THESIS

HUMANITY UNMASKED

Submitted by

Stanley James Scott

Department of Art

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Masters of Fine Arts

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado
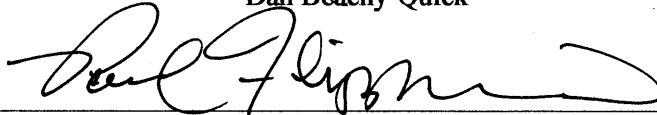
Fall 2009

COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

November, 9 2009

WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER OUR
SUPERVISION BY STANLEY SCOTT ENTITLED HUMANITY UNMASKED BE
ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER
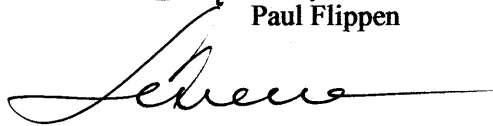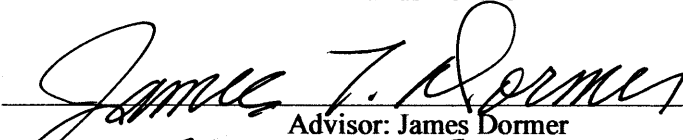OF FINE ARTS.
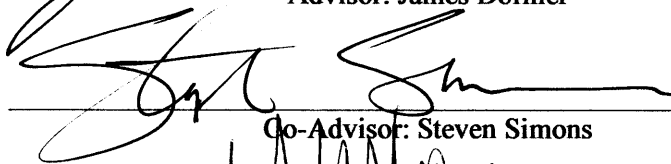
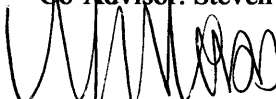Committee on Graduate work

Dan Beachy Quick

Paul Flippen

Marius Lehene

Advisor: James Dormer

Co-Advisor: Steven Simons

Department Chair Gary Voss

ii

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

HUMANITY UNMASKED

The darker facets of human nature drive my work. The figures you see in these prints and drawings are very real depictions of, and responses to, internal conflict. These figures offer the viewer a deeper level of understanding of the human condition as present both within the artist and society as a whole. I am particularly interested in the elements that make us uncomfortable and the aspects of ourselves we deny. These unexpressed emotions are the source of the tension in the images. The tension that binds each of these figures is inside us, driving our own actions and choices. I feel we need to accept and acknowledge our inner demons, both at an individual and a societal level. My work accepts this internal conflict as a normal part of the human condition that we all feel when we struggle. By speaking honestly through the works, the viewer is challenged to redefine their relationship to the internal struggle invoking a raw response.

Stanley James Scott
Department of Art
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, CO 80523
Fall 2009

Table of Contents

Conflict is never joyful or taken lightly, and understandably is often avoided; however, this element of conflict addresses our own humanity. This should not be ignored. The nature of internal conflict demonstrates that we have both good and bad thoughts, right and wrong desires, and power through emotion and will. When we work through these decisions we define ourselves. Through the process of conflict, with all its raw emotion and gut wrenching tension, we find ourselves and the foundational truths that we ascribe to. These uncensored truths are important for us to know and experience to understand ourselves more fully. I feel we need to get down to the raw grit of these struggles to truly understand our depth.

My own conflicting nature serves as the source for the imagery in the figures. Drawing from experience and personal sources of conflict I can better construct the image as it reflects humanity. I seek states of conflict because I can relate to it visually through my own natural raw response to it. The work is made with responsive intensity that translates directly as an element of humanity in the finished work. The work in progress acts as a form of catharsis for the artist, and the expression of which translates the original source of conflict into the created image.

The history of humanity's struggle with environmental and internal tensions is evident from the volumes of global literary and historical references that span cultures, dialects, and religions. We embrace extreme good, but distance ourselves from the dark side of our existence. This may be a natural response, but when left unchecked, this denial of self creates a vulnerability to disillusionment and disorder.

Typically the conflicts of the psyche and its maladies have been the subject of gods and demons that influence the weaknesses of the human body or spirit. (figure 1)

The legend of St. Anthony's temptation, a man tempted by worldly desires of wealth and beauty, illustrates the tension of these conflicting desires through the depiction of grotesque demon figures literally ripping at his body in every direction. This subject easily illustrates this spiritual tension in a very literal way. Rather than illustrating the temptation as part of the self, the artist depicts it as a demonic attack. Yes, tension may feel violent like an attack, however, by externalizing the conflict, we are denying the internal tension present in the existence of human nature. These devils and demons are both personified and made into monsters through the artist's mixed use of human and animal features. Is this what we look like on the inside? If so, is this why we do not want to own these features?

