ART STORIES: SYNTHESIS OF HOMO MECHANICUS DEFECTIO

A Thesis

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by

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"Art Stories" is an account and critique of a selected group of prints I created during my graduate studies at The Ohio State University. It is a thesis document which outlines my thoughts when I was working to produce lithographic and intaglio prints. The stories are a collection of events that invoked the creation of the artwork. The experience conjured strange and sometimes insightful ideas and concepts. "Art Stories" is my recounting of the experience and the results.
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Being an artist that makes prints is a very unique privilege because it links me with a long and enduring tradition of the visual language of the printed word and image. Prints by Durer, Rembrandt, Goya, Bellows, Kollwitz, M.C. Escher, Motherwell, Blackburn, Rauschenburg, Johns, and Dine, are substantial citations of the rich history that precedes me and my work.

From these artists, I have learned that seeing and interpreting are two different functions; and passing on one's interpretation to someone else is still another function. But this is where an artist's uniqueness lies. It is their ability to visually share with others what they have experienced. Making art is always about something, and that something is unmistakably real to the human condition. The most compelling part of making prints for me is the continuing dynamics of learning how to reinvent what I do as an artist. Working in the print media lends itself to this constant search.

I do not make prints for anyone else. This is who I am. I have made art as long as can remember. For me, making art is the equal to breathing, sleeping and dreaming, and eating to nourish my body. It is
an intriguing part of my life. Without it, I am not living. I will continue to nourish and maintain my creative vision wherever it may lead me or transform into.

For now, the vision is a portrayal of the functional, man-made objects that conduct reiterative actions humans need to have performed. The art that I hope to evolve and produce falls into the category of high art, but it is not art for art's sake. In order for the art to have value for me, it has to portray an artist's environment and culture. As the poet and playwright Amiri Baraka once wrote:

"High art, first of all, must reflect the experiences of the human being, the emotional predicament of the man, as he exists, in the defined world of his being. It must be produced from the legitimate emotional resources of the soul in the world. It can never be produced by evading these resources or pretending that they do not exist. It can never be produced by appropriating the withered emotional responses of some strictly social idea of humanity. High art, and by this I mean any art that would attempt to describe or characterize some portion of the profound meaningfulness of human life with any finality or truth, cannot be based on the superficialities of human existence. It must issue from real categories of human activity, truthful accounts of human life, and not fancied accounts of the attainment of cultural privilege by some willingly preposterous apologists for one social 'order' or another."

For now, this is the best description I can give that summarizes what I am ultimately trying to do with the prints I make. I do not believe in gimmicks or deliberately trying to confuse viewers with some pompous and outrageous statement in my work. I just want to be honest and unhindered about what I do. Great art is both simple and complex, and it tells the truth. Truth may be somewhat elusive at times, but it has a concrete effect on what any person attempts to do. It will always find a way to manifest itself no matter the situation. Art and truth are a manifestation of the complex reality we engage in and
experience everyday. The reality of life, or human existence, can be both conscious and subconscious, tangible and intangible. No matter if these elements can be verbalized or not, their impulses are felt by the artist and eventualty they are translated into what we refer to as a work of art.
CHAPTER 2

Artist Statement

Since the very nature and process of making prints suits my personality, it was only logical that I gravitated toward the medium. I have received most of the images of the art world through books and magazines since childhood, and as a result, the print medium has become a familiar vehicle to communicate my visual ideas.

Like any medium, prints have their own aesthetic and language. Learning to see and interpret the language and aesthetic of prints has become a chore which requires learning to produce and recognize its properties. This task is very similar to learning to read, write, and speak another language. To know one's medium is to know how to best express what it can say. Like diagramming a sentence to see if it makes sense and conveys its meaning accurately, a well structured print must also be similarly analyzed to see if it conveys a complete thought.

The ability to understand and determine completeness is part of an artist's human capacity for understanding their subject matter. I see this ability as a way an artist can transfer themselves into the print and actually feel its creative physical and aesthetic properties. This is a
particularly important kind of comprehension which requires some openness to experiencing the image change from a mental picture to an actual one.

For me, it is the making of the art and not the finished piece that is a stimulus for my creation process. Physically creating artwork is a rush I get no matter the result. An analytical approach gives my work its visual form, but an intuitive process of actually physically creating the image gives it life. Once this is achieved, the work is completed.

I cannot partition myself from the irregularities that are around me. But, every artist must make their own statement because that is essentially what being an artist is all about. More importantly, every artist demands that statement from themselves to justify what they are doing. They must, therefore, make themselves vulnerable and make choices. They must be willing to say, "Here I am. You can love or hate me but I will no longer be ignored."
CHAPTER 3
Early Impressions, 1976-1988

As a child, my earliest memories and thoughts were as structured and analytical as they are today. Of course, I am more aware and knowledgeable of the things around me, but that same methodical approach in thinking is still the same. When I was in the second grade, I remember telling one of my teachers that I believed clouds must be composed of steam from a lake or the Gulf of Mexico. She looked at me in strange way and asked who told me such information. I told her that I reasoned on my own that clouds could not be cotton balls, like many of other students thought, because they would be too heavy to float in the sky. My second reason was that when too many clouds were in the sky, they resembled a choppy sea of water and became dark grey. When this happened, rain fell from the sky. Therefore, I concluded that clouds were water vapor in the sky, similar to steam from boiling hot water.

To me, just about everything could be explained -- accept for God (I still have not figured him out.) Being analytical did have its drawbacks. Since I was a kid everyone has told me to be quiet. Very few people would answer my questions. For instance, I wanted to know why
the day sky was light blue and the night sky was dark blue and not true black. Or, why the sky and ocean are blue, but most plants are green. Should not the vegetation be blue also? No one would give me answers that were satisfactory to me. It would be years later that I would find out that the atmosphere and ocean acted as prisms to refract blue light from the sun to give them their blue color and that scientists have discovered that the local color of the sun is actually green. Having a green sun may be the answer to why photosynthesis in plants produces the color green in sufficient sun light.

But as a kid, these were troubling questions. I was told by older adults that ignorance and fear can be ones worst enemies. So, I was always trying to find out all I could. I spent many hours reading encyclopedias at home and consuming as much information as I could. I eventually received the nickname Encyclopedia Brown. The two main things that influence me to read encyclopedias were the documentaries I saw on T.V. everyday and Star Trek reruns I watched right after the cartoons went off in the mid-afternoon. The documentaries came on just before cartoons did on PBS, and they covered everything from history and archeology to science and animals. For additional information on these subjects, I would look up it in encyclopedias.

Star Trek provided me with early glimpses of science, space travel, and science fiction. As a result, I would read all I could about space travel, heavenly bodies, and technology. Another aspect of Star Trek that fascinated me was first officer Spock. Spock was a Vulcan and was

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brought up on his planet to be logical in his thinking and behavior. His logical and methodical approach to solving problems intrigued me. No matter if Captain Kirk, Dr. McCoy, or engineer Scottie lost their nerve under pressure, Spock always remained calm, cool, and collected. I admired that trait in him because he always carried out the most sensible and logical action.

