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# Images in Glass

Douglas Anderson

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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

IMAGES IN GLASS

By

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Douglas Anderson

## PROPOSAL

The nature of this thesis is to mate creative glass working and imaginative illustration. I intend to use a fictional manuscript and interpret its aesthetic meaning in glass. The glass will take a form similar to painting and drawing creating compositions with emotional intensity. I will use, as needed, all available techniques known to me in glass technology to compose these illustrations.

I will present this partnership of glass and illustration in a readable format such as a book.

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## INTRODUCTION

From the beginning of this thesis project to its end, I have seen in myself a development, one which is relevant to my illustrated book, "Images in Glass." Hopefully, you will better understand my personal development by examining some of my background and source materials and relating them to the final glass images.

I was led to believe in 1970, when I began studies in the art of commercial illustration, that it was a public art, or art designed for the general populace, i.e., magazines, books, greeting cards, brochures, etc., because the ideas and training behind this form of expression were very public oriented. I wrongly thought that commercial illustration, with all of its figurative references and expressive techniques to create an image, was more than a commercial commodity.

In working as an illustrator, wanting to be something other than a commercial commodity, I became involved with glass. I discovered myself



creating a utilized art. This led me to identify with a more utilitarian object. My rationale was to use the relationships between glass, a new and different commercial media for me, and commercial illustration, with which I was familiar. The relationships between these two modes of expression were based upon similar visual communication approaches, which identified with the academic theories of composition, color philosophy, and human emotion. It is interesting in actual fact that the utilitarian objects which I was making at that time obscured any expression or illustrative reference behind the many techniques with which I was so entranced. In retrospect, I was conforming to a public need as a craftsman rather than an illustrator (artist craftsman).

Progressively, I have matured into a mode of thought -- "art for art's sake" for lack of a more original term. My outlook now is that there is no such thing as a public (commercial) art, or even a utilitarian art for me, but only a particular way to communicate as defined by me. The labeling of art should be left to the critic, but the way I

see it, who is to say there is or isn't a commercial  
or utilitarian art, or a "Douglass" art?

## CHAPTER I. ILLUSTRATOR AND COMMUNICATION

A historical discussion of my understanding of illustration is important at this time. There were certain attitudes under which the commercial illustrator worked; figurative representations were nearly always present, and the human experience was represented, more often than not, in conjunction with the written word. Numerous techniques could be and are used when the illustrator communicates visually under these attitudes. What appeared time and again to be the most popular technique to resolve assignments was the psychological approach. This approach can easily be demonstrated in the works of past innovators of popular illustrating, including Bob Peak, Mark English, and Alan E. Cober.

Roughly speaking, the concept of psychological illustrating came into being through the work of the Post Impressionists, who dealt with the illusions of reality through optical impressions, and the Expressionists, who dealt with the illusions of the mind. A brief mention of several points

of interest to me in Post Impressionistic attitudes becomes important in my approach to visual communication. Those aspects of interest are formal composition, the use of color in conveying emotion, and the spontaneity of the media used. A system that worked academically in the early 1900's has given me a greater level of interpretive freedom when creating illusions today.

In the sequential attitudes of Expressionism, around which twentieth century American art has centered, I find constructive and useful communicative approaches, not solely in Expressionism itself, but as a reflective comparison to Impressionism. The label, "Expressionism," rightly fits the movement, because of the presentation of ideas which primarily uses the assimilated intellect. What is meant by assimilated intellect is the intellectually growing society which is a human condition. This condition is discussed as symbolic language by Jacob Bronowski, a natural philosopher.

I devoted my second lecture to sketching what seems to me a sensible evolutionary sequence for speech, for symbolic language.

I pointed out that only human beings are able to make, to internalize, and to exchange with one another utterances which have a purely cognitive content. We pass knowledge to one another, that is, information which does not have the preprogrammed force of an instruction. Animals' signals, by and large, are pure instructions. I suggested that this cognitive content has evolved in human language by a process which is continuous from animal signals. The animal sentence has been progressively broken down so that the sentence that we exchange contains words: words which either stand for objects in the outside world or for actions. This analysis of the outside world is bound up with human language. It is closely related to the visual imagination in human beings, and by its means we dominate and conjure the external world.<sup>1</sup>

Symbols, or forms of expression, seem to me to be derived from the expansion of literal visions of reality as depicted by the Post Impressionists. The assimilated intellect of the public accepted the derived symbols with little trouble. Assuming this is true, the attitudes presented by the Expressionistic artists, seemed to me, visually non literal attitudes of nature, which surely came from the creative minds within the assimilated public.

