RESIDUES AND ILLUMINATIONS

A Thesis

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by

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This Thesis is dedicated to my mom, Margaret C. Quiroz and my close friend, Mrs. Rita Donelson. Your love, understanding and support has embedded, deep within my heart a belief in myself and my abilities in accomplishing that which, so many times, seemed impossible.
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FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Painting
TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION .................................................. ii
VITA ............................................................ iii
LIST OF PLATES ............................................. v
RESIDUES AND ILLUMINATIONS ......................... 1
# LIST OF PLATES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLATE</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Paisaje como Pilar</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Embarcación</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>La Luna Empalamento</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Hay Unos Ojos</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>¿Qué es el alma del Trovero?</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RESIDUES AND ILLUMINATIONS

Within each painting lies my response to a process. This takes the form of a residue that is made visible through the recurring use of an additive/subtractive process. This approach allows for the emergence of a sensitized light which filters through the paintings many layers, and is evocative of remembrance. Through the use of this particular process, I have been able to come to terms with individual achievements, struggles, failures, and death.

As I look back to the paintings I produced at the beginning of my graduate studies, I recall many attempts to deal with the idea of a movement within a given space and time. The concept of using 'dance' as a metaphor for that movement allowed my paintings, though abstract in nature, to be extensions of my inner-self. They were works that were intent on dealing with the existence of an identity and a purpose in reference to my new surroundings and affiliations with friends and colleagues. I believed that use of such a metaphor would provide the visual evidence needed to express to others the embodiment of my inner-self, including my heritage. This Spanish-American heritage is one with roots secured deeply in tradition, including the teachings and strong beliefs within the Catholic religion as well as the bonding of strong family relationships. This culture is characterized by an instinctive zest for living a robust life with as much flavor as only a Spaniard can comprehend. My use of intense color became the imprint and declaration of my existence within a new and sometimes alien environment.
It was the synthesis of these related aspects, deeply ingrained within my biological make-up, that also served as a source from which to draw responses to life achievements and set-backs that are continually celebrated throughout a lifetime. The need to prove my meaning of existence within this given environment led me to extend the scale of my canvases. I explored the many possibilities of enlightening the viewer as to a presence, imbedded within each work, by totally enveloping one's visual periphery. It wasn't long before I realized that my paintings ceased to inform the viewer and instead became large, spastic, gestural abstractions that were contained within a field of layered color. This visualization was testimony to the fact that my insights had, indeed, lost touch with my inner-self. At a loss for direction I decided to look back at remembrances of the past; viewed now as specific deaths both physical and mental. My significance, in relation to today's society, was of importance to me. I believed that through my work I had something valid to offer, I just wasn't quite sure what it was.

Influenced by many artists while relating to only a few, I looked with fervor at Matisse, Monet, Van Gogh and Rothko. I believed color, figure/ground concerns, and sensitive paint handling could evoke many moods and feelings. Though these formal concerns were of great importance to me, a preoccupation with them veiled the content I wished to express. Within the works of Sengai, Suzuki and Ikkyu, I experienced the simplicity and spirituality of Eastern influences; thinking less of incompetence and more of process as I went along. I began working by overlaying one transparent color after another, then briskly wiping away its excess which resulted in a film; left to dry only to begin the process over again.

With the amount of wiping and adding-on, certain areas of the surface were raised leaving others to recede. The canvas became more tactile than visual which alluded to a sensuality that I had never before experienced. This process was not considered one
of breaking down but in actuality, one of building up. In the works which soon followed, literal use of the figurative element was allowed to surface, which began in a vain attempt to salvage whatever was left of my dignity after the failing of my second quarter review. I found myself turning to the canvas for answers or perhaps even reasons that might aid in my search.

With palette in hand I proceeded in applying colors of red, yellow, orange, black and blue. I scraped and reapplied, then scraped again. My eyes became saturated with color and the only indication of anger was the sensation of disgust. I turned away from its surface, severely scored. The days that followed were filled with tension and troubled thoughts. I was consumed with the possibility of failing, yet even more so determined to figure out what I was doing or even attempting to do in my work. In a struggle to grasp that badly needed understanding of the concept, angst, I looked into the works of Edvard Much, Emile Nolde, and Francis Bacon.

