TRANSITIONS: A RECORD OF TRANSFORMATIONS

A Thesis

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by

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Preface

"The meaning or content of a work, whether it is a painting or a print, is the essence of the expression of a creative personality, of an individual whose uniqueness determines the nature of his art, but whose ideas are influenced by the social forces in his environment."¹
Philosophical and Technical Transformations

My art involves the quality of inner expression rather than the depiction of recognizable subject matter. The art will be approached within the framework of itself and its relationship to me. The influences leading to my transitions, content concepts, the processes and the results of such experiences will be considered.

In order to better understand the transitions my work has undergone during my two years of study at the Ohio State University it will be necessary to explain the factors which served as major influences. I began study of fine art at the State University of New York at Buffalo in 1970. I chose sculpture as my major area chiefly because one of my instructors, Duayne Hatchet, had the ability to impart enthusiasm and passion for its creation. I found making sculpture involved hard physical work. Sometimes, after collapsing from exhaustion, I would wonder if there were other areas of the visual arts which might also fulfill my creative needs without exacting such a physical toll.

During my second year at Buffalo the long-term fabrication processes of sculpture became extremely
frustrating. I felt a need for something different which might allow for more immediateness of expression; I enrolled in several acting courses. The following semester I auditioned for a part in a major production, Doctor Faustus by Christopher Marlowe and was given the humorous, satirical role appropriate to my character. However, hours in rehearsal left little time or energy to pursue sculpture. I found it necessary to decide between acting or the plastic arts. Choosing the latter, I found more gratification as well as security in reproducing my emotions in the form of visually expressive art objects, rather than in creating a fleeting portrayal of another's character.

But when I returned again to sculpture the experience was frightening. No matter how much visual impact resulted, my sculpture held little meaning for me. Consequently, I had little desire to make sculpture. However, I had taken a course in intaglio print-making and found that the tactile quality of the plate plus indirectness of the process were similar to sculpture. I appreciated the advantage in which working two-dimensionally offered me the freedom to create an environment which was difficult to create with sculpture. Although I performed in an acting company for two years, my visual ideas really focused upon creating a total environment, a stage within the confines of a plate.
as a printmaker I could be: playwright, director, actor and set designer. An illustration of a literary conception translated into visual terms is discussed by Carle Zigrosser:

"The avant-garde influences (on Argentine art) were predominantly literary, since books travel farther and faster than paintings and other works of art. . . fundamentally, literary conceptions (were) translated into visual terms."  

When I began the Graduate Printmaking studies at the Ohio State University I was strongly influenced by the etchings of Mauricio Lasansky. His work displays an extraordinary technical facility. His refined, sensitive drypoint lines gave his prints (from the late fifties and early sixties) a feeling of directness. Through the study of these works, I became aware of the technical possibilities available. A Lasansky print suggests the most delicate tones and nuances through a primarily linear medium.

My visual concerns remained involved with "staging" a total environment. Living alone in a new city had a definite influence on my imagery. I etched self portraits which dramatized various aspects or elements of my character as they became more and more isolated
and exposed. I eliminated the ground around the human figure. Most of the portraits were whimsical self-satires with critical tragic overtones. I was concerned with the human gestures, portraying a story. My work was directed towards an audience, as it was during my acting years. The roles I created in my prints, similar to those on stage, were humorous, satirical statements which culminated in Menopause. (plate 1)

Using my physical self as both model and subject for my etchings, I continued to "play a role". After examining a series of self portraits, I realized there was a gap between what I felt was my true emotion and the superficial, self-conscious projections. I realized that I had trapped myself into a repetitive formula. Again, I questioned if this was the effect or quality I was searching for. I remained dependent on the acceptance or rejection from my audience.

Meanwhile, my search continued for a greater personal expression. Color had always intrigued me but I was afraid to use it since I felt I lacked the technical and theoretical background. The processes of sculpture and etching put little stress on its use. Like most people I experience pleasant feelings when viewing color. The art on my apartment walls are all executed in color. The first sign of spring is a tiny splash of color peeping
out from under the white snow. Even my choice of colors in my wardrobe is not limited to black and white. Living in a world of color, it seemed quite natural to make colorprints. I found reality in color. I agree with Klee's statement that the purpose of a picture is to make us happy.

My first step in using color was to overcome my fear of it. I once again researched printmakers who dealt specifically with color. "Etching had always referred to a plate into which lines were bitten with acid but today artists often combine line etching with the sugar method, aquatint, drypoints and even engraving. To call such prints etchings is as confusing as referring to photomechanical reproductions as prints. A better general term for color etchings would be metal plate prints in color."³ Johnny Friedlaender, an outstanding innovator in the use of metal plates, provided me with the inspiration I was seeking when he wrote, "The possibilities that the metal plate offers are diverse and fascinating. I use different techniques guided only by my inspiration, attempting to establish an equilibrium between it and the craft, whether it involves the velvety line of the drypoint, or the extreme rigor of the burin, the powerful and direct line of the sugar method or the endless gradations of aquatint etching. But when an etcher explains his technique he always forgets one --
that which he has sought and, perhaps, found in the privacy of daily work as in the secrecy of his heart."

