Objects and Images

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Objects and Images

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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I create to emphasize the aesthetic or beauty of an object. When I begin a work, I feel the influence of the many photos I am constantly looking at and analyzing. I look at how light affects color, how light defines form, and how patterns are created by repeated shapes. I try to reproduce the things I see, but with dramatic impact by enlarging shapes and emphasizing colors. While my paintings are about pure aesthetics, my books are social commentary.
Objects and Images

A Need to Create

Enrolling in Master of Interdisciplinary Studies Program (MIS) at Virginia Commonwealth University was not about the end product of a degree, but about my need to create. I needed to be around others who have the same urge to create and explore visual media. The energy and work shared by the other class participants helped me to generate and explore new ideas and expand on ones I already had. I was energized by association with the other students and learned new techniques to share with my students. These classes were instrumental in helping me realize why I need to create.

I create to emphasize the aesthetics or beauty of an object or idea. I want the viewer to forget about the outside world for a time and just enjoy the image, the colors, the shapes, and the forms used in my work. My paintings reflect the beauty of an object and the books I create reflect conceptual ideas.

Paintings

My paintings are concerned with formal elements, for instance, *Audubon Water Lilies* (Appendix, 1) is a painting I worked on inspired by a photograph I took at the Audubon Zoo in New Orleans, Louisiana. This image appealed to me because of the contrast of the pinks and greens of the plants against the dark solidity of the water. This was an exercise in combining strong contrasting colors.

In the painting *Amaryllis* (Appendix, 2) I used only primary colors and filled the
canvas with a large scale image of a flower. This piece was inspired by the distinctive works of Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986) whose flower images fill an entire canvas. The large scale of the flower image helped me focus the painting on form and color. Another influence was the large black and white photographs of Imogen Cunningham’s (1883-1976) lilies and other flowers. Cunningham took black and white photographs of the finest detail highlighting the formal elements of the flowers.

The small painting, *JMU Pear* (Appendix, 3), was inspired by my black and white photograph *Singlet* (Appendix, 4). I photographed a single pear sitting on a deck rail and I decided to use this image to create a painting in colors of violets and yellows. I kept this image small and I see it as a study in color complements.

The *Window Sill* (Appendix, 5) fills the picture plane with the image of luscious red pears. I began this painting with a quick photograph of the pears in the bay window of my house. I was looking for an image that conveyed ripeness and earthiness, but I wanted to contrast it with geometric lines and strong shadow. The lines of the windowsill do not follow correct linear perspective; I was more concerned with the overall color and form and de-emphasized perspective rules. I wanted the pears to seem realistic, juicy, and just ripe for eating. To emphasize the red of the pears, I added complementary green to the background area.

I have always admired the 20th century photographer Edward Weston (1886-1958), whose work emphasized formal aesthetics through shapes and lighting as in his black and white image of a green bell pepper, *Pepper* (1930.) Like Weston, I worked with lighting in the image *Pear Tango* (Appendix, 6). Again, I enlarged the pears to
emphasize their form, but in this painting I focused on the light and shadow effect rather than form and color. This piece was a new venture for me since I usually paint from photographs. This time, I set up a still life of pears with the light coming from a side window enhanced with light from a table lamp. Depending on the time of day I worked on this painting, the lighting varied and I found myself changing the colors and the background several times. Because of factors which I can not control, such as light variation, I prefer to work from photographs rather than from life.

As my painting production increased, I began to look at more paintings by other artists like Andrew Wyeth (1917- ), who painted using naturalistic colors and simple presentation. I am influenced by his simplicity of composition, lack of abstraction, and recognizable subject matter.

The more I painted, the more comfortable with my abilities I became. In *The Real McCoy* (Appendix, 7), Professor Tommy White urged me to venture out and paint on a larger scale. For me, this meant a canvas which measured 60”x36”. The image was from one of my monotypes. I wanted to emphasize the forms of McCoy florist vases. McCoy vases, also known as Roseville Floraline, were very simple yet elegant vases produced in the 1960's specifically for the florist industry. I found working with color on a larger scale was challenging due to how differently colors can interact with a bigger coverage of area.

My paintings continue to change as I develop new images and ideas. I grew up in the South and have always loved the wrought iron seen in many southern towns. *Summer's Gate* (Appendix, 8) is a new direction for me. In this image, I combined a
wrought iron gate and colors I remember from a late summer afternoon. The gate is painted expressively, but is recognized as wrought iron. The colors I have used in the background are meant to give the impression of a garden in bloom. While keeping focused on formal issues of color, line, and shape, this painting is a transition from the techniques of realism to a more painterly expressiveness. This painting is a move from realism to a conceptual combination of color, lines, and shapes. I now find there are other painting styles that I can use to approach formal issues and still keep a recognizable subject matter.