The works of Munch and Nolde dwelled on issues that were of personal content. Their dark side of life was portrayed through the use of physical and mental strain. Death, rejection, deceit and illness were all part of their work at one given time or another. Bacon, however, believed art to be the presentation of an experience instead of representing the existence of something else. He intended his paintings to show visible signs of a presence that once existed there, a type of call to memory. This is what I felt I could relate myself and my work to, that slur of imagery which lingers between the before and after movements of people, places and events.

I approached the figurative element, which manifested itself in my work, with a degree of caution. The element of anguish enticed my sensibility and aided in a body of work that made every effort to confront my personal identity and need to express it. The more I questioned the less separated I became, discovering the possibilities while never quite revealing my total self. This was to become my element of healing.
The figural imagery, within this body of work, was depicted as having no facial features or defined appendages. The hand and head came about as though they were covered with cloth restraints, emphasizing the severity of anguish; mentally in pain, physically impaired. The positioning of the head was just as important as the movement of the entire figure.

A figure's vacant features seemed to be shrouded or veiled, deliberately hidden in arrest. The incorporating of figure and ground was beginning to initiate a movement within a conceptual space. The handling of the surface, in relation to texture, was taking a stand in the foreground and as this occurred, the figural element began to recede. Materials I had never considered were suddenly an important factor but not so much for their durability as it was for their texture. Dealing with this element was not something that was easily discovered. The process played an important part, for without it I would've suffered a great set-back.

As the figures slowly receded so did their looming resemblance to robots. The direction of change was occurring once again and its involvement with the issues of self-definition would soon intermingle and direct itself toward new avenues. Perhaps the last work involving the use of the figural element is the piece which I believe to be the turning point of my work. *Paisaje como Pilar*, c. 1988, interpreted, "Landscape of the Pier", (Plate I), gives the viewer more than one visual perspective by showing different views on one given plane. The first of these views deals with the placement of the pier itself.

Situated four to five inches above the usual horizon line, it goes against any theory of gravity by maintaining a stronghold in a space lacking substance. The second view is found beneath the pier. Half-way through an implied door like passage there appears to be the remains of a fading figure.
The title of this piece, Paisaje como Pilar, does give some indication as to its content and the possible meaning of the content. The representation of the pier and its relation to the ocean, makes reference to a longing desire instilled in my thoughts undeniably vast and every-changing. The permanence of the pier, for all its weight and durability can no more resist the constant rushing of the waves than I can resist its existence within the piece. Each massive pole, eroded by the elements succumbs to forces overpowering its durability. The door-like passage and fading figure then, becomes a suggestion of change.

Through the use of an additive/subtractive process I was able to surface the manufactured marks of the underlying corrugated box panel, thereby incorporating it into the total piece. Paisaje como Pilar initiated new directions, conceptually and physically, with the employment of different materials of varying surfaces. The pieces that followed dismissed the figure and introduced the element of a window blind and its container, the window. This image evolved from the chance occurrence of shadows that were casted upon my work through the open slats of the venetian blinds located in my studio. A day or two after recording the occurrence, I happened across a large, display-like screen that had been discarded. The construction of this object resembled that of the blinds in my window, and instilled in my thoughts a sense of urgency in the claiming of it. Although the construction played an important role in the development of my work, the necessity for its use would not occur for some time. The surfaces, worked to the extreme, were executed without the use of the found construction, allowing the emergence of other images. Though never clearly defined they held their ground and in doing so alluded to a sense of mystery.

There was a mysteriousness to life in that it was closely related to death. For me it meant change, and with the passing of a close friend, that change was about to occur.
The death of John Reynolds occurred just as I began to turn my insights towards my studio window. Once again recalling visions and incidents of the past, I reminisced about the turn of events of years gone by. I relived my last conversation with John, which ironically dealt with his plans for the future. The window image became my response to his untimely death and my self-realization as to the importance of life.

