Photography Into Graphics -
A Combined Approach to Graphics

A Thesis
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Preface

I find it difficult to write about my work in graphics and photography. Since the two processes are so different, I am very uncertain about finding an adequate way of writing about the experience of printmaker. As a print-maker, I work continually in the present. Although what I have been and what I am becoming are constantly influencing my work, I am very seldom deliberately aware of the influence. Writing, on the other hand, is for me, at best, a very self-conscious effort. I dislike dredging up past experiences, sorting them out, trying to determine which are important and constantly looking over my shoulder to see how I have done. Nevertheless, this thesis represents my most honest writing about those experiences which may have some significance for my life and work as an artist.
I grew up in Martins Ferry, Ohio, a small town on the Ohio River. The town is one of the oldest in Ohio, and at the time I was a child, probably one of the dirtiest. Soot filled the air most of the time. The steel mill, the blast furnace, the power plant and the steam engine trains were a continual source of reddish-brown and grey clouds. The streets in the town had not yet been paved with asphalt so the large, dull-red bricks were still visible. The tar used to hold the bricks in place, in the summer would boil up into black, shiney domes.

I mention these facts not to create any particular feeling about the town or to romanticize my childhood, but because these are organic kinds of things. The smoke and the tar, things that grow and fold over in and out of themselves are the kinds of things that keep showing up in my prints today. I don't know what significance these things had for me as a child. Possibly, what they symbolize for me today are spontaneity, freedom and at times even chaos.

I became interested in music while still in grade school. It was almost four years before I had the courage to do anything about it. This kind of lag time between wanting to do something and actually doing it has been typical of my behavior throughout most of my life. It wasn't until about the sixth grade that I began taking piano lessons. Since I was painfully aware that I had started much later than most children, I never did "loosen up" enough to play well. Still, it was an introduction
to music which in another form I grew to love greatly.

At about the time I entered high school, I was told by one of my teachers, who herself had an exceptionally fine contralto voice, that I could sing. Previous to this time, I was thoughtlessly "singing along with" Caruso, Tucker, Pinza or anyone else I could find on record at the public library. I began to study singing seriously along with my faltering piano lessons. Singing suited me both temperamentally and physically. Singing was pure joy for those four or five years. I believe it was the first truly artful experience that I had. However, when I graduated from high school, I entered a seminary.

No one including myself questioned my motives and, completely disregarding my instincts, I chose to do what I thought I "ought to do", rather than what I had a passion to do. I subscribed to the popular Catholic myth of the 50's that if a person was in doubt about a religious vocation, the best place to settle that doubt was a seminary. After six years, I realized that I wasn't going to get kicked out so I quit.

I left the seminary with some very definite ideas about what I didn't want, but very vague ideas concerning what I did want. I felt that I was, at twenty-five, already too old to begin musical studies to become a performing artist. However, I still felt that I wanted to do "something creative". At this time, I entered Ohio State University as a broadcast major. Within the year I realized that it was the wrong major.

I began taking as many courses as I could outside the department. When I eventually discovered what was then the much under-publicized
Photography and Cinema Department, I soon took most of the film courses. Although I enjoyed making films, I found the activity to be frustrating for a number of reasons. First of all, it is very difficult to make films without the assistance from others since films are usually made through team efforts. I found it difficult to tell others what I wanted done. Also, film is an expensive medium, and I always felt there was little room for experimentation or mistakes. Finally, there was always too much time between the idea for a film and the actual execution. The time between idea and execution was always spent thinking about all the problems that I would incur making the film. I made very few films; only one of which was good.

Because of these difficulties with motion-pictures I found myself becoming more and more involved with still photography. Here was a medium I could handle; the relationship was simple: me, the camera, the negative, the print and hopefully, a supportive audience. Still photography had for me all the satisfaction of film making with none of the frustration. I discovered in still photography some of the directness, simplicity and immediacy of singing, and as with singing, I was again dealing with an expressive image. It was again, as in singing, an image which could be molded or "phrased." This analogy between singing and still photography holds except for that time when the photographic image is immersed in chemistry and darkness.

When Clyde Dilley, a photographer-artist, began teaching at Ohio State in 1969, he encouraged me to continue in photography and suggested that I might try combining the photographic and the graphic. Through
Professor Dilley I met Professor Sidney Chafetz, Chairman of the graphic program in the school of Fine Arts.

From this meeting came the basis for a special MFA program which permitted me to do creative work combining photography and traditional printmaking processes. Although I feel that my work is just beginning, I do see some kind of consistent theme and attitude emerging toward the use of combined graphic processes. I seldom begin any image with an idea which might express any kind of fixed or literal meaning. This attitude becomes especially apparent when I examine my choice of subject matter. Most of the objects which form my subject matter are elemental, organic and amorphous. I seldom use subjects which have inherent strong literal symbolism. The weathered, the old and the cast-off debris have a special uncanny appeal for me. These kinds of objects are attractive to me because they are constantly growing in themselves in a process of arriving to a simpler more integral existence, and the signs of the transformation seem always to be written in the gnarled, bitten and craggy surfaces.

Something else I am very much aware of when working, is the process or medium itself. McLuhan, in *The Medium is the Message* and his other works, has already popularized the idea that the medium is more than the conveyor of the image, that it has an influence which may even be greater than the image itself. However, I have found in my own work that the medium is often the source of the image. In this instance, I don't mean source in a metaphorical sense because in a very real sense the image can be the presentation or depiction of the actual, physical workings of the
media-process, itself.

One print, Light-feeling, which I have done, represents the kind of integration of medium and image of which I have written. The print began when I noticed a mercury vapor light which had an unusual bluish glow. I wondered how it would photograph. I realized that if I exposed it at any given shutter-speed it would cause a burned-out spot on the negative. As I watched it, though, I began to think about another possibility. Why could not the lamp be used as a pencil to write with across the film. I was far enough from the light so that it was only a small dot in the viewfinder and so, approximately the same on the film. If I were to keep the shutter open for a few seconds the dot would become a line. I realized that I would not be able to see the image being formed as long as the shutter was open, but I would, in a very strange way, be able to "feel" the light. The light had become a pencil and the camera moving in my hand was the film-tablet.

The image that grew out of this process is important to me because it represents the kind of union of medium, object, and maker I am always striving for. It also depicts the actual working of the medium of which I have written, and it has those organic qualities I look for. Finally, I enjoyed making it.

Printmaking has been for me an always new and vital expression. It is a constant renewal of awareness and an affirmation of that awareness, and my hope is that it will continue to be so.
## Illustrations

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