DAYS OF MY LIFE

A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Master of Fine Art in the
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by

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* * * * *

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JULY 29, 1958
1984

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STUDIES IN PAINTING AND DRAWING WITH GEORG HEIMDAL,
ROBERT SCHWARTZ, AND TODD SLAUGHTER.

STUDIES IN SCULPTURE WITH TODD SLAUGHTER.

STUDIES IN CERAMICS WITH ROBERT SHAY.
PREFACE

Last night I spent the night back home in Gallia County. A magnificent and sleepy country. It is oak country, jersey country, sod country.

I slept in my grandparent's house which is a huge white home with National Geographic on the end table.

This morning I have a sort of torpid joy in my heart as I leave my grandparent's home. I ride by the slow and muddy Ohio River. There are red barns leaning into the ground and cottonwoods with their trunks painted white. Under the trees I see houses with window watches overhead.

I pass by a rusting cemetery. A cemetery that bears my family name. I have felt the sense of death there.

So rich is the morning air. I am full of love for this land. Someday I will come back and inhabit this land again.
IN THE BEGINNING

"I cannot believe you want to race a bicycle instead of going to college." That is what my friends said thirteen years ago in the summer of 1977. Even though I wanted to go to college my passion for cycling was so strong I could not imagine anything that would motivate me with the zeal that cycling provided. Heck, I was going to make the Olympic team.

It took me three years and the 1980 Olympic boycott to realize that maybe there is more to life than being in great shape and uneducated. I started thinking about college again.

In the winter of 1980 I started hanging around The Cleveland Institute of Art because I liked a girl who was a student there. One night in her studio I made a painting. The next quarter I took a class at the Institute. Ten years later I am writing this thesis.
PASSION IS WHAT MAKES ME AN ARTIST

I am not really a complex person. The reasons I paint may not seem complex either. On the surface it looks simple enough. I like making art; I am good at making art; therefore I will continue making art. I have a great passion within me for making art. Passion for art making means that in some way or other everything in my life is related to my art making.

A good example that illustrates my attitude happened two years ago.

In 1986 I dropped out of graduate school because my love for cycling seemed to be pulling me away from painting. I still had thoughts of being an Olympic athlete. In my preparation for the Olympic trials I moved to Belgium.

In the Belgium region called Flanders, I raced against the world’s best cyclists in their own backyard. I raced over their wind-swept plains, the cobbled roads, and the tracks that Napolean’s troops built; always riding in miserable weather.

Belgium, particularly Flanders, is where bicycle racing is rooted. Being part of a great race in Flanders, I could feel myself entering the soul of the people; a rather dour
soul at that. In hind-sight, I believe that bicycle racing is a reflection of the character of the Flemish people. The people of Flanders see bicycle racing as a metaphor for their own struggles with the elements, their land, and invading armies.

It is said that cycling is a sport that defies the imagination. It is a sport that allies beauty and bravery in such a way I cannot help but be moved. It has moved me to painting again. It also convinced me to incorporate a subtle form of landscape into my paintings.

I went for two years, 1987-88, without touching a paint brush, but when it was time to paint again, I knew. It was not hard to paint again. The paintings just came out of me. Painting after painting. I could not make sketches fast enough. I did all the paintings in my thesis show in about three months. It is as if they are one big continuous painting to me. Two years without painting - just looking at the land - was very beneficial to me. After all, I have heard that painting is 90 percent looking.

I still ride my bicycle a lot. I use my time on the bicycle as a self-styled form of pain therapy, also known as "cyclist's high". First I pedal until everything hurts, my back, legs, everything. Then it just gets so easy. Cycling allows me to purge all my bad humor and nervous tension. At
the end of a couple of hours in the saddle, I come in relaxed and at peace. What can be more addictive than a sport that allows you to like yourself?

For a painter, cycling is perfect. All the long hours alone in the beautiful, constantly changing scenery inspire me. Cycling is for the loner. Artists are also loners.
MAKING MY PAINTINGS

The actual style of my painting is loosely based on fifty years of Abstract Expressionism with a little help from one hundred years of Impressionism. It is important for my paintings to be rich, splashy, and very spontaneous. To gain this in my painting I work very quickly and I do not second guess my actions while in the act of painting. When I'm not painting I spend hours thinking about what my next move will be. This does not mean that I sit and stare at the paintings for hours. Most of my painting decisions happen while I am riding my bike.

RISKY BUSINESS

I learned how to paint during my undergraduate years. My first influences were watching an upper classman named Steve Dense and listening to an instructor named Gordon Lee.

Steve's paintings were more like cake and he was a cake decorator. He had an amazing way of moving very thick paint on the canvas as though it was cake icing. When he painted, everything happened on the canvas. He mixed all the paint directly on the painting's surface as he went.
Painting in this fashion makes everything very risky. It either works and you have a brilliant spontaneous painting or you have mud. I paint in a similar, risky manner and I know I can lose a painting at anytime.

Gordon Lee did not teach me much about painting, but he did teach me a lot about looking. He explained to me that painting is more about looking than painting.

FLOATING OBJECTS

People ask me about the objects in my paintings. Do they represent people, animals, or creatures? My best answer is I do not really know. But, I had an idea once about what influenced me to make those objects.

When I first started making the objects in my paintings I only thought of them as reoccurring shapes. After a while I identified them as objects. They may have something to do with my childhood in southern Ohio during which there was a three year period of U.F.O. scares and para-normal happenings. These events came to a head with the collapse of the Silver Bridge spanning the Ohio River at Gallipolis. A lot of people died on the bridge and it seemed to add fuel to the stories of U.F.O.'s in the area and the chance that extra-terrestrials had caused the bridge to fall.
This theory seems a bit out in left field to me. Members of my family, however, saw things they could not explain, and I still think I witnessed the passing of an object in our farm field.

So, with a wink of my eye, I say I do not know what they are or where they come from. I just seem to be good at making them, and I cannot stop including them in my paintings. They are whatever you want them to be.

I plan to continue making art with objects that seem to run, fly, float, and sink into the landscape. These are landscapes conceived in my mind from the years and miles of landscape that have passed by me while I rode on my bike.

I know I do not have all the answers about my art, but I am only 31 years old. I still have some time.
Appendix
Plate II
Untitled
1989
Plate III  Untitled  1989