The denial of ownership for these inner demons is not particular to the story of St. Anthony, but is a pattern that we have seen throughout society's history. We have taken the natural internal struggles out of the individual's control and depicted them as external forces to be avoided and endured. This denial of the darker side of humanity frees the saint and ourselves of responsibility for these carnal desires. My work's focus accepts the reality of this internal conflict and harnesses the resulting emotional intensity that we all feel when we struggle.

We can all relate to temptation. We have all felt the struggles of conflict and can relate to it on a personal level. This is where I want to approach the viewer as a fellow conflicted struggler from to our own base nature. I feel we need to see ourselves holistically, accepting our lusts and greed as fully as our charity and

compassion. These darker desires and temptations define our humanity and complete our human experience. These wants and their resulting internal conflicts realize the depth of our nature and should not be ignored, externalized or forgotten. In the abstract to Mauricio Lasansky's *Nazi Drawings* (figure 2) he states that humanity has been lost due to our denial of others their right to their dignity.[i] And although this work was responding to the specific inhumane acts of WWII genocide, I feel that humanity is similarly threatened in generality, by our own denial of these darker parts of ourselves. These denied areas are the parts of humanity I wish to explore.

In my work, Much like Gericault's portraits of the insane, (figure 3,4) I offer the viewer a look into the realities of the conflicted soul. We don't have to be struggling with dysfunction and psychosis to know how to relate to these feelings of internal tension. I study these darker sides of my own experience and express them through image and process. The resulting figures and faces can be disturbing but are received with a greater sense of humanity as the forms echo my own internal conflicts being explored and transfer relationally to the viewer.

In preliminary works, knotted forms expressed these tensions as the viewer unraveled the form of the knot, they would study its construction and its relationship to themselves and their environment. The twists and turns naturally translated into visceral bodies, intestines and entrails. These anatomical references pointed toward our base human existence, forming depictions of human struggle. (figure 5)

I further explored this foundation of human struggle by tapping into to my own history of struggles and conflict. The research revolved around my own internal conflicts with this base duality. As a twin, I can relate to the concept of dualism in a

unique way, having grown up with a label that could change polarity at any moment. If I was good, I was labeled the 'good twin', (figure 6) if I was bad or even if I was just less good by comparison, I was dubbed 'the evil twin'. (figure 7) The tension from comparison and competition were commonplace, and from these experiences I learned about society's temperamental and impatient nature. Historically, twins have been regarded with some level of mysticism, dualism in the context of twins splitting this balance of good and evil to have each twin embody all good or all evil properties.[ii] Although this concept has ancient and often religious precedents, it continues to be used with surprising regularity.[iii] This typically takes form in cheesy plotlines for mass media to create an easily constructed source of conflict for the show's hero or heroine while unassumingly enforcing this menacing view of twins.

When faced with these extremes, there was not enough room to be myself let alone know where I stood on this black and white continuum. I cannot deny that polarities do exist, but when they do, it is not without conflict and some overlap between the two opposing forces. I know that tension all too well, having subscribed to society's view of twins for much of my formative years. Eventually I began to understand that deep down, I lay between these opposites somewhere in the middle, in a vast area of grey.

Like in this evil twin scenario, our society has historically evolved systematic breakdowns of complex ideas into simple constructs at the sacrifice of accuracy. We do this because we are impatient, wanting overly simplified solutions to problems. This Jekyll and Hyde notion is fascinating but dangerous.[iv] It has all the elements of classic internal struggle, but because its premise never allows for the mixing of the

4

two personalities, it creates a monster. We all have these monsters inside us, and to avoid further conflict, they need to be explored and accepted. This is where the current monotype series fits in.

