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The Image – by any means

Richard Minard

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ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

The College of Imaging Arts and Sciences

School of Art

In Candidacy for the Degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

The Image - By Any Means

By

Richard Minard

Date: October, 2010
# THESIS APPROVAL

**Thesis Title:** The Image – By Any means  
**Thesis Author:** Richard Minard

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS and DEDICATION

I would like to acknowledge the professors on my committee: Alan Singer, Tom Lightfoot and Alex Miokovic. Their knowledge and insight proved invaluable to me during my time at the Rochester Institute of Technology. I would also like to give a special thanks to Professor Luvon Sheppard whose wisdom and guidance are greatly appreciated.

This thesis and the work that it represents are dedicated to my wife Rachel Minard. Without her steadfast support and encouragement, as well as the support of my son Quentin and the rest of my family, none of this would have been possible.
ABSTRACT

Art is inherently a reflection of the human condition. As I am working, my intention is to make images that, at the very least, capture the audience’s attention. By adding layers and fracturing the images, I want the audience to see through various visual relationships. These visual relationships can be interpreted as a metaphor of the often hectic and unstable qualities of daily life. As the human figure is my connection to the work, it also serves as the viewer’s connection. The blending of media and mixing up of figurative representation with abstraction is my attempt to challenge the viewer to search for their own humanity among the clamor of everyday existence. I want to bring a sense of balance and harmony to the disorder of being.

This body of work is an attempt to blend abstract expressionistic painting, collage, and large-format, digital, inkjet printing. In the past I have always kept my life as a graphic designer separate from my life as an artist. I now feel comfortable with the idea of integrating these aspects of myself to create energetic, stimulating, and thought-provoking images.

The finished pieces range in size from 36”x24” to 63”x45”. Some elements in the imagery are painterly in contrast to the mechanical and digital processes that I employ. Figurative elements are combined with abstract forms.

Through training, education, and practice I have come to be a process-oriented artist. I don’t intend to make art that overtly makes any kind of personal, social or political statement. The two things most important to me are the act of making the image and the image itself. This does not mean that content does not play a role in my process. As I work, I let the content emerge intuitively. I use the figure as an element of form. I use bright, contrasting and
complementary colors to stimulate the image. I integrate pattern and design to create depth and motion.

BRIEF HISTORY

The Stereotypical Childhood

Everything I do can be traced back to a childhood fascination with comic books. As a typical kid growing up, all I ever wanted to do was to be a comic book artist. In general, what attracted me to comics were the bright colors and action. The first title I remember taking a particular interest in was “Warlord” drawn by Mike Grell, published by DC comics (1976). What I remember liking about “Warlord” was the fantastic setting with jungles and dinosaurs. The main character had no superpowers, just a sword and a gun. What I recall liking most of all was the way Mike Grell rendered the figure. After him, I became interested in many other artists. Some were Neil Adams, Frank Miller, Mike Zeck, Barry Windsor-Smith, and Bill Siekewitsz—all with their own individual styles. To encourage me, my mother gave me one of her figure-drawing books from college. I also received the book How to Draw Comics the Marvel Way as a gift for Christmas. During high school, partly as a coping strategy, I kept a “picture diary.” I drew myself and my friends as super heroes vanquishing all manner of bad guys. By my junior year, I knew I was destined for art school.

After high school I earned an Associate Degree from the Art Institute of Pittsburgh, concentrating in Visual Communications. I learned about target audiences and demographics. I learned the fundamentals of good graphic design, visual balance, and graphic illustration. I was
shown the power of complementary colors. I still drew entries in my picture diary. The entries became less “fantastic” and more biographical. I still had dreams of being a comic book artist. To these dreams I added the idea of earning a living as a “free lance illustrator.” However, five years after graduation, the best job I could get in the small town where I lived was painting animal designs on children’s furniture. I decided it was time to go back to school.

At Clarion University of Pennsylvania I made the switch from drawing and illustration to painting. I was a horrible painter because I tried to force the image—impose my will onto the canvas. The professors helped me let go of narrative intent and focus on process by saying “Let the paint be paint.” Through that engagement came freedom of expression. I began to paint much more abstractly, sometimes non-representational, but more often than not I gravitated to the figure. I eventually realized that a common theme throughout my work was an interest in relationships. In the last semester of my senior year, as a final project for a weaving class I did two figure paintings, cut them up and wove them together. As I did more of these, I came to understand that they were commentaries on the sacrifices we as people make to hold relationships together. No doubt this was influenced by the fact that I had just gotten married.