About this same time, I was becoming more and more interested in art, especially cartoons and comic books. I had always drawn pictures but never considered it as art making. Drawing was just another activity I did, but I tended to draw more often than most other kids. At the time, I enjoyed drawing comic book characters, and the only professional artists I knew were cartoonists and comic book artists.

One of my earliest influences in fine art was Chuck Close's portraits. My brother Marlin's, who is also an artist, favorite artists were the photo-realists of the late 1960's and early 1970's. When we were kids, he would bring home books from the public library and school with pictures of their art work in them. I was about seven years old and Marlin was twelve, but we felt a kinship to these artists. Close, Estes, and Flack were names I came to be familiar with, and their aesthetic would have a great influence on me for years to come.

Chuck Close interested me the most because of his use of portraiture. I had always been interested in portraiture because much of art history in the encyclopedias I read was comprised of it. Therefore, as a kid, I never drew hot rods or cute little animals; instead, I drew people.
Usually I drew scenes of superheroes or sports figures from what I saw on T.V. and/or in comic books. Sports figures were like superheroes but non-fictional. So, if I was not drawing the Dallas Cowboys winning their fifteenth consecutive Super Bowl, I would be drawing Spiderman battling the Green Goblin. Basically, I would retell events I encountered on T.V. or in books and create new scenarios for them.

Like most people growing up in East Texas, I was a Dallas Cowboys fan. If the Cowboys lost a football game, I would make a series of drawings correcting the "errors" made by the referees to give the Cowboys an impressive victory -- especially if they were playing the Washington Redskins. Spiderman, I watched everyday after school, just before Star Trek. The episode would stay on my mind until the next day, when at school I would draw Spiderman doing battle against his latest nemesis.

Close's paintings did not have action scenes in them, but they were powerful images nonetheless. Even as a child I knew his paintings were more than just bust portraits of people staring into a camera or looking back at the viewer. The figures are static and upright, but they engage the viewer directly without compromise. Close simply places his subjects in the middle of the canvas and makes them big enough to balance the dimensions of the rectangle. There are no three-quarter views, just a straight forward and honest view of the subject. In Close's portraits, the aspect of a short depth of field combined with a high visual impact is achieved through the use of very direct and frontal positioning.
of the subject. As a child, I could not fully comprehend
this about his work, nor did I have an interpreter. Nevertheless, I could
feel the power of it. By the third grade I had became a dedicated photo-
realist.
CHAPTER 4
The First Prints, 1988-93

Throughout my adolescent years, Close's influence on my work went almost unchallenged. By the seventh or eight grade, I could render any object from a photograph or life in a totally photo-realistic manner. It was not until I entered junior college at Lon Morris College, that I began to consider other artistic aesthetics as a possibility. While growing up, I was exposed to many artists and styles and "isms" of art such as impressionism, fauvism, cubism, surrealism, and pop art. The encyclopedias were full of these "isms", but I had no real interest in them. As a college freshman and sophomore, I was introduced to the works of Kathe Kollwitz, Jim Dine, Jasper Johns, and Vernon Fisher.

Going to art museums for the first time also changed the way I saw art work. The paintings and prints were no longer small pictures in encyclopedias. These new experiences opened my eyes to many other methods of physically and conceptually making art. I quickly realized that art did not have to be slick and clean to be good or beautiful. So, I began to loosen up. I tried not to render things in too much detail; instead, I let the materials speak for themselves. At first, it was a big
challenge for me to try not be too tight with my work, but I found it helped me to experiment with various drawing and painting materials.

In the spring of 1990 I started making prints. That spring was to be my graduating semester at Lon Morris College. At that time, I was a painting and drawing major with a strong interest in prints. My first and only printmaking class exposed me to making relief and screen prints. My interest in prints grew stronger when I began to experiment with intaglio prints in my own spare time. The intaglio prints were mostly drypoint and engravings on plexiglass, but the marks I created when printed onto paper, were like no other I had ever seen. Like some internal calling, I sought to learn more about printmaking.

After graduating from Lon Morris with my associate degree in art, I entered Texas A&M University at Corpus Christi (TAMU--CC) to work towards my Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) degree. My studies immediately shifted from painting to printmaking. TAMU--CC was equipped with lithographic presses, and at that point my studies in printmaking revolved around etching and lithography.

While I was at Corpus Christi, I was exposed to the work of Robert Motherwell. Intrigued with the use of abstraction and symbolism in his work, I abandoned using the figure to broaden my scope and facilities as an artist because I wanted to find out if I could do the same thing in my work without it being too "illustrative". From my perspective, Motherwell's ability to use abstract painting in his "Spanish Elegy" series to discuss the rise of Francisco Franco Salgado-Araujo and
fascism in Spain was very effective because it was also indirectly political. As a result, it had references to the fascist revolution but also to the whole struggle the Spanish people had been undergoing for over fifty years. I decided that a change in format would help me become a more well-rounded artist. Knowing I could always go back to the figure was a comfort and safety-net. Playing it safe is not always the best method for challenging oneself to grow and become better. In my case, the absence of the figure would bring forth that challenge.

I soon found myself using man-made objects to replace my figures, and they became characters in their own way. I have always been around mechanical objects. My father, before he retired, was a construction worker and mechanic, and he was never without tools or something to work on. I remember him describing to people how similar vehicles were to human beings. For instance: the gas tank is the stomach, the oil filter is like a kidney, the battery is like the liver, and of course the driver is the brain. He had an analogy for every part on a car and organ inside a person.

Over a period of time, I realized that the objects in my work were stand-ins or substitutes for people. I guess it indicates that my work is more about what people do, and the objects I choose to represent them are metaphors for particular human activities. My work became less straightforward than it was when I used actual figures, and it became more about concepts and ideas related to the human condition. I was fascinated by man-made objects doing chores that people could not
physically do themselves or tasks they would not want to do. I created a body of work which portrayed man's dependence on machines for physical strength for construction, increased mobility, and added leisure time.

These concepts are demonstrated through the use of locomotives, welding and construction equipment and parking meters. Traffic lights and road signs were also used in my art work as indicators of a sacrifice, or detour, modern society had made for progress. I also noticed that most mechanical objects around me were composed and designed from simple geometric forms. The machines were near perfect in the aspect of form serving its function. However, the goal of perfection which is necessity and trial and error is what created them. I only saw these machines in their intended element operating at maximum efficiency.

It was not until I worked in a fabrication and welding shop one summer that I saw these machines being made and fully comprehended that form, function, and durability was one whole thing. Almost all the objects made in the shop were made by machines and tools that were not quite as complicated as the product. But a collaboration of these simpler tools created a more complex one. I began to understand that tools and machines are an extension of man's mental and physical capacities, collaborating and adjusting to perform a task that imagination and necessity has made possible.
CHAPTER 5
Ohio State: The Proofing Stage, 1994-96

As I analyzed the aspect of machines making machines, I realized there was a regression from the complicated to hand-wrought tools. No matter how complex a device was, I could trace its construction back to its hands-on origins. At this point, I wanted to look at the evolution of people and society since the advent of the Industrial Revolution in order to compare that to how far society has evolved to keep up with the technology it has created. I realized that we seemed to be too far ahead in creating with new technology without knowing the consequences of new man-made products in our environment.

