

THESIS

COMMENTARY OF A CRITICAL OBSERVER
RESPONDING TO CASUAL ENCOUNTERS

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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER OUR
SUPERVISION BY Robert B. Ludwig
ENTITLED COMMENTARY OF A CRITICAL OBSERVER RESPONDING TO
CASUAL ENCOUNTERS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIRE-
MENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF FINE ARTS.

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS
COMMENTARY OF A CRITICAL OBSERVER
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The history of prints and drawing indicates that these mediums are closely related and are most often called the graphic arts. The term graphic originated from the early engravers such as Hogarth, who used the medium in a journalistic way. The most obvious reason these early artists chose the print medium was because they loved drawing and the print was the most practical way to distribute their commentaries to the public. Another reason for their continued preoccupation with the medium may have been because they enjoyed the bold, black line that could be achieved with the engraved or etched line. These dark, rich lines against a white background embodied the confidence the artist had in his satirical commentary. Through the years a connection has been made associating the use of a decisive line with editorializing. When I look at this tradition I cannot but help thinking there is a rational connection. I continue to believe in this connection because when I am in the visualizing process for a satirical image, I see it in terms of ink on paper. No other medium can depict with

clarity the message I wish to convey, and when I begin to scratch, draw or cut the surface of the plate, stone or block, I watch the lines develop into people whom I have known, met or observed. The memories are a continuum of the bad times and good times. I like to think of my prints as a diary of a critical observer.

I have always found it difficult to separate my view on life from my artwork.

I look at my past and I see it is full of strange behavior. I look around me and take satisfaction in knowing my life is not the only one that is beleaguered by bad judgement, but rather than dwell on mistakes I or others have made, I usually make light of those troubles. The prints that I have accomplished during the last three years are a documentation of some of the incongruities I have witnessed or experienced in my lifetime.

All of the characters portrayed in the prints are people I know or have come across through the years. I have remembered these individuals because they behaved in a manner that seemed ironic to me. They acted contrary to their professed beliefs. It is this stimulus that supports the scenarios I created in my prints.

Satirizing can overwhelm an artwork to the point where any other outstanding attribute of the work is lost because of the concept behind it, therefore, I try not to push any political views in my work, and I try to refrain from illustrating any religious beliefs I might hold. My satire

intends to make light of bad habits, and at the same time sends a message that there are moral issues I wish to address. By using what for me is the depressing atmosphere of a tavern or my uncomfortable attitude of lounging around the pool, I try to capture in my art that particular moment that has become natural behavior for some of us, but a ridiculous ritual at the same time (Figs. 12 & 15)

I am also aware of the bad habits that I have accumulated over the years. Therefore, I have included three self portraits that make light of how I see myself, and these prints cover such shortcomings as an inflated ego, frivolity, and pudginess (Figs. 4, 13 and 14). These self portraits also indicate an intensity about life and a willingness to confront reality. By taking a closer look at myself, I can recognize the weaknesses in others so that the visual wittiness in my work does not become a visual attack.

Besides my fascination with the human condition, I find the environment in which we function to be of equal interest. The interior setting establishes boundaries for the actors and actresses of my prints to perform within. It seems that a place with four walls often forces people to confront each other, and therefore sets up pretenses. The atmosphere of an establishment, such as a public bathhouse or nightclub, can cause repressed feelings to rise to the surface (Figs. 9 & 8). In such places, shy men become braggarts or philosophers. Public places can effect people

in ways that make their personalities change -- sometimes for the better or sometimes for the worse.

I might be considered a twentieth century satirist, but I do not feel that is the only driving motive behind my art. I enjoy drawing the human figure with all its grace and integrity. The gestures and movement of the figure dissect and rearrange the drawing space. For me, the figure on a page becomes a puzzle. Two or more figures become an entangled network of limbs and torsos crossing and blending. It is the challenge of resolving complex compositions which involve the figure that I find gratifying.

