NO MORE WRITING ON THE MERRY-GO-ROUND:
A SERIES OF ETCHINGS

A thesis submitted to the College of the Arts of Kent State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts

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The Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, first suggested the theory of the unity of opposites, which hypothesizes that every element is an opposite, or is connected to an opposite. It is because these opposites exist that changes occur and nature finds balance among its counterparts. The universal nature of human personality is to swing between opposites while searching for balance. The inner world we want to hide and an outer world we reveal to others. I have applied this theory to printmaking. My goal was to create a completely new body of work using old overworked plates as raw material. Pushing and pulling the images through a range of opposites in form, line, scale, space, process, and idea, provides a framework that will allow for the harmonizing of counterparts to occur. I interpret this balance to mean success.
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AKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor, Noel Reifel, for his commitment to his students. I have been privileged to work with him throughout my undergraduate and graduate studies. I would also like to thank my committee members, Michael Loderstedt and Kathleen Browne as well as my fellow printmakers for all of their support and help.
The Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, first suggested the theory of the unity of opposites, which hypothesizes that every element is an opposite, or is connected to an opposite. It is because these opposites exist that changes occur and nature finds balance among its counterparts. The universal nature of human personality is to swing between opposites while searching for balance. The inner world we want to hide and an outer world we reveal to others. I have applied this theory to printmaking. My goal was to create a completely new body of work using old overworked plates as raw material. Pushing and pulling the images through a range of opposites in form, line, scale, space, process, and idea, provides a framework that will allow for the harmonizing of counterparts to occur. I interpret this balance to mean success.

The exhibition, *No More Writing on the Merry-Go-Round*, is a series of etchings exploring this theory. It is important to understand that the work takes place in two states. State one consists of five plates that focus on revealing personal information about my personality. Utilizing freely-associated random thoughts, song lyrics, conversations, writing, and imagery from personal experience the thought becomes an impetus for the creation of marks. The work of Jean Michel Basquiat, Cy Twombly and John Baldasari informed my use of random thought in text, naive representational drawing, and uninhibited mark-making. As I utilized my personal thoughts as a filter to make the marks, the images took on a narrative quality that had an overarching chaotic look. I worked on these plates over an extended period of time, and, as my mood changed, so did the imagery and marks. Each print is developed through layers of process, which allows
a variety of random thoughts to occupy the same space while trying to find a balance among the formal elements and strong visual compositions.

Throughout state one, I used non-traditional tools and methods, such as throwing gears or other metal objects at my plate, using eyeliner and lipstick, in addition to lithography crayons as forms of acid resist. Throwing a metal gear allowed me to attack the plate in a less controlled way. Lithography crayons create a variety of unique marks that obscure its origin. I fluctuated between non-traditional methods and their traditional counterparts: line etching, dry point, aquatint and open bite. The processes of intaglio allowed me to constantly swing between opposites of line, form and value which created a shallow perceived space. I focused on opposites of scale, direction and tone in order to create ambiguity among special elements. Since zinc plates can be re-worked endlessly, I took advantage of the situation by exploiting various mark-making tools and methods.

Always seeking to gain new perspective, I decided to destroy two years of physical and mental work.

State two focuses on hiding the narrative of the prints to create balance between states. This new motivation came from the sudden death of a friend, Anthony Bartholomew. Reflecting on life’s stages, I decided to focus on changing the images exclusively through opposites in terms of aesthetic qualities. This inspired me to react to Bartholomew’s sense of form and containment by creating a unifying shape that implies an interior and exterior, while Richard Serra’s deep, black etchings motivated me to explore figure/ground relationships in order to push/pull space.
Each plate started with the application of duct tape as either a resist or stencil. A banding shape is formed by cutting the tape into different lengths and widths. The marks created by the tape vary between thick or thin, black and white, open or closed, and foreground or background, which allows the shape to dominate the former image in scale. Throughout the series, the banding shapes encompass the center of the image. Contrast among tonalities and scale help to push the narrative back, while pulling form and line forward.

The implementation of opposite processes such as aquatint to conceal imagery, open-bite to erode it, and duct tape to reveal selected areas helps bring the theory of opposites to life. The aquatint process creates rich black areas that mask pre-existing marks while the open-bite process allows for the lightening and erosion of the plate’s old operation. The monotype process enabled me to use tape as a masking stencil, in order to create the gray and white marks that are not permanent. The original etching remained in the areas masked by duct tape, while unmasked areas of the plates were further etched. By applying tape to the plate before it was inked, the area remains “white” or the color of the paper. If tape was applied before re-inking, only masked areas are printed as a “ghost image”, allowing the gray elements to seem more subtle while appearing to glow. The different lines of the tape began to overlap, resulting in the inconclusiveness of figure and ground. This shift causes a greater sense of depth and ambiguity in the image.

These relationships change the perception of state one. The space is now perceived in greater terms of formal relationships rather than narrative alone. As viewers
approach the image from afar, it first appears graphic and bold. It’s only as they come
closer that the figure-ground elements come more into focus, revealing more and more of
the image. This causes the viewer to become involved in trying to figure out the space,
and it is only after all elements in the image have been found that the entire history of the
plate is revealed. I want the viewing experience to mimic the creating experience. It has
to unfold and take time to explore, fluctuating between past and present.

The title of my show is taken from the lyric of a John Lennon song, “Watching
the Wheels”. One lyric reads, “No more riding on the merry-go-round.” I changed the
word “‘riding” to ‘writing’ in order to allude to the textual and graffiti-like quality of the
plates’ original state. The title of the show becomes a metaphor for changes that have
occurred: time has passed and it is now time to move on. The titles of the prints are taken
from Beatles’ song lyrics which also refer to a change in perspective. As an artist I am
moving forward from a naïve state to a more sophisticated one, with the organic nature of
my investigation resulting in virtually endless variations.

Efforts to transform the perception of the images also caused me to flip the
format from vertical to horizontal. All plates are 18” x 24,” (25” x32” matted) and are
printed on Rives BFK paper. The prints are hung with glass and hooks because I did not
want the imposition of a frame. I want this work to engage the viewer both visually and
intellectually. Engaging viewers with my mark-making methods seeks to stimulate a
conversation about the content of the work. I want the viewer to wonder. Was the image
made all at once or over a period of time? Is the hidden content important, or should it
remain concealed? Which formal elements lie in front, or behind others? The ambiguity
of the images allows for an open-ended response, depending on viewers’ personal experiences. Individual personality becomes an uncontrollable violation of my meaning of the work, yet it is still the individual’s goal to seek balance; whether in nature, life or art.
Figure 1

*I Just Had to Let it Go #1*
Figure 2

_I Just Had to Let it Go #2_
Figure 3

*I Just Had to Let it Go #3*
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*I Just Had to Let it Go #4*
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*I Just Had to Let it Go #5*
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You’re Not the Same #1
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*Just Like Starting Over #1*
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*You Say Stop and I Say Go #3*
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Looking Through #3