By the time I was thinking in these terms and making prints, I was entering graduate school at The Ohio State University. I decided to build upon what I had started as an undergraduate student. At OSU, I set out to create a series of prints using functional objects to demonstrate how dysfunctional people can be in society in comparison to the facade of new technology. In a way, I wanted to show how the majority of people in our society had not kept pace with technology or had not evolved to function as well as simple machines to resolve daily issues. Each print
would in some way represent a crisis that cannot be resolved. The image itself is not a true statement of the tragic circumstances of society. The tragedy exists in how we can make so-called perfect machines in an imperfect world. This dilemma is in how we appear to be moving forward with technology while our basic human relationships are at a stand-still. And because of our shortcomings, the objects we make and use to better our lives are never used to optimum capacity; we do not have the ability to maximize our own internal talents.

The concept of functionality, closure, and resolution are broad topics that intertwine when I am attempting to make a print. I want the print to be like a simple machine in which every aspect of its construction suits its form and function, both visually and conceptually. For this reason, I will explain in this thesis how I created each print and the sequences involved so that the reader can "see" what the viewer may not see in the prints. Also, the works have a chronological progression in their development, reflecting changing events around me. Hopefully, as I explain each print, a better understanding will be gained by the reader into what has influenced image choices in my prints and how those choices manifest themselves.

The prints are a mixture of conceptual and visual approaches I have utilized when in the act of making art. The works selected are a good representation of numerous works produced, and they tell the story of what I was thinking and reacting to during the fall of 1994 through the summer of 1996.
The prints are about ideas and events that I have experienced and interpreted through my work. From there, a chronological influence of events filter into them to help resolve and bring some level of closure to the ideas dealt with in the prints. Even as I speak and write about the works, they continue to evolve and give a different perspicuity to create new works while reelucidating the past ones. Therefore, my inclinations towards completed works and their content may change as my creative processes gain greater complexity through more experiences in making prints.
CHAPTER 6
Seasonal Games, 1994

The game of baseball is considered to be the American past-time. During the American Civil War of the 1860's it was used to help pass the time for Union soldiers when they were not in combat. After such a large exposure to the American male populace baseball became increasingly popular. The 1860's was an age of the Industrial Revolution. But while machines and factories had increased production of manufactured goods and services, baseball was a game used to bring time to a near stand-still. It helped bring order to modern man when many people were questioning twelve and fourteen hour work-shifts for thirty cents a day. The game was simple and fun and lacked the contamination of the Gilded Age of the 1870's and 1880's.

I made the print "Seasonal Games" as a review of how times had changed and how the game of baseball paralleled today's society. "Seasonal Games" demonstrates how the simple game of baseball can be rendered dysfunctional by the actions of men who can not appreciate the very things that have blessed their lives -- the game of baseball and the fans who watch them play. The piece reflected my bitter attitude.
towards the 1994 major league baseball season and the strike that ended it.

The 1994 season was an exciting one. Several players were on the brink of breaking numerous major league records. Because of these potential historical events, I thought a strike was impossible. Why would the players and owners throw away a season of potentially great memories and triumphs for revenues? It came down to just pure greed and shortsightedness. They fought and swabbled over money, and they denied the fans the opportunity to witness one of the greatest seasons ever. Not even the fans' love and support could come between the players' union and owners' greed and selfishness. Even with all the insight and history of the game, the players' union and owners could not decide on a solution to the simple issue of money.

On a lithographic plate, I started out by drawing a front and back of a first baseman's glove which was to represent two hands accepting and rejecting a possible solution. Even though there are visually two gloves in the image, I choose to use one glove. By showing the inside and backside of the first baseman's glove, the print would show opposing views of the same situation. Next, I drew a home plate between the two gloves to create a middle ground for the two opposing views that the players' union and owners held. The home plate represented the fans and their loyalty and support for the game. The gloves are further symbols of an attempt to make progress without shaking hands or the trying to get to first base via the opposing pitcher.
walking the batter. To polarize the opposing views of the gloves even more, I drew batter's boxes around them. With these objects in place, the image looked like an X-ray of a person's heart and lungs. The X-ray appeal of the image was a metaphor for probing into the closed talks of the players' union and owners. It was set up to be an overhead view of home plate with the gloves placed in both batter's boxes.

As I watched the 1994 season drift into the twilight, so did certain supporting elements to the image. First, I deleted the batter's boxes because I really did not see much of a difference between the players' union and the owners. Both sides were simply greedy. Next, the home plate became a black abyss and vanished into the darkness like the batter's boxes. As I completed the image it simply became two views of the same glove floating in a black void of nothingness like an X-ray of two cancer-ridden lungs out of breath.
Plate 2 The Watchmen
Plate 3 amaDolzi
Plate 4  All Possible Heroes Dead from Heat Exhaustion
CHAPTER 7
The Watchmen and amaDolzi, 1995

The fall of 1994 passed without a World Series, and the Winter of 1995 brought about a delayed spring training in baseball. Nevertheless, as the days grew warmer, spring activities progressed on schedule without baseball. I noticed various surveyors, engineers, and architects taking notes of OSU's geography. They were all around the campus marking areas on the sidewalks and grass with orange and green spray paint. With all this happening on a weekly basis, it was clear that a construction project was in the works.

These activities were occurring while I was rereading a graphic novel written and illustrated by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons entitled "Watchmen." By monitoring the progress of construction projects on campus and rereading "Watchmen", I found a new interpretation of the novel and a better understanding of the lithograph, "The Watchmen", that I was working on at that time.

The objects in the lithograph, a double parking meter and a surveyor's transit, were taken from the construction sites to which I was subjected every day. Unlike the rest of the objects in the construction
areas, I could find them all over campus as they preceding renovation throughout the campus landscape. Before the construction began, these two objects disappeared from that area, and they reappeared after the construction was completed. The key to my understanding of the lithograph came when these two objects reappeared in the aftermath of the campus rebuilding and repairs. The reappearance of the objects on campus marked return of order and stability. In the graphic novel, "Watchmen", the main theme was about one man’s quest for peace and order through holocaustic destruction. Simply put, one has to start over sometimes to put things in order.

"The Watchmen" became a print not just about a double parking meter and a surveyor’s transit posed like a typical Chuck Close portrait, but it also exhibited my insight and comprehension that everything I encountered, whether reading a book, an event in my life or construction on a school campus, can provide what is needed for me to bring an artwork to completion.

