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Optical Transmissions

Documentation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Interdisciplinary Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Artist Statement

My art is deeply rooted in graphic design. Along the way I have experimented in block printing, screen printing, and painting. I use highly saturated colors and patterns to create optical illusions. One major influence on my work is the Op Art movement from the 1960s. From Op Art I take the ideas of how color and shape can work together to create visual effects. Music is another influence on my work. I try to create rhythms and the illusion of pulsating beats, visually. I want there to be a sensation of movement within the work where some parts of the artwork appear to advance and other parts to recede. My goal in art is to evoke a sense of visual excitement in the viewer through the use of color, shape, and pattern.

Optical Transmissions

Introduction

Upon receiving my Bachelor of Art Education degree from Virginia Commonwealth University I began my career as an elementary art teacher. For the next few years I concentrated on teaching, and continued to make art. I was working on advancing my block and screen printing style and had been experimenting with pattern, symmetry, and overlapping shapes. When I was accepted into the Master of Interdisciplinary Studies (MIS) program I was pleased that I was able to walk into this environment with a wealth of ideas and design work already completed. This program allowed me to take my art in more directions and make my work more precise, planned, and developed. Being around other art teachers and artists on a weekly basis was an invaluable asset to my own growth as an artist.

Subject Matter

My subject matter in the MIS program consisted of geometric shapes, lines, and various color combinations, such as in *Untitled* (Appendix, 1). This painting shows many circular and curving shapes that overlap. In the overlapping areas I change the color combinations. These overlapping spaces make the shapes seem transparent, which helps to create optical and spatial ambiguity. The contrast between tints and tones in the painting help give the shapes the illusion of layers and pictorial depth.

I had been working with geometric shapes since I first began block printing. I

discovered that I could scan these images into the computer and make them more complex by using different art software. I also discovered that I could draw and design shapes using the same computer software. I used these designs in screen printing, heat transfers, and paintings. My simple computer designs worked well as screen prints and the beginnings of paintings, where as the more complex designs were printed out as heat transfers.

The use of color also became important and I began experimenting with complementary, fluorescent, and reflective color combinations. For example, in *Strobe* (Appendix, 2) I mixed white with hues to make tints and black to make tones. I would also put in a small amount of the complementary color when mixing these tints and tones to create non-naturalistic or *arbitrary* colors. By muting colors and juxtaposing some of them next to fluorescent and reflective paint I created an extreme contrast which makes the colors more complex.

Influences

I have a background in graphic design going back to high school and my first couple years of college. I was also interested in graffiti art and artwork that was design oriented and used color, line, and shape as its subject matter. Then, the discovery of the Op Art movement intrigued and inspired me. Artists such as Victor Vasarely (1906-1997) and Bridget Riley (1931-) were concerned with creating optical illusions. They created these illusions by their manipulation of shapes, lines, and colors. Their choices of juxtaposing contrasting colors and geometric shapes created a visual sense of movement,

and the illusion of three-dimensional space on two-dimensional surfaces. The manipulation of linear perspective rules was another technique they used to create these illusions. These were the ideas I studied and focused on in the MIS program.

Music has also been a major influence on my work. When I first discovered the Grateful Dead I also discovered an entire subculture that associated the music with a wealth of visual imagery. This emphasis on imagery was an integral feature to music in the 1960s. I was amazed at how poster artists of that era such as Stanley Mouse (1940-) and Alton Kelley (1940-2008) were able to create a look in their art that became so closely linked to the music and psychedelic movements of the time. These artists used graphic design elements such as typography and illustration coupled with arbitrary colors. They combined imagery from art history and pop culture thereby mixing elements of high and low art, while trying to capture the essence of a mystical, synthetic experience through retinal stimulation. Their art made music about more than just sound; they also added feelings, memories, and ideas to it. I continue to be drawn to the relationship that can be created between music and art.

Recently my primary focus in music has been contemporary electronic music. Some of the genres I am most influenced by are Trance-Fusion, Dub Step, Down Beat, and Jungle. These musical types can be very simple with just a pulsating beat, or very complicated and layered. This music also has visual imagery associated with it that incorporates graphic design as well as graffiti art. When I listen to it I imagine colors and shapes that advance and recede to the different sounds and beats. I want to represent this correlation between music and art. My goal is to make my art look like the music sounds.

Working with Acrylics

My intentions in painting were to transfer my computer designs onto larger formats than printing, such as canvases and boards. I started out freehand painting in a graffiti style but then discovered that tape helped me make my lines crisp and clean. These advances also allowed me to take these simple designs into much more layered and intricate directions.

I typically painted on canvas and wood. I painted all surfaces with multiple coats of primer and sanded them to make a smooth surface. Then I used a digital slide projector to project one of my computer designs onto the canvas and drew the image on the surface. Once the basic shapes were on the canvas I proceeded to tape areas off and painted them in. The use of tape helped me create multiple-layered paintings that have clean lines, for example *Op-Art Globe* (Appendix, 3).

