SCULPTURE < PAINTING < BOXING

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INTRODUCTION

In my paintings as in my life, I am consistently dealing with the issues of memory and imagination, beauty, hope, and disillusionment. I am interested in how these elements can be touched upon by way of the juxtaposition of fragmentary images as I feel that the mind works in a fragmentary manner. To this end, an attempt is made to incorporate images that are, as different as I can make them. This is taken to the point of including different types of visual information: illustrative or representational images, abstractions, and words. A conscious effort is made to avoid imposing a hierarchy in regards to the images used for it seems that this cannot be done with a confident sense of objectivity. I try to remain objective in hopes of getting a little closer to truth, regardless of how futile this hope may be. Occasionally, an illogical hierarchy may be imposed to emphasize the ludicrousness of this impulse to rank. In this regard I am a realist.

It is hoped that the aforementioned concerns be incorporated as clearly as possible in my work, and in so doing, any use of narrative, allegory, or analytical formulas is forgone; I try to present my concerns directly. Parity is essential if the goal is to overwhelm.
THE ISSUE OF STANCE

Thoughts or the fragments of thoughts, images of one kind or another, flickered in his mind without order or connection. Faces of people seen long ago in childhood, or met somewhere only once and not even remembered; the bell tower of a certain church; the billiard table in a tavern somewhere and some officer at the billiard table; the smell of cigars in some basement tobacco store; a saloon; a back staircase, completely dark, drenched with slops and strewn with eggshells; and from somewhere the sound of church bells ringing... Object followed object, and they went around and around like a whirlwind.

said of Raskolnikov in Dostoyevsky's Crime and Punishment

A statement of great interest was presented to me once. I am unaware of its original source but this is unimportant as it has certainly been passed along countless times subsequently. The statement was simply, "I don't believe in belief". This statement had the powerful effect of reaffirming a notion that had been lingering in my head for some time and that had been inarticulately manifesting itself in my paintings. Upon hearing this claim to non-commitment I no longer felt alone in thinking that we should down-play our passions for the sake of tolerance, for I had so often heard that conflict makes us more "alive". The idea of passion then, appeared to me as something I might want to consider more closely. As a consequence, this small revelation spurred on a more refined direction to my thinking and painting.

It seems obvious that how our passions are dealt with is becoming increasingly important in today's world. It seems important now that we accept the possibility of error and misunderstanding on our part, and in my work at this point,
this acceptance is one of the intentions. My work makes a statement about making statements in general in art.

The paintings included here are addressing this issue insofar as they are dealing with the more personal, individual side of human nature, which is of primary interest to me. This is where the issue of stance plays a role. In dealing with the individual's understanding of human nature, the likelihood of forcing a stance is decreased. The paintings become subjective to the point of bypassing judgements to right and wrong. The images in the paintings are intended to recreate, in a sense, something of what it is to be alive as I know it; an attempt is made at communication. This understanding is of such a nature that moral judgements do not become an issue. The communication is either completed by the viewer or it is not. In this sense, the paintings serve as a kind of mirror in which the viewer derives the level of understanding that he or she brings to the work. The images then, serve as a means for direct experience in which the tightly interwoven issues of memory, imagination, beauty, hope and disillusionment can be addressed.

As concerns the nearly identical ideas of memory and imagination, I have always found it to be the case that a great painting tells me something of my past. Put another way, this simply means that a great painting resonates with a shared understanding of what makes us human. A common ground is reached; a circuit of intuitive knowledge between artist and viewer is made complete. Memory comes to the fore for me because I cannot distinguish between my understanding of life and the events of my past. They become inseparable, even one and the same. Imagination must be present as well because the artist requires the viewer to imagine the artist's past (or any number of other possibilities, or impossibilities as the case may be).
Beauty enters here in two distinct but related ways. In one sense, there is the beauty in this experience of communication. The greater the painting the more beautiful and moving this experience becomes. Secondly, there is the visual reality of the work, in which beauty may occur simply through formal means. Color, pattern and composition, etc. can be beautiful in their own right. It is toward both ends that I try to make my paintings beautiful, although the word "beautiful" in itself can be somewhat misleading as it implies a kind of passive, idyllic quality. Rather, it might be said that the aesthetic aspects of the work are of interest to me. This would include, then, the possibility of "ugly" beauty.

As for hope and disillusionment, they too play an important role in this interconnected web of meaning. It seems that by the mere act of making a painting a kind of hope is being expressed. The fact that there is a reason to give form to thoughts and feelings is a positive thing and necessarily acknowledges expectations for future endeavor. It is very difficult to deal with issues of hope and disillusionment by way of images, without resorting to illustration or a literal type of narrative, but I make an attempt to do this through the character of the images or through the juxtaposition of two or more images.

The space between the "meanings" of two juxtaposed elements penetrates into the more intangible aspects of human nature. I discovered this through the exploration of the essential differences of images placed next to one another. For the sake of imagination, I had the desire to compare elements that were as different as I could make them. This led to the idea of incorporating different types of information. Hence, abstractions entered in to the work next to representational images, and words later entered into further stretch the diversity of the relationships. The representational
images felt somewhat limiting in their scope, but with the inclusion of abstractions and words the paintings became capable of speaking much more loudly in a wider range of directions. It seems that abstractions, for instance, can evoke sensations that transcend a singular, specific reading as might be produced by a representational image. Words can do the same as abstractions when used in a poetic manner, but the realities of the two are very different in that there is the auditory aspect and the familiarity of the words that are absent in the abstractions. Representational images permit us to recognize their names, but we are more drawn to the semantic aspect of the images than to the linguistic aspect of their names. The familiarity of the representational images is somewhat skewed. They are not always what they might at first seem.