For the next 10 years I continued painting in my studio at home while maintaining a day job as a large-format, digital printmaker and silk screen graphic designer. I continued with the weaving process along with abstract and figurative paintings. I entered local, juried competitions, and participated in many seasonal outdoor festivals and community arts council exhibitions.
Eventually I answered an advertisement from a new community art center looking for art teachers. I was hired as the painting teacher. When I got home after my first night of class, my wife looked at me and said, “This is the first time in years that you’ve come home from work with a smile on your face.” We immediately began researching the possibility of me returning to school to earn a graduate degree.

“I just do what my wife tells me.”

Upon arrival at R.I.T., I went about painting using the same process as I had been for the past ten years--just applying paint to the canvas, concentrating on the act of painting with no desired intent. At the same time I was learning new software in another class and achieving interesting and inspiring results. Visually, the images I produced were very exciting and dynamic. I enjoyed the accumulation of layers in the computer by multiplying grid patterns and combining those with figurative organic forms. When I showed these to my family, I made the comment that I’d love to figure out how to do this on canvas. Then my wife said, “Just use masking tape.”

On my first attempt, I did a simple background color field and then applied a simple grid pattern with masking tape. Using a complementary color scheme, I applied another abstract color field, then removed the tape. After a third application of tape and abstract color field, I removed the tape and realized the second layer needed something more. This is when a fellow artist’s advice, “Use what you know” popped into my head. I put a “drop-shadow”—a semi-transparent black line—along one edge of all the shapes of the second layer. This is a graphic
arts technique used to imply depth and mass. I count this as my first success and the inspiration for this body of work. (Figure 1)

I began experimenting more with different approaches. With my paintings, I used thin, one-quarter inch tape, which allowed me to curve and warp the grid patterns. To try something different, I experimented with a wave form for one layer, then a sharp edged radiating form for the next layer. With the digital art, I would scan paintings and drawings and using three dimensional grid forms, fracture the scans and then superimpose them, one on top of the other. All the while I was working toward a convergence of aesthetics. I wanted the digital images and the paintings to have a similar visual appearance.
Figure 1, *Masked Intersections*, acrylic on canvas, 23x34
PROCESS and AESTHETICS

In the early years, when all I wanted to do was draw comic books, that was all I did—draw. I was taught a little about painting at the Art Institute of Pittsburgh, but that was more for illustrative purposes. It bears repeating, when I went back for my Bachelor’s degree, I was a horrible painter.

Part of the problem was lack of experience. All the images I had produced up to that point had been in the context of drawing little pictures for my diary, the occasional illustration for a community event, or painting zebra stripes on children’s chairs; but, I knew I just loved painting. A turning point came when Robert Yarber visited the school to give a lecture and critique our work. When he looked at what I was doing, he asked, “Who are your heroes?” At the risk of sounding tacky, I told him that he was one of them. His use of vivid colors on dark backgrounds, as well as the humor in some of his images, appealed to me. Then he asked, “What was it that got you wanting to be an artist?” Of course I answered, “Comic books.” I cannot remember exactly what he said, but the idea will always stick with me. He said he could see in my work a struggle between concentrating on the narrative and concentrating on the image. He told me I had a choice to make. I needed to decide which was more important to me, the story or the painting.

I chose painting, but I still needed to learn how to paint. For this, my professor established a regimen of completing anywhere from three to five paintings per week. Each week was a different assignment, concentrating on one technique or another. The work-load
seemed daunting, but I had already established myself as someone who put in extra hours. Coincidentally, it was around this time I made the last entry in my picture diary, at number 999.

Obviously, I had to work fast. This forced me to stop worrying about what was in the painting and just focus on what the paint was doing. The speed also facilitated my natural impatient tendencies. It is for this reason my paintings have a similar look as the Abstract Expressionists and the Action Painters. Like them--the paintings became as much about a record of how they were painted, as they were not about anything else. However, it must be noted I didn’t come to that aesthetic from that direction. I didn’t look at Jackson Pollock’s and Willem de Kooning’s work and say to myself, “I want my paintings to look like that.” For me, it was a situation where, as I was painting, I noticed I was just losing myself in the engagement. It became a physical activity for me. I realized what I was doing was exactly the same as what I had been taught as a teenager in Martial Arts. I was shown techniques that I practiced repeatedly until they became second nature.

This was the second turning point for me in my growth as a painter. I realized that I needed to stop thinking about subject matter. When I painted with a specific goal or story in mind, my skills became constricted. The frustration I felt as I “tried too hard”--and grew impatient with the results--showed in the image. When I painted with no narrative intent, my skills were unshackled and the image came naturally. I also felt better about the work. Unencumbered by thoughts like, “this needs to look a certain way...” I was free to enjoy the process and be happy with the results.
The ingredients

The images that came naturally are first and foremost influenced by comic books. My use of the figure, color, composition, action, narrative, and flow, can all be linked directly to comic books. Many of the early comic book artists were classically trained figure artists. The skin-tight costume is a method used to draw the nude figure in action. “The reader responds with the unconscious understanding that gaudily colored near-nakedness is the proper attire for fictional characters enacting dreams and fantasies, as did the ancient gods.” (Daniels 1991, 17) Because of this attraction at such an early age, I have essentially been making art with the figure in it for almost forty years. The figure--both female and male--is the form that is the most familiar to me and the most comfortable. By structuring the pose, composition, and the use of rendering techniques, I can convey mood and attitude.

