

THESIS

EXTERNALIZING THE INTERNAL

submitted by

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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED
UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY MONICA ANN MERSCH ENTITLED
EXTERNALIZING THE INTERNAL BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING
IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF FINE ARTS.

Committee on Graduate Work

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Adviser

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

Externalizing the Internal

As a child I was terrified of people. I would rarely interact with anyone, especially strangers. I grew up shy and studious, content to draw, read, and play in my imaginary world. As I grew older, I began to realize that people were not a threatening mass, but individuals who had problems and concerns very much like my own. I have since tried to develop a more sympathetic viewpoint, not just how is that person viewing me, but how do they view their own world, and whether they have the same self-doubts that I do.

I began drawing people as an attempt to see them as they really were, to look more deeply into them and understand them more clearly than I would have if I simply considered them as inconsequential beings within my space. I drew the model in the studio in an attempt to better understand how we, as beings, fill up space. I wanted to know more about how we moved, and how we are put together. This study brought with it the realization that my interests were more involved with how pose and the way the figure was depicted could speak of that individual. What kinds of things were suggested to the viewer, and what could be said about the human qualities of that model from the way they were depicted.

After a few years of trying to deal with these concerns within the

context of the model in a studio setting, I began to realize that I was treating the model as simply a part of a still life and I wasn't making the kind of connections that I wanted to the 'humanness' of that individual. How could such conclusions be made when I knew so little about the model I was dealing with and the setting was so artificial? I came to the conclusion that I was going to have to expand my subjects if I wanted to begin to deal with the ideas that concerned me. I began to work on this concept by dealing primarily with three different subjects: my cats, self portraits, and my family and friends.

The cat drawings began as a way for me to deal with living beings that I am very familiar with. I have two cats who are both 12 years old, and they have been my primary companions for their entire lives. I know their personalities well, and to me they seem almost human, but they can move in ways that a human could not. If I could succeed in bringing the qualities of the cat to the drawing, then hopefully I would be able to achieve the same with human subjects. The drawing Cat (plate 5) comes closest to this idea, where you can almost feel the crouching muscles, the intent stare of a house cat who is not allowed to reach the birds who reside beneath his window sill perch.

Working with self portraits also became a way of trying to deal with a more humanistic approach to the figurative images that I was concerned

with. Hopefully, by looking at myself and letting these drawings and prints be more about my own self doubts and concerns than simply a representation of my own image I would also be able to better understand ways of depicting others. This work became more about what I was feeling at the time they were completed than any overall view I have of myself, or even of an accurate representation of how I truly appeared to be. For example, I have always been self-conscious about being very tall, and having very large feet and hands. My self portraits began to reflect this as I began exaggerating the hands more and more (plates 3 and 13). I not only began to discover how to depict feelings that I had about myself, but also began to take a more honest look at myself and see how I really appeared to other people. It is strange to realize that our view of ourselves is completely internalized, based primarily on our emotions and the way that we perceive ourselves, which is not necessarily true to others perceptions. We may view ourselves as too fat, too thin, plain, or awkward in some way that the outside world does not necessarily see in us. We tend to view others entirely externally, as they appear in our surroundings, without stopping to think that they possibly share the same doubts we have about ourselves when considering their own identity. This is not the same as observing inanimate objects for we are suddenly

influenced by our perceptions of the physicality of that person, and, if we know them well, by the complexities of their personality and possibly the role they may play in our life.

In beginning to attempt to depict more human qualities in other people, I decided that I should be dealing with people that I knew quite well. My good friends and family members have become the subjects that I am the most interested in. I am involved with their lives, and know their relationships and concerns. When dealing with the images of people I care about it is easier for some of my feelings about them and the knowledge I may have of how they interact to come through in my work. Viewing them as beings within a scene has become a natural approach because of my familiarity with them, and they are no longer simply compositional objects within a picture plane.