Inspiration for the print, "The Watchmen", came also from my idea that the parking meters and surveyor’s transit were portraits of urbanites around and about the campus or the city. This revelation came to me while I was concurrently working on a zinc plate etching entitled "amaDolzi". AmaDolzi was one of those prints that just simply revealed itself to me. I guess I was finally lucky enough to be able to perceive that there was meaning to parking meters in relation to African and Native American masks.
The image of "amaDolzi" is on an odd shaped, scrap zinc plate. The zinc plate was a nice size in area, so I decided to allow the kite shape of the plate to help dictate the image that would go onto it. By positioning the plate, or turning it in different directions, I notice that with the larger end at the top, the two longer diagonal sides of the plate came down to form a wedge. This wedge shape gave the plate a mask-like appearance. At that point, I decided to echo the shape of the plate with an actual mask. I looked at several pictures of masks and toured various antique art shops to see which type of mask would be best suited for the plate's shape.

After this strenuous search, I stepped back from the task and looked at some of my earlier prints with West African masks in them. Eventually, I chose to use a mask image from the first mask print that I ever did. The title of the print was entitled "All Possible Heroes Dead from Heat Exhaustion." The print is a lithograph I had done as an undergraduate in 1992 at TAMU-CC. The shape of the mask complimented the plate well, so I decided to use it on the plate.

The word "amaDolzi" is the Zulu for ancestral spirits. In the context of many African religions, this implies the concept of reincarnation. The print "amaDolzi" is therefore the embodiment of the idea or the representation of a person revisiting himself. This is also how I created the print "The Watchmen": by rereading, or revisiting the book that would help generate ideas for the print.
One particular thing about 1992 and the print "All Possible Heroes Dead from Heat Exhaustion" was that it was also the time of the beginning of my fascination with parking meters and how they would later be portrayed in the print "The Watchmen". This new topic sprung up out of the dilemma about parking space at TAMU--CC. Just as at OSU, growth and progress was the usual sign of success at TAMU--CC. The Texas legislature had decided that the school deserved upgrading that would be on par with its academic performance. However, with new construction projects to add new buildings as the enrollment increased, parking space became a growing concern because TAMU--CC was located on a small island.

At both TAMU--CC and Ohio State, parking spaces, like in any urban area, were becoming a less common commodity every year. Throughout the campus landscape there exists these space-time continuum posts which are used by students, staff, and faculty to structure and organize the use of space within a limited supply of coordinates during a larger demand for that space. The ritual in finding these space-time continuum posts is a reality in which almost everyone on campus must take part at some point in time.

Now as I look back on 1992 and relate in to 1996, it is clear to me that the African mask was originally chosen by me as a personification of the parking meters. For instance, as I worked on the print "The Watchmen", the objects became metaphorical subjects in a story book. The first of the two parking meters in the print represents the concept of
rented space or a chosen area, and the second parking meter is a time
clock in which workers punch in and out their work hours. The
surveyor's transit that I included is like a foreman overlooking the
project and its progress. The transit is in a frontal view which indicates
that the viewer could be being watched by an unknown character staring
through the viewfinder on the other side.

Of course, such specific information is not that readily available
for the viewer to comprehend. The surveyor's transit could be seen as
also cloaked in the disguise of a piece of artwork, just a formal
arrangement of objects. However, like a two-way mirror, it is a banal,
everyday object monitoring individuals as they walk around campus,
avoiding the construction zones. Also, since the print "Seasonal Games"
proceeded the "The Watchmen," there was still some loathing that I was
working through. This made "The Watchmen", in my view, bleak and
cynical. Its diptych composition is much like "Seasonal Games," but,
most importantly its rich, dark blacks create a similar sinister mood.

In some ways, there is a carry-over from Chuck Close's work.
Instead of an entire figure, or parking meter, I decided to just use a head
or bust composition like Close would use. The parking meter has a size
and shape that best approximate the dimensions of a mask; therefore, I
used it like a mask, which is a man-made object, to replace an actual
person's face. "AmaDolzi" becomes my portrait of another man-made
object, the parking meter, which is personified as a African mask. Even
though the parking meters are shaped like masks, they are not intended
to be masks; but, they are functioning objects in society just like the African and Native American masks are in their environment and culture. Therefore, I see the mask and parking meter as being art object and social object, both needed to bring order and structure to our daily routines.

As art objects, both "The Watchmen" and "amaDolzi" are concepts we encounter and try to understand, such as our campus environment -- parking and non-parking. As a social object, "amaDolzi" represents a functional man-made object, the parking meter, that is accessed and used during our daily routine of living. "The Watchmen" is a observation of this daily routine.
Plate 5 Reservation.
"Reservation" initially deals with the observation of the displacement or restriction one feels with the alteration of the landscape that occurs during construction of architectural structures. But, it is primarily about the isolated individual or group and his or her inability to make peace with governmental bureaus or tap into the cultural mainstream while trying to function within the "ballpark" of society.

During construction at TAMU--CC and here at OSU, restrictions are placed on where and when students, faculty, and staff can enter specific areas. Some places are blocked off completely during construction, while other sites allow access only during certain work hours. Most students will have their daily walk to class rerouted due to the changes of the campus geography. As spring and summer construction began at OSU, I felt as if I was being intruded upon. Suddenly, there were massive machines and workers that were not from OSU occupying the campus. Unlike the students, the workers seem to have liberty to go wherever their job might take them. If it meant creating a huge hole in the road in order to fix the drainage system on
campus, they did so without thought that the hole cuts off access to numerous parking spots and awaiting parking meters. Obviously, my first thoughts were a bit selfish because I only thought of my own inconvenience. The repairs and construction being done were necessary for the upkeep of the campus.

This was true at TAMU--CC as well. The construction of new buildings to accommodate the growth of the school was necessary. However, I started wondering about progress as a detriment to us all. Recently, I was watching an episode of "60 Minutes" in which the city of Atlantic City in New Jersey sought to upgrade its city by adding another large, multi-million dollar casino. The downside of this was that a middle class neighborhood, where Black people live, would be destroyed in order for a road tunnel to be built to give tourist better access to the new casino.

Ironically, the casino owners, the mayor of the city, and state officials expected the people to except the fact that they were going to lose their homes and that they would simply relocate so that the casino could be built. The mayor claimed that it must be done to save the city. That progress was needed to keep the city alive; therefore, the road and land would be reserved for the casino owners and their future customers. The fact that these people were losing their homes meant nothing because they were Black. The method of displacing people is part of American history. Whether it was kidnapping people from African or
telling the Native American population to relocate or die, it is done in the disguise of progress.

For me, the "Reserved Parking" status in the print "Reservation" pays homage to both my African and Native American heritage. Being part Creek/Cherokee, I am fascinated with the Native American concept of land as a opposed to a Western philosophy. From a Western perspective, land is to be owned and controlled, similar to what the officials are doing in Atlantic City. Even though those Black people have lived there for decades and they are taxpayers, this means nothing in comparison to financial profits.

The concept of controlling the land is very brutish and shortsighted. In the wild, animals generally mark their territorial boundaries to let animals of their own species know that a particular area is their hunting ground. This exclusive territory is needed to sustain the life and well being of that particular animal or group of animals. However, such logic in relation to humans is near nonsense. Native Americans believed that no one could own the land. Land was equated with the sky and ocean. They are things of nature, of which man is one also. Therefore, to own the land is to enslave oneself. The equivalent to owning land would be like trying to keep people in your near vicinity from breathing the same air you are inhaling. For the Native American, there was plenty of air to breath, plenty of water to drink, and plenty of land to share; therefore, they did not see the need to
reserve the land exclusively for themselves. Unfortunately, the Europeans did not see things the way the Native Americans did.

The United States government claimed the land and reserved it for white settlers, some of whom were still in Europe. Eventually the Native American would be relocated to land the United States government and its settlers did not want. The land would be called reservations, land reserved for the Native Americans. In the case of Atlantic city the casino owners were still in Las Vegas, Nevada and they were simply waiting for legislators the remove those people from their homes and neighborhood so that they could move into the land reserved for them.

The "Reserved Parking" bag is the central object in the print and is surrounded by supporting structures which are conceptual in their design. The image size is 36" x 24". Within this, the entire image area is secured by a two inch border made up of puzzle pieces around the entire rectangle. This puzzle is a conceptual link into the peripheral unknown. No matter how deeply one probes into something or some idea, there is always a mystery left. Old questions are answered while new knowledge stirs up new questions. So, the puzzle is a symbol for those intangible links from the inside of the piece to outside influences that help generate its creation, or the condition it might represent.

Next, a white rectangle echoes the frame and shape of the image. This rectangle is an area for the parking meter. The importance of the white rectangle is the idea that everything visually and conceptually
specific takes place inside it. The outside puzzle is the vague and obscure linking to an unseen reality. Also, the rectangle references a batter's box in baseball. A pitch can not be thrown by the pitcher unless the batter has both feet inside the box. In other words, the batter must be contained in the box in order for the pitcher to take action against him.

Conceptually, the batter's box is not overt, but the use of a home plate helps relay the message. The home plate is also inside the batter's box instead of on the outside. It is located in the lower one-third of the image and is a dark void from which the parking meter is rising. Home plate indicates starting and finishing. The parking meter could easily be rising from or lowering into the home plate. Its dark structure implies its is more like a trap door or a hidden passage.

The parking meter becomes a portrait of a Native American Indian or the Black people facing the loss of their homes, and it is a batter with a bag over its head, blinded them. They are tied up at home with the American regime looming in the background, represented by a flag. Behind the flag is a ghost image of a train wheel. Together, the train and flag represents the doctrine of Manifest Destiny and the westward movement of the United States government and its settlers. The batter's box acts as boundaries, a prison without walls for the Native American who is under siege in his own home and native land, and it acts to represent the captivity of Black people. Like the batter, they must function inside the box as the pitcher (Uncle Sam) dictates the game to them with his pitches. But because the batter has been handicapped by
the opposing team and forced to play by their rules without knowing them, he will strike-out every time.
Plate 6 A Ready-Made.
CHAPTER 9

A Ready-Made: The Documentation and Theory, 1996

The print entitled "A Ready-Made" isolates the idea of the inability to access help from government officials a little more than the print "Reservation". The image area of "A Ready-Made" is only 12" x 9", making it one-eighth the size of "Reservation". It is a five color print which combines four photomechanical lithographic plates and one intaglio plate. The four litho plates are printed to recreate an actual telephone book page with a negative ghost image of a train on a thin, 12" x 9" sheet of relief printing paper. This was an important method and concept since all telephone books are printed photomechanically and lithographically. Also, this method accurately mimics a book page and was convincing to the eye and touch. However, my page was carefully printed by hand as a limited edition with a personal touch, while a real page would be massively produced by an offset (indirect) lithographic machine. From here the image is printed as chine colle onto a 18" x 14" sheet of gray paper with a 12" x 9" key image which is from an intaglio plate. This process gives it a more physical presence than the four previous colors due to its embossment of the paper. Another imposing aspect of the key image is that is a representational image of a small,
under-privileged girl with a positive ghost image, from the lithographs of a train, in the background. The positive ghost image of the train matches up with its negative ghost image, creating some volume and mass to the train as it recedes into the background. In the end, the five plates and two sheets of paper come together to make one image and tell one story.

The image began with me being selected to make a print for Southern Graphic Conference that was to be held at West Virginia University. It was for this reason that I temporarily stopped working on "Reservation" in order to complete it. Some of the ideas that were being dealt with in "Reservation" would help jump-start "A Ready-Made". The theme of the Conference was "Remote Sensing" and my topic to work with was "Surveillance." I was more interested in the theme "Remote Sensing" and how that related to the print "Reservation" from the standpoint of the Native American and the displaced residents of Atlantic City. So, I began to ponder the phrase "Remote Sensing"; it sounded like a fancy phrase for some concept that I was probably already familiar with. Of course, the term "Remote Sensing" is very old. It has its origins with map makers and militaries in Europe from around the time of early hot air balloons. It became another way of surveying the land more accurately but in a more indirect way. Remote sensing is a form of surveying or surveillance. Defining the phrase in a contemporary view was the first thing I thought I should do. Nevertheless, the more critical thinking I gave it, the more political the term seemed since I had related
it to the greedy casino owners taking people homes away from them. Politics and the idea of displacement were especially apparent in the context of a conference where the work would be shown because no one had made reference to the term's origin. This made me feel as if the conference was going to use the phrase in a totally different way, again without acknowledging its past.

"Remote Sensing". Sense what from afar? All I could imagine was a couch potato turning on the T.V. or a sniper from a book depository window. How was the conference going to use the phrase was a constant question I asked myself. What I really wanted was to continue to use my current imagery and ideas. I knew I wanted to put a section of a train in the work and maybe another parking meter. With all the metaphors and historical associations American culture has with the train, it is an icon for use with a broad range of topics. I simply just approached the print as I generally do--with a concept that would evolve and become more clear like so many others have been resolved. Along with my already completed works as reference, I began to work through this piece. At this point, I began drawing out the image in my sketch book. And of course, the first object rendered was a large wheelbase section of a train, an image I have and continue to use in much of my work.

In the back of my mind was still that sketchy theme. How could I remotely sense something? I eventually referenced a telephone book page. I did this because I am constantly wiping my copper plates with newspapers and telephone book pages. Over time, I have absorbed an
understanding of the type of information they contain and the format in which they are presented. I also found it quite ironic to be using and destroying printed material to create my own prints. Telephone books are less media oriented than newspapers, are as communication and they are free. The telephone book is more about finding things a person wants or needs to accomplish a task or to communicate to someone.

Since we are bombarded by printed material everyday, selective reading becomes a must for us to function on a day-to-day basis. We can not read everything. Instead, we choose to read only certain pieces of newspapers and magazines. Usually this is done to entertain or inform oneself. But occasionally, when we inform ourselves, we immediately act on what we have obtained. No one memorizes the telephone book. It is strictly for reference to find someone or something. However, we do occasionally memorize certain coordinates such as street addresses and telephone numbers to contact a specific person or arrive at a particular place. Since, there is a constant need for individuals to interact, exchange ideas, seek information and items, the telephone book has become an arbitrator by consensus of its community. Because, it is so accessible and common, it becomes a very mundane but a necessary book of information. It may not appear to be a book of enlightenment; nevertheless, the people and materials it relays to the seeker gives it that potential. Whatever a person wants to tap into in the society or community, the telephone book makes them available for use. But, nothing will happen unless the person accesses the information.
The page from a telephone book has a list of names that act with coordinates so they can be found on a corresponding map. Each name has an address which can be physically accessed or reached by mail while the telephone number assigned to the name can be assessed through remote means as well. The particular names (points) are in alphabetical order. But according to the addresses, the names are in a random pattern throughout the map. With this in mind, the page had to represent coordinates that access help and information. As a result, I chose a page for my print which listed government agencies or civil services. In the context of my idea, the dilemma was the issue of government and the bureaucracy behind it. How easy is it to access services from such a source? What is the government's policy on people of a particular status in our society? Do some groups get more preference over others? If so, why?

Next, I needed something that was not only frontal but confrontational and engaging to the viewer. If the image was not engaging (such as staring back at the viewer), it would easily be mistaken for another typical page in telephone book. I needed to use an unusual portrait of a person. It could not be the typical snapshot of a smiling ad for a business owner or an attorney. Creating such a different image in a repetitious telephone book would truly need to be conceptually stimulated by its relationship or conflict with the page itself. It must be someone with the bare minimum requirements for humanity. For these attributes, the person had to be either young or old,
poor, Black, and female. Such a person would draw the least amount of sympathy, compassion, and importance. To make the image stir and challenge the imagination of the viewer, the picture plane could not act as window into another dimension. With this in mind, I attempted to make the image into a mirror of the viewer's visual conscience and a subconscious thought about their existence.

The image and its portrayal here is what most people view this type of person to be. Ignorance and mislead stereotypes dominant people's perspective of many things around them. The print itself uses the manifestation of that consensus thought. The print becomes a consensus thought because it is this type of image that is portrayed throughout the mass media, and is a concept most everyone buys into without question. To challenge this stereotype of a poor, ignorant and helpless Black person being a burden on society brings a lot of resistance. People want to believe in this image because it empowers them. They feel less threaten by the idea of someone in this condition because this person is "obviously" powerless. And in a self-centered society that we live in today, it is very important that people feel unthreatened by another group of people.

Also, people want to believe that there is no need to help others because if they are having hard times they probably deserve it, or they are simply too lazy to better themselves. How effective is the telephone book and the use of it in actually accessing and gaining from government bureaus and their services? Will the person in the print be
able to effectively access and utilize the government and its services? Is the person in a position to access these services? Does she have a telephone and telephone book? If so, will she be able to find the proper government coordinates? How much help does she need? Does she really need help? Will help come?.... These are some of the thoughts and factors that are ongoing in my mind as the image unfolds.

Part of the unfolding was the shift from the train in the initial phases to the image of the figure. The train, at first, was in the foreground, and it was the central focus of the piece. But, as the total image evolved, the train made its way to the rear until it became a backdrop for the figure. The train lost clarity, but it still maintains the essence of a train, which in the end is an important metaphor.

Was the train departing without her or arriving to get her? Maybe it was just passing by and it never stopped. If the train left without her, did she have the proper credentials? Or was she watching someone leave? Who was that person leaving? Was that person like her? Did that person successfully access information that will take him or her to another level of opportunity? Maybe the person is a victim and has been carted off like cattle on a train, and she is the lucky one. If the train is coming to get her, is she worried? Does she know what to anticipate? Is she the potential chattel?

The number of possible scenarios is enormous. Nevertheless, things in her environment seem very remote. One's awareness of things at their disposal will determine if they are able to access them along
with other opportunities. I do not know if she is able to sense the things around her correctly or completely. Is the train too loud? Can she hear herself think? Is it a passenger or freight train? Would she be considered a passenger or extra baggage? Or is she cargo being relocated like the Native American?

This is the crucial reason the train appears in the background. Suggesting the act of deportation, the train becomes a ship making a routine trip across the Atlantic Ocean, settlers moving across the American west, or a train leaving for Auschwitz. These are definite events most of us will agree took place at one point in time. Everything we experience has varying degrees of reality. However, no matter how horrible and real an event is, most people will not take notice of it until they are forced to board the train themselves.

I have good understanding of the histories that the train represents in the print, but the events all remain remotely in the past. As a result, my sensitivity to them always remains one step removed from them. All the sounds and smells are gone. Their physical remains weathered away, leaving only footnotes in history books. In the end, history runs its course like an ongoing pendulum--swinging back and forth from one extreme to another, just as the train moves back and forth along the tracks.
CHAPTER 10
Mental Notes On "A Ready-Made"

In "A Ready-Made", I had to analyze the anatomy of my work to see how it was operating according to the ideas in "Reservation". The spatial aspects in both prints are somewhat compacted. This uncomfortable space that is created plays off the words "Reserved Parking" written on the parking meter bag in the print in "Reservation", while the little girl's (the image I chose for that print) contour echoes the shape of a parking meter. Both pieces are centered around the idea of place. For me, the parking meter references the concept of time and space because of its function in the urban community. With a parking meter and its allotted space to be rented, a person can claim a space with a vehicle to be secured as theirs for a selected amount of time in that space.

The objects in both prints symbolize a displacement of people. They are two-dimensional prints that reinstate the two-dimensional aspect of many people's lives. Using a portraiture style composition, I made images of functional objects that had human anatomical features, the parking meter being the main one. The portrait nature of Chuck
Close's paintings is still apparent in my work; however, objects are now more than just physical metaphors for people, and the people are more than a physical metaphor for man-made objects.

As I was working on "A Ready-Made", I realized how insensitive we all are to tragedy if it is disconnected from us. Only "Third World" nations know what severe hunger is (such things exist here in this country but are rarely acknowledged), and only a rape victim knows the feeling of being violated and abused in such a way. We hear about people losing their homes also, but there is no personal grief experienced unless we know the victims personally and are directly affected.

The moment the little girl's (whom I will call Americana) individuality connects conceptually with masses of people in a similar situation, her personal strife is rendered insignificant. This may lead the viewer to consider the idea that one person cannot make a difference. The huge agglomeration mass of people she belongs to is one of the chief factors responsible for psychological mass-mindedness of communist rationalism, which robs the individual of their uniqueness. As a social unit she has lost her individuality, and to a lesser extent her dignity, to become a mere abstract number in the bureau of statistics. She plays the role of an interchangeable unit of infinitesimal importance. It is easy not to imagine how one ever came to endow individual human life with so little dignity. The truth is a paradox when considered with the fingers on ones hand. For instance, what is the function of one finger
without the other four? All five fingers function together best to constitute the hand. How does the image function if one of the five plates was left out in its creation? If the text is left out, how would the viewer respond? Or, if Americana, which operates as a thumb, is removed from the image, how would it function?

