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by
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INTRODUCTION

be.gin.ning/ bi-gin-in/ n 1: the point at which something begins 2: the first part 3: ORIGIN, SOURCE 4 a: a rudimentary stage or early period b: something undeveloped or incomplete.¹

A beginning. This thesis and my work are an ongoing unfinished beginning. The following pages came about in the same spontaneous and impulsive manner in which my visual work develops. This thesis is an event.

event/ i-vent/ n.... 4: the fundamental entity of observed physical reality represented by a point designated by three coordinates of place and one of time in the space-time continuum postulated by the theory of relativity.²


² Ibid., p. 287.
A Parable

From a letter written to me by my uncle, Charles Lewis
7/24/63

"...Watch a fly try to get out through a glass window pane. He sees the outdoors on the other side but he refuses your help, in one of your moments of 'gentleness to flies', and he scoots along the pane but rarely does he leave it to fly back into the room where he doesn't want to be. What he sees is far closer to freedom. To us he's blind but aren't we often blind? He can't get back far enough to see reflections..."
I am sitting here thinking about writing my thesis. Country music is on the radio, wine in the glass. Aimlessly, I am wondering where I have been, where I am, and where I am going.

I am sitting in a chair that my mother refinshed and whose seat she caned. I am at a table that Ralph found in the street in a suburb, my town, on the local clean-up-fix-up-get-rid-of-your-trash day. It is a fine old oak round table. I am in the dining room and I am contemplating those things with which I surround myself. (Plate 1)

In the living room is a rug I made - braided and sewn from scraps of wool and skirts I wore in grade school and high school. I remember wearing them, adolescently. I made the rug while I was waiting for my baby, pregnantly.

On the couch are pillows from truck stops and souvenir shops in Niagara Falls, Arizona, and South Dakota. There is a shoe-shaped pillow embroidered with the fabled old woman who lived in it, yellowed with age and the comfort it has given.

There is a quilt too, from a collection I have been gathering for years. This one is made from portions of Navy uniforms - arm patches with chevrons. These patches are from the sleeve of some woman's son's uniform and I wonder if he lived to sleep under it or died a career Navy man. I have sure proof that someone cared about his sleeves. All those stitches, all those threads, all those stripes.
"Load your own truck," he said.
"Make that drawing crawlly," said Fred, "I want it to come alive."
"Mebbe, mebbe not," said Rupert.

I guess you just had to be there; and I am glad I was. I entered undergraduate school at a perfect time, a time sandwiched between the hopeless apathy of the fifties and the compelling, sometimes tragic, and always political days which were to follow. All our days were filled with making art, talking about it, looking at it, living it. I was a painter then, a colorist, a figure painter usually, but always a painter. I loved the physicality of the material – the smell, the oilyness, the maneuverability. My hero early on was Matisse who said:

I dream of an art transfusing a sense of balance, purity and calm, in which there is no discordant or worrying note, available for all who use their minds, for the businessman as well as the lettered artist, a balm, a means of calming the spirit, something similar to a comfortable armchair which brings refreshment to physical tiredness. ³

Much of the work I did at that time reflected that influence; I used color, flat patterns, interior views with figures, a use of the mere essentials and a deliberate deletion of details inessential to the whole.

As I progressed through undergraduate school, I progressed in my own painting and in my awareness of

contemporary painters like Richard Diebenkorn and Elmer Bischoff. I reveled in the fluidity of their brush strokes and the color quality they achieved. These too began to become my concerns. At the same time I became suddenly and excitedly involved with several Pop artists. Even more than their images, I responded to the numerous statements they made about their work. Many of these statements still have relevance to my work today:

I am for an art that grows up not knowing it is art at all, an art given the chance of having a starting point of zero. I am for an art that embroils itself with the everyday crap and still comes up on top. . .
I am for an art that takes its form from the lines of life itself, that twists and extends and accumulates and spits and drips, and is heavy and coarse and blunt and sweet and stupid as life itself. . .
I am for art from a pocket, from deep channels of the ear, from the edge of a knife, from the corners of the mouth, stuck in the eye or worn on the wrist. . . I am for the art of things lost or thrown away, coming home from school. I am for the art of cock-and-ball trees and flying cows and the noise of rectangles and squares. I am for the art of crayons and weak grey pencil lead, and grainy wash and sticky oil paint, and the art of windshield wipers and the art of the finger on a cold window, on dusty steel or in the bubbles on the sides of a bathtub. . .