More recently, the images of my family have become concerned with a sense of history. How we all got where we are, what my parents were like when they were the age I am now, and how different members of my extended family interact with each other have become important considerations when dealing with their images. The Wedding (plates 1 and 10) actually depicts a scene from my parents' wedding, where my uncle and grandmother are about to enter the church. She is a very strong

willed woman, but my uncle, who has cerebral palsy, is filled with self-doubt and is almost being held up by her massive form. Considering how these and other family members interact and effect my own life has taught me more about myself and my views than drawing hundreds of self portraits.

I would like my work to be similar to a moment in time; a slice of a larger picture where it is not necessarily important what that larger picture is. I am not interested in narratives, but rather a sense that some kind of action just took place, or will soon. Knowing the story behind that action should not be essential to viewing the work, but, rather, should add a feeling that you are viewing a segment of a larger idea, not unlike a movie still.

Formally, my work deals with close, almost confrontational space, with value patterns and with shapes. Strong value contrasts are often essential to my drawings and prints, but they do not always designate a dramatic light source. These contrasts will often lead people to see my work as having a dark psychological content. Maybe it does, from somewhere deeper in my psyche, but this feeling is not necessarily a conscious attempt at stating an emotion, but simply a residual effect of the way I see things.

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PLATES



Plate 1. The Wedding Ink, charcoal, and graphite, 42" x 44".



Plate 2. Sisters Intaglio, 11 3/4" x 9 1/4".



Plate 3. Self Portrait with Big Hands Pastel on gessoed paper, 40" x 28".



Plate 4. D.D.'s Nana Charcoal, 28" x 40".



Plate 5. Cat Charcoal, 40" x 28".



Plate 6. Gold Intaglio, 12" x 12".



Plate 7. The Room Pastel and graphite on gessoed paper, 12 1/4" x 11".



Plate 8. The Gardens Charcoal, 40" x 28".



Plate 9. Outside Charcoal, 39 1/2" x 27 1/2".



Plate 10. The Wedding Lithograph, 11 3/4" x 8 3/4".



Plate 11. Zucchini and Ribs Pastel, 40 1/2" x 28 1/2".



Plate 12. Marlene Charcoal, 27 1/2" x 39 1/2".