I believe we are all capable of things we don't want to acknowledge our capacity of, but rather than ignore these darker sides of human existence, I want to flesh them out. (figure 8) These contortions, and monstrosities offer an internal representation of an interior view of a multifaceted individual in a multi-dimensional society, not simple studies of grotesques or abnormalities (figure 9), by I feel my work needs to relate to more than individual struggle. In Baskin's Hydrogen Man, (figure 10) we see the figure not only as a representation of a human form, but as a result of human destruction.[v] In a similar way I want to show the form as a representation of what is socially edited from humanity. The darker sides definitely question and pull the viewer to look deeper into themselves.

My process is simple and direct in an effort to communicate directly. I am essentially a formalist working on both aesthetic and emotive levels. I try to avoid prescriptions and aesthetic formulas in the work. This leaves room for conversation and natural, intuitive response that speak in a raw elemental form.

I am influenced by the rawness of form in Bacon's mature style. The figures scream in physical and psychological pain while the constructed portraits lie mute in some form of introverted agony. In these self-portraits and distorted human figures, (figure 11) Bacon shows us a montage of elements, exploring the internal and the external visible figure "in an attempt to make a certain type of feeling visual".[vi] His work disregards the details of the superficial surface and captures the elemental form

that lies beneath. It is only through these distortions that, he says, one can convey fact.[vii] This element of raw expression demands further thought from the viewer as it forms the figure's presence. The humanity that is presented is real, full of the grit and dirt that comes from the conflicts within it. The distortions in perception serve as an indicator of tension's effects. This speaks to me.

I am interested in these inner and outer visual relationships in my assembled figures. (figure 12) When constructing a figure in conflict, it is important for me to experience these conflicts on a common ground with the viewer. I know my response to a work, and I use this as a barometer to guide my own studio decisions. Because these aesthetic decisions are so dependent on my own personal response, the priority while working is to first communicate honestly with myself, then find the source of the conflict within the image. I try to work in the mindset of the figure. Sometimes this is achieved by calling on personal experiences of conflict, which ultimately work with a commonality of human relationship in mind.

The scale of these monoprints adds an interesting element in its relationship to the viewer. (figure 13) The three by four foot matrix shown here provides a window to a giant figure staring back at you through human-like sockets. The colossus depicted relates to you as a viewer in a larger context than in the typical heads we converse with in personal interaction. In this way, the figure no longer serves to portray an individual but becomes a representation of humanity itself.

Feelings may be far from reliable, due to the differences in individual emotive response. Rather than trying to bludgeon the viewer with imagery that is intended to evoke feeling, I simply try to connect to these feelings through process. I look to

Francis Bacon's description of this process (in painting) as "the pattern of one's nervous system projected on the canvas."[viii] Similarly I believe this projection through process translates the human commonalities to the viewer naturally. To put it simply, when an image is constructed with a psychological element of conflict in mind, I believe this projection of self will transfer relationally to the viewer.

These decisions and responses to the self all make up the final image, as formal elements are consistently referenced when thinking of what the work needs as it is in progress. There is a slight switch here when the way of making meets the formal aesthetic vocabulary of these final decisions. Overall the process avoids structure except to nurture the artist's reception to the work in progress. The things I am responding to are universal, and in their base commonality we respond to and relate with them.

In most of these works, the subject is formatted as a bust or portrait. I feel that we naturally relate and acutely respond to the face. This is also what we primarily relate to in terms of identifying one another. We have been communicating with people all our lives and we gravitate towards this informative nexus. I come to the suggested image of a head with an equally suggested commonality. In this space we are equal, and in this equality the figure suggests a mirror, leading the viewer to see one's self or part of one's self in the form.

Printmaking and drawing make up the majority of my studio practice. In drawing, I can easily capture the human scale by translating these conflicts into gestures and arm length movements on a one to one scale. The drawings occur in real time, without the variables of translation through printmaking processes. The

monotype print format allows me to keep these elements of drawing and scale, while being able to work in layers of glowing color. Maintaining crisp definition where colors stop and overlap is an element that the print process capitalizes with unique forte.

Often when setting up these visual problems, I start with a rough idea and let the image emerge, revealing itself through mark making and the subsequent decisions that build in layers upon themselves. The execution of these decisions in the drawings is immediate and without the limiting consequence of finality that is tied to the print process. If something is disjointed, out of place, or if I don't like a certain area, I can erase it and try again. Although slower to realize, the printed aesthetic makes up for much of its lack of spontaneity.

