

THESIS

VISUAL SATIRE OF THE MACHO EGO

Submitted by
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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY CRAIG KINTOKI CONAHAN ENTITLED VISUAL SATIRE OF THE MACHO EGO BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF FINE ARTS.

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS
VISUAL SATIRE OF THE MACHO EGO

My work began as a satirical critique of the macho ego, but while it remains largely critical of the macho male, it now embraces a more general human issue. Through manipulation of symbolism and carefully considered usage of the picture plane, the work is a visual study of the insular world of the macho self.

I have concentrated on containing images and their activity within the picture plane, without suggestion from the viewer. The allusions created by the idea, like the illusions created by the self, are supported by a narcissistic dependence on the internal structure of the image.

The symbols - sperm, fire, and hands - represent three critical views of the ego. The progression of the use of these symbols parallels the progression of their interpretation.

In conclusion, I have developed two significant means to achieve a more complete exposition of ideas: the symbolic use of conscious containment of visual elements within the picture plane, and the integration of formal elements and content through the transformation of overt symbolism to plastic visual elements.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
List of Figures	v
Text	1
Documentation	4

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>		<u>Page</u>
1	“Humpty Dumpty,” lithograph, 21" x 14"	5
2	“¿Quién es Más Macho?” lithograph, 18" x 13"	6
3	“Mr. F,” intaglio, 23.5" x 17.5"	7
4	“Asshole Mouth for Kurt Vonnegut,” intaglio, 23.5" x 17.5"	8
5	“Japanese American Scum, We've Come For Your Money,” intaglio, 23.5" x 17.5"	9
6	“Mr. P,” intaglio and woodcut, 23.5" x 17.5"	10
7	“Drowning Man,” woodcut, 23.75" x 27.25"	11
8	“Man In Fire,” woodcut, 30.5" x 31.25"	12
9	“Machismo,” intaglio, 23.5" x 35"	13
10	“My Big Head,” intaglio, 23.5" x 35"	14
11	“Consumed Man,” woodcut, 27" x 23.75"	15
12	“I'm Full,” woodcut, 27" x 23.75"	16
13	“Mr. Vain 1,” woodcut, 27" x 23.75"	17
14	“I'm So Rich, I Must Give Myself Away 1,” woodcut, 30" diameter	18
15	“I'm So Rich, I Must Give Myself Away 2,” woodcut, 30" diameter	19
16	“4:40,” woodcut, 30" diameter	20

LIST OF FIGURES (cont'd)

<u>Figure</u>		<u>Page</u>
17	"Mr. Vain 2," woodcut, 96" x 48"	21
18	"Consumed Man 2," woodcut, 96" x 48"	22
19	"Three Books For Your Ego: Gimme, Gimme, Gimme — Sperm," woodcut, 11" x 11.5" x 11.5"	23
20	"Three Books For Your Ego: Gimme, Gimme, Gimme — Hands," woodcut, 11" x 11.5" x 11.5"	24
21	"Three Books For Your Ego: Gimme, Gimme, Gimme — Fire," woodcut, 11" x 11.5" x 11.5"	25

My work represents a satirical view of the ego. It began as a critique of the macho male, based on observation and on personal experience, but while it remains largely critical of the macho male, it now embraces a more general human issue.

In this visual study of the individual, the picture plane denotes the insular world of the macho self. In the two-dimensional world of the picture plane, color, shape, line and symbols interact with each other and do not require any support from the viewer. The allusions created by the idea, like the illusions created by the self, are supported by a narcissistic dependence on the internal structure of the image.

“Three Books for Your Ego: Gimme, Gimme, Gimme,” illustrates this idea in both form and content. The book form represents the self-contained idea. It closes in upon itself to conceal and protect its contents. When the book form becomes a box, it is a different kind of container, one, like the picture plane, that physically confines its contents within its borders.