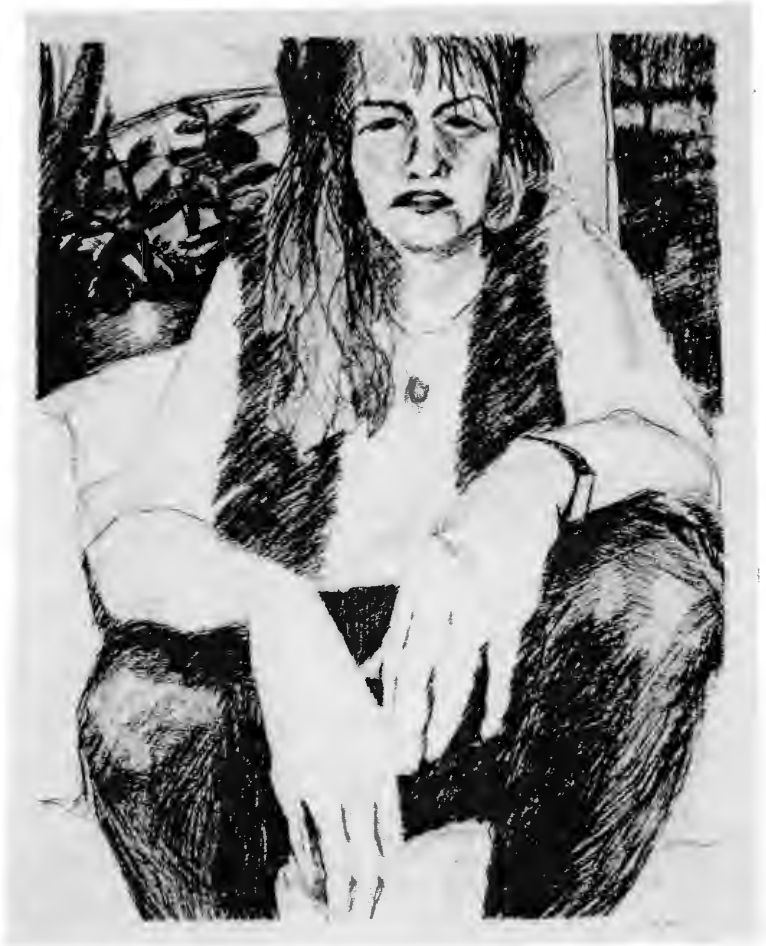


Plate 13. Self Portrait in Chair Charcoal, 26" x 20".



Plate 14. Beau Charcoal, 31" x 21 1/2".



Plate 15. Self Portrait in Green Jacket Pastel, 42" x 28 1/2".



Plate 16. Figure 9 Pastel, 14 1/4" x 13".



Plate 17. Bill and Marlene Oil and graphite, 39 1/2" x 27 1/2".



Plate 18. Hillside Lithograph, 11" x 7 1/4".



Plate 19. Self Portrait in Black Dress Charcoal, 40" x 28".



Plate 20. Two Figures Oil and graphite, 29 1/2" x 41 1/2".

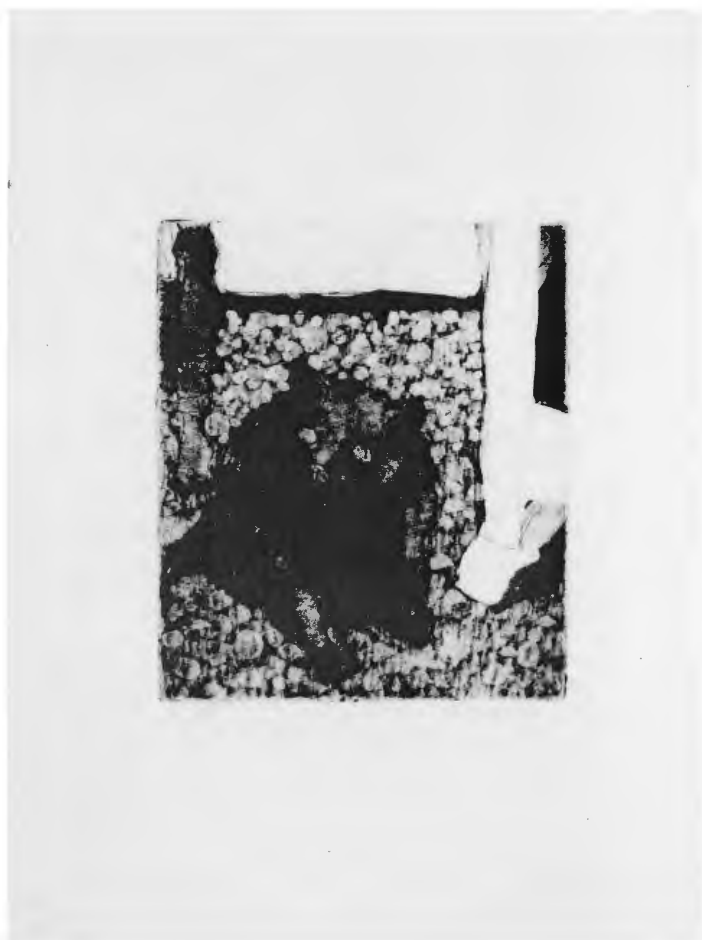


Plate 21. Mutt Intaglio, 4 1/2" x 4".



Plate 22. When He Went Home Charcoal, 40" x 28".



Plate 23. Self Portrait with Glasses Lithograph, 15 3/4" x 12".



Plate 24. Figure 11 Pastel, 24 1/2" x 20 1/2".



Plate 25. SunCat Charcoal, 40" x 28".



Plate 26. CJ not Eddie Charcoal, 39 1/2" x 27 1/2".



Plate 27. Figure 3 Charcoal, 11" x 10 1/2".