The focus on conflict and tension is at the front of my mind. As I concentrate on the conflict, I am responding to it. In this way, I view the progress of the work as a conversation. I listen and feel, responding to these stimuli by making. I feel each action informs the other and are of equal weight in the expression of this conflict. I try to keep the process simple to be able to keep the concentration necessary to focus on the tension that drives the image. Lithographic and monotype printing techniques bridge the gap between drawing's natural scale and style with a working printed aesthetic.

Although I mention that the technical process is secondary in my mind while making, this does not mean it doesn't take any thought. The process requires some decisions from the beginning. The white or lighter areas need to be considered as the

initial plate is drawn into. The image will get its highlights from these exclusions. In this way, the monotype print process is very similar to a reductive woodcut or erasure drawing. The paper will provide the brilliance of the color by reflecting light that is allowed to pass through the various translucent layers or 'drops' of color. The Image can take any number of drops to achieve the desired result, but there is a fine line between color and layer complexity and an oversaturation of ink. If this happens the print becomes dull and lifeless, reflecting only a solid or muddy color.

The First impression is usually light with a high transparent base content. The transparent base to ink ratio can be anywhere from 25-75% and typically works toward less and less transparent color drops as the image is fully defined. The color pallet needs to be considered, but only in its relationship to previous colors.

Much of the decisions made in the start of a monoprint form a framework that will help to inform the final look of the piece. This initial framework is then built upon and added to, as areas of color become more detailed and informative through use of contrast in subsequent layers of color and line work. This framework does not mean that the works are premeditated with a planned outcome, as I feel the process needs to be conversational not a dictation. (image 14) This conversation starts from the first line or decision on the plate. Each subsequent mark or impression will be a response to both the emerging image and to the self. (figure 15)

In image 14 we see the subtle build up of complexity with the second layer of orange dropped over the initial yellow drop. Both layers of color were put on with a thin roll of translucent color evenly blended across the Plexiglas matrix. The second

layer mimics the first with slight variations to build volume to the figure. The use of denatured alcohol adds texture and highlights to the plate and a richer complexity to the layers of color ink. I used this technique in these images on multiple layers, the most evident use of this process is on the third layer of this print, where a grey field was laid out over the yellow and orange. The result is a highlighted spot of yellow and white that is visible on the upper left of the image.

The dotted haloes and textures resulting from alcohol spraying or hand dripping techniques work by drying the binders in the ink body to where they can no longer transfer to the paper when run through the press. The reverse effect is achieved if another layer of ink is added to the matrix after the addition of alcohol has dried. This process is evident at the bottom of the second layer in Figure 16 where the darker blue 'spots' show up as positive marks rather than exclusions. The ink added to the plate sticks to the alcohol-dried ink and accumulates an intense saturation of color faster than surrounding areas.

The layer of grey pushed the intensity of color back and made a more definitive figure ground relationship. The following layer of red added to the features' definition while further negotiating the figure ground relationship. This layer was applied differently than was previously done. I rolled on the red with an eight-inch brayer in spots rather than using a larger roller to blend the color into a uniform layer over the entire plate. This spot roll added atmospheric surface textures to the background through the brayer's inconsistency of opacity from the overlapping 'lap marks'. These occur when the brayer turns more than one full rotation, transferring less ink on to the plate during the second revolution. The final drop of color, usually

black, solidifies the previous drops and brings a final direction to resolve the image. Positive line is achieved by using the brayer at an angle where only one edge rolls out a thin line of ink onto the matrix. Matboard chips are used to sweep areas of color away in broad strokes, but can just as easily add color back in by dabbing at the matrix with a corner of the chip with excess ink.

In addition to the monotype print process, I have tended to gravitate toward intaglio processes. The intensity of the final image and the resistance of the material keep drawing me back to the process. The linear and atmospheric effects that can be achieved through the intaglio process are seductive both to look at and to create.

In the Untitled constructed figure, (figure 12) I built the image with layers of fine lines drawn through a hard ground on a zinc plate. The plate was then etched in a nitric acid bath for various periods of time, applying stop out to areas where I wanted lighter lines to set the desired depth of line. The depth of the etched line in the zinc directly translates to value within the final printed image. I have always been attracted to the rich blacks that can be created through the intaglio process, but recently color has started to play a more important role in my work.

