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Rochester Institute of Technology

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
The College of Fine and Applied Arts
in Candidacy for the Degree of
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

INTIMATIONS

By

Scot Bennett

May 1983
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May 15, 1983
Thesis Proposal for the Master of Fine Arts Degree

College of Fine and Applied Arts
Rochester Institute of Technology

Title: Meditations on Death
Submitted by: Scot Edward Bennett      Date: 10/5/82

Thesis Committee:
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Departmental Approval: Date: 5/20/82

Approval, Assistant to the Dean for Graduate Affairs: 10/10/82

Final Committee Decision: Date:

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The concentration in this thesis will not necessarily focus on the print as an isolated wholistic art-form, but rather present the print as an intrinsic part of some other whole.

 Practically the purpose will be to manually and visually transport the viewer from a present environment to another; one in which he may hopefully identify.

 The works will be multi-media ones inclusive of and related to the techniques of printmaking (intaglio and lithography).

*Since the geographic distance between my second and third Associate Advisors (Messiah College Grantham P.A.) is great, a second page of signatures will be submitted shortly.*
TO my Mother and Father for their unrestricted encouragement, and to Lisa.
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**Colour Plates:**

- Pre-thesis work ................ b/w vii&l
- Thesis work ................... 1a-6a
The greatness in art is not in the display of knowledge, or in material accuracy, but in the distinctness with which it conveys the impressions of a personal vital force, that acts spontaneously, without fear or hesitation.

Alan Glassow
I realized that I had things in my head that others didn't have...
I made up my mind to put down what was in my head.

Georgia O'Keefe
PREFACE:

I have been considering what to favour you with in this writing for the better part of the year, however when I begin to write I find my thoughts escaping me. I am tired of trying to appear clever: tired of all the artsie gibberish that I am exposed to every day. The insatiable need to exist in communion with the cosmic universe is an 'Art-House' built of cards, which has little meaning when all is said and done.

I am learning that attitudes concerning my work and art in general, that I once held dear, are no longer so; they have become curiously suspect. I do not wish to make a cavalier attempt at sifting through the stacks of pretty thoughts that I have collected with the hopes of endearing those of you who will read this short work. Nor will I attempt to present you with some fantastically contrived prose. The writing between these two covers will be an attempt to relate what has coloured my work since coming to R.I.T. and beginning this thesis.
INTRODUCTION:

Immediately after coming to R.I.T. I continued the careful calculation of work began as an undergraduate. The photograph was surely the key to success. Its instant recognition and public appeal would lead to the overwhelming acceptance of my work. With such apparent sarcasm I do not wish to demean the photograph, for there are those who use it wonderfully and unashamedly. For me it was an outright crutch. It negated the need to create. It was a 'ready-made'. By dressing the photo with widely accepted and ultimately stolen marks, the images that I produced were indeed acceptable, they were also void of vitality. These images were learned, they had only the hint of creation. I am not naive enough to assume that one can escape the internalization of another's symbol. I do however value personal vision; my images did not have this.

In writing just now a somewhat vague pattern has appeared, vague but nonetheless important. It seems that when confronted with the need to produce, i.e. entering graduate school or producing a thesis, an almost infectious sense of melodrama 'grips my very soul'. Photo-images that were overstated and sacrosanct led to a thesis proposal that was, needless to say, strained and sensational. As always I began with the grandiose symptoms of megalomania adopting large-scale plans that bypassed the crucial. The moment something important needs attention a deceptive smoke-screen goes up and the vision at hand is lost and another adopted.

Needless to say the title Meditations on Death provokes one to
numerous melodramatic innuendo. I must apologize to those of you who have read on hoping to explore the infinite realms of philosophic discussion on the subject of death; you will not be so stimulated. I have chosen to change the title and scope of my thesis to a somewhat more subtle one: *Intimations*.

The emphasis in this thesis was to be what appears in the following proposal.

The concentration in this thesis will not necessarily be on the print as an isolated wholistic art-form, but rather present the print as an intrinsic part of some other whole.

Transporting the print in its 'gallery-clad' form to an existence more tactile, was to be the emphasis. (By 'gallery-clad' I refer to the usual method of presenting the print: two dimensionally in archival board and frame). The hand-made paper boxes that appear in the colour plates that follow, were to be the catalyst for these more tactile works. All of the prints in this thesis are 'gallery-clad'.