The symbols - sperm, fire, and hands - represent three critical views of the ego: the conditioned ego, the vigorous ego, and the narcissistic ego. I use the sperm as a symbol of virility, or as a visualization of the conditioning imposed on men by society to be macho. The presence of the sperm with a figure represents the conflict between who I think I am and who society tells me I should be. In a work like “Drowning Man,” for instance, the sperms represent the macho identity that society recognizes as male – strong, courageous, confident, stoic. The figure is

imminently threatened by drowning in the aggressive environment that surrounds him, should he refuse to react.

The fire represents man's passion, will, or chosen direction. Fueled by his passion, man will focus on his own agenda and exclude those around him. Threatened by his passion, he will question his self-worth. In "Man in Fire," the figure again is being overcome by an aggressive environment that requires a confrontation. The man engulfed in fire is the man engulfed in his work. He is confronted by choices that threaten his virility and/or his life, and must choose one over the other.

The hands are symbols of self-love and desire. The vain man is oblivious to the potential of self-growth. He stagnates in his self-contained world of self-admiration and embraces his illusions in complete isolation. In the black and white woodcut "Mr. Vain," the embrace of the hands has become the figure, and completely consumes it in its isolation from the equally consuming blackness of the ground.

The progression of the use of these symbols parallels the progression of their interpretation. In the earlier work, the symbols accompany the figures as attributes. In a piece like "I'm So Rich, I Must Give Myself Away," the figure arrogantly and ignorantly manifests his egotistical self while consciously embracing his virility. The sperm fly off the figure in an aura of vanity, acting primarily as decorative idea.

The symbols later expand their function, from communicating singular ideas, into actively participating in the picture plane as significant form and atmosphere. In "Humpty Dumpty," the form of the sperms is equal to the form of the figure. The sperms create a mass on which the figure is precariously balanced, and are about to enter the figure through a less-than-invitational orifice. The difference between the

treatment of the sperms in these two works illustrates the progression from symbols as marks, marks as ideas, to idea as form.

Finally, the symbols swallow the figures and become the significant forms themselves. As form, the symbols take on more visual meaning and are a more integral visual element. In the black and white woodcut "Mr. Ego," the swirling sperms create the volume that becomes the figure and they also create the movement that gives meaning to the form: a dizzying, blurred and unstable existence.

It is important that the viewer recognizes that the liberties taken through use of symbol and metaphor contain the derisive humor of satire. I use lyrical line and gesture to evoke a sense of relaxed contemplation rather than a rigorously tense approach. The colors are intentionally brilliant, not only to excite the viewer's visual experience, but also to emphasize the expression and emotion involved in each work. The relationship between these formal elements and the seriousness of the issues acts as a metaphor of the contradictory contemplation that occurs in my daily life.

In conclusion, I have developed two significant means to achieve a more complete exposition of my ideas: the symbolic use of conscious containment of visual elements within the picture plane, and the integration of formal elements and content, through the transformation of overt symbolism into plastic visual elements.

DOCUMENTATION



Figure 1. "Humpty Dumpty," lithograph, 21" x 14"



Figure 2. "¿Quién es Más Macho?" lithograph, 18" x 13"



Figure 3. "Mr. F." intaglio, 23.5" x 17.5"



Figure 4. "Asshole Mouth for Kurt Vonnegut," intaglio, 23.5" x 17.5"



Figure 5. "Japanese American Scum, We've Come For Your Money,"
intaglio, 23.5" x 17.5"



Figure 6. "Mr. P.," intaglio and woodcut, 23.5" x 17.5"



Figure 7. "Drowning Man," woodcut, 23.75" x 27.25"



Figure 8. "Man In Fire," woodcut, 30.5" x 31.25"



Figure 9. "Machismo," intaglio, 23.5" x 35"



Figure 10. "My Big Head," intaglio, 23.5" x 35"



Figure 11. "Consumed Man," woodcut, 27" x 23.75"



Figure 12. "I'm Full," woodcut, 27" x 23.75"