Susan Langer says often in her book, "Feeling and Form," that symbols are the ruling power and purpose of art.

To explain further my interest in the attitudes of Expressionism, the Expressionistic illusion is not a mere arrangement of given natural forms in an aesthetically pleasing manner, it is what results from the arrangement. This is literally something which the artist creates, earning for himself integrity as artist and communicator. This is another important point for me as a human being and communicator; to have integrity and to always be ethical in what I do with my skills. Therefore, all of these means of expression -- commercial illustration, Post Impressionism, and Expressionism, have helped me to understand the process of communication through visual and philosophic means and serve as a basis for what I do with glass.

## CHAPTER II. GLASS AND POETRY

In myself I see a romantic, impressionistic attitude, yet I believe strongly in the use of an Expressionistic technique, that is letting the materials express themselves. "Great art often tells a story but great art is always something plus the idea. Ordinary art does not rise above it."<sup>2</sup> This quote is important to me because it deals with concerns I have about technique in itself ruling the direction of the pieces I create. I do believe in technique though, just as I believe in theories as techniques, again not as an end in itself for total communication.

When glass was introduced to me it was very mysterious, in that I could not identify it by anything I had ever known. Since then I have been totally involved with the technique of glass. Completely infatuated with the hypnotizing substance, I put the idea of illustrating out of my mind. As the years went by I discovered that I was developing many relatively unusual images by way of technique.

I became aware of my individuality in the field of glass at this time.

Soon I began seeing a relationship of glass techniques to commercial illustration. As mentioned in my introduction, the first attempts at emphasizing this relationship were not completely successful, I think, because of my conceptual immaturity as an artist. Eventually, after much observation, listening, thought and practice, I felt more confident with glass as a media for illustrative expression. I now determined that it was time to explore the glass and illustration relationship once again. These two subjects which have been of great interest to me have now pushed me into a new consciousness: the human being in relationship to art. In other words, the human being in relationship to me.

To aid in my further understanding of the human condition and to aid in demonstrating glass and illustration's compatibility, I chose poetry as inspirational material. Because to me, poetry is an art form, its use seemed advantageous. The poetry was written and it was as if I was commissioned to illustrate a text. The fact that the poems from



Edgar Lee Masters' "Spoon River Anthology," were analogous to what I metaphorically imagined glass illustration to be eliminated many additional unforeseen problems of creating images in glass. The more specific my thesis was to human references, the more direct the solution at which I would arrive. To further direct my concentration I chose to visualize and compare directly my life's experiences to what I felt other human beings experienced. This notion was supported by the fact that the poems were very humanistic in nature. What follows is a discussion and personal interpretation of the chosen poems as written by me early in my thesis work.

I have selected ten poems from Edgar Lee Masters' "Spoon River Anthology." His poetry is heavy in psychological, romantic, and humanistic tonalities. These qualities are dominant interests to me as a communicator,

The poems, based on real human characters, are supposedly collected from epitaphs located in a midwestern town. I feel these poems become personal truths to the reader, because he is reminded of the timelessness of humanity. Masters is one

interpreter of humanity who has created his own beauty as a poet. I do not wish to illustrate his written word literally, but rather through my personal interpretation and experiences. In this case, dealing with the poems illustratively, I feel a psychological approach using symbolism as a main thrust is appropriate.

First, my basic interpretations of each character are needed. Then from this, visual images in the form of illustrations will be made. This, I feel, will carry my personal statements made up of symbols. Types of symbols, for instance, a circle or sphere as symbol for man; color and texture symbolizing mood and detailing subject matter; life symbolized by line.

Here are my basic interpretations:

Margaret Fuller Slack - A character of fate, this woman is unable to fulfill all her romantic aspirations because of female tradition.

Peleg Poague - Tragedy characterized by a man, handsome and virile. He attracts love and affection, but cannot give love and affection.

Schoreder the Fisherman - An observant, wise old man who respects life. He notes that the strong survive in a crowded world. This poem has a salty humor.

Jonathan Haughton - A romantic tragedy of a man who did not know who he was. He was caught in passages of past-present-future, past-present-future.

Henry Layton - A tragedy of life. A man whose parents were mismatched and separated from one another creating a man absent of a happy family.

Theodore the Poet - A sensitive character as poets are. Surrounded by water, the symbol for rebirth, he is obsessed with contemplating the nature of things and man's relativity. In one sense this is a tragic poem of one's fate.

Thomas Ross, Jr. - A tragic characterization of a young man who has been over-protected by a loving mother. He has no sense of self for she dies before his maturity.