The print was to be an 'intrinsic part of some other whole'. When drafting this proposal I flirted with ideas that would put prints into these boxes or assemblages. The key phrase here is: 'put into'. This correlation of print and box was not irrelevant, it was however very inhibitive. The box provided a shell that housed unchanged prints. The desire to homogenize print and three-dimensional media was not the answer that I was looking for. The answer was in the prints themselves. The
initial notion became only the mechanism that produced the answer in a raw state, a l'état brut, as Duchamp would say.

In the creative act the artist goes from intention to realization through a chain of totally subjective reactions. His struggle toward the realization is a series of efforts, pains, satisfactions, refusals, decisions, which cannot and must not be fully self-conscious, at least on the aesthetic plane.¹

As I mentioned above the problem was not the boxes nor the idea to correlate prints with them, the images themselves were in neglect. The thesis that began 'pro-forma' was now beginning to engage itself with another set of circumstances, new realizations.

Discarding a thesis proposal at mid-term is not a confidence-builder, yet when set aside it was of much more use. Working through the problems initiated by the proposal was the only way in which to purge the underlying conviction of my work. Much of my time had been spent skirting the boundaries of that which I wished to address. The boxes had been a mask, a bandage. In a sense the 'statement', now discarded, proved to be the iconoclast that destroyed my 'old cherished errors'.²

The answers were to come from introspection which was triggered by the physical problems presented by removing the print from its traditional two-dimensionality. The answers came only after and as a result of this attempt.

What is the use of disguises and artificialities in a work of art? What counts is what is spontaneous, impulsive. That is the truthful truth. What we impose upon ourselves does not emenate from ourselves.³
The following prints evolve from a concerted effort to offer the viewer space, an environment within which to journey. I hope that they are ambiguous enough fathoms to beckon to one's conscious and sub-consciousness. I wish them to be openings and revelations that the viewer must himself conjure.
Box #1
hand-made paper
Box # 2
hand-made paper
You have invited me inward
To the chaos of infinite activity
Showing me eternity
Fragments
Repeated beauty

Bennett
How will you manage
To cross alone
The autumn mountain
Which was so hard to get across
Even when we went the two of us together?

Princess Daihku
Seventh Century
Pendant between two worlds,
   Acclaimed to none,
I cannot smell the lilac now
   Or touch Aldebaran.

Pale stars below, above,
   But warmth from neither—
Float me a little down
   Or Higher, Ether!

Elizabeth Hollister Frost
Already my slow steps had led me on
Into the ancient wood so far, that I
Could see no more the place where I had entered.

Longfellow
No don't leave me tonight
It is late and I'll be alone
(The dark space between us now
I think is the door to heaven)

Bennett
Thy pilgrimage begins in tears
And ends in bitter doubts and fears,
Or dark despair;
Midway so many toils appear,
That he who lingers longest here
Knows most of care.

Longfellow
AFTERWARD:

The preceding prints exist within an atmosphere of intimation. The vocabulary entered was chosen consciously and spontaneously in an effort to meet the inherent needs of the viewer. In them there is heavy emphasis on philosophically spatial and infinite environments. These works intend to illuminate the milli-second images through which one journeys in the pilgrimage of dream. They are sacred in their hint, suggestion and sometime declaration of formal existences.

I sense no need for narrative explanation of the prints for they themselves allegorize. Philosophic definition more exhaustive than that above would jade their universality. Suffice to say that these works recall the intense struggle of personal sublimation; this is my manic nemesis.
TECHNICAL APPLICATION:

Literature concerned with lithography, particularly the graphite process, is often clouded with a mistique added to elevate the position of those who write the text. I would suggest that texts of this sort, bent on extravagant technical process, should be taken with a grain of salt. The graphite adds only one initial step in the lithographic process. The following are a few suggestions and a brief explanation of this process.

Materials include pencils 6-B to 9-H, graphite sticks 4-B to 6-B, cotton balls or Webril Wipes, and an ordinary wood file. Pencils seem to work well with moderate pressure, however the use of graphite stick or powder may necessitate a more vigorous approach. Powder may be made from filing the graphite stick with the file. The file tooth and the number of the stick will produce some variety in particle size that may effect the image quality. A soft clean cloth may be used to rub the dust into the stone, however cotton balls and Webril Wipes are much more absorbant and produce a more consistent tone.

The stone may be grained as desired, i.e. 100, 180, 220, or 'FF'. Consideration of the image is important. The rougher the surface the greater the quantity of dust the stone will hold. The rougher surfaces will produce an over-all intense black, but will tend to reveal a much grainier surface. The finer grained stones will resist quantities of dust. Greater pressure is suggested to insure that the particles are
absorbed into the stone. The latter will produce a much more intense continuous surface. Graduations or imperfections in the stone surface will produce variation in the image and may be valued as an additional drawing tool.

