A BIRD IN HAND

A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

by

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FIELDS OF STUDY

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Choices

Reflecting on my childhood, I remember how my time was filled with a multitude of creative activities. When I wasn't practicing my flute or piccolo, I was drawing, painting or doing some kind of craft.

My musical instruction began in grade school and continued for a period of nine years. During this time, I studied with Yolanda Picucci at the Wilmington Music School. She was a fiery, dark haired Italian woman who both inspired and intimidated me. Even though I towered over this stout, five foot woman, she exuded such energy and aggressiveness in her playing that she seemed to be a giant. She was the kind of instructor who strove for perfection. Grueling, warm-up exercises were practiced ritualistically every lesson. Stamina, patience, and endurance were insisted upon.

Intertwined with my musical instruction was my art work. I was very good at watercolors, pen and ink, and crafts. At this time, I was heavily influenced by my sister. She painted and drew very realistically from nature and was influenced by the painter, Andrew Wyeth. Having no other influences at this time, I began to draw in the same fashion as my sister and did not know how to deal with my work on an intellectual level. The Brandywine River Valley and surrounding areas are depicted in a realistic manner in Wyeth's paintings and drawings. Living and growing up near this beautiful countryside, my sister and I often explored the woods which Wyeth had used as subject matter in his paintings. Most memorable in my thoughts was the time spent hiking through the woods at the Brandywine State Park and surrounding areas. Rainy afternoons were our favorite times to explore the park. We would put on our raincoats and stomp through the woods for hours while experiencing the vast variety of vegetation and animal life. All our senses came alive as we walked from the higher wooded pinelands to the bogs and swamps by the riverside. One can't help but notice the variety of odors, colors, and textures which consume the senses when walking through this park.
With the completion of high school, I began to place all my creative energies in visual art. Since I played rather than composed music, I had the desire to express my own emotions rather than interpreting someone else's. My music instruction was abandoned one year later as I found it frustrating and impossible to do both music performance and visual art.

A Creative Niche

My first year at the University of Delaware as an undergraduate was spent floundering in drawing and painting. I continued to draw in the manner in which my sister and I had drawn and soon became bored with the technical rendering of pinecones and seashells. I wanted to find a way to incorporate my love for nature in a more expressive manner.

It wasn't until my first printmaking class in intaglio that I became conceptually aware of my work. My instructor challenged me by asking what art meant to me. As my imagery developed intuitively, my use of line and texture was approached very lyrically and spontaneously, thus allowing me to personally reinterpret those things in nature which I loved so much. The physical aspects of intaglio were very appealing to me. The stamina, patience, and endurance which I had developed during my musical studies proved to be helpful and necessary while creating my intaglios. It is a time consuming process with many steps to follow. The variety of tactile levels and surfaces, created while doing an intaglio, was and is emphasized when I am sanding or burnishing. This technical process encourages me to touch and feel the images as they develop on the plate and establishes a link between myself and the imagery which I create on the metal surface. This became, and still is, a very important element in my work because it allows me to physically mold, develop, and shape the images which in turn become physically and emotionally rewarding.
I decided to go to graduate school to further my career and develop my conceptual and technical body of work. I had received much support and positive feedback from my instructors and peers at The University of Delaware but desired a new artistic environment to stimulate new ways of thinking while further developing my imagery. The Ohio State University afforded me the opportunity to fulfill my aspirations.

Cow Town Rodeo

When I was an undergraduate, the work of Joseph Cornell first inspired me to do boxes. They seemed to be visual diaries and keepsakes which were encased to last forever. The intimacy, which is felt while viewing these pieces, is a quality which I enjoyed and wanted to convey in my own boxes. Because of their small scale, the viewer is invited to inspect the activities and events which are occurring within.

My first experience as a graduate student at The Ohio State University began as a teaching assistant in the woodshop. This experience rekindled my interest in making three-dimensional pieces. This is when I began to re-explore the concept of the "box." I wanted the new challenge of working three-dimensionally which would, also, incorporate the printed surface. I did not want to abandon the intaglio process altogether but rather use it in a new way which I had never done before. I ventured forth on my own after watching and listening to basic instruction and began constructing three-dimensional enclosures which included printed surfaces from my intaglios, lithographs, and woodcuts as well as a variety of other mixed media. Cornell used found objects in his timeless pieces. Old wood and small artifacts from antique stores were used throughout his work. When including found objects in my own work, every surface has been touched by my hand, either by painting, sanding, or by laminating them with my prints. They then became unique and personal to me.
Great care is taken to give all the surfaces of these structures a finished and refined character. Even the backs of the pieces have been sanded and evenly painted. As the viewer approaches my work from the side or views pieces from behind, it is important to me that the same aesthetic concerns for craftsmanship are maintained. Some people perceive this attention to minute detail as being somewhat neurotic, but I feel this is natural to my temperament. I take great care and pleasure applying layers of paint on a surface until it is glossy or elaborate upon an edge for a subtle color change. This may not be noticed by everyone, but I know they are there, and they make a difference to me. These characteristics can be seen in Shrine for Grandfather's Pheasant. (See Fig. 1).