In this image (figure 12) I am exploring the inner and outer workings of the figure, constructing a surface in flux. The skin is taught and sparse in areas, as if it were transparent or nonexistent. This transparency of construction intrigues me as it relates to clarity or honesty in the perception of self. The honesty sought in these inner perceptions were critical to the development of the psychological monotype works previously mentioned.

The studio as an environment serves as a crucible for an intense focus. When I am in conversation with the work, I feel tied to something larger than myself, and I feel undeniably that what I do matters. I believe this is tied to Joseph Beuys' influence, in viewing the artist as shaman, and acknowledging "the unity of art and life'.[ix] Through my responses to raw emotion, I am listening to the work and to myself with a clarity and directness that recognizes the wrongs of self and society. Through this process, I feel that I find truth through intensity. The distilled self may be raw, but it is honest. In a focused and responsive state, I trust in my primal instincts and allow the image to translate my responses honestly to the audience. Working with an intense focus on the feeling-through of a conflict brings me closer to the truth, and closer to unmasking my humanity.

Slide List

Figure 1: Martin Schongauer - Temptation of St. Anthony, wood engraving, c.1470s

Figure 2: Mauricio Lasansky - # 28 of 33 from the *Nazi Drawings,* 1966.

Figure 3: Theodore Gericault - Portrait of a Kleptomaniac, *1822.*

Figure 4: Theodore Gericault - Portrait of a Woman suffering from Obsessive Envy*, 1822.*

Figure 5: Stanley Scott - The Dream borders Nightmare, 2007.

Figure 6: Stanley Scott - Twin Duality 1, graphite, 32"x41", 2008.

Figure 7: Stanley Scott - Twin Duality 2, charcoal and pastel, 32"x41", 2008.

Figure 8: Leonardo da Vinci - Grotesque profile, red chalk, c. 1490.

Figure 9: Leonard Baskin - Hydrogen Man, woodcut, 158 cm x 62 cm, 1954.

Figure10: Francis Bacon - Self-portrait, pastel, 14" x 12", 1974.

Figure 11. Stanley Scott – Contorted Figure, etching, 18" x 24", 2009.

Figure 12. – untitled constructed figure, etching, 18" x 24", 2009.

Figure 13. – untitled figure #1, monotype, 36" x 48", 2009.

Figure 14. – untitled figure #2 , 2nd impression, (yellow and orange,) monotype,

36" x 48", 2009.

Figure 15. – untitled figure #2, final image 5th impression, (yellow, orange, graphite grey,

red, black,) monotype, 36" x 48", 2009.