The incorporation then, of an image of, say, a flower and a non-objective representation of the flower, in conjunction with the word "flower" or "daffodil" is of great interest to me, but I never remain this limited when choosing images. I am more interested (to speak of one case specifically) in the incorporation of an expressive, abstract line drawing in blue on a white ground, next to a tightly rendered lobster with bound claws, with the rather cryptic phrase, "balls, Lee" painted above. These elements vary greatly. As a result, each work becomes open-ended, regardless of my earnest attempts at specificity - the specificity of the mind, which can house very disparate images simultaneously. A compromise must be met in this regard, because specificity is generally lost in proportion to the magnitude of the goal for any given painting. The viewer's handling of the respective parts becomes quite important to the completion of the work. In the case of my work, I might like the viewer to experience an exact duplicate of that which is working in my head at the moment of inspiration, but this is obviously an impossibility. I am content then, with letting the viewers create their own
version of it in their own minds. It is for this reason that I do not impart to the viewers which of the images they should deem more important or how the images might be combined for the sake of interpretation. None is more important than the other and they do not work together to form a literal statement. If there is any conclusion arrived at as to moral judgement, it is on the part of the viewers and not because they were led in that direction.

I feel strongly about this way of working in which the viewer is not asked to align him or herself with the worldly attitudes of the artist. In my case, it seems natural to avoid leading people by the nose. It is all too apparent, though, that this is not the only way to go about matters. The Modern movement is filled with examples of artists (or critics) who claim to know how the viewer should think. It is quite common to see works or writings, past or present, in which some agenda is being espoused and viewers are trying to be won over. Be it the Futurists with their pro-war, anti-history sentiments, or the Surrealists and their complete rejection of the rational, or Clement Greenberg’s declaration of a flat, anti-illusionism as a prerequisite for true painting, or on a more contemporary level, artists such as Holzer, Kruger or Coe with their left-wing proclamations, there seems to be a solid precedent for very specific, very rigid statements in art.

But am I to claim that these great figures are wrong in their approach? This claim surely could not be made with any certainty. In fact, with the exception of Greenberg (whom I have never quite agreed with), I believe more or less strongly in all of the aforementioned sensibilities. It simply does not feel appropriate to adopt this mode of thinking for myself. The idea of seeing the world through the eyes of another does not always hold up for me. What difference does it make what I or anyone else
likes or dislikes? I do not feel that the specific individual's perspective on any given topic is of particular interest. Bigger things than personal preference can be touched upon in art. There are common truths to human nature that, though granted they vary with the individual's understanding of life and art, can transcend trivial notions of likes and dislikes. I attempt to approach these truths, but I believe it is impossible to arrive at irrefutable conclusions.

It is with this in mind that I refuse to make decisive statements in my work. I have not been able to agree with myself long enough to feel comfortable doing this. Which leads me, as always, to the question of whether this singularity of vision, this strict claim to what is right, is actually the core of greatness or a source of conflict that would best be avoided. I have opted for the latter but, again, it is an issue that continues to be of some question to me.

Even as I have made an effort to avoid taking a stance in my work, I am not naive enough to imagine this as anything more than a symbolic effort. For one thing, contrary to whatever my intentions may be, the paintings here are always based on a point of view (mine). I cannot get outside of myself to form a completely unbiased perspective, and consequently all of the decisions that go into the making of the paintings, in terms of both form and content, point directly back to me. Secondly, I fully realize that simply by questioning my endeavor, I am not likely to influence others (whose endeavors may be much more questionable than painting) to question theirs. Those that I might like to have some rapport with in this regard are generally (though certainly not always) outside of the world of painting. Even if I were an exceptionally visible artist, I would still have no contact with these individuals.
TIES AND CONTEXT

- Tentative half impressions that dissolve in light...

- ...I am a recording instrument...I do not presume to impose "story" "plot" "continuity."...Insofar as I succeed in Direct recording of certain areas of psychic process I may have limited function...I am not an entertainer...

"Possession" they call it...Sometimes an entity jumps in the body - outlines waver in yellow orange jelly - and hands move to disembowel the passing whore or strangle the nabor [sic] child in hope of alleviating a chronic housing shortage.

excerpts from the Atrophied Preface of William S. Burroughs' Naked Lunch (ellipsis marks etc. his)

The sources from which I derive inspiration and which shape my understanding of art and my painting specifically, are as varied as the sensations that I experience and try to incorporate into the work itself. These elements may be, but are as often not, in themselves thought of as art. "Nature", the vernacular art forms, rock-n-roll music, the so called, higher art forms of film and painting all manifest themselves in my work.

It seems the most consistent and profound influence on my work may be the most obvious. This is simply nature. By "nature" I mean both the concrete reality that makes up our visual awareness of our surroundings and the organic elements that exist outside of man's creation: rocks, trees, birds, clouds, etc. This influence may not be of great interest per se, owing to the fact that it is extremely common for man to represent visual realities in paintings, but the fact remains that I strongly lean toward the sensual side of experience in general, and consequently, the same follows true for painting. Oscar
Wilde made the statement that "It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances. The mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible", but this is only partially what I am referring to. Actually, I am not as concerned with the way things look as I am with recreating visual sensations derived from images seen. It seems that certain visual realities in themselves can possess aesthetic qualities that lead to emotional responses. It is my intention to re-create the responses produced in these instances.

In terms of the way my paintings are painted - the materials, their usage, and the visual ramifications of such - the influence of the vernacular art forms is undeniable. These are the common, popular manifestations of art. Street signs, for instance, viewed on a regular basis, inevitably have an effect on the manner in which I actually apply paint in my work. The commercial, manufactured sign is of interest to me, but more than this the hand painted sign (the cruder the better) definitely influences my painting. Beyond this even, is the spontaneous, non-professional declarations found in shop windows, gas stations, etc. which may only consist of magic marker on a scrap of cardboard. The greater the presence of the human element in the sign the greater its interest to me. So, the simple, crude "out of order" sign that might be found in a laundromat or public restroom holds significant meaning for me. Its directness and unselfconscious nature can be quite expressive, and it possesses a purity not frequently found in more sophisticated painting.