When I was living in Delaware, a friend of mine gave me a beautiful pheasant carcass which was passed down to him from his grandfather. This bird was a brightly colored, male, ring-necked pheasant. I used some of the feathers in many previous pieces of artwork and decided to construct a final resting place for this elegant gamebird. Since I have always owned birds, I have a fond affection for their physical beauty. Their delicate patterning and colors are visually exciting to me. Their gentle personalities are conveyed through their gestures and daily activities. Thus, it was natural for me to fall in love with this beautiful pheasant carcass. Its elegant shape, patterns, and colors inspired me to encase this bird in a special place for all to see. It also served as a place of safe keeping while protecting it from the ravages of time.

Set behind glass, the pheasant is enshrined with a conglomeration of textures, shapes, and patterns which are organized in layers to cause the eye to move across and within the composition. In my intaglions, these layers become textures and color which are printed on top of one another to achieve rich tactile surfaces. They become a delicate contrast to the flat, organic shapes. This process of "thinking in layers" occurs in Shrine for Grandfather's Pheasant.
A painted glass surface is the first level of this structure. The images, which occur on this surface, reinterpret the bird form while relating to the underlying structures. The eye is next drawn to the pheasant contained within a box which comfortably accommodates its size and shape. A gesturally expressive black and white intaglio image echoes the bird form for the third time. The compartments create intimate places which demand close inspection and serve as "treasure boxes" to be visually discovered by the viewer. The entire structure becomes a shrine for this bird and symbolizes the motion and spirit which was inherent at one time in this pheasant.

The baroque characteristic of elaborate patterning and color is found in Three-D Birdhouse, (See Fig. 2). I wanted to make a performance space which was as beautiful as these feathered creatures and used a variety of patterns to create a synthesis to their motion. Marbleized paper, floral design, and zebra wood are some of the materials used to enhance their decorative environment.

Alexander Calder's wire drawings were an inspiration for the linear birds adhered to either side of the house. I felt the plain, unadorned surface of the screen needed elaboration. The simple shapes, formed by the phone wire, create lines which are three-dimensional and form an elegant organic contrast to the geometric pattern of the screen. Within the house are wooden perches made from sections of old molding from a Victorian style house. This molding was salvaged from someone's garbage which I found while walking to school one morning. This treasure was immediately confiscated, stripped of old varnish, and adhered to the interior. This particular piece of molding functioned perfectly for a perch while its curvilinear design enhanced and complemented the organic floral interior. Additional birds, made of zebra wood and marbleized paper, sit upon the structure in clusters and by themselves to portray a whimsical reflection of the activity of the live finch within. They become caricatures of the playful personalities of the feathered creatures inside.
A marbleized etching was printed and laminated onto cut circles of wood and adhered as steps to the front of this stage. Simulated doric pillars of hand-turned zebra wood support the main structure.

All of these parts add up to the total which is an elaborate performance stage for live finch. It was specifically designed to display these birds for the opening night of my thesis exhibition and was not designed to house them for a long period to time. The structure is a highly decorated surface which, again, is reminiscent of the activity, motion, and beauty of these creatures. It is intended to delight the viewer and allow him or her to enjoy the visual beauty and movement of these finch in an intricate setting which becomes a shrine constructed specifically for these birds.

Because of the Gilmore Grant, which I received in 1986, I was able to complete the Birdhouse and consider it to be one of the most successful pieces I have completed during my studies here. I feel it is successful because it breaks away from my original vision of the "box." It goes beyond displaying objects or sentimental memorabilia, symbolizing the motion and beauty of birds and bird forms to an actual stage which physically and visually displays live birds. One is sentimental and reminiscent of what was; this Birdhouse is current and confronts the viewer with what is.

As I watch my birds in their cage at home, they are a constant source of amusement and beauty. Their delicate movements and unique personalities offer hours of visual enjoyment. Their chirps create a song which charms and soothes the senses. Three-D Birdhouse pays homage to the gentle beauty which I find so intriguing in these birds. The joy which they bring to me is endless. This performance stage is a symbol of my appreciation, love, and understanding for birds while offering stimulation for future projects involving environments for other feathered creatures.
Doggie-Kon, (See Fig. 3), was constructed when my dog, Tessie, was very ill and there was a chance she would die. During her illness, I was taking a Russian Art History class and discovered Russian icon paintings of the 16th Century. These icons were found in every home in Russia and depicted religious saints. If one could afford it, craftsmen would elaborately repousse and enamel gold or silver coverings, known as rizas, which would then be placed on top of the painted surface. The head and hands of the saint were cut out of this metal covering and exposed the painting beneath. Doggie-Kon becomes the quintessential for the concept of enshrinement. My love for this animal is celebrated in this contemporary icon which is directly inspired from the icons found in Russian culture.