Figure 16. – untitled figure #3, 2nd impression, (yellow, blue) monotype, 36" x 48", 2009.
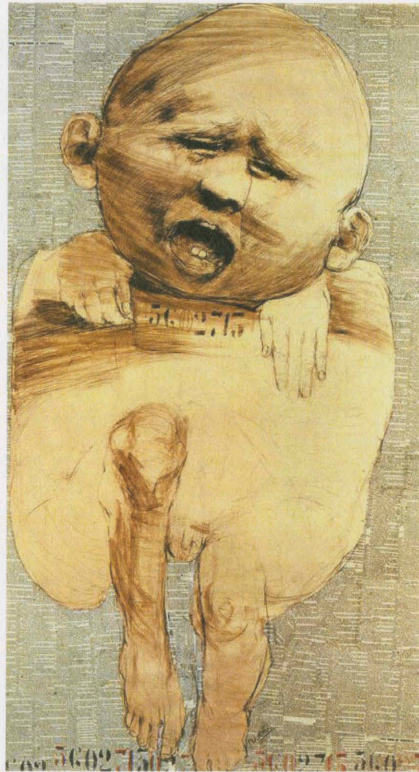
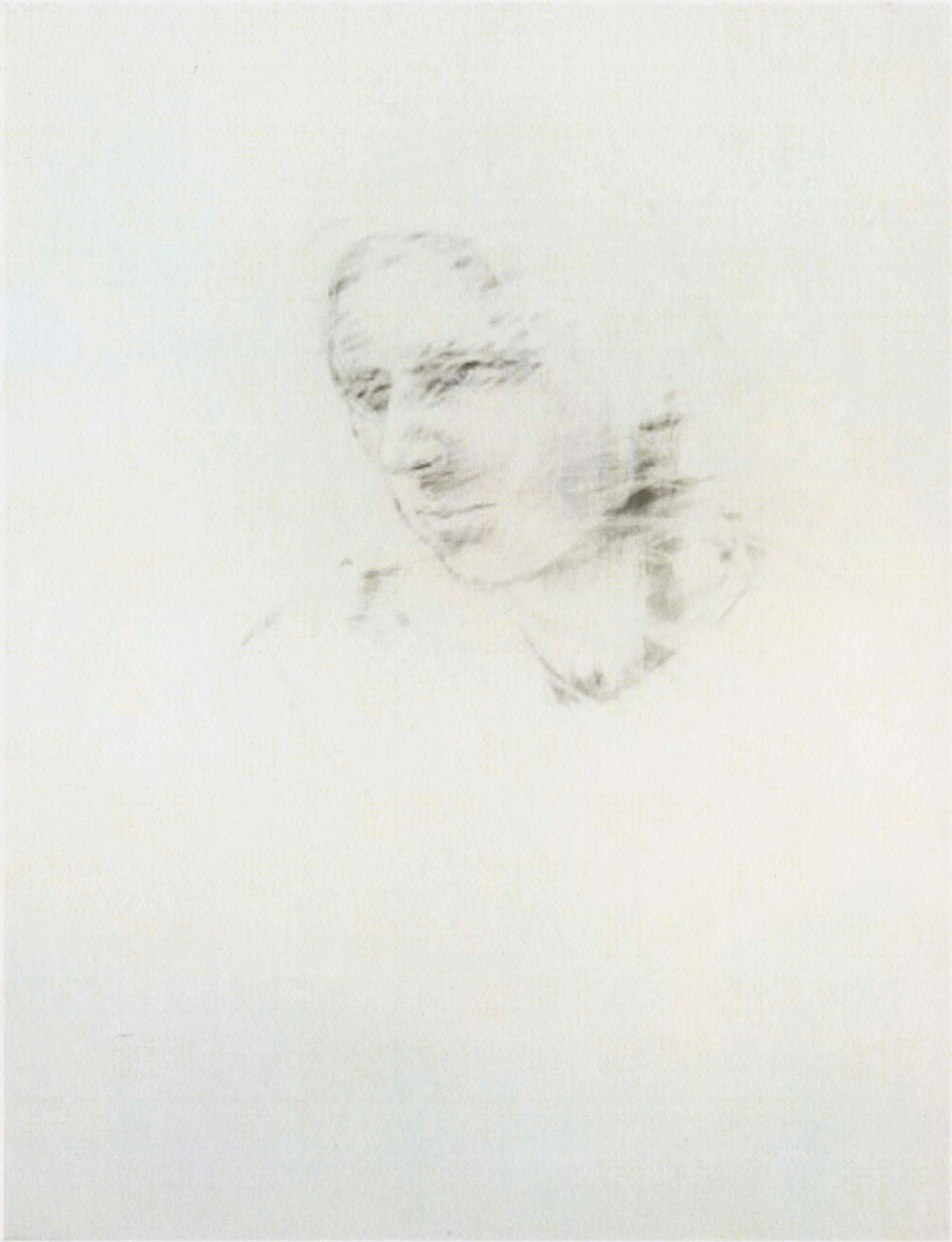Illustrations:

