Journey

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by

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Artist Statement

My art explores the traditional elements of line, value, and texture. I use pencil and charcoal to create my drawings, and use the computer to alter and enhance my photographs. I also explore the relationships created through the combination of traditional and digital processes. Through the process of drawing, scanning, and layering images on the computer, I reveal details created by the contrast of these media. My goal is to successfully combine and balance traditional art practices with digital technology.
Journey

Introduction

All through my childhood I was interested in art. I remember trying to stay in the lines when I colored in my coloring books, and I loved my yellow Crayola scissors and 64-pack of Crayola crayons (with the built-in sharpener). My mom, a kindergarten teacher, was constantly bringing home some kind of art project. Whether it was illustrating posters or coloring hanging charts, there was always something for me to help with.

My passion for art continued in high school and college. I was exposed to many traditional art processes and techniques. However, I focused my studies on digital and electronic media which included computer graphics, digital video, and 3D animation.

Upon graduation from college, I found myself working as a graphic artist where I was given the opportunity to work on a range of local and national projects. My attention to detail and organizational skills allowed me to succeed in this environment. It was exciting to use the tools and techniques I learned in college. However, the challenges of being productive and of meeting specific project criteria limited my creativity. I had no outlet to be artistic. My passion for art suddenly became a need to share my knowledge with others and help them learn more about art.

I made the transition between the corporate world and education, longing for the opportunity to share my knowledge of art, my passion, with others. My excitement during my first year as a high school art teacher was so great that I quickly confused the students with too much information. As my teaching style developed, I learned to differentiate between quantity of information and quality of information. I now emphasize the latter with my students. However, the requirements of a full-time teacher did not allow for much free time, resulting in
my passion for creating art going unfulfilled.

Enrolling in the Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Arts (MIS-IAR) program at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) gave me the opportunity to spend more time creating art. The wide range of classes available in the program allowed me to explore new media, develop new techniques, and refine my existing skills. My experiences have challenged me to combine these media in new and exciting ways, fueling my creativity.

Aesthetics

I have always been attracted to paintings and drawings that have a realistic, or naturalistic, quality to them. Line, value, and texture are elements that are commonly manipulated in realist techniques and make me feel connected to the images, as if I am in that place or in front of that object. These three elements are important to me because, although simple, can be powerful if used effectively.

Line serves as a foundation for my artwork. In my drawings, I focus on using lines to define the subject matter because it is important that I reproduce the look of the subject as accurately as possible. Value is another element that is important to achieving realistic qualities in an image. By manipulating value the artist can create form, adding volume to a flat shape and also defining space. This definition of volume and space is what allows the drawing to take on the naturalistic look of the real world. Texture is the final element of my artwork. I use traditional mark-making media such as pencil and charcoal to add visual texture to my drawings. While my mark-making ranges from controlled to expressive, all of my renderings are intended to reflect the essence of the subject matter.

I am also able to capture the essence of a subject through the use of digital technology. I
use the camera to record an image, and use the computer as a tool to exploit the lines, value, and texture in the image. Through the use of filters and image adjustment techniques, I am able to further enhance the realism of the photograph.

I have more recently begun exploring the technique of combining traditional drawing processes with the digital processes of the computer. Being able to create line, value, and texture on the computer has allowed me to use these fundamental elements of art in a new way. Specifically, I am able to create and individually control multiple layers that contain varying amounts of line, value, and texture. This control of the digital processes of my art allows me to achieve the naturalistic and realistic look I desire.

Influences

My first exposure to the digital imaging program, Adobe Photoshop, came in high school during a computer graphics class. I was comfortable creating art in my graphic design and art classes, so using the computer to draw was completely new to me. I remember the first time I applied a filter to a photo, the anticipation of the resulting image was exciting. I quickly discovered that I could draw things faster on the computer than I could on paper. Though the greatest attraction was having the ability to quickly and easily undo my mistakes whenever I desired.

In contrast to the world of digital technology, I am equally influenced by the world of pencil and paint. I have great respect and admiration for the works of realist artist Andrew Wyeth (1947-2009). I remember the first time I saw *Christina’s World* (1948). I really felt as though I was there in that moment, standing in that dry, grassy field feeling the warmth of the sun. The individual blades of grass, the openness of the space, and the brightness of the sun all
worked together to capture that specific time and place. Wyeth’s use of detailed line, pen, and brush strokes present in many of his drawings and watercolors, helped to create a powerful sense of realism. His mark-making implies texture that makes me imagine the feel of the grass and the wooden planks on the house. Wyeth’s approach to realism is a feature that I want to have in my work.

