FRUSTRATIONS, CHALLENGES, AND ACHIEVEMENTS
EROTICAL THEMES IN MY GRAPHICS

A THESIS

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BY

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to review my work, attitudes, concepts and growth as a graduate student at the Ohio State University. I came here after having completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree at East Texas State University. In Texas I worked with non-objective shapes in intaglio and collography. As a graduate student I have strayed away from many of the preconceptions of my undergraduate influences. More importantly, I feel I have experienced a maturation process which has directly influenced my attitudes concerning my art.

My first three quarters at Ohio State were confusing, problematic, and for the most part non-productive. However, I was making progress during this time, in that I was becoming increasingly aware of other artists, their ideas, and their work. In turn, I began to question my own attitudes and how they related to those of professional artists. This questioning marked the beginning of my growth as a serious artist.

I have always been attracted to erotica in art. However, during undergraduate school, and through most of my third quarter of graduate school, I lacked the maturity to deal openly with these ideas in my own work. I was able to overcome this incapability and learn more of why I was drawn to such images through close evaluation of specific artists whom I felt handled erotic themes successfully. Paul Wunderlich's prints and drawings provided the most insight and stimulation for me. Although his shapes are erotic, the element that saves them from being pornographic is the context in which he uses them. The erotic rendering of his images is supportive and secondary to the delicate tension he creates.

W. P. Eberhard Eggers also introduces erotic shapes into his prints. He, like Wunderlich, uses erotica in a subtle fusion to heighten the sensual effect of his composition.
I learned from studying Wunderlich, Eggers, and other artists concerned with erotica, that their works achieve a sensual and aesthetic appeal which legitimates the subject matter. Their images, although often non-objective and sometimes ambiguous, evoke associative emotions which induce responses toward the erotic for me. Shapes suggesting erotic association are an effective means by which the artists enhance, clarify, and support their purpose. This essential identifying awareness has helped me to progress and better understand my role as an artist. I feel I have gained a workable perspective on erotica as it relates to image. For me, erotica for its own sake is nothing more than pornography. However, it remains challenging for me to use erotica in the support of an overall sensually unified work of art.

My third quarter of graduate work was critical, not only because I had begun to investigate eroticism, but I also had gained a working knowledge of the creative possibilities of the photomechanical processes. When my first photographically conceived print was completed I was so greatly impressed with the technical accomplishments, that I made no effort to evaluate it as objectively as I might have. I continued to work with screenprinting and photomechanics for the duration of my third and fourth quarters of graduate work. I feel now that my prints became increasingly more sterile as I directed more and more attention to technical procedures, with little regard to the imagery.

Although I had progressed from the point at which I entered graduate school, I found little satisfaction in my prints other than that they were excellently executed graphic copies of photographs.

When I began to evaluate my work as an artist rather than as a skilled technician, I found that the first photographic screenprint stood apart from the rest. (Plate #1) The one basic element that separated this print from the rest, was that
I had manipulated the image in such a way that it was not a copy, but an image distinctly separate and apart from its photographic beginnings.

The upper portion of the print appears to exist on a flat plane which sets up a spatial contradiction in the lower portion due to a change in value. Although the lower portion of the print is darker in value, it gives the illusion of coming forward. This contradiction exists partially because of the gloss surface applied to the bottom portion of the print and the shift from yellow in the upper area to a gold in the lower.

I began to consider other possibilities of manipulation after realizing that I had created an illusion of space. This was a major turning point in my work. My work began to take a definite direction, and most importantly, I was enthusiastic about it.

During my fifth quarter, I worked in intaglio. I thought I would be more at home with this more familiar media. However, this switch did not prove to be as rewarding as I had anticipated. I had grown accustomed to immediate results in silk screen, and at the time, that was what I needed. My composition, imagery, and use of color demanded an academic approach in order to solve the problems I was confronting, but I had yet to find an image that was comfortable for me to use. To this point, each print had taken a new direction and I felt that my work lacked the unity it needed.

In order to find my direction as an artist I began to draw with the intention of returning to printing when I was more confident of what I wanted to do. I did not intend for any of these drawings to exist as finished pieces; I valued the chance to work quickly and directly.

This was the first time I had any conscious reason for doing any serious drawing. Ground graphite was a suitable drawing medium, and I became very free in using it. I became increasingly interested in figure/ground relationships.
I was attempting to let both figure and ground become one and the same, and yet maintain a three dimensional quality in the picture. I would often drape a white sheet over a three dimensional object and draw it in subdued light. These overall still lifes present unusual problems in which the figure flows into the ground in a subtle fashion and the form becomes practically indiscernible.

These drawings led me to work in lithography where the surfaces are most similar to that of drawing paper. Photographic images were again used as points of departure to provide my imagery.

My first lithograph (Plate #2) was started during the second quarter of my graduate work and was put away after having completed only the lower right portion since I was at a loss as to how to finish it. I pulled it out a year later as it still presented a challenge; finally I arrived at a satisfactory result.

In this print, I have attempted to manipulate space in such a way that the figure and ground shapes exchange back and forth. The work represented my first attempt to deal with erotica as a subject. I feel that as the purple organic shape moves into the composition it not only dominated the vaginal shape in the lower left, but also, set up a palpitating motion between figure and ground in the classic Gestalt manner.

I again incorporated photomechanics into this print (Plate #3), as it seemed the simplest means by which to accurately copy light and shadows cast by the circles in the lower and middle portions of the print.

