THE SPACE BETWEEN

A Thesis

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by

Peter Timothy Metzler

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Master's Examination Committee:
Mary Jo Bole
Richard Roth
Bob Shay

Approved by:

[Signature]

Adviser
Department of Art
It was totally inexplicable, but for all that it seemed all the more real to her, because the most basic things in life exist without explanation and without cause, containing their own reason within themselves. 1
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Bob Shay
John Thrasher

And to all those (mentioned and unmentioned), who have given me strength and support in both my life and work during my two years at Ohio State: I will miss you.
VITA

July 19, 1958
1985
1989

Born - Kitchener, Ontario, Canada
B.A., Antioch University, Yellow Springs, Ohio
M.A., Arkansas State University, Jonesboro, Arkansas

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Art
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CHAPTER I

Text

I

Although I came to Ohio State as a maker of ceramic objects, this current work celebrates the beginning of my journey into painting. My first year in graduate school was a time of great internal struggle and flailing about: unsure of my place, my work, or my direction, I turned back to myself—my body and personal history—as a focal point for the beginning and content of my work. I brought the world in close, with myself at the center, in the hope that by looking inward I could gaze out at that which surrounded me with greater clarity, keener vision, and a certain open-ended moral sensitivity.

II

Due to its immediacy, the quickness with which an image can be generated, its historical relationship with drawing and self-portraiture, the accessibility of scale, and my love for the medium, I began to paint. I approached this act of painting with both trepidation and hope, for I knew not what to expect nor, exactly, how to proceed. I have entered a doorway, perhaps, or a point of departure: I feel that this work represents the space between my first (awkward) attempts at self-expression and meaning, and the more fully developed and mature work that (I trust) lies ahead.
III

I cut and assemble plywood in the shape of a map; I project my body onto the studio wall; the Western Hemisphere takes shape in tin, rubber, and wax; I walk home with the moon full in the night sky; I pray to certain Gods; I dream of sitting on a rock, my skin pierced from the inside by the feathers of a hawk; I have turned thirty-three; I sing with John in our basement studio (together); I remember a reptilian past and imagine a place without time; I read William Blake, Robert Irwin, Lewis Hyde, and the criticism of Arthur Danto; I look at the work of Elizabeth Murray, Phillip Guston, Joseph Beuys, and Sigmar Polke; I stand in a labyrinth of white marble and parched earth; I am learning to paint; I know it will soon be time to leave; I (still) dream of truth and the suspension of disbelief.

IV

There are certain things we cannot talk about, that I cannot say to you. Mystery still lives in this world: acts, images, and words that cannot be spoken or explained, only revealed. In his book, The Gift, Lewis Hyde suggests that:

The greatest art offers us the images by which to imagine our lives. And once the imagination has been awakened, it is procreative: through it we can give more than we were given, say more than we had to say. “If we become the aliment and the wet,” says Whitman of his poems, “they will become flowers, fruits, tall branches and trees.” A work of art breeds in the ground of the imagination. In this way the imagination creates the future. ²

There is mystery in both the production and consumption of images, and although submerged—revealed slowly over time, perhaps, or in the flash of instantaneous recognition—the creative activity of art-making is the remaking of the self, the world, and all that they contain.
Like the gift of food which strengthens only when consumed, creative activity nourishes vision. It is celebration, for it matters not whether the image is true or false, proved or disproved, realistic or abstract: what matters is that I find the means to live my life with passion, imagination, discipline, attention, and an active intelligence. The creation of images is a work that nurtures the imagination of possibility, giving hope and meaning to my present situation and time.

I was born naked, but not so now.

From what life-flow do I take example, from what in this vast seminar of experience and memory do I make my own? There is a feast going on around me and I am consumed with hunger. How do I answer William Blake, who passionately incites the artist to drive his horse and cart over the bones of the dead? To make distinct this thing from that, to value one thing over another, to sit at this table and consume all that is before me: I must chew well before spitting out what is not my own: I must make tradition live in my own body, and take form through my own hand and mind.

I live in a world based on power, self-interest, violence, and threat; in a culture that lacks any sustainable vehicles for conflict-resolution, peace-making, or forgiveness. Its faith: a quick ride to heaven. Its politics: an act of obliterating
memory. And its understanding of history is blinded by the short-term maintenance of the status-quo and the blind pursuit of immediate possession. Art is of this world, and while both contain terrifying paradoxes and disappointments, the making of images, the act of painting, the creative acts of writing and speaking: all are vehicles for the preservation of hope, of future possibility, of images (once imagined) made real. In the words of historian Ernst Fischer: “It is the historical possibility projected from the past and the present, into the future.”

VIII

First, put aside the desire to judge immediately; acquire the habit of just looking. Second, do not treat the object as an object for the intellect. Third, just be ready to receive, passively, without intermediating yourself. This nonconceptualization...may seem to represent a negative attitude, but from it springs the true ability to contact things directly and positively.

Art must integrate morality and knowledge.

As a model, the creative activity of painting allows for the integration of morality and knowledge, while at the same time suggesting a vision (an ordering of possibilities) that is beyond valuing, beyond the assignment of a moral hierarchy to the world in which we live. It is a point of view, neither fixed nor static, and one way to engage the world directly and (possibly) without bias.

I am very hopeful.
There is something very much akin to the Buddhist precept of "right action" at work in the act of painting, but I do not have the language to speak of it.

I sit in front of this darkened window, my fingers on the keys of this typewriter, and listen to the quiet rhythm of insects in the trees outside. The words I write become patterns and intonations, and I am reminded that all is not bookmarks and footnotes, nor this academic seminar of word-speech and logic. The change from instinct to intellect and back again is terrifying, and when conscious of this change, I shrink back as if facing my shadow in a mirror. Yet in my work—as, perhaps, in all that I hope to do—I return near to where I started and, if the spirits of the dead are with me and I have chewed my food well, will know the place for the first time. As the poet Santayana has suggested, life is free play. And for the soul that is buoyant, full-blooded, and not too much starved:

Why should we willingly miss anything, or precipitate anything, or be angry with folly, or in despair at any misadventure? In this world there should be none but gentle tears, and fluttering tip-toe loves. It is a great Carnival, and amongst these lights and shadows of comedy, these roses and vices of the playhouse, there is no abiding.
APPENDIX

M.F.A. Thesis Exhibition: Documentation of individual works
PRIMUM NON NOCERE  1990
Mixed media on plywood
70" x 74"
II. still, my present shared  1990
Mixed media on plywood
70" x 74"
III. **turning away**  1991  
Mixed media on plywood  
70" x 74"
IV. contingency  1991
Mixed media on plywood
47" x 120"
V. dog generator 1991
Mixed media on plywood
67" x 95"
VI. meridian  1991
Mixed media on plywood
67" x 95"
VII. *C'est n'est ce pas une sortie* 1991

*with John Thrasher*

Mixed media on plywood

72" x 108"
VIII. **today, tomorrow, forever** 1991
Mixed media installation
89" x 75" x 18"
IX. **a point of view creates more waste (I myself am WAR)** 1991
Mixed media installation
86" x 288"
X. hunger, my vessel, my brush  1990
Mixed media installation
48" x 108" x 16"
XI. and make myself over as if waxen and of milk  1991
Mixed media installation
49\" x 94\" x 16\"
NOTES


SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


Santayana, G. *Carnival*. n.p., 1921.