My use of bright and exciting colors is also influenced by comic books. I want to grab the audience’s attention. I incorporate complementary colors to make the image stimulating. I use highly contrasting lights and darks to create depth as well as pictorial balance. These are all strategies employed by comic book artists to help direct the narrative. All of these tools and methods were reinforced and refined by my training at the Art Institute of Pittsburgh. Putting them into practice for ten years as a graphic designer sharpened these skills to the point of them becoming instinctual. I don’t have to think about these things--they just come naturally.

As a painter the skills are all about technique. Through training and experimentation I've learned the differences between the look of wet and dry application. What does the paint look like when applied with a coarse-bristled brush as opposed to a smooth-bristled brush?
What does the color look like when mixed on the palette as opposed to mixing the colors directly on the canvas? How is the texture going to look when applied with a palette knife instead of a brush? All of these skills were honed through hours of work to the point where they are automatic.

Except for the courses I took here at R.I.T., my skills on the computer are either “self taught” or, in other cases, on the job training. Through experimentation, I’ve learned what software to use, which buttons to push, and which filters to use in order to achieve an overall look.

Convergence

As stated earlier, in the past I have always kept my life as a graphic artist separate from my life in fine art. I now feel comfortable with the idea of integrating these aspects of myself. What led me to this is a relationship I developed with a client I met through my job as a large-format, digital printmaker.

Carson Waterman is a Native American artist who lives in Salamanca, NY. He is a very successful artist with paintings in the permanent collection of the New York State Museum. He has also done many commissioned pieces for public sites, as well as illustrated two children’s books. I first met him when he came in to inquire about getting reproductions made of his paintings. The images he provided were incredibly well-executed, acrylic paintings. The subject matter was Native American. The paintings were very brightly colored, using a mix of
traditional symbols and figures in a modern graphic arts-like style. During our conversations I asked him how big the original paintings were and was jealous to learn that some were as large as 6’x10’. I told him so and explained that my own studio was only an 8’x10’ room partitioned off in the basement of my house. He laughed and then invited me to visit him in his studio.

When I went to visit his studio, I was able to see first-hand how I--in my capacity as a digital inkjet printmaker--was helping him with his projects. He had been commissioned to produce the artwork for murals that would be installed in the new Seneca Allegany Casino. He had done several small magic marker and colored pencil designs that were scanned into the computer. On the machine at work, I printed these sketches on canvas at about 2’x10’. Carson then took these prints back to his studio, stretched them onto frames, and then embellished them with acrylic paint. These paintings were shot again using a very high resolution digital camera. Those files were taken to a larger facility and printed full size, (about 10’x60’) and installed in the casino.

During our conversation that day, he very graciously gave me several bits of advice. The one thing that has resonated with me is the comment he made, “Use what you know. Don’t keep the techniques and rules you know from your training as a graphic designer separate from your painting techniques. Those rules are interchangeable.”
This is the advice stated earlier (see fig.1), in conjunction with Rachel’s advice, that sparked this entire body of work. Not only am I trying to physically mix together painting and digital printmaking as methods of image making, I am also blending techniques. I am unifying both aspects of myself to become a more holistic artist.

I must reiterate that I am a process oriented artist. Everything stated previously is a tool-set which is used to produce work. Stephen King writes, “The only thing talent wants is to be used.” (2004, 290) I keep this quote tacked to the wall in my studio because it inspires me to just work. Another quote that inspires me is from the book Art and Fear, “The function of the overwhelming majority of your artwork is simply to teach you how to make the small fraction of your artwork that soars.” (Bayles and Orland 1993, 5) I don’t think about what my art is saying because when I do, the gears get clogged. During the act of making art, many of my decisions are based simply on the idea of, “I just thought it would look cool.” In other words, the process serves the image. My focus is to get to the image through the process. No matter what I’m doing, painting, drawing, or working with the computer, the ultimate goal is to get to the image--whatever it is. The content comes intuitively. What the image is about is not resolved until after the image is made.
THE IMAGES – PART I

Digital Image Making and the Print Making “Debate”.

“If the technology has advanced, then the process should advance as well.” - Mary Housel-Demanchick, fellow MFA candidate and 20 year Middle School Art teaching veteran.

During the ten years I was employed as a graphic designer for a screen printing shop, my primary duties were to generate designs for clients ranging from local little league baseball and soccer leagues, community softball associations to high school and college sports teams along with everything in between.

