THE LABYRINTH IN MY HEAD

A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Fine Arts

by

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Approved by

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Department of Art
FROM THE BEGINNING TO THE BEGINNING

1956 - I began

1960 - Pre-School
Wanting a sister or older brother or a dog
Getting a dog

1962 - Grade School
Drinking lots of milk and playing pretend

1968 - Jr. High
Eating lunch with the lepers and dying

1970 - High School
Facade renovation - independant resistant

1973 - Transgressions
High School drop out
Disinherited and I am the only child

1977 - Renaissance
Last time on methadone
Halfway house on Beveridge Street
Enter Southern Illinois University - Carbondale

1982 - Graduation
Graduate school in Columbus, Ohio - sounds so generic

1984 - Seven Years Past
Retrospection and what is next!!?
LABYRINTHS

Graduate school has given me time to grow and mature. During the past two years beliefs have changed and developed, knowledge has grown and new, sometimes useful, ideas have developed. Abstractions from these experiences along with some personal insights are offered as a thesis on art.
THE THRESHOLD

"Art was the prescription for sanity and relief from the terrors
and pains of human life."

-Anais Nin

In 1977 I entered college and chose the only major I could
stomach: art. This choice induced a rediscovery of my sanity.

-excerpt from journal - January 1978

I told them I was going to quit. They looked at me in disbelief
while saying yes and shaking their heads no. In the city it is
called "BOY". Ironic - I have never met a man that seductive.
Quitting the act was hard, enduring life is harder. I have found
a new world; a place for energy and excitement. This world is
mine. Here there is no right or wrong. My dreams take me back
to the past as I am sure they always will. The present is filled
with this new world and there is little room for anything else.
This must continue. I have found a substitution.

It has taken me seven years to rekindle this new world. Life
and time will further the flame. I am one of the lucky ones who found
that place inside myself that has no rules or laws, that has unlimited
options. This is the place that will carry me through this life. Pre-
dominantly unconscious production occurs here, and rarely on command.
This is the friend that will never leave me, the one I can escape with
any hour of any day and a breeding ground for future revelations. This
is me and also my salvation. Someday I think I might find art here.
SYNOPSIS: FROM THERE TO HERE

I came to OSU with a portfolio full of ceramic cookie jars and boredom in my heart. The jars, with additional refinement, might eventually fit into the pages of Ceramics Monthly; but was this a goal to pursue? During the first year in graduate school I discovered that I could handbuild most anything I chose. I was an object maker and my love for craftsmanship, elegance, and decoration flourished in clay. Yet what resulted were empty statements, frustration and the realization that skill is a means to an end and not an end in itself.

New ideas which demanded materials other than clay were on my mind. I felt obligated to continue working in clay since I was, after all, a ceramics major. If the finished product was my main concern, then the way in which I arrived there should not be the dominant issue. I finally came to terms with the fact that clay is merely a material (as is wood, paint, etc.) and should only be used when and where deemed appropriate. The first step toward my eventual break from clay came when I allowed myself to mix clay with other medias. The resulting work was still decorative and object-oriented but a new concern became evident: dichotomies. The new work could be described as beautiful yet abrasive, seductive yet forebidding, precious yet wicked.

During the winter of 1984, I signed up for an independant study in painting. As an undergraduate I was told I could not draw. The studio elective requirements were avoided for as long as possible due in part
to this remark and due to fear. I felt sure that because I was not adept at drawing the nude, as the matchbook cover instructed, two-dimensional pursuits were beyond my reach.

- my dream - recorded at dawn, October 19, 1983

It was in a house. People were sitting around, going through their portfolios, and complaining about the fee and the rejections they had received. I apologized and said it is just a part of life. Then I noticed the house was moving. We had been swept out to sea and were sinking. No one really seemed upset even though there were no life jackets in the house. I remember glancing out of the huge picture windows. The water was bashing up against them. Out on the wave crests, all in a row, and spaced equally apart were army helmets floating upside down. I wondered where the war had been fought and who had won. I wished the helmets were inside so that we might possibly use them for floating devices. I wandered around the house and found a hatch in the floor that led out under the water. I had to decide whether I would wait and die in the house with all the rest or overcome my fear and take the chance of swimming through the hatch to the surface of the water and then to shore. I decided to take the chance. I plunged through the hatch holding my breath - swimming, swimming through a tunnel which seemed like a birth canal. Suddenly I popped up on the surface of the water. Surprised and relieved, I found I was only a few hundred feet off shore of a city. I remember heading for shore.
TO MAKE ART

"To me the truth is something which can not be told in a few
words, and those who simplify the universe only reduce the expansion of
its meaning."

-Anais Nin

Once I heard a person say, "I have Saturday afternoon free to
make art." How do they know that is what they will end up with once
the afternoon is over? Is it that simple? Is it that difficult?

I found the true meaning of frustration and anxiety in graduate
school. Lists and parts reappeared in my journal, never extending
beyond the paper they were written on. Each new direction my work took
rapidly replied "NO." Occasionally the fragments would reassemble, re-
alizations would pour in and joy would return. It was always short-
lived. Time would tell as it always did. Thoughts, dreams, and visions
precede a piece, time caused them to fade. The piece then stood alone.
One quarter ended and a new quarter began. The interim between quarters
was enough time to tell. The new quarter began with a review of last
quarter's work. "SO WHAT" seemed to be permanently etched on my lips.
It was time to start over again. Sometimes my endeavors seemed as
futile as a dog's effort to catch his tail.
MOST RECENT INTENTIONS

"I want to live only for ecstasy. Small doses, moderate loves, all half-shades leave me cold. I like extravagance. Letters which give the postman a stiff back to carry, books which overflow from their covers, sexuality which bursts the thermometers."