The way light describes form is an integral part of my imagery. The effect of fractured light throughout a composition tends to be the first impression a viewer may have, but each highlight and shaded area is there for a purpose. The highlights emphasize features of the figure or interior that are significant to the irony of the subject. A raised glass, for example, picks up the sparkles of light and at the same instance brings attention to a controversial social practice (Fig. 10). Subtle lighting is used more often than dramatic lighting so that the message is not overstated.

Recently, I have discovered that the use of color helps strengthen my expression. Stark vivid colors that are used to describe a figure also project the emotion of that character. The use of naturalistic colors, would be much less effective in showing the peculiarity of the situation

described. Many interior settings are lit with artificial lighting and these incandescent lights cast a strange glow, changing the appearance of people and objects. I try to incorporate these filtered colors in my prints because they provide the facade that people hide behind in a social gathering, and the dream-like colors add to a sense of absurdity.

I find the drawing process a means of discovering form, and printmaking offers me the flexibility to arrange and rearrange. Whether it is the intaglio, lithographic or relief technique, I am able to search for the configuration that matches my mental image and to rework the passages that fall short of it. When creating a satirical image the artist is required to be aware of the general understanding of nonverbal communication. In my work, if the facial expression is not correct, or the gesture is wrong, the impact will not be there. I use my knowledge of the printmaking medium to refine my drawing and my conceptual intentions. Through intuition as well as a conscious determination my imagery evolves.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figuresviii
Documentation 1

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>	<u>Page</u>
1 <u>Speaker for the Defense, #1.</u> Drypoint, 12" x 15-3/4", 1984	2
2 <u>Speaker for the Defense, #2.</u> Drypoint, 12" x 15-3/4", 1984	3
3 <u>Speaker for the Defense, #3.</u> Drypoint, 12" x 15-3/4", 1984	4
4 <u>Bob.</u> Engraving, 18" x 13-3/4", 1985.	5
5 <u>Combing of the Hair.</u> Lithograph, 20-3/4" x 15", 1985	6
6 <u>Accident in the Loge.</u> Etching, 27-1/2" x 23-3/4", 1985.	7
7 <u>Family Unit.</u> Lithograph, 23" x 18-1/2", 1985	8
8 <u>Nightclub Moves.</u> Lithograph and Woodcut, 24" x 31", 1986	9
9 <u>The Bathers.</u> Lithograph and Woodcut, 17" x 24", 1986	10
10 <u>Raise a Glass.</u> Lithograph and Woodcut, 31" x 24", 1986	11
11 <u>Dance Partners.</u> Lithograph and Woodcut, 18" x 13", 1986	12
12 <u>Down Time.</u> Etching, 18" x 24", 1987.	13
13 <u>Bob's Demo.</u> Lithograph, 31-1/4" x 22-1/2", 1987.	14
14 <u>Bob at CSU.</u> Lithograph, 22-1/2" x 16-1/2", 1987	15
15 <u>Pool Side Boredom.</u> Woodcut, 42-1/2" x 28", 1987.	16