Clarence Fawcett - A poor man with little dignity and respect; contrasted by a man of wealth, also with little dignity and respect.

Roger Heston - A cynical character who died an ironic death because of his failure to listen and learn from his friend. This poem has a wonderful flavor of metaphysical humor.

Eugenia Todd - A pathetic character unhappy with her experiences in life. She waits and yearns for her dues to be paid and to be rewarded with death.

### CHAPTER III. GLASS AND LIFE

The world, past and future, seems to be full of paradoxes confusing humanity. To cope, we use our intellectual capacity to associate and imagine and interpret what we have learned and know as individuals.

Walt Whitman had a powerful purpose to live by and with which to create.

A complete picture of humanity, of society in all its phases, and the world in all its sweeps of landscape and oceanic spread ...to express in sharp-cut self-assertion one's self, and also, or maybe, still more, to map out, to throw together for American use, a gigantic embryo or skeleton of personality, fit for the west for native models.<sup>3</sup>

Whitman was a great influence and inspiration upon my beginning of this thesis.

The poet as seer should be conscious of the subterranean root of human personality both in himself and in other men. It is his business to bring up out of the depths of man's nature whatever is there. Whitman

is a distinguished poet, not only because he was not blind to the irrational forces of man, but also because he had a sublime conception of the art of raising those potential forces so often errant and destructive to a divine expression of man's nobler self. He did not yield to the cynical temptation to depersonalize and dehumanize man. It is the poet's function to inspire, to create personality, not to escape or depress it.<sup>4</sup>

History in glass tells us about humanity of a particular time. Just as glass today creates our present history. Within these humanistic qualities of glass there are potentials far outreaching other visual materials. It is much more than a container that is acid resistant, more than transparent or opaque, more than strong and architectural, more than fluid or ground into powder to be used as paint. It is a statement of our time in the form it takes. I believe, not because I consider myself a visual communicator, that the forms glass takes are perceptions of yesterday, but that they, too, are surely for the senses of the imagination that perceives them today.

Glass relates to life in metaphorical terms interpreting the world around us. The kinds of

expressions or forms that it assumes are pure and unquestionable like Walt Whitman's concept of self. The human construction of imagination is language. In this way the material of glass, which is as immediate as the imagination itself, satisfies my drive to create.

## CONCLUSION

Analogous to life, in metaphorical terms, is the process of glass. As a communicator, the symbol or metaphor is a prime consideration. With this type of mental association to life, glass acquires a personality.

Through involvement with a material in a one-to-one relationship, the material responds with less aggression. The material, in this case, glass, flows with a language, as if saying, "do this to me," or, "do that to me." Glass becomes a friend. Because the glass has so many variables, it must be dealt with as if it had a heart.

Sometimes when I work with the molten glass it reminds me of the softness and sensitivity of a woman. Sometimes we go on dates and dance; waltzing, dipping to the pre-set timing and rhythm of heat ranges.

The sentient relationship that is between glass and myself is somewhat difficult to explain, because it involves relating an inhuman to a human



condition. However, when one sees a sensitive, aesthetic piece of work made of glass, he will know what I mean by the glass' personality.

Personality in glass comes not solely from its creator. The forms, the qualities and the molecular arrangements change from day to day and piece to piece. The manipulator employs knowledge and thought processes when creating. But only within the glass' limits of capability at that particular time.

The approach I used in my thesis was to create a palette of individual metaphors. By having a theme in mind, I was able to skillfully explore the ranges of form the glass could possibly take. Within these ranges of form surprises often came forth giving not only spontaneity to the form but credit to the personality of glass coming through the form. This I was finely attuned to. In this thesis work the assembly of all collected knowledge including use of materials, metaphors, and visual communication training must surface in the final image. In this way I feel the well rounded image becomes powerful and alive, and this is of the utmost concern.

The irony I see from my personal development is that through all this searching, working and experiencing, no matter what a person does, it is all public oriented. Now it's what Walt Whitman said, that counts. "The new influences, upon the whole, are surely preparing the way for grander individualities than ever. Today and here personal force is behind everything."<sup>5</sup>

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Jacob Bronowski, The Origins of Knowledge and Imagination, 6th ed. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 43.

<sup>2</sup>Barbara Rose, ed., Readings in American Art 1900-1975 (New York: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1975), p. 7.

<sup>3</sup>Arthur E. Briggs, Walt Whitman, Thinker and Artist (New York: Philosophical Library, 1952), p. 276.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 278.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 245.

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