The circles in the lower portion were altered slightly in shape to destroy the consistency that the photomechanical technique produced. They were printed in fairly consistent values in an effort to keep them on a constant plane. The circles at the top of the print, however, present a peculiar spatial play with respect to those in the lower portion. The gradation of values from left to right allow them to appear to exist above the surface of the ground on the far right, and to become
almost flush with it on the left. These relationships become more complex when the value shifts of the ground are taken into consideration. Since the image had a floating quality, I felt that it needed a stabilizing element to hold it together, however, I did not want to destroy the illusion of space I had created. I believe that the purple line running from top to bottom fulfilled the need.

I considered the next two prints (Plates #4 and #5) to be the most successful I have done to date. They were printed at the same time from the same photographic images; the color structures are virtually comparable.

One of the prints (Plate #4) is merely a part of the other. The element that attracted me to the first state of the print (Plate #5), was the weightlessness of the ground in comparison to the massive figure shape in the center. I was also interested to see how this print would compare to the later state.

This image (Plate #5) is complex to the point of being almost chaotic. Two grounds actually exist in the print. The first is the heavy bolt pattern which fights for attention with the shape in the center. In contrast to the first ground, there exists an overlying yellow structure. Although it is opaque, its intricacy gives it a free flowing quality. While this may be difficult to see around the edges of the print, it is more obvious around the center shape as it separates it from the first ground. The shape in the center was especially important to me because of my interest in erotica. This non-objective shape appears very organic with erotic associations. Not only do value and hue separate it from the ground but also the way in which the shape appears to break through the massive surface accentuates its erotic dominance.

Although the fore mentioned prints were successful I still felt the subject matter in the finished products retained a sterile quality. I sensed that this might be the result of my over dependence upon photomechanics, so I went back to
drawing the images I wanted on litho plates. I began using an air brush to see if I might obtain sensual flowing qualities and because that tool seemed most natural for rendering the shapes I wanted. However, after repeated attempts to overcome technical problems in printing the air brushed plates, I returned to drawing directly on paper.

The first of these drawings (Plate #6) evolved through three previous attempts to print the image lithographically. After each time the plate failed to print correctly, I redrew the image, refining it a step further.

During the time I was doing this drawing, I was becoming increasingly concerned with incorporating the entire piece of paper into the composition. Up to this point, I had allowed for borders (3 to 4 inches) to neatly frame all the prints and drawings. However, because I was dealing with unpredictable spatial relationships, it seemed illogical for the border to remain static. In an effort to remedy this problem, I moved the border back into the composition where it could function as an integral part of my image.

This drawing (Plate #6) was exciting for me in that I was working with a personally satisfying image. I was refining my use of eroticism as a structural theme or point of departure. The shape in the lower left of this drawing was derived from the vaginal shape in the lower left of plate 3. However, in the drawing it was pulled apart and modeled to obtain a flowing figurative quality that in contrast related to the static collinear figure in the center.

The second drawing (Plate #7) dealt with some of the same considerations as did the first. Again, I allowed the border and drawing to work together as a unit. However, I introduced color into the center portion of this drawing as a unifying and emphasizing element. Without color, the drawing seemed to float, the space was undefined, and there was no focal point.
The success of plate #7 led me to experiment with the possibilities of using color not only to create an atmosphere but also to emphasize spatial relationships. (Plate #8) This seems to work best in the yellow-orange shape flowing diagonally across the drawing. This shape rests on the surface of the ground in the lower portion. However, as it progresses upward through the drawing, it appears to slide below the surface of the two shapes moving in from the right. This is mostly due to a shift in values, but the changes of hue act to emphasize the movement. The importance of the drawing is that it represents a transition to what I consider to be one of my more successful pieces.

This drawing represents a successful synthesis of all the elements I had dealt with in the drawings that preceded it. The values, hues, shapes, and figure-ground relationships are supportive of each other in such a manner that no element appears extraneous.

Once I heard my major advisor say to a student of intaglio that in order to make art, the artist must conceptually experience a love affair with the plate. For me that statement was strong and very accurate. It spoke of total involvement and awareness.

I still felt self-conscious. Perhaps my awareness was assigned to composition and my involvement to reason or stimulus. Although the images worked well within the composition, I felt they were lacking something. If so, this predicament was hard to accept, and even more difficult to deal with. I became frustrated, bored with my work and tired of drawing only for composition sake. e became even more tired of thinking about it. I stopped working for two weeks and tried to take my mind off of art. When I decided I was ready to do another drawing, it was with a renewed interest in making those erotic, organic shapes appear more natural in my art.
The next drawing (Plate #9) with its inspired inventions of organ-like erotic forms, successfully represents the direction I intend to continue with in the future. I feel this piece is separate and apart from any work I have previously done. I am especially intrigued with the spatial relationships that exist, but more important to me is the relationship of the figures which causes them to take on a significance that goes beyond their simply holding the piece together compositionally.

I have taken this attitude a step further in my last drawing (Plate #10). In an effort to heighten the significance of the figures, and to manipulate the figure ground relationships to a great degree, I have experimented with using pencil over the air brushed areas. While I did not feel comfortable with its use at the time, I feel it is a step in the right direction.
CONCLUSION

This thesis sketches frustrations, challenges, and achievements that I am sure every serious art student experiences. I am pleased that I completed the last drawing before writing this thesis, because it allows me to conclude on an optimistic note. This, in turn provides a healthy spirit for me to evaluate my past two years of work. I have experienced many transitions and realizations concerning my work and myself during this time. Each trial and tribulation has provided the steps necessary for me to eliminate subjective reality, and strengthen my own presence and confidence in my work.

The last two drawings (Plate #9 and #10) have provided me with the assurance to continue my career as an artist. I feel the erotic-organic idiom is one which will continue to excite me with its infinite possibilities for art.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


