

Can you ever imagine the impact you have had and the multitude of lives you have changed and made better? ...I fell into a trance of remembering the year 1961 very well, and the true impact of your enthusiasm, your joy for art, is something I'll never forget. I hope you could sense it then — that I wanted to know and be a part of that joy which you so vividly expressed. You may not picture yourself this way, but in my memory, your intellectual clarity was an inspiration to us all, and I have always wanted to be, in that way, as much like you as humanly possible.

...Now, as I'm in Boston to speak in an hour, please know that my personal belief in the life of a teacher was, in many ways, a reflection of all that I admired in the way you

taught. It all seemed valuable, honorable, and in small part a balance against what one has been given and the world's indifference. So again I must speak of my gratitude to you.

...My friend, the photographer Robert Adams writes, "Away at the horizon, almost like a line of trees, are the picture makers on whom I depended." To so great an extent, you opened that world to us and it is important to me that you know what a blessing, what a living example you have been.

Emmet Gowin

I was introduced to Richard Carlyon in the late 1970s, after a brilliant lecture on drawing that he gave at Virginia Tech. It was an eclectically broad historical survey that illustrated drawings from Leonardo to de Kooning — a stunning array of images accompanied by Carlyon's insightful commentary. He presented the development of drawing in Western culture as a quick-graph of our evolving humanism, an analytical interpretation of a never-ending project.

A year or two later, I was invited by Radford University to participate in a two-person exhibition with Carlyon. I was delighted to be invited to show with him, but because of his passion for classical drawing, I assumed his works would be figurative and realistic. When I

saw that his paintings were abstract, geometric and minimalist, I realized that his personal narrative of the history of drawing had led him toward a blanker canvas on which quieter, more subtle aspects of human nature might be perceived. His paintings are autonomous forms in themselves and are, in that way, essentially representational. He carefully paints rectangular forms on a flat color field so they may alternately appear as figure and ground. His work does not "buzz" the retina like Albers' paintings; they do not urge your eye to travel across and up the canvas in the manner of Newman's "zips;" and unlike Reinhardt's brooding cruciforms, they do not inhale you. They breathe in a manner that keeps you looking.

Carlyon's paintings can be meaningfully compared to Robert Rauschenberg's "White Paintings" (1951), which the experimental composer, writer and artist John Cage described as "airports for lights, shadows, and particles," and which inspired Cage to write his most famous composition, 4'33"(1952), his notorious "silent" piece. I

mention Cage because Richard Carlyon and John Cage became friends in the mid-1960s. Having known both of them, I can say that they shared a sensibility very akin to a Zen aesthetic, in which contradictory experiences must be kept in mind. Like Cage's "silent" piece, in which the indeterminate sounds produced by the audience make the piece different every time it is performed, Carlyon made meditative paintings that are simultaneously empty and full, and may always be experienced another way. Cage's time brackets in 4'33" create a theatrical moment in which any sound may be "musical." Richard's paintings create a sense of reduction of the space around you; they remove the clutter. They do not lead a viewer's eye anywhere but offer an unrestricted view of everything.

Ray Kass

When Richard retired from VCU in 1996, he was cleaning out his office and found drawers-full of committee minutes and agendas. In the margins of all these documents he had drawn cascades of marks and scribbles. He had survived the thousand committee meetings by gaming his colleagues' voices into visual scores. And now instead of shredding them, he took a mass of the pages and enlarged the margins' drawings on the office Xerox machine, organized them by meeting date, and taped them together like frames of a film to make a long strip, hundreds of feet. Devising a system for rate of feed, he did a duet with that Xerox machine, keeping it

continuously in copying mode while slowly pulling the strip across the platen. The machine produced page after page of marks, the lines of the drawings made fluid by motion. And he took those fourth-power Xeroxes, enlarged them, and transcribed them by hand onto watercolor paper, the old fashioned way, with mapping grid and squared labor, ink and brush. His skill as a draftsman was superb.

But he never presented work with any description of how it was made. A Duchampian use of chance... but Richard will invent a chance-driven process and then take it through such a sheer cascade of algorithms — things done to things done to things — that one finds oneself ultimately in the presence of ideas about evolution, complexity, and the mind's experience of time. You might ask, is this an endless set of voyages into chance? Or is there a world of readable information in every moment, only needing a scribe with a powerful enough frequency of attention?

The "minutes" of those meetings he made, for they are the minutes taken by a divine secretary: it seems as if the more he invents strategies of chance to eliminate all traces of self from his actions, the more the world in all its history and bible of voices rushes in.

In a show of his work at 1708 a few years ago called *Sightings*, Richard mounted an epic selection of paintings, drawings, and video, culled from some of the major series that formed his career. There were five works for multichannel video, each of which took up one to seven banked video monitors. You walked into the gallery and some 25 televisions, all going at once, met you in a standing wave of sound and action.

One series: his upside down talking head on one screen; on another, just the left lens of his

glasses; a third trained on a blank wall of his studio with the shadows of cars and people passing on the street. From each monitor, his voice quietly speaking, a series of stories, looped and repeated from different points, like a fugue. Moving into its range, one heard first speech, then speaking, then words, and out of the words, stories. Stories written or found, each no longer than 10 or 20 seconds. I remember them now as a sequence of short whispered passages or dreams, emerging and disappearing in a chorus of voices.

Moving through the show, parsing out one piece from the other, an astonishing second order of happening began. Two different pieces suddenly articulate the same sentence in unison. A written

word on one screen is heard spoken on another. A glance up finds it spelled out in paint on canvas across the room. You felt suddenly that the gallery was a matrix, a brain, and yourself its swift and constellating thought.