For reasons not yet realized, I lost that drive for the physical act of painting, perhaps out of respect for the dead, odd as that may sound. Unable to produce anything worthwhile, I turned my expended energies towards the medium of Printmaking; which is highly process oriented. I worked ardently yet automatically, as if I were on an assembly line with an unexplainable insight towards the preparation of the plates I used to produce my monoprints. Though little thinking of planning was involved, the prints I produced had a dynamic all their own.

From time to time, as I worked in the print lab, memories of John surfaced. Even though I was distanced from the funeral proceedings, I would often catch myself working quietly, as if in reverence or out of respect, and usually at a time when I was completely alone. I worked to produce a number of monoprints; applying ink only to wipe or blot it off. For a short period of that time I became those earlier robotic figures; producing and reproducing as if I were in an automative state of mind. After a days work in the print lab, I gathered my materials, monoprints included, and made the trek upstairs to more familiar ground; my studio space. As I walked with my mind free of thought, I began to visualize a replay of every step taken during my stay in the lab. Like the viewer of a silent film, fully enveloped in darkness, I relived my actions. Though unable to see myself on the screen, I managed to see, throughout this film, my hands at work. For a brief moment in my mind I became the camera lens, the projector, the screen and the viewer.
Once inside my space, I proceeded to hang my monoprints on a vacant wall. As I viewed what I had reaped surges of excitement, anxiety, tension and relief abounded within my very essence. Finally visible were those strong relationships hinted upon earlier. The meaning of the window blinds, veils, and screens enlightened my awareness of the interpretations of remembrances past, momentary thoughts of feelings and failures.

John's death, though a great loss, sparked an understanding of a union between my inner-self and the work recently produced. The type of process employed when first producing the monoprints, was an undeveloped process. From the materials used to the formulation of thoughts into ideas, I struggled to find a common arena between the reoccurring imagery and its ground. The most significant example was a print produced late last year entitled, Embarcación, c. 1988 (Plate II). It introduced the repetitive black and white, horizontally rectangular shapes. Similar to the agility of a venetian blind, was the indecisive feel of it simultaneously opening and closing.

Though influenced by memory, the total piece suggested, in my mind, the beginning of a long and distant voyage. The works that soon followed would suggest as well the effects of many reverberated thoughts, passing of friends and the denial of self both physical and mental. The window blinds instilled the idea of facades used by individuals who were at one time or another unable to allow themselves to be seen as they really are. As glass reflects the image placed before it, so too reflected were my views on life and responses to the environment.

In La Luna Empalamiento, c. 1989 (Plate III), indication of the process becomes more apparent by showing traces of more than one plate being used at a time. The varied blotting and wiping of the ink as well as placement of the images, as mentioned previously, takes on an organic feel and in doing so gives the rectangular shapes a sense of direction as it visually penetrates the space past where they may have originated.
The title interpreted reads, "The Moon's Impalement". It deals with a break in communication, suggesting the pain of not knowing what the truth is and what occurs when a confrontation is avoided. The visual movement created by the implied shifting of the plates further suggests the friction between the two parties concerned. Although there is no representation of an actual 'moon', there is a light source emanating from behind the second plane that continues through the center of the picture space, illuminating the panel in the foreground.

After producing a number of monoprints, the desire to go back into the studio to paint was overwhelming. Though I had already decided to utilize the process I employed while printing, I was hesitant to begin work. I viewed instead those artists whose works dealt with the idea of process while still exhibiting remnants of a past existence. My search led me to two individual artists, Anselm Kiefer and Joseph Beuys. Together they brought to light what I understand to be remembrances of the past. Through my use of metaphor, whether the image of a window blind or a form of a residue, I found a kinship with the internal aspects of their work. My response to that lingering existence that is neither in the past nor in the present was the result of my additive/subtractive process. The over-worked surfaces that occurred from this point on were created through the use of the found construction mentioned earlier. Manipulation of the varied materials, over its prefabricated divisions, allowed a particular amount of light to filter through each slat. Throughout the surface of this construction, I was able to monitor the degree of pressure needed to resurface the buried imagery while sensitizing the light to its highly receptive surface.