DOCUMENTATION

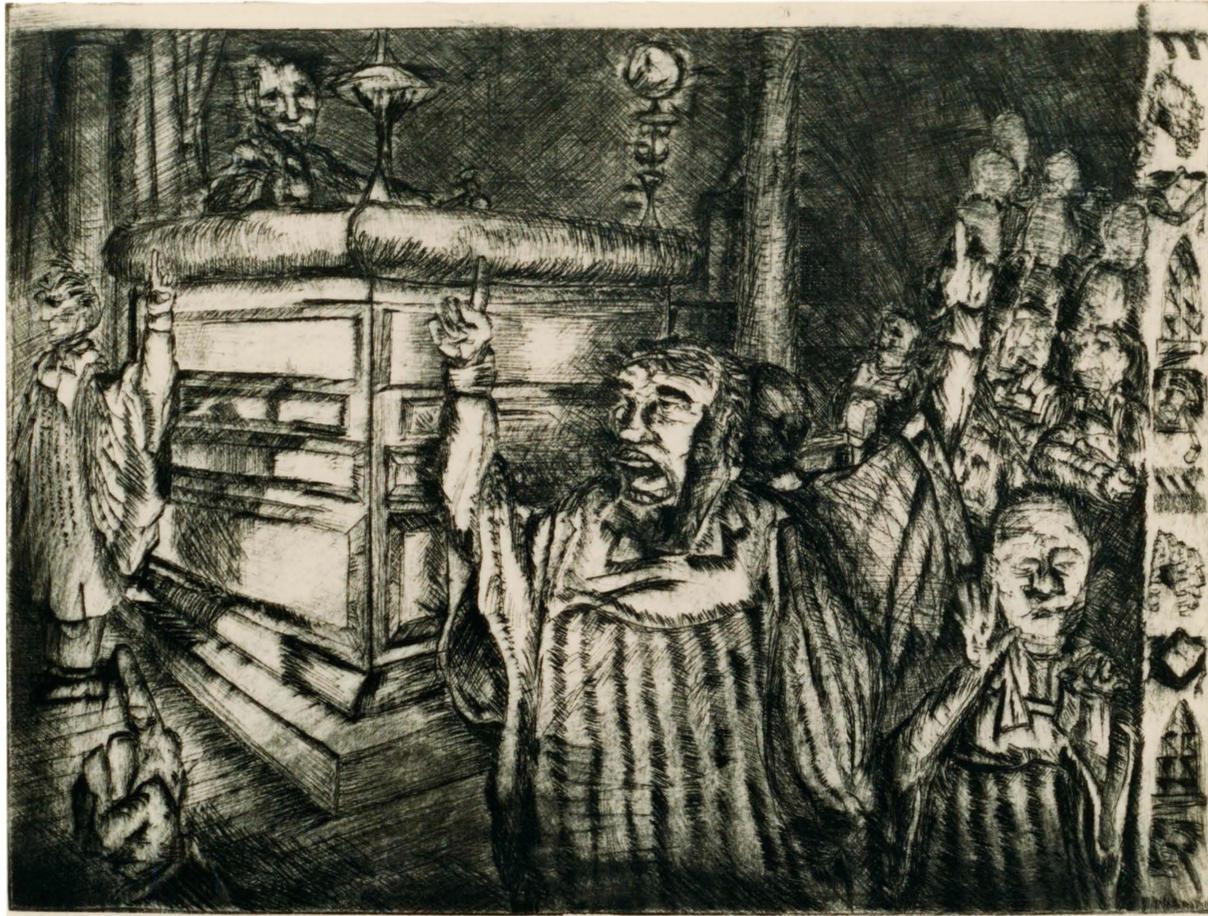


Fig. 1 Speaker for the Defense, #1. Drypoint, 12" x 15-3/4", 1984.



Fig. 2 Speaker for the Defense, #2. Drypoint, 12" x 15-3/4", 1984.



Fig. 3 Speaker for the Defense, #3. Drypoint, 12" x 15-3/4", 1984.



Fig. 4 Bob. Engraving, 18" x 13-3/4", 1985.