The same can be said about mass oriented art-like forms such as advertising design and illustration, product packaging and television imagery. Because these common forms are generally not trying to make high art statements, they seem to exude a freshness and a kind of freedom. Again, it should be pointed out that I am referring to
the visual aspects of these forms and not to any sort of message being sent through this type of information. There are fewer restrictions as far as historical or contemporary (i.e., art world) pressures go in the creation of these images, regardless of how engulfed in trends they themselves may become. While studying the cereal box when eating or watching half an hour of MTV for instance, (not the videos so much as the material presented in the spaces between them) many interesting combinations of images can be "stored up" and either consciously or subconsciously referred back to when painting. Sometimes an image will appear that will elicit an immediate sketch which may be used in some form at a later date.

Pop music, though an auditory medium, has had an effect on the way I look at painting, particularly in terms of structure. The well-crafted pop song is free of extraneous elements. Its composition is very tight and, though painting lacks the temporal factor inherent in the song, I try to emulate, translate, something of the ordered quality of the pop song structure. Repetition is another aspect of all pop songs and has overtly made its presence known in my work. A conscious effort has been made on my part to incorporate these elements into my paintings, (unlike many other influences that enter the work before I am aware of them).

There are aspects of pop music that enter my painting less directly. This starts to move away from formal similarities and primarily becomes evident in the tendency toward the sentimental or melodramatic. This is present in much of the best pop music but I have tried to keep it in check until such point that it can be used for more deliberate ends. It does creep into the work at times, regardless. The conscious and subconscious effects of this vernacular medium are certainly at work in my paintings, due in part, simply to its sheer prevalence in our society; I hear it daily. From the early
stages of my childhood, I believe I was affected by the likes of Roberta Flack, and of Dionne Warwick and her masterful collaborators Burt Bacharach and Hal David.

On the grittier, less kitchy side of pop music, though, exists rock-n-roll. The effect of this genre on my life is irrefutable, to the extent that, at times, I feel myself to be a product of rock-n-roll. Its relation to my painting is only slightly less obvious. The aesthetic/expressive sensibility of the Rolling Stones, the Who and the Jimi Hendrix Experience have long been influential and are still sources of inspiration. The crudeness of my paintings may be seen as a result of the type of mindset evident on such rock staples as Iggy Pop’s Raw Power. There is an unfocused flippancy, aggression even, toward the world at large, but toward the respective mediums of music and painting as well.

A final aspect of rock-n-roll, that of social commentary, is also of interest to me. On a few isolated occasions, I have made some, mostly obscure, hints at race relations in the United States. These have been kept to a minimum due to my belief that painting is an ineffective way to promote change. These examples primarily exist as a display of one individual’s erratic personal concerns and I am fully aware that they will have no effect on any social situations. When I have allowed myself the liberty to address this issue, though, (most obviously in Night Fire, Plate IV), contemporary rock-n-roll (rap) groups such as Public Enemy, Ice-T, and Boogie Down Productions have played a vital role in my doing so.

Another musical influence - an overwhelming factor in the shaping of my understanding of art - is the work of Don Van Vliet (known most commonly as Captain Beefheart). I have not been exposed to much of his painting; it is his music that has been so important. As a musician Van Vliet bridges the gap between popular music and
art music (i.e., "classical"), though he will certainly be posited in the latter category posthumously. Having first been exposed to him early on in my undergraduate studies (my first exposure coming via his 1978 release Shiny Beast (Bat Chain Puller), his semi-rational imagery and extremely expressive delivery of such has taken me out of the realm of criticism. This is not to say that his work is beyond fault, but rather, he redefined my understanding of art at this very impressionable stage in my life. In the case of his music, structure per se is of little interest to me. It is generally too complex to get any sort of handle on. Rather, its his drastic use of imagination, his creation of images that evoke memory, the overwhelming formal and emotional beauty that arises, his optimism and his biting cynicism. These elements are all I strive to achieve in my work.

With a good deal of attention allotted to the effects of music on my work, it may seem peculiar that painting became my chosen field in the first place. This "choice" seems to have much to do with my general personality. In addition to the simple fact that painting and drawing have, since my first exposure to them as a very young child, not ceased to be an important means for understanding my existence, it seems that painting's appeal lies in its solitary nature. Whereas music generally involves a group effort of some sort, painting, obviously, does not require involvement other than the painter and his or her materials.

Joseph Conrad (the writer) claims that music is the "art of arts" due, in part, to its "magical suggestiveness". I do believe in Conrad's statement, and find that for myself music has a much greater potential to speak of human nature than painting ever can. So, as experience, music is more potent to me than painting, but in terms of creation, I feel more prone to make paintings due to their greater personal, individual nature.
The performance of painting happens alone.

Film is another medium that nearly always requires a group effort but has still had an enormous impact on me theoretically and emotionally. The work of the Italian Neo-realists is of particular interest to me as well as the Italian filmmakers sprung from this movement, namely, Michelangelo Antonioni and Federico Fellini. With regards to the original neo-realist movement, specifically in the hands of Vittorio DeSica, art was a way to penetrate into the realm of human nature by way of the simple reality of our everyday lives. Art was not an escapist venue nor a device swamped with allegory or thin metaphors. The nature of meaning in the work of DeSica is attained through direct experience. In his Bicycle Thief of 1948 a man's search for his stolen bicycle becomes the basis of action for the entire film. Plot does not get in the way here, and DeSica is left with much freedom to directly deal with many diverse aspects of our nature as human beings. With Antonioni and Fellini the same follows true. These directors came to be known as creators of the "human condition" film because, again, this was the subject of their endeavors, and issues of plot, allegory, symbolism, etc. were avoided because of their potential to cloud the primary issues. These two great artists, though the antithesis of one another, Antonioni the austere disciplinarian, Fellini the "master showman", have shown me the great importance of purity to the making of a meaningful statement on life.