Seen from this standpoint, Americana really is not of diminishing importance. But, she is compared with a multitude of people experiencing the same plight. Therefore, the bigger the crowd the more negligible the individual seems to become. If Americana is overwhelmed by the sense of her own so-called puniness and impotence, she may feel that her life has lost its meaning. She may develop the mind-set to not use the telephone book because of her inability to successfully access the services of the bureaucratic system the page represents. This may cause her to feel like she is a failure, even though many individuals experience this some problem. Feeling even more isolated, may she give up on trying to resolve her predicament since there is no one to help her. This condition is present in our society today. We become fascinated and overwhelmed by statistical data and large numbers fed to us by the media on a daily basis. As a result, this creates a void of futility for a lot of individuals, since none of these statistics are personified.

Under these circumstances, judging an individual separately grows increasingly difficult and such responsibility becomes collective. The personal decisions that she would normally make for herself, or
partake in, is delegated to a corporate body. In this way the individual becomes more and more a function of society (Americana being a symptom of this larger dilemma) which in its turn holds the function of the real life carrier, whereas, in actual fact, society is nothing more than an abstract idea like the State. Both are autonomous and separate. The State (represented as a telephone book page) is turned into a quasi-animate personality from whom everything is expected. The telephone and telephone book acts as bridge for her to access the information needed to perform these activities.

A culture can be likened to a quilt of intricate geometrical design in which all of the many colored pieces (people), their shapes and stitching, flow into one another, and constitute the whole. Often, the design on the upper side of the quilt is different from the undersurface pattern. Still, the undersurface design is essential for the outward surface appearance. Without a poor there is no rich. And without a working class, a society does not move forward and meet its basic needs. In reality it is only a camouflage for those individuals who know how to manipulate it and give cake to bread-starved masses. Thus the constitutional State drifts into a modern society -- a communist industrial tribe where everybody is subject to the autocratic rule of a indirectly appointed leader or an oligarchy.

"A Ready-Made" is a blend of these patterns and stitches. For this reason I began questioning whether Americana had a telephone and telephone book. The telephone book can be equated with the rights of
an individual in a democracy. A democracy only functions when the populace is educated enough and has access to petition the governing body of the republic. Therefore, without a telephone book she will never be able to take the first step in decoding her troubles. And through creating the print I have given myself the task of dialing up the situation in which she is submerged in. This dialing up amounts to a turning over, and examining and laying bare the intricate pattern pieces underlying the situation. Thus, all the plates and images are significant to making of the hand.

The use of the telephone as a cultural icon allowed me to illustrate the rules and ways and means of understanding the social system and the culture that we all live in. Because of this concept, I chose to create the print through the use of five plates with the two sheets of paper. The words and names on the telephone book page form a cryptic map and a possible guide to assistance. The photographic nature of the print suggests that Americana is probably a real person, actually existing in a troubled condition. To use a method of reproduction and photographic techniques bring into play the everyday and mundane. The subject matter in the print is also a common topic in our society so it looses its power due to frequent publication. It becomes a facade because it appears to have no more dimensions than what is seen of the surface. Since the print focuses on one person it creates a dilemma for the viewer. The print itself is a multiple original. Many of them exist. This gives rise to the idea that this little girl is also a
multiple original. There are 5.5 billion people on earth. So, how important is one print in comparison to all the media material the human collective produces on a daily basis?

Finally, I needed to relieve myself of the print and rethink the ideas it had stirred up for me. I had to put a silver lining in the print. It had to be humble, subtle, and act as a salvation for the little girl. The salvation had to be all conquering, so I used a baptism. As viewers look at her, they will notice that she is wearing a very simple garment, similar to those who partake in a baptism. I made her appear as if she had just surfaced from the water after being cleansed. Her arms overlap, forming a cross in front of her body, as she stands in the pool of waist-deep water.

Since I am pessimistic as I am about bureaucratic services, I figured that she would probably not get any help. Therefore, the baptism was necessary to save her from this world by giving her hope through contacting a greater power not of this world. Sure there are a number of churches listed in the telephone book, but, some are too particular about one's religion or denomination. So, the baptism uses a 1-800 number which connects her directly with God. From this solicitation, I determined she would be in good hands from now on. The piece also did what I initially wanted it to do, and that was to personalize the dilemma in "Reservation".
Plate 7 Social Elevation.
Plate 8 Eks Joints.
"Social Elevation" was another revisititation to a previous print I had done as an undergraduate at TAMU--CC. The print was a lithograph entitled "Eks Joints". In the print, a section of a pipe system in the lower half of the composition and a coupling system of a train in the upper half make up the two objects in the image. The concept of the image originated out of the history of the Underground Railroad and Harriet Tubman's involvement with it.

"Eks Joints" all started when another student asked why I did not make art about any famous Black women. The fellow student was an older white woman whose work focused primarily on feminism and the empowerment of "womyn". My work at the time was not overtly political nor about "Black Art" as most white people always tried to label it. Nevertheless, she had always tried to impose her feminism onto me by nagging me to make prints about Black women.

At first, I thought it was very humorous that she was constantly complaining to me about not making Black women's art when I was not a woman and she was not Black. But she was very strong in her
convictions. This made her look very hypocritical since she was a housewife who drove a luxury car, and her husband was very wealthy. In my eyes, her lifestyle undercut the sincerity of her work. I am not saying her work was bad -- it was excellent in quality, both visually and conceptually at times. In her work, she constantly pointed out a phallic, male dominated society which she felt needed to relinquish more power to women. However, she was a housewife who sent her children to private school, lived in nice large house, and had all of her financial needs taken care of by her husband. In return for his services as the sole provider of the household, she went to school to become an artist. I thought to myself, "Wow, what a luxurious position to complain from. For a person who has it so good, why is she complaining?"

In considering to the comments she made to me, I felt that to speak on the behalf of someone else would rob that person of an independent voice. Black women such as Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Ida B. Wells, and Angela Davis demonstrated that they could effectively speak for themselves about the issues they faced. Therefore, I felt that my voice was not needed to spearhead any petition on their behalf.

She freely admitted to not knowing a lot about African American history and the suffrage that Black women have had to endure. I guess she felt that because she was a woman, she had to make art about women suffrage and feminist issues, no matter how trite they had become. It became clear to me that she and others were trying to project this.
psychosis on me, hoping I would make some trite "Black Art" so that they could package and label me in that category without confronting the fact that I was an individual artist.

This concept of packaging and labeling is an attempt to agglomerate a large mass of people and to eliminate the distinction of the individual by linearizing a group of people. When I made the print "A Ready-Made", I dealt with this issue. The print "Eks Joints" was my first critique of this type of psychological mass-mindedness of genre art versus individual expression.

Once I understood the position she had apparently taken, I decided to do a print about a famous Black woman so that she would not rant and rave at every critique. I was getting annoyed by her complaints, therefore a print based on how Black women have struggled in this country in comparison to white women would probably silence her and make her.

Since I had made a choice to not use human figures in my work, I had to substitute "man-made" objects for them. With all the construction going on around campus and around town in Corpus Christi, I wanted to incorporate mechanical structures in the print because she had always complained how masculine and phallic they were. Since I was fascinated with trains, I quickly made the connection with the Underground Railroad, which in turn led to using Harriet Tubman as the Black woman in the print.
Instead of using the traditional stereotypical images most people associate with "Black Art", such as portraits of Black people and lynch mob scenes, I used metaphorical elements such as a train coupling system, to indicate unity and a pipe line to represent secrets passages to liberation. The coupling system of a train in the upper section of the print is a modern reference, from one era to another, of one person or generation reaching out to another. In the lower section of the print, the pipe line system and lock represents a linkage of the past to the present, as was the secrecy of the Underground Railroad linked to its covert success at freeing the oppressed.