David Hockney (1937-) is another artist that has been influential to my work. *A Bigger Splash* (1967) is representative of the painterly style present in many of his early paintings. Through his use of large areas of bold, bright color he recreates the stereotypical California landscape of flat roofed houses with swimming pools in every backyard. The clear, blue sky and palm trees reflect the natural, warm weather. In some of his later works, Hockney began to explore the use of photography to create composite images. *Pearblossom Highway, 11-18th April 1986 #2* (1986) is an example of this direction. It is a collection of many different photographs of the same environment. Each photograph is of a specific area in the view of the landscape. The finished piece consists of all of the photographs layered and overlapped to create the overall view. I am drawn to this effect because there is a painterly quality in the image which, despite the absence of a brush, attempts to merge traditional media with digital. This relationship is something that I explore with my digital imagery.

Hockney’s style certainly contrasts with that of Wyeth. Wyeth’s controlled realism opposes the painterly realism of Hockney’s. Although quite different, both artists use techniques that I want to explore and experiment with in my artwork.

**Photography**

When I entered the MIS-IAR program, I first explored digital photography and using
Adobe Photoshop. Since I was already well-versed in this program, I used the opportunity to work with one of my photographs. The finished piece is entitled Roof (Appendix, 1). First, I enhanced the quality of the image by adjusting the color balance, tonal values, and overall contrast to emphasize texture and line. Then, I adjusted the saturation of the blue in the sky and the red in the roof to equally balance the visual weight between each of these two areas. Since the focus of the image is the roof, I also wanted to emphasize the texture of the metal which I did by increasing the value of the reds and increasing the overall contrast of the roof. I was also able to use the tools in Photoshop to remove wires that appeared against the background of the sky, behind the roof. Having the ability to use digital processes on this photograph allowed me to quickly improve the overall quality of the image, enhancing the realism.

I continued to explore texture in my next series, entitled Silos: A Collection of Images. Inspired by the rural, farm landscapes of Wyeth’s work, my purpose in creating this series was to document the many textures and styles of old, dilapidated silos. Silo: Marshall, VA (Appendix, 2) is a digital photograph from this series. The silo is framed in the middle of the composition to show its large size and scale. This framing allows the sky to surround most of the structure, with the dark brown top contrasting against the blue sky and gray silo. To begin my alterations to the image, I first adjusted the tonal levels in Photoshop. These adjustments allowed me to balance the levels of white, black, and gray present in the photograph, resulting in increased overall contrast and exposure. I also used other tools in Photoshop to remove several extraneous tree branches in the background of the image. In the final image, the texture of the weathered paneling of the silo stands as the focal point, framed by branches and the sky.

With Yellow Flowers (Appendix, 3) I explored a new process called High Dynamic Range (HDR) photography. The HDR process combines several (usually three) photographs of
the same subject to create one image with balanced exposure values across the entire image. This process results in an image without overexposed highlights and underexposed shadows, as well as improved detail. In my image, I began my process by increasing the color saturation of the flowers. I then adjusted the levels of the white, black, and gray tonal values in the image by increasing the shadows and highlights. These adjustments resulted in increased overall contrast, texture, and clarity of the flower petals, and allowed me to achieve my goal of creating a photorealistic image. As a final step, I added a vignette effect around the edges of the image to emphasize the central portion of the flowers.

Drawing

I transitioned back to the world of drawing and began working with charcoal, conté crayon, and pencil. Figure (Appendix, 4) is a gestural figure drawing completed with black, white, and brown charcoal. I began by drawing lines and circles to position the head, shoulders, and arms. Once I placed the body on the paper, I focused on correcting the proportions. I used white charcoal to erase my mistakes and cover any lines that were not needed. I then used brown charcoal to fill the shape of the figure, while black was used to add value, and white for highlights. I then continued to use black charcoal to emphasize the lines. My goal was to make painterly and expressive marks that defined the contour of the form, capturing the essence of the figure.