On evaluating my own work, I cannot view myself as other than a realist in the strictest sense. I do not mean realist in the visual sense, but rather, in regard to the realities that form our understanding of life: joy, pain, lust, fear, fulfillment, hatred, loneliness, etc. Essentially: hope, then disillusionment, but always with the thought of what could be. This predilection for imagination, though, should not imply a tendency
toward escapism. On the contrary, it is this very aspect of our make-up, imagination, that makes us human. The other animals experience emotions also, but these are merely reactions. They cannot rationalize what could be. I think this is the heart of our dilemma as humans. We can dream of things that we can never have or achieve.

So, as I see it, there are two approaches that artists can take in their work. On the one hand, they can simply present the fact that to be alive is to be disappointed. Or, on the other hand, they can create images of what they would like reality to be. In either case, particularly the latter, the result might seem insufficient. With artists such as Willem DeKooning or Philip Guston, though, there seems to be something of both of these possibilities. Their work displays some degree of cynicism, aggression even, yet a profound beauty emerges through this dichotomy in which the cynicism becomes an indispensable part, due to its kinship to reality. In a manner of speaking, this becomes a prerequisite for my appreciation of a work of art.

Pure, unadulterated nihilism makes me uneasy; maybe I am a coward. Pure escapism, though, is much worse, and the same follows true for its close relative, "taste". As the Danish artist Per Kirkeby said, "All good painting is more kitchy than tasteful." In this day and age, I feel that this could not be more true. It is apparent that many artists today are fully aware of the truth of this statement. Contemporary geniuses such as Robert Rauschenberg, Sigmar Polke, David Salle and Julian Schnabel are prime examples. It seems that they cannot, in today's world, create "tasteful" work with a clear conscience. By this I simply mean that there is an attitude expressed in their work that acknowledges that there are severe problems with the world in its current state. Salle and Schnabel have been a particularly strong influence of late in this regard in general in both the form and content of my work. The use of juxtaposition to speak of the
intangible nature of our emotional and psychological composition and the use of irony as a potent, though frequently humorous, statement-making apparatus, have found their way rather blatantly (subtlety and I are strangers) into my work. Both of these great artists employ these means in their work. The aesthetic side of their work is another area of influence. Though probably not thought of as makers of beautiful paintings, it is my belief that they (most notably Schnabel with his tarpaulin paintings of the late '80s) have been responsible for some of the most aesthetically pleasing work of this era. There is an ironic, unsentimental toughness to the beauty in their work, which in our age is the only way it can be treated.

As far as the notion of direct experience is concerned, these two painters seem to have an indelible kinship to the previously mentioned filmmakers.

In their own respective words:

What I saw in Karole’s work was the creation of an entity, a thing that alluded to and resembled other things, stirred your imagination, stirred your linkages to other things, but in fact remained a new thing by itself, apart from everything else that it wasn’t...What was happening on stage was something that wasn’t a stand-in for something else and didn’t point to the feelings that you were supposed to be having if you were going to have any. It was those things; it wasn’t linking arms with something else. It wasn’t, in a sense, making way for the footnotes to attach themselves to it.

David Salle, speaking of the dancer Karole Armitage

Presenting a work publicly invites its own situation; that of emanating information with its very own specific qualities and viewing time; the possibility of a direct relationship, one to one, between the viewer and the object, is an ideal rarely achieved; there are so many distractions.

People have a funny involvement with art. They are interested in it for many reasons that address their relationship to the world; what art means to them; their idea of what it means to others; their conception of the artist's intent; and, perhaps lastly, how they actually feel about it. Layer upon layer, obscuring a direct relationship with the object.
There is altogether too much mediating going on; too many words and ideas and theories come between the viewer and the object of contemplation.

Julian Schnabel in an excerpt from his writings

A final note on the impression painters make on me concerns the personal side of their existence. I am very intrigued by the lives of great individuals, be it rock stars, athletes, or in this case, painters. I am just as interested, more so even, with Van Gogh the man as I am with him strictly as a painter. I have a greater sense of empathy for his work due to my awareness of the condition of his life. The same can be said for Marsden Hartley whose isolation and confusion in life were a vital impetus to his work. The knowledge of this for me is as moving as his actual work, because, like Van Gogh, a kind of modesty prevented him from illustrating these personal realities in his work. The sincerity of these artists is overwhelming and influential.

Another artist whose life is of great interest, though generally thought of as existing on the opposite end of "sincerity", is that of the contemporary wizard Mark Kostabi. I see Kostabi as possibly the primary proponent of art as life in the art world today. His cynicism and cleverness make him the ultimate realist in the society currently existing in the United States. With the art world such as it is, we need individuals like Kostabi to bring about its more rapid demise. Through unrelenting self-promotion, Kostabi's life becomes his art and he wisely, very consciously, utilizes his role as a product of the backward, mean-spirited mentality that is the United States of this era.