**Process and Technique: Computer Transfers**

Producing computer transfers is a hands-on and process oriented area of my work. The process of using computer transfers had me taking photographs, processing the film, scanning the image or negative, and manipulating the image through a computer program before printing the final product and transferring the image on to paper. I teach photography and felt this was an ideal class to carry over to my teaching. I liked the idea of combining photography or scanned artwork with a computer to enhance an image for a new work of art.

I liked the excitement of producing an image onto a strip of plastic, as in traditional photography. Digital photography produced this same excitement in me. In addition, the computer transfer technique allowed me to use a computer program to cut my final print time to a fraction. I have to admit I was reluctant to move from a standard film camera to a digital camera, but there is a correlation between the two. Like negatives
on film, digital image files are created for viewing but the time frame for producing an image varies greatly. Normally an image on film could take an hour to develop; a picture taken with a digital camera can be downloaded to a computer and printed within seconds of taking the picture. For example, the image Singlet (Appendix, 4) was taken from a black and white negative which was terribly scratched during traditional film processing. I scanned this image into my computer, and then used a photo program to remove the scratches. After removing the scratches, I increased the contrast and blurred the overall picture, then printed the image out on T-shirt transfer paper. This new process has allowed me to use previously unusable images and process them in a faster fashion. It also allows me to save the final image digitally for possible use at a later time.

When working with transfers, finding the right iron to transfer the image to printmaking paper was a challenge in itself. To transfer the image properly, I had to have an evenly hot temperature in order for the material to melt on to the paper. This step proved frustrating at times, the transfer medium varied from cool peel to hot peel meaning the product either had to be completely cool before the paper backing could be removed or removed when the paper was still extremely hot. Another roadblock was the uneven transfer of an image due to not applying even pressure to the iron. In this case, the image will either adhere to the paper or remain stuck to the transfer paper. When this happened, I decided to work with the inconsistencies of a transfer by adding or fusing another image on top. With trial and error, the best transfer method I found is using a dry-mount press not an iron for even, consistent results on paper and fabric.

The use of fabric and sewing has been a big part of my creative endeavors. Royal
Dux Blue (Appendix, 9), is a miniature quilt created by using a digital transfer on fabric and fabrics. I began by taking a close up digital image of a Royal Dux pottery vase. The Royal Dux Porcelain factory began its operation in 1853 in the town of Duchcov in Czechoslovakia, now known as the Czech Republic. The factory is noted for its fine porcelain figurines. However, I chose to depict one of their vases with sculpted poppies in relief on the sides. I worked on the digital image of the vase in the computer, changing the colors from oranges to the contrasting blues. The range of blues worked with the collection of fabric pieces I had on hand and I added paint to enhance the transferred image.

While the process of computer transfers is great for creating images directly onto paper, I used another method for the fabric on Wisteria Vest (Appendix, 10). I printed onto the fabric straight from my printer. This involves treating 100% cotton fabric with a solution called Bubblejet Set which was developed specifically for fabric artists. This solution makes the inks colorfast and that images can be printed directly on to fabric. The computer program I used also had the ability to modify an image to appear as a line drawing or a watercolor painting. I created line drawings from my digital images and printed them onto a fabric sheet treated with this solution. Next, I hand-colored them using fabric paints. I no longer needed an iron or dry-mount press to create fabric works. I had added to my range of techniques and was now a convert to digital transfer technology.
Book Art

In bookmaking, aesthetics plays a large part. But in addition to creating a book that is pleasing to look at, I found myself using this medium for social commentary. The bookmaking classes opened a whole new realm of expression for me, including pop-up books, picture books, fabric books, sculptural books, and the altered book. There are a myriad of techniques for binding and creating books.

The biggest challenge in this class was overcoming the ingrained notion of not defacing a book, which is done when altering a book. An altered book is a book either purchased specifically for a piece or salvaged from a trash can or library sale. This book is then somehow changed in order to move the book to the realm of art. The altered book process meant I had permission to cut, glue, wire, tear, or paint any book. Therapeutic Nutrition (Appendix, 11) was a textbook from a nutrition class. My idea was not only an altered book, but also a topical social commentary on eating disorders. So, I wired the pages together like jaws being wired to prevent eating and cut into the pages to create a pocket for the comfort food, a chocolate bar. The paper doilies were used on the interior pocket and on the cover to emphasize the association of a trip to a special candy store.