With Sandals (Appendix, 5) I challenged myself to think about the media in a new and different way. Working from a still life of my sandals, I used conté crayon to intentionally show both left and right sides of my shoes. I used yellow and blue conté crayons to emphasize the colored straps. Next, I tore the completed drawing into pieces to use as inspiration for a new
composition. I began my composition with a new ground by applying watercolor wash to the paper. To create a sense of movement and rhythm, I used charcoal to repeat the tread lines from the bottom of the sandals onto the new ground. This mark-making allowed me to seamlessly combine the old torn up image with the new composition. As an homage to the Cubist movement and Hockney, I recomposed the torn pieces of the original drawing to show alternate perspectives of my sandals from a single viewpoint. The final step was to use matte medium gel to secure the pieces of torn paper onto the background. The matte medium allowed me to emphasize the texture that was created from the overlapping pieces of torn paper. This composition was a transitional step in my journey because I began to explore the relationships that could be created by combining media in new and exciting ways.

A New Combination

Transitioning back to the computer, I challenged myself to combine my drawing and computer skills. With *Ruins* (Appendix, 6), I used pencil to first sketch the basic composition of a photograph onto paper. I then scanned the sketch into the computer and used the tools in Photoshop to digitally paint and recreate the photographic image. To begin, I used the brush tool to paint the background and clouds. To create the texture of the stone ruins, I used several layers of brush marks varying the color and texture on each layer. I adjusted the opacity of each layer independently in order to blend each together. As a final step, I emphasized the marks of the original pencil sketch by darkening the lines and blending them with the other layers. The overall focal point is the simulated texture and high contrast value of the stone ruins.

This process of scanning a sketch was then repeated to create *Rooftop* (Appendix, 7). My goal with this image was to emphasize the texture of the stone roof while also contrasting the
clay roof tiles with the blue sky. Similar to the style of Hockney, I used large areas of solid color. In the background, there is a subtle transition of dark to lighter blue, which I applied to give the illusion of a photographic neutral density (ND) filter on the sky. I layered several different brush shapes and sizes together to create the stone texture of the gray roof tiles. The clay roof tiles are shaded with a darker value to create depth and emphasize their texture. As a final step, I layered the marks of the original sketch over the image, blending them together.

Working with conté and charcoal on paper has allowed me to easily translate traditional art practices onto the computer. Conversely, digital photography affords me the ability to record a subject that will later be reproduced on paper. I have been successful in working with both types of media, singly and combined. Ultimately, my goal is to reproduce the naturalistic and realistic look of my subject through the use of line, value, and texture.

Conclusion

The MIS-IAR program at VCU has been a journey of exploration. I have been exposed to many different media and processes, and have learned many new skills and techniques. The knowledge and creative passion displayed by the instructors has been inspiring. I have been challenged to not settle with my art making, to push myself out of my comfort zone, and to think about making art in new ways. However, the successes I have experienced have far outweighed the failures. I began this program with the simple desire to make art again, but am leaving with much more. I now have a whole new set of tools available to me that I cannot wait to use. Ultimately, I am most excited about the new combinations with my drawing and photography that I have discovered that I will be able to continue to explore.
Bibliography


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Figure 2. *Silo: Marshall, VA*, digital photograph, 12” x 7”, 2009.

Figure 3. *Yellow Flowers*, digital photograph, 7” x 12”, 2010.

Figure 4. *Figure*, charcoal, 24” x 18”, 2008.

Figure 5. *Sandals*, mixed media, 16” x 20”, 2008.

Figure 6. *Ruins*, digital illustration, 7” x 11”, 2010.

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Figure 1. *Roof*, digital photograph, 9” x 12”, 2007.
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Figure 6.  *Ruins*, digital illustration, 7” x 11”, 2010.
Figure 7. *Rooftop*, digital illustration, 6”x 9”, 2010.
Resume

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EDUCATION:
2011 Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Arts, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia. Emphasis in Drawing, Painting, and Digital Photography.


TEACHING EXPERIENCE:
2005 - Current Art Teacher, Battlefield High School, Prince William County Public Schools, Haymarket, Virginia.

RELATED EXPERIENCE:
2000 - Present Freelance Graphic Artist, Warrenton, Virginia.


MEMBERSHIPS:
2009 - Present Prince William County Education Association, Manassas, Virginia.

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EXHIBITIONS:

2006 Faculty Art Show, Battlefield High School, Prince William County Public Schools, Haymarket, Virginia.