Fig.1

Fig.2

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

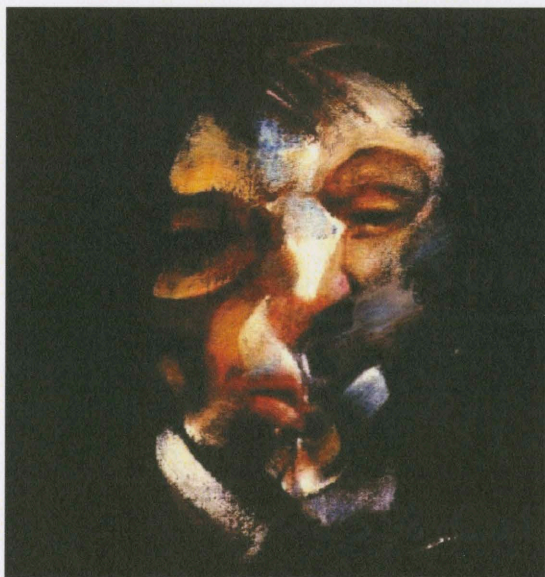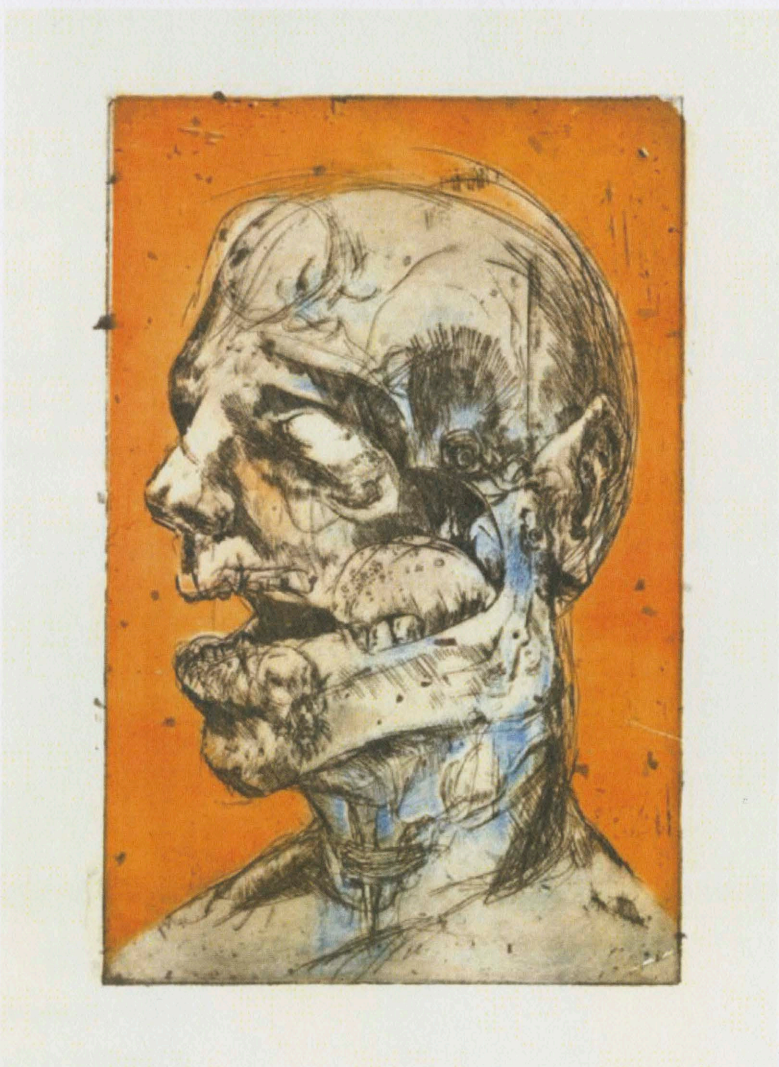fig.6

