6-1-1966

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SERAGLIO

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CANDIDATE FOR THE MASTER
OF FINE ARTS IN THE COLLEGE
OF FINE ARTS OF THE ROCHESTER
INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

JUNE 1, 1966

LAWRENCE M. WILLIAMS
Title Page

Title: Seraglio

Thesis Proposal for the Master of Fine Arts

College of Fine and Applied Arts

Rochester Institute of Technology

Submitted by: Maruta Racenis Date: Feb. 12, 1966

Advisor: Lawrence Williams

Approved by Graduate Committee: Date: 2/24/66

Chairman: _________
I. Purpose of the Thesis:

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the human figure in form, line and value through the intaglio process.

II. Scope of the Thesis:

The scope of the thesis will include an examination of prints by both master and contemporary printmakers, as well as research into their techniques and writings. I plan to do research on the following printmakers: Rembrandt, Villon, Goya, Lesansky, Picasso, Piranesi, and others. Technical research will be in the areas of etching and exploration of various grounds. The number of works will be determined by the actual thesis.

III. Procedures:

The presentation will include drawings, readings and research, prints in editions, and conclusions.

IV. Alternative Proposals:

The Print: a Social Commentary Past and Present

Lithography
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5. Third state.


7. First state.

8. Second state.


10. First state.

11. Second state.

12. Final state of "Beneath the music from a farther room." 16 x 20. Intaglio.

13. First state.


15. Final state of Ostia Antica. Intaglio. 8½ x 12.

16. First State.

17. Second state.

18. Final state of "...in what part of the wood do you want to flirt with me?" Intaglio. 16 x 20.

19. First state.

20. Second state.

21. Final state of "...with up so floating..." Intaglio. 16 x 20.
There lives no man upon earth who can give a final judgment upon what the most beautiful shape of a man may be; God only knows that ... 'Good' and 'better' in respect of beauty are not easy to discern, for it would be quite possible to make two different figures, neither conforming with the other, one stouter, the other thinner, and yet we might scarce be able to judge which of the two excelled in beauty. 

Dürer
Until photography came into existence, printmaking was considered to be the lowest form of art, because of its utilitarian nature. However, due to the advancement of photography, printmaking has again become a widely recognized form of art. Printmaker Gabor Peterdi states his opinion of why this is so.

Unquestionably, we are now witnessing a great renaissance of printmaking. There are many reasons for this. One of them is that an ever-increasing number of people are becoming actively interested in art. They want to see works of art and they want to own them. Many of these people cannot possibly afford the price of an original oil painting. Because they do not want to put reproductions on their walls, they prefer to buy original prints. Printmaking is on the way to becoming a great popular art, as it was in Japan in the time of Hokusai and Utamaro.2.

One must look at the printmaker today as one looks at the painter or sculptor. As a fine artist, the printmaker is not interested in having his work reproduced in enormous quantities for public distribution, but is primarily interested in making a personal visual statement.

I make prints because in using the metal, the wood, and all the other materials available, I can express things that I cannot express by any other means. In other words, I am interested in printmaking, not as a means of reproduction, but as an original, creative medium. Even if I could pull only one print
from each of my plates, I would still make them.

Gabor Peterdi

To the untrained eye, a drawing may bear a strong similarity to a print, and, although an etching in many respects depends on one's drawing ability, there is a vast difference between the two modes of expression. The most obvious difference is the technical element involved in the intaglio process. The other is the fact that drawing is a completely two-dimensional medium; the pen or pencil line has no depth. A print resulting from an engraved or etched plate will have an actual tactile surface quality; the plate itself is similar to a bas-relief sculpture, which is enriched in appearance as it is worked and reworked.

In this thesis I have experimented with the intaglio process, approaching the problems which I have set up for myself with a concern not solely for the initial statement, but with full involvement in the media. My main subject has been the human figure. Using it as a source for my imagery, I have tried to define the figure in line, form, and value through the intaglio process.

Because of the recognizable subject matter, one might say that the prints are quite romantic in character; admittedly, there are some romantic elements to be found in my prints. The treatment of certain parts of the figure and groups of figures has been influenced by the
early Sienese and Florentine painters, Duccio, Cimabue, and others. I am also particularly fond of the early printmakers' works, especially those of Dürer, Graf and Breugel, and find them a ready source of inspiration.

Much of the other imagery in my work in form and concept stems purely from the imagination, creating a humor and myth of my own. I have found the graphic work of Redon to be very stimulating to the imagination, and agree with his views on fantasy and imagination in art.

