualities of creasing, folding, and casting shadows. The Christmas tree mapped out on the graph paper is an easily recognizable shape that was spontaneously added without thought or deliberation. Eeyore is a character to which I have always likened myself. He is a serious, sad, almost existential fellow and I have always felt a strange kinship with him. The chili peppers and suspended light bulb are included simply for the allure I feel towards their shapes. The bound drapery, whose bulbous content is unknown, is added, again, for the fascination I have for drapery. Upon closer examination, the shape of the bound drapery echoes in the shape of the suspended light bulb.

It Might Have All Been Mine began as an intuitive work but, the more I worked with the images, the more conceptual it became. To begin with, I mapped out the grid of four

rectangles and simply started to draw into them. The images that began to arise were all new and spontaneous, such as the rooster, the seated horse, the girl on the tight rope, and the two seated children. I put the drawing aside for a short while and, upon later inspection, realized that the images drawn were all, in some way, autobiographical. The rooster signifies the strong presence of a lover. The horse deals with my passion for the animal; the girl on the tight rope was in some way reflective of the unbalanced, uncertain destiny that I feel my own life; the seated children became my sister and I as youngsters. I then consciously began to manipulate these images by adding new elements. For instance, I let the tight rope walker hold a teetering tray with two innocent rabbits who are themselves trying to upset the figure by means of a strategically fastened string. Beside the rooster I added an egg housing a human fetus to represent the unborn in my future. The two seated children have suspended above them a phone receiver to indicate the strained relationship and lack of communication we once had as children that I feel between my sister and I as adults. The hanging pear above the horse is merely a formal element to relate the sensual line and shape of the seated equine. The pumpkin, dangling spoon, train, and ribbon are all spontaneously drawn images that came from my subconscious for unrevealed reasons.

Keep It Under Your Hat is one of the intuitive, subconscious pieces. I began simply by drawing the women with no justified reason for their existence. Once they were completed, I realized that I had drawn myself into a corner. I did not know what to do with the images once they were finished. This seemed so typical of myself that I got a bit light-hearted about my predicament. I began to recall that what always seemed silly to me about women was what they chose to wear as hats to compliment an outfit, make a fashion statement, and so forth. Again I began to draw totally baseless and inappropriate hats to what the women were wearing, what function it had to their activity, and what would seem proper. The ropes are merely a design element to both help join the four images visually and, at the same time, separate them from one another. The drawing is a fun piece and is by no means a revolutionary statement on my part about fashion design.

The next work, On Your Mark...Get Set..., is a conscious, conceptual effort that represents a relationship I have been having. The theme of this drawing is simply that love is not perfect and this can be seen via the drawn elements. The caricature images of the man and woman represent me and my lover. The Snow White and Prince Charming figures suggest a storybook perfect relationship. Snow White hides her face, though, in a frightened pose. This is to suggest the fear of relationship--knowing they

are all far from fairy tale perfect. The iris image, a reoccurring personal icon and seen before in It's All Debatable, is a reference to the beauty of love, but the missing puzzle piece implies that it is all but complete and perfect. The hanging ear of corn is the only intuitive element in the drawing and, although there is no conscious explanation for its presence, I believe it works positively as an element of surprise and contemplation. Strings continue to bind and wrap certain images and, as with all the other works, color is limited to small areas of the drawing.

You Dress Me Up But You Don't Take Me Anywhere is, most definitely, a conscious, conceptual work. The work is autobiographical in that it concerns the continual separations I have from my lover due to our different lifestyles. The drawing involves a rendering of me, as can be found at the top of the page. The many facets of my life are illustrated in paper doll fashion with images of the outfits I wear for each activity in which I participate. For example, there is the printmaker's apron for the artist, the swimsuit for the athlete, and the jeans and jersey for the horsewoman. A cutout paper doll is placed among the images to stress the dress-up game, as are the suspended pair of scissors and the bundle of crayons.

Lover's Cross, too, is one of the conscious, conceptual works. The drawing was executed with a purposeful attempt

to express my feelings towards my lover's continual absence. As it is his job to travel, he is away most of the time and I am continually left behind, hence the message on the rendered notebook paper. The plane signifies my lover leaving me over and over again. I am the nude on the cross made of ropes. The ropes suggest being crucified for my art and I portray myself nude to show my vulnerability to the situation. The total image represents the martyrdom I feel of late; because of my artwork, I am unable most of the time to travel with my lover and so the relationship suffers. The bound, strangulated heart suggests the anguish I continually endure by being left behind.