It is not my intention to echo the lives of these artists myself, but the knowledge of the person behind the product has always been significant to my deeper understanding of the work because of the creator's tendency to shy away from speaking to us directly about themselves.
THE ROLE OF TEXT

Bellerin' Plain - Parapliers the willow dipped Rolled roots gnarled like rakers This hollow hole don't hold no jokers er' fakers Don't fall by no jokers or fakers Puller down to the stirrin' hay acres Parapliers pinches uh levy 'n pulled way thru the toe Foothills, locomotives walked in sugar beets rolled Down the tracks Sunbum bounce soot off the black smokestacks Parapliers pinched up slow down the sky Blue 'o' poured the engineer's voice Whistlin' down low 'n piped like clacks By the ol' scarecrow 'n pots 'n pans burn the fireman's hands till the Kettle leaped fire 'round the bellow 'o' The bayou boy bums with sunken gums 'n pits his strength to the 7th sons down Parapliers rumbled like uh straight iron gun Like uh red hot iron thru the egg white 'o' Sunnyland drum, horn blow Sun like uh bubble pop yellow, down she go Muh cowcatcher whistled like uh steel flash scream Hose sucked out for water 'n the wheeldriver Sparked like an Indian flint 'n the fireman 'n the brakeman bent 'n waved his long red underwear arm All aboard The lantern flared 'n the caboose waved uh green gone on

from Captain Beefheart's 1970 release
Lick My Decals Off, Baby

The use of text as a creative device first appeared in my painting in the winter of 1990, and though a smattering of examples exist from as early as high school, this was when text first became a staple of my work. The manner in which I incorporate words and phrases in the paintings has been from the start quite varied, but the impetus for using them has remained strong. The different results achieved range from the personal to the societal to the absurd.

The first example occurred with the inclusion of "Dave Clark Five" as a kind of exclamation point to a painting that was very nearly finished. The result may be seen as absurdist to a degree as the images range from eight groupings of bowling pins to a pair of swastikas flanking an erect penis and of course the text (the name of the light-
hearted, Beatle-esque pop music group). The extent to which this painting is absurdist is dependent on the viewer's readiness to delve into the realm of imagination, for at the same time, this work may be seen as strictly realist in approach, due to the fact that it echoes something of the real workings of the human mind; (can one ever think of one thing exclusively without many other thoughts or images entering into the mind on various levels of consciousness?). These elements all do exist in their respective allotments in reality. I am simply bringing them together as a single, non-judgmental possibility. The emergence of "Dave Clark Five" in relation to the swastikas, for instance, is a good example of very different ideas coming together, but each of these elements is very much a part of human nature. They speak of aspects of our make-up that exist to various degrees in everyone. This is where the text plays an irreplaceable role. It is the idea of this insignificant pop band in relation to the swastika that is of interest to me. I am not concerned with the visual appearance of the band with that of the Nazi symbol. Hence, a visual portrait of the Dave Clark Five is very different from the phrase "Dave Clark Five" and would not suffice to satisfy my intentions in this regard.

The same is true for "Dissector" (Plate 1) but the result is dissimilar. In terms of specificity, this example is indicative of the various directions the text can take. With "Dave Clark Five", reference is being made to a specific entity; "Dissector" is open-ended, it refers to nothing specifically. Here the intention was to create a sensation, a character, that played off the other sensations that make up this painting. The word in this instance is placed within a separate panel and with the other elements that comprise this panel the feeling of a kind of mysterious, pseudo-science-fiction-like aggression is created. This is not to say, though, that this was the predetermined intention. Rather,
it evolved into its present state which is left for the viewer to experience. The reality of this piece, as with all of my paintings, exists within the viewer.

The "feeling" that I speak of is quite dreamlike, but again, dreams are a reality; the viewer will bring to this painting what he or she knows of this reality and of life and art in general. All of the elements are on an equal level and for this reason the text does not necessarily become the title of the work. In fact, it rarely does. Instead, the title usually comes about after an assessment of the composite image, but still does not serve to "explain" the painting. Frequently, the works remain untitled altogether in order to place emphasis on what is actually there on the canvas. This emphasis on the object is another, more general, function of the text. I hope that these paintings do not become evasive of the primary issues. For this reason an awareness of the materials is important. By putting words or phrases on the surface of the painting the two-dimensional picture plane is being emphasized and a strict illusionism into space is denied. Frequently the surface is punctured or otherwise marred in the process of painting and, though this never occurs through a calculated effort, (it simply happens during a rigid dialogue with the materials) the end result of bringing the object to the fore remains the same. The intention of these activities is not to create an object to be revered for its attractiveness; rather, the object remains merely a vehicle into my previously stated concerns regarding human nature.

It is important to retain a connection to the object to keep from moving from reality into an insubstantial realm.

Returning to more specific functions of the text, some mention should be made to its role in my work in regard to social realities. In the previous section the painting Night Fire was briefly noted. Despite my concern for the "non-statement", here is a case
when my personal sentiments begin to seep to the fore. I generally opt for the larger scope of our constitution in my efforts, as opposed to fixating on one ugly aspect, but specific issues may take precedence in specific paintings. The phrase "Impending Race Riots" comes from the idea held by some that these are inevitable in the not-too-distant future in the United States. It is a fact that a relatively high number of white Americans are stock piling weapons for this very reason. Having seen televised reports of this and heard of at least one case directly, this subject entered my work, dare I say, without my choosing. The phrases "18 hands", "hand guns", and "or dogs" point to a kind of confused aggression and the violent potential intrinsic in these particulars.