-Anais Nin

Intensities are what I live for. Some of the art I see, along with most of my old work, leaves me cold. I believe art is valid when it produces an extreme response within me, such as love or hate. I have continually pursued something more than "half-shades" in my work during the past two years. More often than not the work has fallen short. However, working two-dimensionally has provided me with an escape from a preoccupation with materials and allowed me to directly pursue my main objective: incorporating part of myself into my work. Actual subject matter has provided the means for expression of personal and intense feelings. The use of color coupled with the imagery I choose is usually intense. My inner reality of extreme emotions and feelings now have a viable outlet, which is often lost in my three-dimensional pursuits. There are still "half-shades", yet now I can actually foresee myself overcoming them.

In my current work, color and subject matter are manipulated to produce certain visual dichotomies. The images and color are at times pretty and rich yet upon closer examination one finds them to be caustic
and sinister. I manipulate color with the intent of exacerbating the subject matter. My interest in dichotomies stems from a time in my life when I found it imperative to maintain several dualities in order to survive. At times I have appeared sincere and above reproof yet was in fact calculating and manipulative.

The content in my work is usually satirical and delineates a sardonic view of human nature and/or a descriptively poignant vignette. In retrospect, I find that the content of my work directly correlates to some experiences I have had with human nature and indirectly correlates to some poignancies I have known:

- they told us to come back in four weeks - what to do in the interim? "keep doing what you've been doing - we will have the methadone for your in four weeks"

- when you need to tell someone something you know they do not want to know it is best to wait to tell them when you are ready to leave town and by all means do it in a letter

- they said Mike Ashmann killed himself in a closet - he had a bullet hole in his heart - he was wrapped in a blanket and the gun along with the key to the closet were on the closet shelf

- when you are offered a pedestal with someone perched upon it - walk around it a few times before you buy - chances are it is only two-dimensional

- Bob Rembke had a multi-faceted talent for music, art, and writing - they stamped him "sane" upon his release from the psychiatric ward after his bout with confusion - Bob Rembke killed himself on the couch in the afternoon - he stabbed himself in the heart with the sewing scissors

I paint self-portraits because the paintings are based upon exaggerated portrayals of my experiences. I believe these experiences are universal to us all in varying degrees. The work has been more successful since I began to paint what I felt without questioning the symbolism or logic behind it. Sometimes a need for order makes this difficult to do. Titles, formerly shunned, have come for each painting as I paint it,
as does the meaning of its composition. The puzzle I create unfolds itself to me as I paint. When logic interferes with my ideas I repress it with free association exercises. More times that not I find there is sense in nonsense.

—selections from the past two years

Peter Pan had no friends
My animals stare nowhere
How many cats climb the fence?
It is always questionable — the sheets are fluffy and hard
My stove is a tomb for cremation
Roll up the brain on pink foam curlers — brown if you are black
Chairs deform the body
Inner circles have no boundaries
Hairless creatures carouse the sky
Antedotes are too sparse
Time is a constant barrier
Downtown and in the sky — all the people want to die
Can’t be a canary
Jails in June
Plastic lamps look like ear bobs
Money for what?
New shoes change your life
My mouth goes off on automatic
It takes courage to eat a tomato
Only leaves feel the breezes
Floating in the sky is a crime
Cause brings jail terms
My booboo is a dog
His freckles were pastees
My rug is a varment trap
Can my mother see straight?
Nice white room is still a virgin — don’t use white paint
There were twentyfive guns in my closet
Kitties like to pretend
The arms are never straight
Repetition again
Spirits are stuck in the wood
THINGS I HAVE LEARNED

- no idea is inadequate - the execution of the idea is where it may fall short
- rendering is a learned skill
- everyone can draw
- craftsmanship is important in all artistic endeavors yet pure craft is rarely art
- risk and failure are imperative if learning is to take place
- the vision must never give way to external pressure
- I can still revel in intensity and/or insanity
THE PUSH TO POSSESS

...we might say that the wooing of this infinitely seductive Bride can never wholly succeed. The Bachelors may expend all their art in the attempt—and all their luck as well—and the Bride may even further their efforts with her own quickening desire to be possessed. But this bride, like life itself, can never truly be possessed, nor even stripped bare. The courtship is what matters...

—Calvin Tomkins, The Bride and The Bachelors

I know a feeling
I see a flicker of light
I want a vision that encompasses it
I want a piece that holds it all
I will never have it but I do have food for life
MUTATIONS

"Our heads are round so that thoughts can change directions"

-Picabia

What I was told about art -

ART IS:

-most all the plates in Gardner's *Art Through the Ages* and Gombrich's *The Story of Art*

-most all the objects in galleries and museums

-most all the objects in art magazines

-most all the art of the art "stars"

Present beliefs about art -

ART IS:

-alive and breathing

-confronting and/or embracing

-emotive and all emotions are valid

ART IS MOST OF ALL:

-rare
LIST OF COLOR PLATES

1. *Another Unavoidable Premeditated Murder*
2. *Mastered Chaos*
3. *They'll Take It All*
4. *Measured And Marked*
5. *That's Not My Friend*
6. *Simultaneous Existence - Together Again*
MASTERED CHAOS
THEY'LL TAKE IT ALL
MEASURED AND MARKED
THAT'S NOT MY FRIEND