The final work to be discussed is Too Much To Consider which began as an intuitive piece. I started by subconsciously drawing the suspended pots. These vessels have been an important part of my personal vocabulary of images for a very long time. I consider them to be spirit pots containing within their walls my spirit, my being, and my wishes, dreams, hopes, and aspirations. Once again, as with Keep It Under Your Hat, I had drawn myself into a corner. This is when I had to stop, take an objective look at what I had done, and decide what I wanted to say. I realized that I needed to include more visual information to put forth the idea of the importance of the spirit pots so I seated a contemplative image of myself beneath them. Again, I am nude to suggest my vulnerability to myself, my needs,

and my spirit. I then decided to fill the pots with the objects of my contemplation. One pot contains an iris to refer to my femininity. Another contains a jumping horse to suggest the horsewoman side of me, and yet another holds pencils in reference to the artist I am. One pot has its base broken out from it and will never again be functional as a container. This suggests parts of me that are past and lost forever. These are the failures of life, the broken promises I have encountered, and the disappointments, lies, lost relationships, and heartbreaks that make up a person's individual history. The reoccurring image of draped banners is again present and a bound radish is suspended, as with On Your Mark...Get Set..., for subconscious, unknown reasons but works as an element of whimsy and consideration.

CHAPTER 3

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

I would like to take this opportunity to answer the questions posed in Chapter 1. To successfully answer these questions, though, I believe an overall summarization of the project is necessary. Many realizations became apparent after a retrospective view of the work.

To begin with, I realized that I unintentionally, subconsciously created a visual, personal language to reveal the intent of each drawing. I know now that, more often than not, my images come from formal concerns rather than a conscious attempt to use images as vehicles for deep, profound statements. My work deals with fleeting memories, temporary moments, and passing emotions unique to me. The work is a synthesis of many different experiences, feelings, and ideas. How a piece succeeds visually seems more important to me than having a grandiose statement to make. For instance, order is integral to the work. Even something as simple as the shadow cast by objects is highly considered. The shadows act more as formal design elements to accent the edges of pictorial elements rather than being true to nature. I allow the viewers to draw their own conclusions, make their own interpretations, and form their

own relationships with the icons offered in response to their own personal experiences and vocabulary. I feel successful when people go beneath the surface of the work and discover deeper meanings or personal icons of their own. If I can establish a conversation between the viewer and their unique experiences, then I feel my work is worthwhile.

I carry on silent conversations with my drawings. As I work on them, the images, compositions, colors, and so forth tell me whether it is working or not. As I rework the drawing by adding and subtracting elements, the piece continues to speak to me and the discourse continues. This is both a conscious and subconscious experience; an ongoing conversation with my artwork that, hopefully, will never end. The dialogue leads to conversations in new works so there is a natural flow from drawing to drawing.

To answer the questions posed then, many new images and ideas appeared in my work. Images formed in response to what was happening in my life. I made a conscious attempt to try to avoid old icons and so fresh images were inevitable. The importance of these new works, during times of stress, anguish, and confusion, was almost a form of therapy. I realized that when my life was chaotic and almost unbearable, the works became obsessively compulsive; exacting detail, fanatical patterning, and zealous designing prevailed. These techniques offered me a release from all the devastation going on in my life.

Many new images and icons appeared in the works and several kept reappearing such as Mickey Mouse, the bound ropes, the paper and fabric renderings, the nude self-portrait figure, the fish, the iris, and many more. Their importances are all unique to their own identities and visual purposes. They reappear by virtue of their meaning in my unique vocabulary. Many images, used only once and never to appear again, do so because they were used to express a momentary thought and are never applicable again or in many cases, they simply bored me, formally speaking, and therefore I abandoned their use again.

Several patterns were found reoccurring throughout the works in this project. For example the ropes appeared in many instances as cross forms. This was done consciously in certain cases to divide the picture plane or to actually use the crossed ropes as crucifix images. In other cases though, the form was the unconscious result of intuitive drawing. Another obvious pattern was the suspension of compositional elements by strings. This was done with conscious consideration not only to help direct the viewer's eye through the drawing but to satisfy my interest in bound and suspended objects.

After labeling each work either a consciously conceptual drawing or a subconsciously intuitive drawing, I examined their similarities and differences to draw a conclusion as to which type of work was more important to me

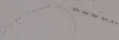
and, therefore, more successful. I discovered that each category had what I considered successes and failures for their individual reasons. Therefore, in answer to this question, I conclude that both approaches to drawing are justifiable. Both resulted in a similar amount of successes and failures. Both approaches led me to discover what my images were about and why I used them. In view of the conclusions drawn through this project, it is to be considered a personal success as it made me aware of my imagery, why I use the images I do and how I am able to distinguish between a successful drawing and a failure. It has increased my personal vocabulary of images and made me realize that I must continue to discover new images to keep my work fresh, visually interesting, and maturing at a level expected of me.

APPENDIX





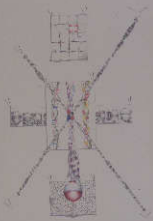


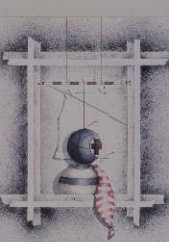












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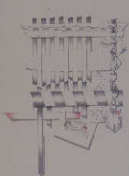


















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