When I began painting I combined two different styles of art I had done over the years, my early graffiti work and current computer art. Since painting was a new way of creating art for me, I decided I wanted to make it more of a new and current expression. With this decision I left my graffiti style behind and chose to slow my process down and make more symmetrical images. As I improved with my taping technique and started painting on larger canvases, I was able to create three-dimensional illusions, as in *Optical Transmissions* (Appendix, 4). This new direction also had an effect on which computer designs I could use because some of these shapes do not work as well with my taping technique. With these findings certain shapes are used more in my paintings than others.

As I continued to create three-dimensional illusions on two-dimensional surfaces I began to think about actually adding three-dimensional aspects to the paintings. With this idea in mind I did a series of relief paintings. For example *Untitled* (Appendix 5) was created out of wood pieces that were cut and glued onto the board. I was able to blend the three-dimensional pieces into the two-dimensional areas by incorporating their design and pattern aspects with the color scheme.

Working with Heat Transfers

The computer heat transfer technology allowed me to make art on the computer. My first intentions were to scan in images of my block print designs and manipulate them using computer software. Eventually, I began to create designs on the computer by just using the shapes, lines, colors, and filters provided by the software program.

The heat transfer process consisted of two steps. The first step was to scan, download, or draw a digital image on the computer. I then manipulated these images with the computer software by stretching, overlapping, and changing the colors of the images, such as in the computer image *Massive* (Appendix, 6). The second step was to print these designs out and iron them onto different surfaces. I chose to transfer my images onto white paper. Using a white ground helped to enhance the image rather than compete with it.

Some of the most interesting transfers were made using images that were first created on the computer, then turned into paintings, and then photographed and put back into the computer for further manipulation, as in *The Future* (Appendix, 7). This basic

ball design was at first created in just black and white. When I transferred it to a canvas I was able to make it more intricate by using my taping technique. The final stage of photographing it and putting it back into the computer as a digital file allowed me to make it even more complex and layered before turning it into a heat transfer. I was fascinated and inspired when I recognized how intertwined my computer art and paintings had become.

Conclusion

My time in the MIS program has been a very productive time in my life for making art. Throughout my course work I have added different media to my existing artistic style. The additions of painting and computer art have elevated my skills as an artist. The techniques and processes I practiced gradually became more refined, which in turn made my work more visually appealing.

I have created a visual language with the designs I have created. These designs have helped create a visual conversation that I will be able to explore for years to come. Looking to the future, I plan on taking the knowledge and ideas I have learned to new and exciting places through my use of screen printing, painting, and computer design.

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Appendix

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- Figure 1. *Untitled*, acrylic on canvas, 36”X48”, 2006.
- Figure 2. *Strobe*, acrylic on canvas, 16”X16”, 2007.
- Figure 3. *Op Art Globe*, acrylic on canvas, 16”X16”, 2008.
- Figure 4. *Optical Transmissions*, acrylic on board, 24”X48” 2008.
- Figure 5. *Untitled*, acrylic on board, 48”X24”X2”, 2008.
- Figure 6. *Massive*, computer heat transfer, 7”X4”, 2008.
- Figure 7. *The Future*, computer heat transfer, 7”X7”. 2009.



Figure 1. *Untitled*, acrylic on canvas, 36"X48", 2006.



Figure 2. *Strobe*, acrylic on canvas, 16"X16", 2008.



Figure 3. *Op Art Globe*, acrylic on canvas, 16''X16'', 2008.



Figure 4. *Optical Transmissions*, acrylic on board, 24”X48”, 2008.



Figure 5. *Untitled*, acrylic on board, 48"X24"X2", 2008.



Figure 6. *Massive*, computer heat transfer, 7”X4”, 2009.



Figure 7. *The Future*, computer heat transfer, 7"X7", 2009.

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Education:

- 2009 Master of Interdisciplinary Studies, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia, Concentrations: Painting, Computers and the Arts.
- 1996 Bachelor of Fine Arts, Art Education, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia
- 1992 Associates Degree, Graphic Design, Mohawk Valley Community College, Utica, New York

Teaching Experience:

- 2001-Present Art Teacher, Parkside Elementary School, Spotsylvania, Virginia
- 1997 - 2001 Art Teacher, Brock Road Elementary School, Spotsylvania, Virginia

Exhibitions:

- 2009 *Optical Transmissions*, Master of Interdisciplinary Studies Exhibition, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia, Fredericksburg Center For The Creative Arts, Fredericksburg, Virginia
- 2008 *Alumni Show*, Mohawk Valley Community College, Utica, New York
- 2008 *Fine Arts Festival*, Hurkamp Park, Fredericksburg, Virginia
- 2007 *Fine Arts Festival*, Hurkamp Park, Fredericksburg, Virginia
- 2006 *Fine Arts Festival*, Hurkamp Park, Fredericksburg, Virginia
- 2001 *Color Show*, Fredericksburg Center For The Creative Arts, Fredericksburg, Virginia
- 2001 *Virginia Commonwealth University Computer Transfers Show*, Colonial Art and Frame, Fredericksburg, Virginia
- 1996 *Senior Show*, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia