

THESIS

DYNAMIC EXPRESSIONS

Submitted by

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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY MICHELE S. GRAHAM ENTITLED "DYNAMIC EXPRESSIONS" BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF FINE ARTS.

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

DYNAMIC EXPRESSIONS

Inherent to my spirit is the belief that intaglio printmaking is not a static process but a dynamic experimental one. Idea and faith in the experimental process are inseparable to me. It is this faith in the investigational process that has allowed me to experience my own art with a new and fresh approach to expressing my reverence for the world around me. Investigation into the visually creative side of my thought processes via the Master of Fine Arts in Printmaking has taught me to express my creativity with spontaneity. The MFA has placed me on a rewarding path of self-discovery in printmaking that is now an inseparable part of my life.

The initial phases of a more expressive and spontaneous personal creativity began after studying other printmakers. Artists like Stanley William Hayter, Gabor Peterdi, Robert Motherwell, Mauricio Lasansky, and Joan Miro all expressed themselves with freedom and autonomy. Their innovative responses to their visual experiences are the form of creative response I seek - responses based on visceral reactions as opposed to responses based solely on observation.

I derive my subject matter from the natural world around me, more specifically from places where I can feel the vastness of space or the power of nature. Responses to my subjects are attempts to be spontaneous, active and reflective of the changing qualities of these inspirations. I want my line-work to be bold and independent, following contours, shadows and structural elements (*Rhino*). My textural variations can be brought to the

surface of the plate by spontaneous selections based on physical reactions to the subject (*Corn*). My value changes are chosen with consideration of life experiences that often have only vague connections to the inspirational subject (*Vertebrae*).

There is a duality to my work. The most obvious manifestation of this duality is the two visual approaches I use; a softer representational interpretation and a more freely abstract approach. At times I will look at a subject and see every detail or a subject bathed in soft light and find myself very comfortable creating a work with a more controlled literal interpretation of the visual impression (*Alexa Reneé* and *Driveway*). Other times I will see a subject as chaotic lines and overlapping forms suffused in rapidly shifting light and find myself equally satisfied to work with these visual impressions (*Leaves* and *Three Sisters*). I look forward to these variations of interpretation and let them develop as fully as possible in the prints without forcing the image away from the direction it intends to go.

This duality is also apparent in the printing process. The majority of my prints involve double printing. The first impression is made usually in a lighter color and the plate is then inked a second time in a darker color and printed over the first impression. This process invariably adds depth to the colors and vibration between the overlying lines and forms.

The natural organic functioning of the grounds and acids allows me a gradual departure from the original idea, altering the image in a way that only the intaglio process can accomplish. The process of working and reworking the metal surface of the plate leads the image into an evolution of space and form, making the print an amalgam of destructions and constructions that develop progressively. With each successive plate in my experience as a printmaker, I react to the world around me and realize what a privilege it is to be a part of the immensity of gravure of which Stanley William Hayter spoke.

In 1940 Stanley Hayter brought the well established printmaking studio Atelier 17 to New York City as a place for the exchange of ideas and technical information about printmaking. During his lifetime Hayter taught a generation of American and international artists that the intaglio processes had virtually limitless potential for artistic expression. Hayter's love for the medium and dedication were carried across the country by men and women who had worked with him and had taken light from Hayter's enthusiasm and expertise. The contributions of Hayter and Atelier 17 to the development of printmaking in the 20th century, center primarily around two fundamental practices: Hayter's insistence on an experimental approach, and a cooperative workshop environment.

Hayter wanted the artists of Atelier 17 to try the ideas for themselves. He insisted that only one's personal experience could lead to significant advance. The artists needed to ask themselves the questions and seek resolutions through the intaglio process. Hayter's philosophy was successful in reviving and expanding intaglio printmaking as a medium of creative expression. The vitality of his experimental approach and the cooperative workshop environment is continued today in the practices of the professors of Colorado State University's Printmaking Studio.

The legacy Atelier 17 transmitted through university printmaking workshops is not an "Atelier 17 style" or even a certain number of intaglio techniques that have come to be associated with the workshop, but an approach to printmaking. That approach encourages a passionate curiosity based on experimentation, freedom of expression and a deep love for the metal plate as a means for original creative expression. I am privileged to have inherited the viewpoints surrounding this approach to printmaking through the efforts of professors Jim Dormer, Steve Simons and Jack Orman here at Colorado State University.

It is my belief that intaglio printmaking revolves around confidence in personal visual interpretations and the process of experimentation. Through this faith I have begun to move my artwork on a course of more expressive and spontaneous creativity. With inspiration from printmakers who have preceded me, my work has become more honest to my spirit; it has become a free expression of the joy I experience in life. I most certainly realize now what a privilege it is to be a part of the immensity of gravure.

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Douglas, I thank you with all my heart for welcoming me into your personal studio and sharing with me your immense joy of life and the art of printmaking. Without you I could not have reached as far. I look forward to many more years of laughter and creating fine prints together.

DEDICATION

I dedicate all of my work to my loving husband Jim and my daughter Alexa.

Their remarkable support toward my art is inspiring and has instilled in me a creative confidence I could not have without their love.

I love you both with all my heart and soul.

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Fig. 2, Rhino, soft-ground and aquatint etching, 36 x 24 in.



Fig. 3, Remnants of the Earth, soft-ground and aquatint etching, 36 x 24 in.



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