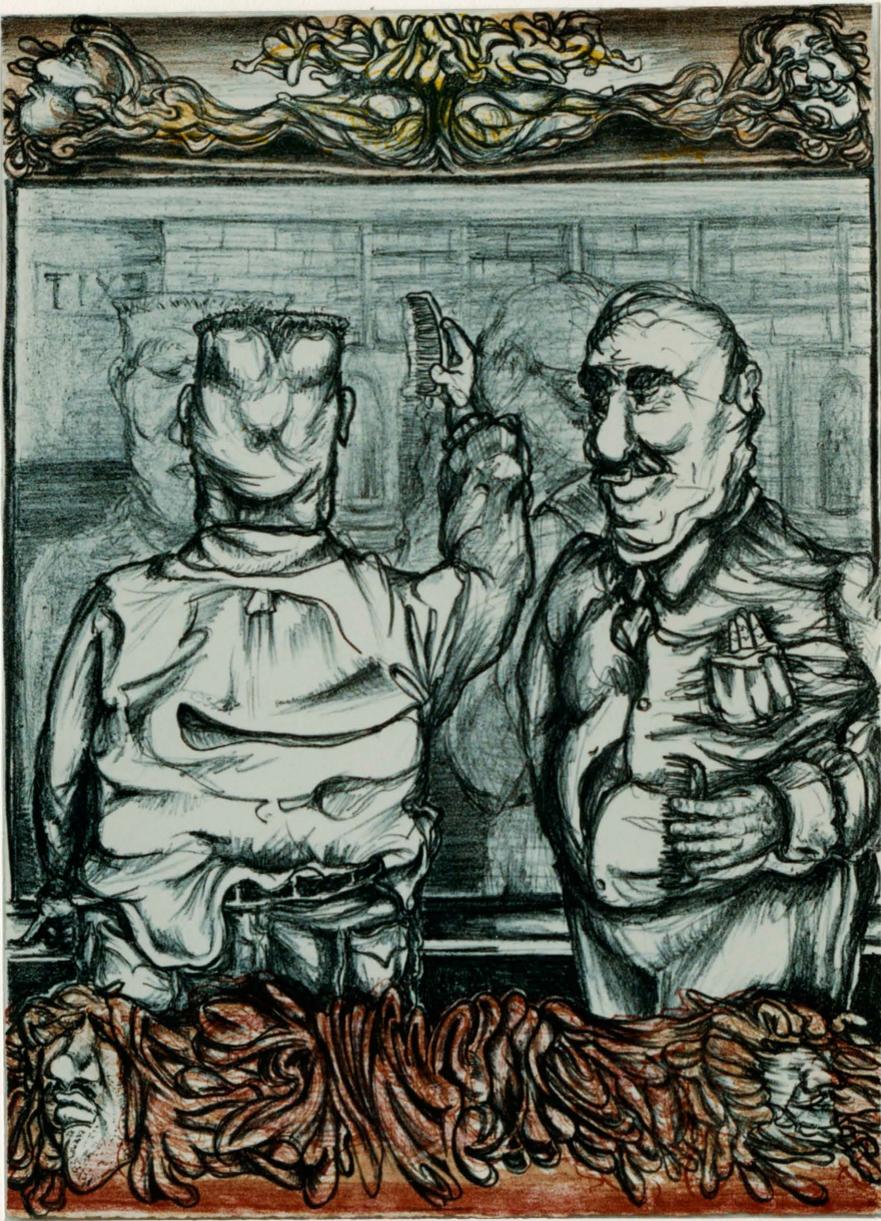


Fig. 5 Combing of the Hair. Lithograph, 20-3/4" x 15", 1985.



Fig. 6 Accident in the Loge. Etching, 27-1/2" x 23-3/4", 1985.



Fig. 7 Family Unit. Lithograph, 23" x 18-1/2", 1985.



Fig. 8 Nightclub Moves. Lithograph and Woodcut, 24" x 31", 1986.



Fig. 9 The Bathers. Lithograph and Woodcut, 17" x 24", 1986.



Fig. 10 Raise a Glass. Lithograph and Woodcut, 31" x 24", 1986.



Fig. 11 Dance Partners. Lithograph and Woodcut, 18" x 13", 1986.



Fig. 12 Down Time. Etching, 18" x 24", 1987.



Fig. 13 Bob's Demo. Lithograph, 31-1/4" x 22-1/2", 1987.



Fig. 14 Bob at CSU. Lithograph, 22-1/2 " x 16-1/2", 1987.



Fig. 15 Pool Side Boredom. Woodcut, 42-1/2" x 28", 1987.