The humour in this homage to "man's best friend" is contrasted against religious implications. A cross, constructed from burnt wood and copper, sits in the center of an arch above the shrine. The physical action of using a blow torch to scorch and burn areas of the copper surface and cross was ritualistic. Burnt wood creates a lavish blackened surface and accentuates the element of impending doom. This was my way to make a statement about the love and devotion I have for this animal while conveying the life and death situation taking place.

Even though these three-dimensional structures were exciting and satisfying to do, I never abandoned my intaglios which were developed purely two-dimensionally. A Bird in Hand, (See Fig. 4), is a continuation of the bird theme and further explores lavish textural surfaces in a landscape format. Inspired by the Fibonacci Theory, stating that all life evolves from the spiral, the vortex present in this etching reflects a bond with nature through artistic representation. The spiral is accentuated in this intaglio as its size takes on an omnipotent presence. It is used repeatedly in my work and is later transformed into a whirl of broken lines and marks rather than a solid shape. Earlier pieces use this spiral as a decorative symbol for the forms found in nature. Later these forms
are used as an expression of energy which accentuates emotional feelings or actions which are taking place at the time.

The colors which appear in this print were selectively chosen to cause the eye to move from one point to the next. Because of the broad range of color used, it became a difficult process choosing ones which would "pop" from the surface and become separate entities from the underlying planes. The shapes and sizes were equally as important in order to begin to accent different areas and cause a whirl of visual movement across the composition.

The finger-like marks, which are turquoise in color, were initially inspired while making sheets of paper at the Logan Elm Press. Streaking my fingers across the colored pulp created an organic shape which I found intriguing, and I incorporated this shape into the composition. Just as a child imprints his or her hand in a pie tin filled with plaster to create an individual imprint which is captured in time, so are these finger-like marks created. Interacting with the landscape and spiral, they represent a self-portrait embedded in the printed surface. Veiled layers of texture and color are used to evoke an elegantly worn surface. By scraping and sanding the copper plates, ghostly marks and scratches appear while additional patterns of texture are added. Together, these elements contribute to the rich underlying surfaces and actively support the accents of color which move in a staccato-like rhythm.

The ornate qualities, which are characteristic of my three-dimensional structures, are also found in my intaglios. Almost all the surfaces of my prints are activated with either line, color, texture, or pattern. This desire to "fill up space" becomes descriptive of my personality. I am an individual who becomes bored easily and finds it challenging and stimulating to participate in a multitude of activities. The surfaces of my intaglios are loaded with visual stimulation. Intricately rendered patterns will hopefully captivate the viewer and draw him or her into the imaginary world I
have created.

In Alleyway and Backyards, (See Fig. 5), those characteristics, found in previous pieces, are accentuated by increasing their scale, thus, for me, creating a sense of monumentality. I wanted to confront the viewer with this large birdhouse image just as it had visually confronted me. Inspiration for this piece came during one of my many walks to school. Walking down our alleyway, my neighbor's backyards are dotted with many playful birdhouses and whirligigs. One birdhouse, in particular, had always caught my eye. Aged and discolored by the weather, it sits atop a pole at an angle, enduring years of rain, sun, and snow. Its iconographic character is visualized in this large etching which pays homage to the birdhouse and the activity which surrounds it. In order to convey the activity which surrounds a birdhouse, the printed surface is consumed by a variety of marks and textures as color bounces across the surface. This energetic use of color and texture was used to instill this sense of motion to the viewer and used the same sensibilities as Three-D Birdhouse. A spiral of energy is whirling in the background as numerous stylized birds twirl upon the surface. Additional spirals arch into the print and interact with the stoic birdhouse. The sunflowers which are bent over the lower portion of the print were initially inspired from dead and blackened sunflowers draped over my neighbor's backyard fence. Although their colors had long since faded, I found them to be incredibly beautiful. Just as this weatherbeaten birdhouse has a beauty of its own, so do these lifeless plants.

The values, created in some of my earlier prints, basically rely on the use of color. In order to stimulate a new challenge for myself, I began work on a large black and white etching entitled, Anticipation of the Final Outcome, (See Fig. 6). Created simultaneously with Doggie-Kon, it is an overt narrative which evokes an emotional situation which was taking place at the time. There was a period of two weeks where my husband and I were waiting for the
results of tests which would determine whether or not cancer was present in our dog. It was during this time period that I began work on this intaglio.