A rare artist has the power to bring something into existence without appearing to lay any claim to it. "The eye hears, the ear sees," Richard says. Within the tapestry and the acoustics of his work, a high-up pure emotional tone sounds, behind the generous play and hubbub at hand. A tone so harmonically perfect that one emerges from an exhibition dazzled by the bright light it has shed on the community of mind.

Elizabeth King

I first met Dick almost fifty years ago. I was an uncertain art student while he, at least to me, was an accomplished artist living in the lower east side of New York City. At that time the lower east side was not the trendy place we know today; it was a lot rawer, a lot dirtier, and a lot cheaper. Dick lived and worked in a cold-water flat, or more accurately, a cold-water room, in a walk-up building with shared bathrooms on each floor. His room was extremely small with a tiny storage pantry. He could live in the room — there was a cot, a table, and a chair — or he could work in the room; there was not space, however, to do both at the same time. Dick's solution was to get up in the morning, dismantle his cot, and move that, along with most of his other living stuff, to the storage area. Painting materials would then be brought from the

storage area to what was now his studio. In the evening, the room was swept, cleaned, and sometimes even repainted, if needed. His studio returned to being a small room with a cot, a table, a chair, and a single painting on the wall. Dick did this every day, seven days a week.

Many years later while going through the Monastery of San Marco in Florence, I found myself thinking of Dick and the way he lived and worked during this period of his life. I think it was because of the simplicity of the individual monk's cells, each a small room with a cot, a table, a chair, and a single painting on the wall.

Bernard Martin

Team teaching the Art Intro class with Richard was the best education in education I have ever received. Few people I know are as fortunate as I to have had such a stellar colleague. When I think of the man, I remember that the light from the distant stars still reach us long after the star is no longer there. I think of Richard in this respect; his gifts to me and others will carry on his spirit, persona, and notions for generations to come.

I know my students loved him. They parroted his lectures and criticism, and felt superior to their peers because they had a seat in his classes and were not part of the SRO crowd. Tempers flared when the space in Richard Carlyon's sculpture class was

kept at a sane level. The adoration of the student body was earned through his giving. I think every kid knew that when Richard regarded their work or lectured, they were getting the maximum from someone whose love of the field was absolutely unquestionable. His ability to find germs of quality in the paltriest endeavors was part of his genius. A student once said of Richard that he knew Carlyon had great eyes because he could brilliantly explain what he perceived. "And, of course, he loved my work." Richard seemed to leave each student with something positive to build upon.

The honesty and positive reinforcement were things those who loved Richard emphasized in their own teaching. I learned from Richard that "keeping the glass half full" was essentially a choice against its alternative.

...Once while conducting a critique of a sculpture student's work in the lobby of the new building, I saw Richard across Broad Street walking to his studio. I asked the students if they knew that white-haired guy in the black jacket. They lined up at the glass windows, and several of the students said, yeah, that's Richard Carlyon. I then asked if they knew where he was going. It was wonderful to be able to talk to the students about Richard's commitment to his work and his work habits relative to their work habits and commitment. I told the kids to check on Richard and they would see him most days trekking to his studio. A few students commented on their Carlyon sightings. They were the best students, upon whom a good example is never wasted.

Lester Van Winkle

Richard Carlyon is one of the most influential artists in Richmond's history — generations of artists in this community have been profoundly inspired by his generosity, intellect, broad perspective, and process. As part of this retrospective dedicated to Carlyon's career, a tribute celebrating his artistic connections and contributions to dance and performance was presented by the VCU Department of Dance and Choreography on September 26, at the university's Grace Street Theater.

Entitled *Move*, the evening-length program included images of Carlyon's work, several of his performance-based videos, and dance inspired by him and his work. The "script" for the performance came from Carlyon's own lecture notes, quotations, and statements, combined with the perceptions of other artists who spoke to the vital, influential role that he played for so long. Using Dick's own words, we found, enabled us to present some of his great wit

intact. The program featured appearances by fellow artists, colleagues, former students, and performers from the Richmond dance community. These participants included Sally and Tim Bowring, Felix Cruz, Jason Carlyon, Mary Flinn, Buffy Morgan, Laura Schandelmeier, and Ray Schandelmeier.

It also featured *Their Then Now / Doin' The Shorty George*, a dance created by choreographer Laura Schandelmeier in 2003. The footwork in Schandelmeier's dance is an adaptation of the movement in Carlyon's video *Their Then Now*. Through video editing, Carlyon re-choreographed the Shorty George dance number performed by Fred Astaire and Rita Hayworth in the film *You Were Never Lovelier*, originally choreographed by Hermes Pan.

For me, this evening was an extremely important part of the city-wide retrospective honoring Richard Carlyon. Dick had a gigantic range and ability to address and comprehend diverse aesthetics and art

forms — sculpture, painting, film, etc. — and dance was certainly included in that range. He danced as a child and as a young man, studying the Martha Graham technique when he became a student at Richmond Professional Institute. Later, when he was my painting teacher and I was considering dance as a career, his understanding of Dance the Art Form was clarifying and invaluable to me. Over the years, his informed comments and feedback continued to be invaluable and somehow always inspiring. He had that rare ability to infuse an emerging artist or re-infuse a working artist with the excitement of the process, the challenge, and the journey.

In truth, to watch Dick move at any point in his life was to see him dance. This performance was a way of sharing another rich aspect of Richard Carlyon, THE ARTIST.
Chris Burnside