A similar sentiment is expressed in an untitled work that contains, among other things, the statement "Make Me A Victim" in a panel positioned above a second panel displaying the name "Al Green" (the great Motown recording artist), (Plate II). Read consecutively, these phrases create a statement that speaks, in the most general sense, of a white/black relationship and a male/maie relationship. The "me" refers, rather obviously I think, to myself, the creator of the painting, as a white male. The ambiguity as to whether this is a statement expressing an interest in the reversal of the wrongful situation forced upon African Americans or a statement with homosexual overtones is intentional. It is not my desire to make declarations about racism or homophobia here, but rather, to simply recreate the workings of one individual's mind at a specific instant in time. The superstar, idol/fan, worshipper relationship was also a part of the impetus for this statement. The inclusion of "LaRouche '92" in the same painting, may or may not have anything to do with "Make Me A Victim Al Green". There is a personal, even idiosyncratic, side of this work that, if at all successful, hits a more universal chord. This example exhibits the final principal direction that the text has taken in the work of this
body. A painting such as *Anti-Irony Act, 1791* (Plate III) fall into this general category as well. It is my feeling that *Granny* (Plate VI) is the most poignant of those in this grouping, and it will be discussed in the next section.
INDIVIDUAL WORKS

Whatever I say or do, there's always one part of myself which stays behind, and watches the other part compromise itself, which laughs at and hisses it, or applauds it. When one is divided in that way, how is it possible to be sincere? I have got to the point of ceasing to understand what the word means. It can't be helped; when I'm sad, I seem so grotesque to myself that it makes me laugh; when I'm cheerful, I make such idiotic jokes that I feel inclined to cry.

Armand in Andre Gide's The Counterfeiters

A further, more thorough, discussion of individual works is appropriate at this point in order to more clearly illuminate my intentions. Dry Rockin' (plate V) preceded the paintings which make use of text as an artistic device. Essentially, the general form is consistent with the other paintings of this body; pattern, repetition, ambiguity of images, and emphasis on structure are present here. The only major difference is simply that this painting is limited to essentially two types of information - representational and non-representational imagery. Even so, there is a bit of gray area between these categories because of the various levels of recognizability of the images. A collaged piece of fabric is to some extent abstract, but there are obvious references to foliage as well. Two rounded forms touch one another slightly at their tips. These could be sleeved arms with amputated hands, but could just as likely be stylized penises (hence the title). In two separate segments, a sea of what appears to be peanuts floats above a field of either dried blood or brownish red paint. These elements all work together to create a world that echoes our own in its ambiguity and underlying aggression. They also reflect the contradictory impulses inherent in introspection spoken of in the opening
epigraph of this section. The only areas that are decidedly representational or non-representational are the crudely drawn insects and the abstract fields of blacks, grays and ochres that occupy opposite corners of this painting. The abstract fields were intended to evoke the sensation of dense earthiness as they bring to mind rocks, soil, fossils, rotting plant and animal matter, etc. The section of drawn insects (appropriated from a chart labeled "Injurious Insects") speaks simultaneously of the insects themselves, in their original state; the human endeavor of documenting other species (science); and the desire of an artist to use this information in a painting.

This painting, as a whole, covers a wide range of earthly and human realities. There is the acknowledgement of a physical realm below the earth's surface that occupies a space in time, past, present and future. There is the endless depth in which the "cosmic peanuts" float that suggests the immensity of the unknown. There is the human element in the "stubs" that can be seen as sexual, or benevolent and tender, or both. There is the presentation of the non-human creatures, which in itself may imply any level of specificity. Finally, there is an extremely specific factor in the form of the scrap of found fabric. This might be found covering one's couch or adorning one's windows. This item speaks of the aspect of our lives that is trivial and expendable. In addition to these elements, there is present different levels of beauty and of "seriousness". Some aspects are quite gaudy; others possess a kind of quiet, albeit tough, beauty. Some images are goofy, others are more stern. This is meant as a reflection of the different aesthetic and emotional levels that exist within ourselves. All told, I feel the intentions of this painting to be rather lofty in their scope, and, though there is no hope of fully succeeding, the effort and a reasonable outcome are what is important. The intentions beforehand may be more or less specific regarding form, but the underlying meaning,
itself approachable from different angles, is always the same. In any case, the successful object, being the embodiment of these concerns, must become an entity in and of itself.

A second painting, while being simpler on a visual level, retains the same prospect of multiple readings as that of *Dry Rockin'*. This painting, entitled *Anti-Irony Act, 1791* (Plate III), relates back to the work containing the statement "Make Me A Victim Al Green", insofar as it echoes a personal sentiment experienced at a specific moment in time. Having been consistently dealing with the possibilities of irony, I was at one point struck by the opposite urge to say something very directly, very literally. In a particular instance of self-doubt, the phrase "You're OK, I'm All Talk" sprang into my consciousness. The sentiment expressed here was very sincere at the time, but, in the context of the paintings that preceded it, might easily have been misunderstood had it been stated directly. The secondary phrase "Anti-Irony Act, 1791" was brought into the piece in order to emphasize the fact that irony was not intended in the larger, more dominant phrase. Again, the intention of the original phrase was simply the solidification of a fleeting mental sensation. The assigning of a kind of mock historical legislation to this claim of anti-irony, was, for me, another jaunt into the realm of imagination and memory. "Anti-Irony Act, 1791" points back to another place and time, regardless of how non-specific it may be. Here is a case where the viewer must by necessity, supply his or her own story. For myself, it evokes images from history books depicting the founding fathers signing a momentous bill or declaration. As concerns the image between the two phrases, the allusion is to the individual's body and soul. The lung-like forms signify speaking and hence, "speaking out", and the lungs, being our organ for receiving air, contain our breath, our life. With the ribcage forms, a reference is being made to the inner person - what the person consists of "deep down". The
overall shape of this central image imitates that of the skeletal pelvis which speaks, in a general way, of the sexual energy that plays such a prominent role in art and life.

It must be said, though, that this central image is certainly not meant to be experienced in this step-by-step manner. By breaking the image down and discussing its respective parts, light may be shed on the mental processes that took place during its creation, but it is meant to be encountered and understood directly. I maintain that interpretation is not a valid method for understanding art, but this will be discussed further in the following section. A David Salle statement seems enough to summarize my thoughts at this point:

Like so many things that interest us in art, or that percolate through art and obsess us, if one has to ask about them, it is unlikely that they will be understood.

And, though this statement may seem smug or self-serving, I believe it to be applicable to the elements in this painting. If they are to be understood in any capacity, it will be through the overall sensitivity of the viewer and not through the piecing together of a kind of intellectual puzzle. This latter approach would merely be grasping at straws.

Even more obscure in its nature, but more confrontational in its prevailing thrust, is the painting entitled Granny (Plate VI). Here, irony comes back into play. In my experience, I have found that irony frequently manifests itself in the form of the lighthearted, even flippant, treatment of a serious subject: Peter Saul's cartoon handling of tragic events, Guston's hooded figures on joyrides. I too employ this tactic in my work, but in the case of Granny, the opposite direction is opted for as a nostalgic, sentimental subject is treated with aggression and hatred. The impending death of someone held very dear is difficult to handle directly, so the use of irony entered into the work quite naturally, even, dare I say, only semi-consciously. Each of the three
primary elements in the painting, delegated to separate panels, forms an integral part of the whole, but it is the sentence in the lower right that most directly makes use of irony. Within this sentence, two contrary sentiments are expressed. The statement begins on a tender note as the "I" of the brief narrative is moved to tears at the sight of someone. When it is revealed that the object of this affection in an old cunt, the irony becomes mildly alarming. The resultant reaction is, hopefully, expressive of a situation in which one loves too much (in this case, Granny being the object of this love). The need to "turn oneself off" is dealt with by means of affecting an opposing stance. This was the impetus that made this painting possible, but I understood that many other viewpoints would arise regarding the intention of this piece. I accept and approve of these various renderings, but it is hoped that the viewer will at least come away with some understanding of the purpose of this type of irony.

The flower pattern in the upper right of this work has obvious connections to the elderly woman of the title. Flowered dresses, wallpaper, quilts, etc., may all be associated with this person. With the large black shape at left, however, I could never hope to communicate a specific entity. This is intentionally quite open-ended and posits itself far from the flower pattern in terms of specificity. It has already been said that this disparity is a consistent concern. The black shape was simply intended to convey something of the inner reality that exists, for me, in connection to the subject of this painting. Ambiguity, uncertainty, austerity, boldness (courage?), perversity (a grotesque profile seems to flank either edge), are all embodied to some extent in this shape. The ethereal quality of the ground the shape is painted on hits at this mental image as one that is fleeting, intangible.

A final work that merits brief mention, is entitled Sunburger (Plate VII). This
painting differs from the bulk of the others both visually and conceptually. Here the text takes on a somewhat more prominent role than the other images and has been used as the title. The intention here was more specific than usual and was fully realized before the execution of the actual object. The subject is simply the dichotomy that is life: love/hate, war/peace, life/death, etc. The idea of the hamburger is, for me, one of ugliness. I associate the hamburger with our desire to dominate other species, and also, with the excesses of capitalism in our fast-food society. Coupled with the idea of the sun, the source of life on earth, it was my hope to create a likeness (of the order espoused in the Tao Teh Ching) of the duality inherent in our existence. The cross in the lower right, though almost more important as a formal element, was included with the same intention of duality. Sincerity and generosity exist within the realm of organized religion, but there is a negative side present as well. As is the case with the cross, the formal side of the other elements is of importance as well. There is a visual simplicity and rigid structure evident in this piece that lends it a sense of austerity, but, again, there is a flip-side working as the color assigned to its various parts gives it a lighthearted feeling. The word "Sunburger", presented as a kind of cheap, commercial logo, also adds to this up-beat character.
POETIC COMMUNICATION

ANIMALS ARE PASSING FROM OUR LIVES

It's wonderful how I jog
on four honed-down ivory toes
my massive buttocks slipping
like oiled parts with each light step.

I'm to market. I can smell
the sour, grooved block, I can smell
the blade that opens the hole
and the pudgy white fingers

that shake out the intestines
like a hankie. In my dreams
the snouts drool on the marble,
suffering children, suffering flies,

suffering the consumers
who won't meet their steady eyes
for fear they could see. The boy
who drives me along believes

that any moment I'll fall
on my side and drum my toes
like a type writer or squeal
and shit like a new housewife

discovering television,
or that I'll turn like a beast
cleverly to hook his teeth
with my teeth. No. Not this pig.

Philip Levine (1968)
As should be clear at this point, my primary concern in painting is communication - a dialogue, by means of the painting, between myself and the viewer regarding our understanding of art and life. A monologue might be a more accurate assessment were I only to produce paintings, but an actual dialogue regarding the human spirit does exist within the correlations between my paintings and the viewer and other paintings of which I am the viewer.

Were I to merely reproduce Joseph Conrad’s preface to his story *Nigger of the Narcissus* and Susan Sontag’s essay *Against Interpretation*, I would have nothing further to add regarding communication in art. I do wish to quote these potent thinkers, but will only include those excerpts which seem most vital.

The power of art lies in its ability to acknowledge and represent the questions that we as humans are necessarily confronted with. The essence of our existence is intangible and undefinable. It seems that all humans, through the mechanisms that define us as such, make a perpetual, albeit futile, effort to understand ourselves and our surroundings. We can only be certain of our desire for certainty, and it is the role of art to examine this unrelinquishable urge.

In the noble words of Joseph Conrad:

Confronted by the same enigmatical spectacle [as the thinker or scientist] the artist descends within himself, and in the lonely region of stress and strife, if he be deserving and fortunate, he finds the terms of his appeal. This appeal is made to our less obvious capacities: to that part of our nature which, because of the warlike conditions of existence, is necessarily kept out of sight within the more resisting and hard qualities - like the vulnerable body within a steel armor. His appeal is less loud, more profound, less distinct, more stirring - and sooner forgotten. Yet its effect endures forever. The changing wisdom of successive generations discards ideas, questions facts, demolishes theories. But the artist appeals to that part of our being which is not dependent on wisdom: to that in us which is a gift and not an acquisition - and, therefore, more permanently enduring. He speaks to our capacity for delight and wonder, to the sense of mystery surrounding our lives; to our sense of pity, and beauty, and pain; to the latent feeling of fellowship with all creation - and to the subtle but invincible
conviction of solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts, to the solidarity in dreams, in joy, in sorrow, in aspirations, in illusions, in hope, in fear, which binds men to each other, which binds together all humanity - the dead to the living and the living to the unborn.

I am in complete agreement with Conrad here, and having established the intention behind my work, it should be said that the method undertaken to achieve those ends is of great importance. I believe that purity is a vital component in the successful completion of communication. I do not intend to entirely discount the use of allegory, narrative or symbolism as means to convey aspects of human nature in art, however these approaches are for me, inconsistent with the essential nature of the medium of painting. The core of meaning in art need not be obtained via a filtered experience.

It seems to me that the level of intensity of the art experience has a significant relationship to the directness with which the issues are spoken. The art experience should in some way echo the life experience. For this occurrence to take place, the work must not be comprised of individual symbolic elements that require assembling through a series of independent conclusions. The work must become that which it is attempting to address and not simply exist as an illustration of it. Only in this way can the experience be accurate in its relation to life. Art that succeeds in doing this can cease to be merely an idea that represents something and can become a reality in its own right.

Susan Sontag makes strong claims for direct sensual experience as a more meaningful way of understanding art than that provided by interpretation. She states:

In some cultural contexts, interpretation is a liberating act. It is a means of revising, of transvaluing, of escaping the dead past. In other cultural contexts, it is reactionary, impertinent, cowardly, stifling.

Today is such a time, when the project of interpretation is largely reactionary, stifling. Like the fumes of the automobile and of heavy industry which befoul the urban atmosphere, the effusion of interpretations of art today poisons our
sensibilities. In a culture whose already classical dilemma is the hypertrophy of the intellect at the expense of energy and sensual capability, interpretation is the revenge of the intellect upon art.

In most modern instances, interpretation amounts to the philistine refusal to leave the work of art alone. Real art has the capacity to make us nervous. By reducing the work of art to its content and then interpreting that, one tames the work of art. Interpretation makes art manageable, comfortable.

Sontag goes on further to claim that those prone to reach for interpretation when confronting a work of art are only expressing their lack of response to what is there before them. This refers back to Conrad's claims concerning the "gift" that is utilized when experiencing sophisticated levels of art and, though this may sound somewhat elitist, I believe it to be true.

I am quite confident in the direction that my thinking currently takes in this regard. I have come in contact with the writings of many great individuals that confirm what I have found to be true. This is by no means to say, though, that my current work successfully conveys my concerns. This is something that may never be entirely within my grasp. One potential difficulty that I see in my work is that, to some, it is of a nature that invites interpretation. I do not feel particularly responsible for this state of affairs, though, for as Sontag states (her essay was written in 1964, I believe things to have worsened since) it seems to be a common tendency among art world adherents to break a work down into a neat, easily digestible package. Having said this, I must admit that it could prove beneficial to find a way to speak of this in the work itself - for the work to present itself as something that should be experienced directly. This has been considered at some length but it is very difficulty to put into practice. This points toward further exploration and makes for an exciting prospect for the future. Surprisingly, the sheer difficulty of saying anything important through the medium of painting has not been the source of discouragement in my endeavor thus far. On the
contrary, this tremendous challenge has inspired interest, awe even, and a continuously fresh sense of possibilities.
POSTSCRIPT

The work discussed in this thesis represents the direction my thinking has taken over, approximately, the past year. None of the paintings in the exhibition are more than ten months old. Several changes have taken place in both form and content in my work during my course of study here at Ohio State, but it is my belief that a common underlying core of meaning unites all of the work done here to some degree. My primary concerns regarding memory and imagination, beauty, hope and disillusionment as items of content have remained consistent. It is only concerning specificity in the work that changes have been evident. Upon my arrival into the program, my work dealt with a more specific "Man vs. Nature" theme, (though even at this point, essentially non-declamatory) but this direction became superseded by a concern to avoid making claims to right and wrong.

Stylistically, the work has remained relatively consistent. An emphasis on structure, fragmentation and variety are basic to the way I naturally work and have played a very conspicuous role from the first painting. All of the subsequent paintings have made use of these means. The most obvious changes have merely been an issue of materials.

One thing that should be understood through this, the written portion of the thesis, is that I would like to remove my personal point of view from the work, but despite this hope it is acknowledged that this is an impossibility. Questions may be asked as to why I chose to talk about street signs or Italian Neo-realism here, or why I claim that
Schnabel is a contemporary genius, or why I think interpretation is simple minded. The answers to questions of this sort are the constituents that define my being. This is how the world has manifested itself in me, and I cannot venture outside of my finite scope of understanding. Hence, this thesis is by nature perpetually self-disproving.
LIST OF REFERENCES


Plate I Dissector
Plate II Untitled
Plate III Anti-Irony Act, 1791

YOU'RE OK
I'M ALL TALK
Plate IV Night Fire

Impending Race Riots
Plate V Dry Rockin'
Plate VI Granny

[Image of a drawing with text: "I tried to see that old man again"]
Plate VII Sunburger
Plate VIII Bones(s)
Plate IX Finitude
Plate X Xotic
Plate XI The Art Project