After graduation from Illinois Wesleyan University and a one year stint at public school art teaching, I entered graduate school at Southern Illinois University. There I was graduated with, after a change in major, a Masters of Science in Art Education. My two years of

schooling in Carbondale were spent developing my philosophy of education, and I gave less attention to developing my imagery and concerns as an artist. There were many reasons for this shift in emphasis, but the major single most important factor was the state of the world, the country, and the campus at that time. I devoted long hours working for Martin Luther King, helping develop a local Community Action Program, and working against the war in Viet Nam. There are times when events external to me and cruel tides in the political sphere demand more attention from me than even my art. And in my minor way I tried to articulate. If I was not heard, I was speaking to the issues that concerned me. I collected money, marched on Washington, wrote polite letters to the governmental officials, said my piece.

Taking a short-sighted view, all my efforts were to no avail. King was killed, then another Kennedy; friends were drafted, sent away, and returned - some dead, some injured, and some whole physically but fractured mentally. But in the overview, it was the collective voices of many who helped correct several of the inequities which were running rampant at that time. Those voices were numerous and varied; some small, some profane; some backed with pickets or bombs, songs or poems, and some backed by visual statements. It was then that I first became aware of the work of Sidney
Chafetz whose prints concentrated on politicians of whom he has said,

. . . (they are) that group of men upon whose supposed wisdom, good will, and intelligent behavior our very lives depend. It is the subtle relationship between these men and the goals and methods they use in politics that interest me.5

It was, indeed, an abrupt change for me to move from the large and tumultuous campus of a big university to the ivied walls of Denison University in Granville, Ohio where I taught as a Visiting Lecturer. It seemed to be the artist/teacher's dream. And for a while, perhaps it was.

Farm house
white house
new house, blue house.

Rambler Ambassador
rambling along and on for six years
and on and on and then
on for me to graduate school.

I began graduate school at the Ohio State University in the fall of 1975. Having done predominately drawing during my stay in Granville, Ohio, I entered the print-making program to learn lithography and to pursue the conceptual development of my own imagery.

The first and perhaps most significant piece I did that year was My First Litho. (Plate 2) It had begun as a rather haphazard test print in which I experimented with the various ways to make marks and images on a stone. The ten prints which came out as an edition were just that - ten duplicated images, all similar, and all clearly test prints. With that print, I began to question the purpose for making multiples of the same image. I rather abruptly realized that I had no real interest in making numerous copies of a single image. Therefore I began to alter the separate copies of the edition, so that the edition evolved into a series of related prints rather than ten identically imprinted pieces of paper.

Such fun it was to work on! I erased it, drew on it, stuck stars and seals on it, and corrected it. The element of humor was present as was the use of commercially printed materials. A breakthrough! I realized that the printed image, my printed image, could provide a format for further image making; there was no rule to which I had to adhere about edition making.
While I found that the precise technicalities of the lithographic process itself interfered with my method of mark-making, I enjoyed the discovery, simple as it may seem, that I could make my own image and bounce from it and back into it at will.

I made several discoveries that first year, particularly in terms of my art and graphic processes. I found that my conceptual concerns did not really require many of the techniques and processes available to the modern printmaker. I found that I had no real interest in manipulating them to serve my image-making concerns although I did go about the business of familiarizing myself with such processes as photo-mechanical printmaking, serigraphy, relief printmaking, intaglio techniques, and, of course, lithography. But drawing remained my major concern.

Often I worked in a divided compositional arrangement with familiar subject matter - simple still life objects (fruits and vegetables) used in conjunction with fanciful, dreamlike landscape elements. With some reluctance, a healthy resistance, and equally healthy critical pressure, I forfeited that orientation. I realized that a different approach to subject matter and mark making was necessary to get at the meat or core of what I was really dealing with. I needed to impinge upon, even attack, both my subject matter and my paper.
Perhaps not coincidentally, this happened at the same time as events surrounding me began to impinge upon and affect me and my family. Ralph's job dissolved, two colleagues were denied their degrees, a Professor Emeritus was almost denied access to campus, and two friends found themselves jobless.

And he said to a man, a friend, and he pounded his desk and he said loudly and coldly, "I make the policies here; I can break the policies here."

And I didn't understand. And all my work became apples, shiney and polished, for my teachers to accept or to reject, to spit out the seeds; the core of my work remained inside, invisible to them; and it did not matter.

I had strange and graphic dreams in which I recalled hearing years ago, and seeing the Reverend Jesse Jackson in a crowded pseudo-baroque theater now turned church in the South Side of Chicago. I heard him saying to the crowd that came to hear him every Sunday - a city crowd with exotic and darkened city faces, flowered hats, white handkerchiefs, and all the baubles and shine that adorn the urban poor - to them he said:

I may be poor, but I am somebody.
I am (pause) somebody (pause) somebody.  
I may be black (pause) but I am (pause) SOMEBODY.  
I may be a woman (pause) but I am (pause) SOMEBODY.  
I may not have a job (pause) but I am (pause) SOMEBODY.  
I am (pause) SOMEBODY, (pause) somebody.