The idea of a sculptural book was entirely new to me. A pop-up book is one type of sculptural book, but the book only becomes sculptural when it is opened as in Pop Out (Appendix, 12). I believe that sculpture is meant to be either in the round or relief. So, I made Bed Doll (Appendix, 13) to conform to my idea of sculpture. This book stands on a pedestal and can be viewed from all sides. The term bed doll comes from the dolls created in the 1950's and 60's to adorn a young girl's bed. Book of Wisdom (Appendix,
14) is also a sculptural book. I included in this book a personal commentary on the trivia our subconscious includes in our minds by using phrases and words relating to wisdom.

Bookmaking has opened up a whole new area of work for me. Different processes and techniques can be combined in one book. For example, *Sample Book* (Appendix, 15) includes the test pieces I created in trying out different methods for working on fabrics. *Little Black Book* (Appendix, 16) is a collection of my handmade papers, which are bound together by using a sewing machine rather than sewn by hand.

Lastly, my instructor and advisor Ginna Cullen challenged me to create a wearable book that I named *Artist Statement* (Appendix, 17 and 18). Since I had sewn for many years, it seemed very logical to me to combine the idea of a book and a garment to wear. I decided on a vest as a way to create a book with a cover which allowed for space for writing on the inside of the vest. For the vest, I decided to use the discharged dye process. Taking 100% black cotton fabric and using a bleach solution to remove the dye from areas of the fabric is called discharging. This process is difficult to control and the manufacturing of the black fabric affects the color created by discharging. The spine of the book was created using an Afghani piecing method. This method involves using stacked fabric triangles that are framed by narrow fabric strips. For the fabric triangles, I used fabric remnants and discarded discharge attempts. I wrote my artist statement using the discharge dye technique on the lining fabric of my wearable book.

The books I have created have given me new methods and ideas for creating and exploring art. I have shared several of them with my high school students and they have been enthusiastic about creating their own books. I intend to continue working on the
idea of the book as art and include it in my art curriculum in the future.

Conclusion

Just where all of these MIS classes will lead me remains to be seen, but it has already given me the impetus to find venues for exhibiting my work. The processes and techniques I have learned from these classes have made me stronger in my ability to convey my ideas. I feel more comfortable and confident in my work and want to share it.

As a teacher, I feel more passionate about the importance of art for every student from elementary school to post-graduate education. The MIS program at Virginia Commonwealth University is unique and I feel I have truly benefited from it. The networking and classroom discussions with other artists and teachers in the courses have been very helpful in my teaching. This program has already helped me gain confidence in my work along with knowledge and ideas to share with my future students.
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Education

2005  Master of Interdisciplinary Studies,
      Virginia Commonwealth University,
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1979  Bachelor of Science,
      Florida State University,
      Tallahassee, Florida

1977  Associate of Science,
      Pensacola Junior College,
      Pensacola, Florida

Academic Appointments

2004-present  Art Department Chair,
               C.D. Hylton Senior High School
               Woodbridge, Virginia

2004-2005  Mentor to new county art teacher
           C.D. Hylton Senior High School
           Woodbridge, Virginia

1999-present  Art Teacher
             C. D. Hylton Senior High School
             Woodbridge, Virginia

Memberships

2002-present  National Art Education Association

2002-present  Virginia Art Education Association

2003-present  Fredericksburg Center for Creative Arts

Exhibitions

2004  *It's All About Color*, LibertyTown Arts Center, Fredericksburg, Virginia

2001  *Fine Focus Art Quilts in Miniature*, San Jose Museum of Quilts and Textiles,
      San Jose, California
      *Fine Focus Art Quilts in Miniature*, Adobe Gallery, Vista, California

2000  *Fine Focus Art Quilts in Miniature*, Manfield/Richland Public Library,
      Walter Greer Gallery, Hilton Head, South Carolina
Exhibitions Continued

1999  *Fine Focus Art Quilts in Miniature*, Crest Theater Gallery, Delray Beach, Florida
1998  *Treasures Underfoot*, Cabin Branch Quilters Annual Show, Lake Ridge Middle School, Woodbridge, Virginia
1996  *ArtFirst Group Show*, Art First Gallery, Fredericksburg, Virginia