Hay Unos Ojos, c. 1989 (Plate IV) translated, "There are some eyes", extends the idea of a momentary thought as a presence within, which is woven in and around the given imagery of the blinds and light source. Going barely undetected is the reoccurring image of a stare, though not a prominent image, the existent/nonexistent quality further
emphasizes the many interpretations given as suggestions of semblance. The work initiates a visual dialogue through the composition of the imagery. Physically, the viewer is on the outside looking in while simultaneously the image within glares out. A sense of depth is also evoked by the structure-like imagery seen in the distance where the bright illuminating light source is casting its shadow. The title, "There are some Eyes", establishes further the existence of a past presence by calling the viewers attention to the possibility of a spiritual entity.

From the works that soon followed, Hay Unos Ojos to those still created today, the manner in which I work has become almost second in nature. Visible to the viewer is the actual physicality of the additive/subtractive process. The many raw surfaces exhibit the erosion of the materials used such as, oil paint, oil sticks, and chalk pastels, which manage to cling to the tightly bonded sheets of paper that in and of itself succumbs to pressure being applied as the wiping off and erasing begins. The surface surrenders itself to the already accumulated wads of 'after-existence', only to lose grips with the reality of no longer being necessary to the piece as a whole. What remains is only the presence of what was there before; a residue of organic outlines, some actual others implied, colors faded to white; the total culminating in a signature of identity.

Perhaps the most significant manifestation of this process is that of ¿Qué es el alma del Troubero?, c. 1989 (Plate V). This piece deals with two actual experiences of an impending death involving a close family relative. "Which is the soul of the Troubadour?" brings together two separate entities and visually bonds them. The bonding of the two separate individuals, occurred over a period of a years time. As studio-mates, Pamela Gerber and I allowed between us an exchange of words which manifested in itself a substantial dialogue. Views and observations of the others work became vital considerations in reference to perception. Perhaps the most significant of
common denominators, discovered within eachother's work, was the element of light and apparent use of an additive/subtractive process.

Randomly observing Pam as she painted, I found myself being sensitized to the steps she took in furthering the progress of her work. The sudden realization of her use of a process, similar to my own, provided the evidence I needed in order to come full circle to the source of creation in my work. Together we fed off each others insights, and as friends we enriched eachother's lives. Our dialogue now would become a process in and of itself; one of offering and acceptance.

Though determined to uphold a positive attitude, the news from home, concerning her father's failing health, threw her into a tailspin of indecisive uncertainties. The very thought of her father's passing reverberated the ill feelings I encountered when my father suffered a massive heart attack, just four years before. As I expressed an understanding for what she was experiencing, she allowed me into her thoughts and confided in me the enormous sense of loss that enveloped her very essence.

It was her physical pain, though silent, together with the resurfacing thoughts of my father that brought about the use of the two emanating light sources, one reflective of the other, as seen in ¿Qué es el alma del Trouvero?. Another visually related element found within the work is the rather large vertical structure located deep within the boundaries of the background. The very existence of the structure counter-acts the blind-like imagery seen fluctuating between the foreground of the painting and the viewers actual space. The dark looming qualities of the structure is indicative of a future not yet known, and it serves as a constant reminder of the many directions a life will experience; hinting on the outcome while never revealing itself fully. The title then, "Which is the soul of the Troubadour?" is no more significantly a question of valor than it is a basis for stating a need to understand the existence of the two emanating life sources and their unification.
¿Qué es el alma del Trovero? affirmed the belief that a spiritual entity existed within each of my painted paper pieces as a recorder of those internal/external aspects of my identity. Documenting those images that surfaced, only to recede, encapsulated those remnants of a time that is far from being forgotten. My painted paper pieces have become that celebration of life, as only I can comprehend; illuminating those individual successes as well as failures. They have manifested within my consciousness a strong sense of purpose. With them I have become the after image of who I was before. I am the present while my works are of the past. I have finally, an identity and my work is my signature.
PLATES
Plate I

Paisaje como Pilar
Plate II

Embarcación
Plate III

La Luna Empalamiento
Plate IV

Hay Unos Ojos
Plate V

¿Qué es el alma del Trovero?