The silhouette of Tessie's head is dominant as she becomes the spectator to a gruesome activity. A spiney, visceral vine chokes the life from a bird form set against a landscape, painstakingly and intricately rendered in a variety of textures and patterns. The birdhouse reappears as a dark shape in the upper left hand corner of the print. Its flat, black shape echoes the shape of Tessie's head as the eye moves busily from one point to the next. The spiral, which has been used so rigidly in the past, is transformed into a gestural wave on the horizon and accentuates the highly charged emotional quality of this piece. I wanted to depict motion and energy in the background to set a contrast to the narrative which was taking place. The void within the spiral is occupied by a cross. The decision to place the cross in this piece was difficult. It was initially drawn and etched into the plate as a stylized image outlined very specifically. I went one step further and painted it with gold leafing. It then became the visual focus of the print which was not my intention. I removed sections of the cross and printed it again. I then added line work only to remove it a second time. This physical action of adding and subtracting to find a comfortable resting place with this religious symbol finally came to an end when I realized its importance in the piece. Questioning the life and death situation at hand, the cross becomes important as a religious symbol of love and devotion for our family pet while creating a visual image of fear to the "final outcome" of this situation.

The ominous overtones, created in this etching, can also be found in Can I Talk to You for a Minute?, (See Fig. 7). Concurrently, when Tessie went to the vet for her operation, my husband went to the hospital to have tests done. He had been experiencing some physical problems and decided to go a physician. A normally uncomplicated lifestyle was interrupted by circumstances beyond my control. The
climax to these situations was an obscene phone call at 2:30 in the morning. A hushed voice whispered, "Can I talk to you for a minute?". As my heart pounded, I hung up the phone and went back to bed. The next day, I reflected upon that moment and my reaction. Even though few words were spoken before I hung up the receiver, enough was said to create an unforggetably eerie feeling. The early morning phone call became the climax to an already emotional situation.

The complicated and severe shift in planes and angles seen in this intaglio was used to depict the many events occurring during this time. Contradictions take place as light sources shift in this confusing environment. A threatening vine bows through a picture frame which is patterned with a simulated wood texture. As is true of many of my 3-D structures, this picture frame is not square. Its awkwardness is represented as a sharp point which juts out into space. In the lower left hand corner of the print, a scratchy mass of lines evolve from the spiral to form a nest. The associations that one makes with a nest are those of security, birthing, Spring or new beginnings. In contrast to these feelings of peacefulness and security, are those which are often unexpected and unfortunate. In Can I Talk to You for a Minute?, these contradictions in life are symbolized in a confusing and contradictory representation of space using elaborate baroque qualities to enhance the surface of the print.

**New Beginnings**

As my work in Graduate School comes to an end, I feel in some ways my work is just beginning. While I was putting up my Graduate Exhibition, I was able to review the work which was done in this very short two year period. My usage of organic and animal imagery is consistent throughout. The energy and serenity, which I find in nature, will most likely be an ever present issue in my work and play a major role conceptually. Hand in hand with this is my use of animal imagery. There is a physical and emotional bond that takes place
between an animal and its owner. The relationship, which is established within this bond, is one of devotion and unselfish giving. This is a bond which seldom, if ever, occurs between myself and other people. Having always had birds and dogs for pets, they have offered me an endless source of love, companionship, and physical beauty. I find their shapes to be more interesting than the human figure and will most likely continue to use them visually in one way or another.

My use of color and the role it plays in my work was also re-examined. After completing my two large black and white intaglias, it became apparent where my primary interest lies. My imagery and concepts behind them are what is most important while color becomes secondary. In the past, my color usage was so complex that it consumed the image and for some became the primary issue. I will never abandon my use of color entirely, yet I can see it becoming more simplified and almost secondary. Strengthening my work conceptually by elaborating upon the image itself rather than the underlying colors has become more important. For me, Anticipation of the Final Outcome and Can I Talk to You for a Minute? are my most successful intaglias. They are dramatic narratives which address the emotional situations which inspired their execution. Three-D Birdhouse and Doggie-Kon are my most successful three-dimensional pieces. They, too, are more directed and focused conceptually and offer additional ideas for the future. Working two-dimensionally in intaglio and three-dimensionally in wood are very different; yet, both have many of the same tactile sensibilities which I enjoy. In the future, I will continue working in these mediums to further develop my work conceptually and visually.

In my very early works, I had drawn realistically from nature, depicting, as best I could, those things which were visually loved and cherished by me. These early images did not include any notion of what they were about conceptually. When my work began to evolve intuitively and conceptually, these things in nature became symbols for people or events. Thus, for me, I personalized them and made them uniquely my own. I have arrived at a body of work which represents
more than just surface decoration or a conglomeration of visual images and is a very direct, purposeful, and graphic body of work which contains specific elements used symbolically to express ideas. I do not expect the viewer to understand their meaning completely, but if the essence of their meaning is somehow conveyed, then I am satisfied and feel I have been successful. I have been able to do more than record what they look like or the single thing they may be.
PLATE III