Figure 13. "Mr. Vain 1," woodcut, 27" x 23.75"



Figure 14. "I'm So Rich, I Must Give Myself Away 1,"
woodcut, 30" diameter



Figure 15. "I'm So Rich, I Must Give Myself Away 2,"
woodcut, 30" diameter



Figure 16. "4:40," woodcut, 30" diameter



Figure 17. "Mr. Vain 2," woodcut, 96" x 48"



Figure 18. "Consumed Man 2," woodcut, 96" x 48"

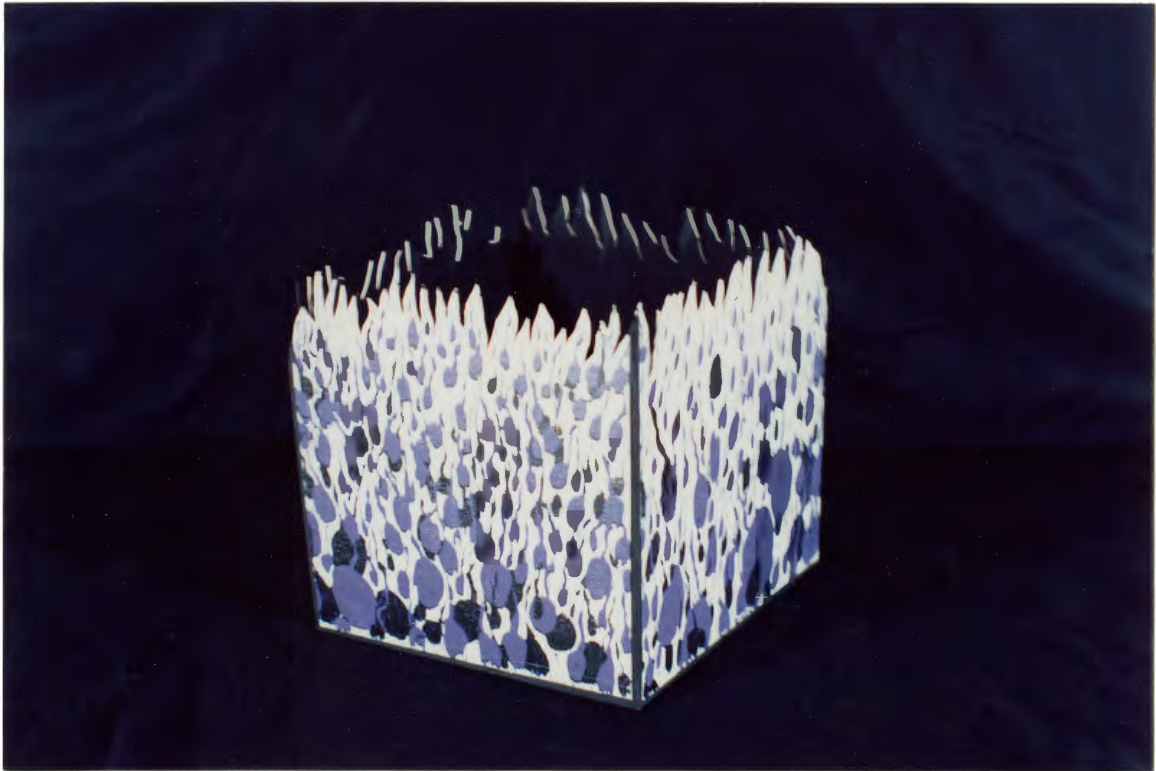


Figure 19. "Three Books For Your Ego:
Gimme, Gimme, Gimme — Sperm," woodcut, 11" x 11.5" x 11.5"



Figure 20. "Three Books For Your Ego:
Gimme, Gimme, Gimme — Hands," woodcut, 11" x 11.5" x 11.5"



Figure 21. "Three Books For Your Ego:
Gimme, Gimme, Gimme — Fire," woodcut, 11" x 11.5" x 11.5"