At that earlier time I thought I understood. I think now that I did, indeed, understand; but it became a head-scratching, bruised-in-the-stomach belly-aching what'd I
do wrong bitterness too at this later point in time. The same issues were in question; the same concerns I had worked for, however ineffectively or inarticulately, those same concerns had become directly and poignantly pertinent to my life and well-being. It all seemingly had twisted back upon me; I was (we were) the object of all the same kinds of arbitrary decision making, even discrimination, that I (we) had continually worked so enthusiastically to eliminate. I kept thinking, I am somebody. I think I am somebody.

Shot from the hip to the spine
through the marrow
contusions and lesions of the nerves
to the soul

dispense with it
dispose of it
recycle those cans.

Thus began the second important piece of work I did during my first year in graduate school. It was titled *Apples for my Teachers* (Plate 3) and became an ongoing theme for me. It was centered around a letter I had written expressing my genuine concern and personal dis-may for events directly affecting me as a graduate student at the Ohio State University.

As I wrote that letter which I felt compelled to compose, and as I put much time and consideration into it,

I realized that I did not want to forfeit my conceptual development as an artist. Further, I realized that the letter itself was the single most important statement, visual or otherwise, that I had made during my stay in Columbus. Therefore, as I had done with My First Litho, I began to use the letter itself in conjunction with color xerox copies of that letter as a format within which to impose my visual sensibilities. It became yet another arena in which I could fight, a stage upon which I could dance, a lectern which I could pound. The final piece became all the fragmentary notes and outlines which went into making the composed product, the letter itself, additions in the form of visual modifications drawn on various pages, and color xerox copies of each piece of paper. The piece exists as a strong statement on many levels and had to be done. It was, simply, a necessity.

Drained, saddened, and extremely disappointed, I saw my first year of graduate education at the Ohio State University end. I decided for reasons obvious to myself to stay out of school for the summer, work on my own, travel a bit, collect myself, refresh myself, get out of HOPKINS for a time. I wanted to get ahead a bit and did a series of drawings that summer based upon that idea - some pun, some humor, some not - of heads of lettuce. (Plate 4)
Lettuce forget
Lettuce move along
Lettuce alone
Lettuce progress
Lettuce be.
And so we travelled a bit:

"Oh, you don't want that old thing," she said, standing in the general store/gas station—short plump, silvery grey curling hair tight against her round face. "It's broke."
"Is it a bicycle horn?" I asked.
"Lord no! It's one of them old flashlights. But it's broke."
"Could I see it?" I asked.
"Sure, sure. You can look."
"May I buy it?" I asked.
"Don't know why ya'd want it, but gimme a dollar and it's yours," she said.

We left each other delighted, pleased the way our separate days had begun.

Early in my second year of graduate school I began a series of pencil drawings in my new studio on campus with its big, old, oak desk. In the same spirit which had allowed me earlier to impinge upon the parts of an edition, I now began to impinge upon the subject matter itself. I fastened three objects to the side of my desk with a screw, a safety pin, and a push-pin. Then I began to draw. My interest was centered upon the mark-making itself and while the drawings revealed rather clearly the subject matter portrayed, it was the hairyness and scratchiness of the marks themselves which invigorated me.

Scratches made while on the train, in a plane, a hangover from the High Renaissance where every telephone number and coffee stain (by the right person) revealed the inner or under or deeper or less disguised and more naked creative nerve—so many exposed nerves; see them trembling beneath the neuritis and neuralgia of the cross hatching... Perspective is bad, almost as bad as shading. Drawing should reveal the momentary, involuntary
fit of creative seizure. The best way to emphasize this is to consider the type of paper. Duchamp preferred menus but times have changed. Personally, I think old hardware bills are an advance. I always carry a few in case of seizures. One should try for that quality that a total spastic might reveal while juggling with all the skill and malice of W.C. Fields. And remember, it is better to have drawn and lost than not to have drawn at all.7

These drawings were done in a private atmosphere of intensity; they were personal, energetic, sometimes frantic, and self (or family) centered. I began to let the objects drawn represent my daughter (a balloon from her birthday party), my husband (a sweat sock), and myself (a tied ear of corn). (Plate 5) In fact at times they became too personal and too intense. In them, I missed the connection I have always felt for the "Somebody", known or unknown, the somebody elses, the anonymous faces encountered daily. These somebodies were to be dealt with in other aspects of my work done at about the same time.