Fig 7

Fig.8

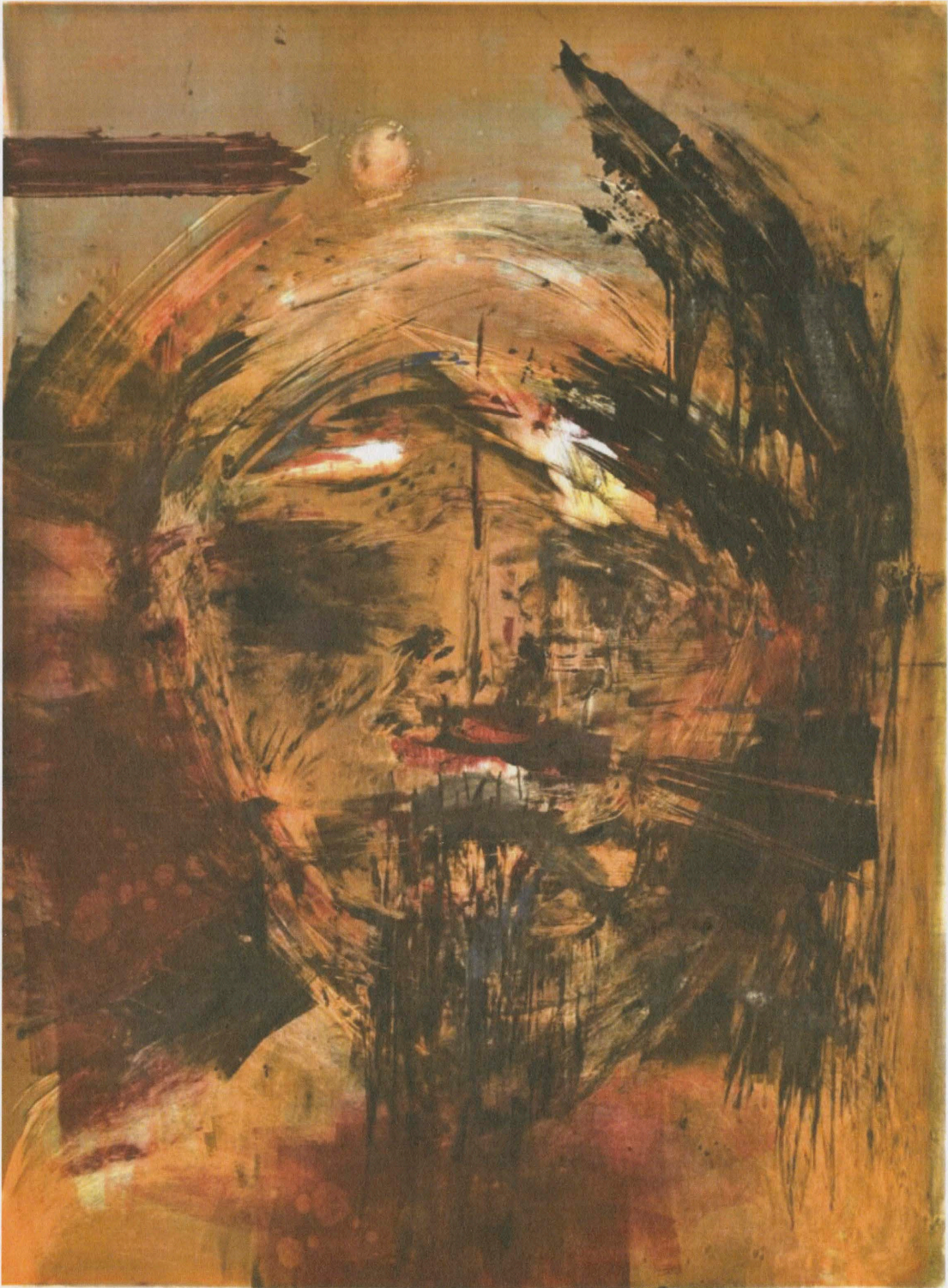
Fig. 9

Fig. 10

Fig. 11

Fig. 12

Fig 13

Fig 14

Fig 15

Fig 16

End Notes

---

[i] Lasansky, Marcicio, The Nazi Drawings Artist's Statement,1966

[ii] Stookey, Lorena. Thematic Guide to World Mythology, greenwood press, 2004: pp. 189-96

[iii] ibid. "Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainya, identical twin gods in the Zurvanite branch of the Zoroastrianism faith serve as eternal co-representatives of Good and Evil." There are several Native American legends from various tribes that illustrate similar roles.

[iv] Stevenson, Robert L. *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.*

[v] Fern, A. and J. O'Sullivan. *The Complete Prints of Leonard Baskin*, Boston, MA.

1984. pp. 8-9.

[vi] Farr, Dennis, *Francis Bacon: A Retrospective* p. 58

[vii] Bacon, Francis. Interview by Hugh Davies March 17, 1973, London.

[viii] Farr, Dennis. p. 58

[ix] Adriani, G. ; Konnertz, W. and Thomas, K., *Joseph Beuys: Life and Works*, p. 71

Bibliography

Adriani, G. ; Konnertz, W. and Thomas, K. *Joseph Beuys: Life and Works*, translated by Patricia Lech. Woodbury, NY 1979.

Bacon, Francis. Interview by Hugh Davies. 17 March 1973.

Farr, Dennis. *Francis Bacon: A Retrospective,* Abrams, New York, NY, 1999. p. 58

Fern, A. and J. O'Sullivan. *The Complete Prints of Leonard Baskin*, Boston, MA. 1984. pp. 8-9.

Lasansky, Mauricio. *The Nazi Drawings: Artist Statement.* 1966.

Stevenson, Robert L. *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.* University of Nebraska Press, 1998.

Stookey, Lorena. *Thematic Guide to World Mythology*, greenwood press, 2004. pp. 189-96.