Linear and tonal drawing may be accomplished much like on paper. Remember that when rolled up the image will appear much darker than in the drawn graphite state. Graphite may be removed from the stone surface with a plastic eraser, however some dust and grease may be pushed into the stone and a tonal quality may appear in the final image. Tape and Grumbacher MISKIT will remove large areas and provide some texture. Brushstrokes can be achieved with MISKIT much like that of a dry-brush gum lift. Contact papers will vary tonal qualities according to their adhesion and the manner which they are removed, applied, and drawn into.

Water applied at the time of drawing whether puddled or sprayed will etch immediately rendering areas touched lighter. (This will not appear until roll-up) Rubbing graphite over a somewhat moist gum area will sometimes result in a very intense black. Spot etching is also applicable at this point. Try varying mixtures of water to drops of etch. Varying mixtures of water, laquer thinner, and lithotine will provide rather dark-edged washes.

The instability of graphite on the stone surface necessitates the insertion of a spray etch prior to standard lithographic procedures. The etch is sprayed into the stone with an airbrush. A dark grey stone
will accept a stronger etch than a softer yellow one. An etch of five to nine drops mixed one to one with water is common, while I have used etches of nineteen drops. It is important to consider what spray one should use. A fine spray will insure complete resolution of the drawn image, while a thicker more intense spray may leave a much grainier one. Consider variation of spray and stencil use to achieve greater tonal range. Spitting and accidents will effect the surface. It is important if complete resolution is desired, to keep all moisture from the surface of the stone. The spray should be set at forty to sixty pounds pressure, on the airbrush. Four passes over the stone is the usual application, however a fifth may be necessary if the graphite lifts off to a clean dry finger. Two, diagonal, a vertical, and a horizontal pass should be made approximately fourteen inches from the stone surface. It is important to apply a consistent even coating. The time between the initial spray etch and roll-up seems inconsequential.

Ink used in the initial roll-up is a one to one mixture of Senefelder's Crayon Black 1803 and Monter a Noir. The Monter is a much greasier ink adding greater adhesion and transfer of the graphite. Too much Monter will result in loss of detail, too little will make the roll-up longer, and may result in loss of image altogether. When rolling for the first time float the borders with water. With roller in hand sponge the stone and begin rolling. Do not rush or roll too quickly. Roll with medium pressure. Drying the image at intervals may aid in the acceptance of ink. Once rolled-up the image should be treated as any
other lithograph.

It is important to note that any text is not a substitute for personal experience and should not preclude what one finds to work.

The images in this thesis incorporate graphite and standard lithographic procedures. The graphite is a joy to work with in that it is very direct, spontaneous, and unpredictable. It provided me with the excitement of inconsistency, which forced me not to hold the images too preciously. I have learned not to fail, it is if one learns to make use of what ever the stone delivers, and to accept change. This is one of my most cherished findings.

The prints are bleed prints because I love the edge of the decalled paper as much as the interior.

Evident within these prints is the beginnings of experimentation with stencilled acrylic washes. The washes boost one's vocabulary when they offer a noticeable difference. The desire to change the print is still somewhat present.

Printing marks of various colours was done at the same time, provided the lines were not overlapped. Small brayers were used to roll each individual colour. Instances such as 'Equinox' seemed to necessitate etched surface lines. These former lines were applied with prismacolor and the aid of a cut mat board stencil.

The images here are not considered complete for when ever I close my eyes after looking at them for a time, new marks dance and flirt across my mind's eye. The inconclusiveness recalls the following words of Picasso
But worst of all... is that he never finishes. There's never a moment when you can say, "I've worked well and tomorrow is Sunday". As soon as you stop, it's because you've started again. You can put a picture aside and say you won't touch it again. But you can never write THE END.
NOTES

1 Marcell Duchamp, The New Art, A Critical Anthology
   Editor: Gregory Battcock (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1973) p.48

2 David B. Guralnik, Webster's New World Dictionary, 2nd Ed. 1970

3 Sabartes, 1946, The Documents Of 20Th-Century Art: Picasso on
   Art, A Selection of Views Dore Ashton (New York: Penguin Books,
   1972) p.21

4 Ibid., p.49 (Quotation of Picasso on 'The Necessity of Work')
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