There is a window I made which hangs inside of a larger window in my living room. I made it from scraps of glass I found in the Hayes Hall parking lot:

I saw the university glass truck in the lot and ran down the fire escape to catch the man before he left. Huffing a bit from the run and the

irritating if slight bit of nervousness I feel when encountering someone new, I explained that I was an art student who sometimes worked with glass. "If you ever have some scraps either my classmates or I would appreciate having them," I said. "And we would gladly come to pick them up or you could leave them here."
"Fine with me," said he. "Why don't you pick through there," he said, pointing to the back section of his university truck. I did so and found several pieces of nice glass, small but textured and dirty and old like the glass in university bathrooms and hallways and doors of older buildings. I thanked him for what I had gathered and began to walk away with my small load.
"Know where that all came from?" he asked. As I shook my head he responded, "From a window in that building over there." With a jerk of his head to the campus behind us, he continued, "Some guy jumped out last night. Just took all that out and put in the new window. Don't know how anyone could do a thing like that."
He scratched his head, climbed into the cab of his truck, and backed out the driveway.

I constructed Window for the Man Who Broke It.

In the same vein, though seldom so somber or so vital, I also did a group of Pound Prints. This series involved fragments and scraps of flat found items which were stitched to grey paper. They included a wide range of common often discarded bits and pieces of paper or cloth. Most of the images used were found in my pocket, on the sidewalk, beside wastebaskets, in my school mailbox, in the bottom of a desk drawer, in a fortune cookie, in boxes of art materials. They supplied a very open, direct, honest, and blatantly straightforward presentation. What concerned me most in making these pieces was the real, implied, and imagined history
each fragmentary image had. The foot that stepped upon the envelope, the hand that wrote the baggage claim, the process by which each "print" was made fascinated me.

By the very process used in making these Found Prints, I eliminated many traditionally artistic/aesthetic considerations. In spite of that fact, many of the images seem to come full circle and happen in their directness and simplicity to become strong visual statements. I am reminded of some statements made by Robert Indiana in an interview with G.R. Swenson concerning Pop Art: "(It is)... a reenlistment in the world, it is the American Dream, optimistic, generous, and naive... it accepts all... all the meaner aspects of life."  

Custodial Rags.
Ralph, Many thanks. Bob.
Domestics. Domestics
Haber's.
Snack Tray.
Property will be left to you.

That blue isn't working.
Dig it.

Sewing images to paper allowed for many things to ensue -- thoughts about needles piercing paper, threads left hanging, stitches, loose ends, split ends, bobbins,

and the mysterious and personal past each image had.

Presently, my work involves a combination of several separate aspects of my previous work. It is, in a sense, a unifying of both process and imagery. I am using, often on the same page, found items in conjunction with drawings, mark-making, and machine stitching.

In plate #6, a study in redundancy, I attached a number of pieces of masking tape to paper and further secured them to the page by machine stitching. I then drew those pieces of tape and proceeded in rows to draw the drawings. Each row as it nears the bottom of the picture is one step further away from the top line, one step further removed from the reality of the scraps of actual tape.

In this group of drawings, I use for subject matter the same inconsequential bits and scraps I used earlier. Similar to Jim Dine, I do not depict "...heroes or signs from the culture at large, but familiar homely objects of an everyday life... Dine's subjects are like apple pie: homespun, literal, unpretentious, and private."9

Take an object.
Do something to it.
Do something else to it.

Take a canvas.
Put a mark on it.
Put another mark on it.

Make something.
Find a use for it.
AND/OR
Invent a function.
Find an object.\textsuperscript{10}

I am sitting here thinking about concluding my thesis. Country music is on the radio; Ralph is in the yard transplanting tomato plants - tiny, delicate, fragile, white stemmed seedlings. I am wondering where I am going.

I dream of a cottage on a hill with a goat in the yard in the country with more hills in view. And the smells of hay and mown grass and wet black dirt.

My work will continue - sometimes reminiscent of Matisse's comfortable armchair, sometimes of Oldenburg's everyday crap, or Morris' exposed nerves. It will continue as I will continue to make things. It will continue with the highs and lows, the ebbs and flows, the ups and downs, and screams and whispers. It will continue with the storms and the calms which come before - or do they come after.

My work will continue as I will continue to make things.
CONCLUSION

con. clu. sion/ k n-kloo'zh n. 1. The close or termination of something; the end; the finish. . .

Not a conclusion. A beginning. This thesis and my work are an ongoing unfinished beginning. The preceding pages came about in the same spontaneous and impulsive manner in which my visual work develops.

EPILOGUE

We approached a one-way street and my five year old daughter asked, "Mom, does that street go to the left or to the right?"
"What do you think," I responded hopefully, maternally. Her large and beautifully blue eyes searched my face as she thought and eventually responded. Quietly, she said, "I think it goes to the right."
"Wrong. It goes to the left."
"Oh, well, Mom, I was close." she said with a shrug of her shoulders.
Selected Bibliography