Also, the pipe line is a representative of a transport for those events from the past to the present in American history, ones that are rarely exposed in an academic environment. Both the upper and lower sections have objects that are joined and linked to other objects or systems. The historic implication of the upper section is the coupling system of a train. It is an homage to the struggle of the people involved in the underground railroad, while other historic events happen concurrently. As a result, significant events are often a hidden history, thought of only as Black History. It is reciprocal to the history which is taught in public schools being described as white history.

For instance, the modern coupling system of the train was invented by a Black man named Elijah McCoy. McCoy's contemporary, Thomas Edison, said that McCoy was the greatest inventor of his time. But like so many other Black inventors, McCoy did not get full
recognition for his contributions to society. The phrase "The Real McCoy" makes reference to Elijah McCoy's many inventions and the superior quality and craftsmanship with which they were manufactured. Even though the majority of the general public had heard of the phrase, almost no one, outside a Black Studies program, could tell anyone of its origin. The United States, which has such a short history, generally knows the origin of its more popular sayings. But one might speculate that since the phrase is a linked to the legacy of a Black man, American history deletes McCoy from its pages.

When the print "Eks Joints" was shown and talked about in the critique, I was able to finally silence the housewife's request for some Black women art, but she was somewhat disturbed that a Black male inventor was also reference in the print. The overall attention the print received was due to the fact that I had created an image that could not be associated with being "Black Art". "Eks Joints" did not have the typical "Black Art" images in it. They also were disturbed by the quite nature of the piece because it did not say, in a visual way, "Kill Whitey"!
Nevertheless, no one bothered me again about what I made in class for my assignments. It even appeared that they were even terrified from that point on.

I realized that the real struggle was not in what I did but what they had come to expect from themselves and others. When I looked at the artwork of my classmates, it was clearly evident that everyone made images that they felt the society around them wanted them to make.
Whether it was making feminist art or Hispanic art, they all conformed. However, they were puzzled by the fact that I did not conform to the perceived aesthetics of "Black Art". For this reason, Tubman and McCoy are even more significant to the print because she was a liberator and he a great inventor and genius. These are attributes American society does not normally associate with women and Black people. Tubman and McCoy did not conform to the stereotypes of the day, that they remain slaves. They had decided to make their lives useful to others by freeing people and making train travel safer.

"Eks Joints" was one of my more successful conceptual prints as an undergraduate because it brought about my realization of my environment and the people around me. But, the lack of closure I felt for it stimulated me to create "Social Elevation". "Social Elevation" was even more successful because it was a more mature and complete interpretation of the concepts dealing with Tubman and McCoy's plight. "Eks Joints" and "Social Elevation" are basically the same image existing as two interpretation of the same problems stemming from the same conditions which had led to the creation of the Underground Railroad and Harriet Tubman's struggle to lead a group of people to freedom in the North. Also, the two prints pays homage to Elijah McCoy's upward plight to gain an education to become an inventor and creator of devices for the betterment of our society. This is somewhat ironic for Tubman and McCoy, since the society in which they lived was set up to restrict
Black people's ability to access the liberties and benefits in the United States.

In the print "Social Elevation", I expanded on this concept of "Eks Joints." Instead of a coupling system, a train wheel is used while the pipe system remains the same. A shelf of books is added to the top of the composition to represent an apex or a symbol of learning. Any learning of one's condition requires the knowledge and awareness of the surroundings and the obstacles that will present themselves. Once the realization of one's true problem is recognized, appropriate action can be taken to overcome such restrictions. Obviously, both Tubman and McCoy were able to analyze their situation while in a hostile society and to flourish, regardless of the circumstances. "Eks Joints" and "Social Elevation" do not openly show the historical data that went into the making of them. But, the source is there for me and the strength of connections in a more general sense becomes the strong parts of the work.
CHAPTER 12

Conclusion

"I learned something very basic here... I realized in putting things together... I entered into not only a multiple subject matter, but a multiple way of applying it.... You might say it becomes more complex, more ideas, and more subtleties are greater depths. When we think in terms of structure of life and structure of personalities and people, we have things we do not expose to all. There are certain things we keep secret... So in painting [printmaking], how can you show these kinds of qualities that which is private and probably hidden. That which is out there in front, bold, and you know, what does boldness always mean. It may not be the real and great meaning. It may be hidden back there which you may have to look through many layers of things to see and to feel. So, becoming a story teller I just feel as I grow older, I hope to God I am becoming a more effective story teller. That's what I hope."

---- John Biggers

At this point in my development my work mirrors my visions: fractured, juxtaposed planes, masks, machines, and parts of everyday objects. I see myself as having many parts and angles, therefore, my prints reflect the same disposition. To understand such characteristics is to become more mature as an artist but it is only a fraction of what reality really is. The potential in fracturing and reexamining truths captivates me, leading me to the opportunity to experiment with different visual, and conceptual variations and permutations that then give alternatives which suggesting fresh directions.
After producing numerous prints at The Ohio State University, I feel somewhat detached from them. I view the experience as another phase in my life, and now it is time to move on. The work has been done, and as I have recourse with the events over the next few years, I will have to try to make sense and focus the experience. "Art Stories" was written as autobiographical account of my art making endeavors because an artist's artwork is in many ways a diary that recounts the actions and thoughts that meshed together and visually materialized into a work of art. By analyzing the stories, I am able to critique what I gained from my experiences in creating the artwork.

The underlining lesson I learned was that every artist ultimately teaches himself to be an artist. I have discovered myself to be a lone wolf, making prints about seemingly trivial topics such as parking meters, baseball gloves, and trains and relating them to events in American history. Since history is best told through stories, I generally choose a narrative approach to making my prints. This suits my work because it allows me to filter and bend many parallel ideas into one concept. By putting a print into the context of a short story, it has enables me to sift through the multiple meanings an object may have.

Telling the story to myself is a form of self-analysis because it makes me focus on why I chose the objects in my work and their juxtaposition with one another. For example, through substitution and personification of objects, I was able to find common ground between the parking meter and batter's box in the print "Reservation". Together
they represented a blindfolded baseball player at bat. I believe all man-
made objects have an interrelated history, and what I try to do is find
that common heritage and express it in my work.

I am fully aware that the majority of my work is not always easy
for a viewer to access and comprehend immediately. That is what
illustrations do. They quickly inform the viewer as to what they are
looking at. In reference to Amiri Baraka, art that is "high art" must do
more than show nice pictures. Through my prints I have expressed my
experiences and the predicaments they suggest. The issues in my work
are truthful accounts through my eyes of the activities surrounding me.
I simply attempt to describe or characterize my portion of the profound
meaningfulness of human life but I attempt to do so without the
superficialities of human existence.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