Fantasy is also the messenger of the unconscious of that very eminent and mysterious personage...who arrives in his own time, according to the moment, the place, even the season. This should enlighten you and make you understand how difficult it is to answer the 'why' or 'how;' since in the fatal crucible in which the work of art is wrought, everything is dominated by the precious caprice of that unknown...nothing in art is achieved by will alone. Everything is done by docilely submitting to the 'unconscious.' The analytical spirit must be quick when it appears, but afterwards it is of little importance to remember it, as with each work it proposes a different problem to us."

In some of my prints I have worked directly from a live model or from drawings. Because the human figure is an endless and variable resource, beautiful. sad. and humorous, I have chosen it for my subject matter.
Earlier in the year, I began to experiment with various etching techniques. Working on zinc plates, I tried the following methods: line etch, straight bite, sugar lift, acquatint, salt ground, and soft ground. The results of these techniques may be seen in Figures 1. and 2. In Figure 1. the texture in the two figures on the right of the print is salt ground; in the lower central area a soft ground technique has been employed; the dark areas are a result of acquatinting. In Figure 2. on the lower part of the print, sugar lift has been used along with straight bite, the lower right hand corner. On this plate I also used line etch for the finer lines, and some soft ground for textured areas such as the upper right hand corner. The dark areas are, again, the result of acquatint. Most of these techniques were employed in my final prints.

When printing, I found Senefelder's black etching ink (#514) to give the most satisfactory values. During the experimental stages of my work, I found Rives paper to be the best for the printing of etchings; however, I also discovered a type of white cover stock which is less expensive and works as well as the Rives.
Although I did not work in this way, I have divided my prints into two groups. In the first group of prints, Figures 3 - 12, I have dealt with the problem of first initiating a simple loose drawing, and then working into the plate, using a variety of techniques to enrich the image and to establish forms and values. A zinc plate was used for Figure 6; to obtain a rich textural quality, I used sugar lift and straight bite extensively; this can be found on the right hand side of the print. The white areas of the print are a result of the scraping out of previously dark areas, Figure 5.

My approach was very similar in the next print, Figure 9. I used the same techniques as in Figure 6, but this time on a copper plate. Because I used mostly Dutch mordant for my etch, the etching process itself was longer. The results were, however, more satisfying, for the copper seemed to give a richer print quality than did zinc. Figure 12, is a print worked from a zinc plate. The figures and areas in this print have been worked out by means of acquatint, line etch, soft ground, and scraping.

Differing considerably from the previous prints, the next plate, Figure 15, emerged as a spontaneous line etching. I was particularly interested in building up light and dark values by the pure use of line; I did this mainly by etching, although there is some
drypoint and engraving on the plate. The images were first worked out on an overall grounded plate. I periodically stopped out areas with ground to vary the values and line quality. Areas such as the upper left hand corner were first filled in with line; the images were then drawn out with hard ground. This plate does not have as many varying states as those preceding, for I made very few changes in the initial image. I found that copper lent itself very well to this technique, and I was encouraged to try the same on a zinc plate.

In Figure 18, I discovered that by first coating the plate with soft ground, then with hard ground, prevented the ground from breaking down as easily when working with closely spaced lines. However, since the nitric acid bath bit both vertically and laterally into the zinc, the lines are not as crisp as they are on the copper plate. To get sharp lines I used an engraver's burin. For the soft black areas, as in the upper left and right hand sides, I used drypoint over the existing etched lines.

In the last print, Figure 21, I have once more used the etching, engraving, and drypoint techniques to define a number of forms and to establish values and transitions. While doing research, I became particularly interested in Rembrandt's etchings, and in the way in which he handled the dark areas of his prints: they had such a rich
quality. In Figure 21, I found that by drypointing over existing etched lines, I could draw out soft black areas. Again, the qualities which the copper plate produced in the final print were quite superior to those of the zinc plate.
In any art form, the limitations and specific potentials of the materials and methods have some part in shaping the image that the art projects.

Although I have shown only three states of each of my prints, the prints presented in this thesis have all gone through a greater number of states; the reasons for the number of changes have been both technical and intellectual. I feel, that at times there is a danger of ones ideas becoming so precious that the print inevitably can become a slave to the image. In working I have been conscious of the existing images, but I have tried not to sacrifice the print purely for the sake of the image.
FOOTNOTES

3. Ibid. p. xxiii.
5. Frank and Dorothy Getlein, The Bite of the Print. p. 10.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