Traditionally, the painter's first task had been to hollow out an illusion of three-dimensional space on a flat surface. One looked through this surface as through a proscenium into a stage, allowing the viewer to escape into the illusion of space. I think of my first color-prints as minute sections of infinite landscapes involving the use of light, space (depth) and color. Volume continues to influence my prints as it had in my study of sculpture. I approach these images as scenes into another reality, as though looking through a window. This is apparent by noting the borders or frames which serve as enclosures. (plate 2) Piet Mondrian has discussed framing in terms of causing sensations of three-dimensions. Framing gives a spatial illusion of depth. My images appear as if there was a camera lens sweeping a panorama, stopping at a random location. My landscapes are a personalization of my emotions. The frames are the stage in which my personal reality is given life.

Varied methods of indicating space may occur within a composition. One of the methods I use to imply depth is overlay (the implied "space" overly of one area or shape upon another). (plates 4, 5, 6) I have also incorporated linear perspective as an indicator of space.
This takes form in the implied horizon lines.

The space in my most recent color prints have less of an infinite landscape quality. They take on characteristics of viewing the inside of a box or the mind. The shapes appear crowded, struggling as though viewing molecules through a microscopic lens. They appear to be closer to the surface although the pictorial space remains "inside". (plate 7) Piet Mondrian stated, "To bring the painting forward from the frame, is to give it a more 'real' existence. It is being moved into our surroundings."
The Process

The process is the means by which artists develop ideas. As artists we are faced with an infinite amount of decisions, possibilities and choices. Drawing and painting are the means I use to develop my images. These processes allow me immediate manipulation and rearrangement of color and space. This direct approach, unlike the intaglio process, allows for changes without too much difficulty.

During my earlier black and white work, my drawings served only as a means of arriving at an idea for a print. These preliminary drawings were incomplete. The solutions that they implied and evolved were transferred to the plates and served as initial means to another end. Now, my recent drawings and paintings are solutions in themselves although they continue to influence my etchings. "An earlier element never becomes meaningless when a new one is added in the process of development; it remains equally true, though perhaps less obvious." 6

I no longer refer to the human figure as my subject. I have begun to work non-objectively to define my subconscious emotions. The forms and colors are no longer determined by the subject to the same effect. The
problem for me at present is the relationship of parts
(or color as shape) to the whole. Paul Klee articulates
my feelings stating, "In a picture . . . everything is
possible if its peculiar world is persuasive enough
to become a credible reality, if things are correct in
themselves and correctly related to each other." My
present work is somewhat influenced by the art of Paul
Klee. In his piece intitled The Twittering Machine,
the design is traced by transfer on an atmospheric pink
and bluish purple ground. Drastic simplification of the
design forms a calculated contrast with the sunset
tones of the picture field. It is not surprising that
this watercolor and oil drawing would appeal to me,
since its characteristics are similar to the metal
plate printing method. Since the design was transferred
on to it, not applied directly to the sheet.

I begin my drawings and paintings with watercolor
washes covering the entire surface. Since the paper
is damp it is not difficult to vary or add color and I
continue to add shapes of flat color which appear to be
floating on a subtle, contrasting field. Perhaps, one
could refer to these works as painting-prints since many
of the shapes are transferred to the paper with cut
linoleum and paper cutouts rolled or painted with a water
base paint and by fingers, cup rims, or anything else
which might assist me in achieving a solution. I feel that my drawings, paintings and prints are just beginning to merge into a single entity.

Perhaps, I will begin to draw and paint into my prints as another possible solution. Although my color-prints increasingly resemble paintings in both design and color. I take care to maintain the characteristics of etching with its traditional concern with the unequalled beauty of the etched line. I have no desire to create prints which merely resemble paintings printed on paper. To succeed in creating images, which to me symbolize (express) beauty is my purpose. "Theory is an aid to clarification," Klee discussed in a lecture. "We have rules and the possibility of deviating from them. If one takes the rules too seriously, one finishes up in the arid region. One can alter the standpoint or the thing; in either case the liberating movement is, so to say a moral duty."8

I feel that my art demands little intellectual response, but rather calls for an emotional one. I trust that in looking at my recent prints and drawings, one does not so much think about them as see them, hopefully, as the dream-fantasies of my creation.
CONCLUSION

Within the search process, the artist's problem is to choose or eliminate the possibilities. Too many means of expression from which to chose may hinder the artist. There are many failures and deadends but experimentation is always necessary. I feel Klee has been an eloquent spokesman for the goals, achievements and reflections of artists. He certainly speaks for me at this particular stage in my career with my formal training being terminated. "The artist knows a great deal, but he only knows it afterwards, and perhaps even then not with certainty." Although I have found meaningful solutions in my art thus far, I find myself continually pressing on to try new possibilities. The conclusion of each work reveals new problems and challenges I may tackle or meet in my next piece.
Footnotes


7. *IBID*, pg. 206

8. *IBID*, pg. 206

9. *IBID*, pg. 302
Bibliography


Plates

1. "Menopause" etching 18" x 24"
2. "Escape II" color etching 16" x 23 1/2"
3. "All Points Loud and Clear" color etching 19" x 23 1/2"
4. "Untitled" drawing 15" x 18 1/2"
5. "Princess with Flowers" etching 18" x 22 1/2"
6. "Escape I" etching 17 1/2" x 23 1/2"
7. "Second Level Emerging" color etching 24" x 18"
8. "Up Red Turtle Creek" drawing 18" x 23"
Plate 1
Plate 2
Plate 4
Plate 5
Plate 6