My other major responsibility was to generate artwork and designs for banners and large-format digital prints that I printed using solvent based inks on a 50 inch Roland SOLJET SC500. These jobs were printed on various substrates (the media or material the image is being printed onto) such as scrim vinyl, photo-glossy paper, adhesive-backed and translucent vinyls, as well as fine art canvas. The finished products ranged anywhere in size from 18”x24” to 4’x20’.

During that time in my life, I played around with the computer, manipulating photo references and integrating scanned drawings and paintings, but never with any serious thought. So, when I was registering for courses at R.I.T., I was pleased and intrigued to see a class offered called “Digital Art and Printmaking” taught by Professor Alan Singer. This class presented the
perfect opportunity for me to utilize my skills and knowledge of generating images on the computer and then transferring them to paper using traditional, fine-art printmaking methods.

Professor Singer introduced the class to many new software options, all with the purpose of expanding the range of image making possibilities. I scanned in paintings and manipulated the colors. I imported figure drawings and integrated them with geometric shapes. I pulled apart photo references and made patterns from the organic forms. I then combined all these elements by layering them on top of one another. These images are a progression from my woven paintings, where only two layers are physically woven together. Utilizing these new tools, I was able to build images in the computer that are essentially multiple layers, all reacting and interacting with one another.

After the images were generated, Professor Singer showed us how to use traditional printmaking techniques to transfer them to fine art paper. We printed the images onto transparencies treated with Gum Arabic. The transparencies were then placed on the press with paper that had been soaked in water. After passing them through the press under pressure, the image would transfer from the transparency to the paper. These were the images which provided the spark, “Just use masking tape.” (Figure 2)
In addition to this printmaking technique, I also learned non-toxic techniques from Professor Keith Howard. I had some experience with traditional printmaking from my days at Clarion University. We produced prints using linocut, lithography, and intaglio techniques. Professor Howard showed us techniques that produced identical results without the use of dangerous chemicals.

At the beginning of my second year, Professor Singer asked me to help him break in a new EPSON 4880 ink-jet printer. He purchased this for his class and wanted my help with troubleshooting. He was concerned about the ink-jet heads clogging up during long durations of non-use, so he asked me to run the printer on a weekly basis. This provided the opportunity
for me to further explore the digital aspect of my image making. I found I was having the very same experience producing images with the computer as I had when I was painting. I realized both processes informed and inspired one another. I combined magnified sections of my paintings with figures and layered them with geometric forms and patterns. I inverted colors and drastically readjusted the hues and saturation. Just as when I am immersed in the process of painting, I enjoyed the process of manipulating all these elements, in order to produce dynamic and exciting images. I showed these ink-jet prints to the members of my thesis committee and was encouraged to hear they could see a correlation between them and my paintings.

As I continued with this, the decision had to be made as to which process I was going to use to print the final images. I considered using the transfer process, but decided against it because of the limitation in size. Professor Singer’s new printer can only print on media up to 17 inches wide. My smallest paintings were 34 inches wide and I wanted the prints to have a comparable, physical impact. While I have tremendous respect and admiration for Professor Howard’s non-toxic techniques, I felt the processes were too far removed from the digital aspects of the imagery. The prints made with his techniques are compelling and attractive. The colors produced by the use of four different plates cannot be accomplished through any other process. But there are elements in the images—what Professor Howard likes to call “artifacts” of the process—that separate the finished product from what I am trying to achieve. The artifacts, the little imperfections, add interest and complexity, but they distract the viewer from the image.
The clarity, sharpness, and vividness of color are what I am striving to attain. If I maintain that I am a process oriented artist then I should remain true to the process. The images were made digitally. It only makes sense they be produced digitally. I have to fall back on the advice from Carson Waterman, “Use what you know.” I know from experience that a large-format digital inkjet printer will produce the results that meet my standards. During the break between the winter and spring quarters, I went back to my previous place of employment where they graciously allowed me to produce the prints myself. All four images are 41”x31” inkjet prints on canvas. I chose not to frame them behind glass because I did not want the added layer of disconnect between the viewer and the image. They were displayed using simple metal tubes attached to the top and bottom of the canvas.
Figure 3, *Eighth Nascent*, Ink-jet Print on canvas, 41x31

Figure 4, *Tenth Impetus*, Ink-jet print on canvas, 41x31
Figure 5, Physiomorphic I, Ink-jet print on canvas, 41x31

Figure 6, Physiomorphic II, Ink-jet print on canvas, 41x31
Painting 1 - *Incongruent Tranquility*

I started this painting as a charcoal drawing on canvas. I used as reference a quick sketch I had done as a demonstration in the use of line for an open figure drawing session. As the work progressed, I started to use water in conjunction with the charcoal. I wanted faster, more immediate, more expressive marks on the canvas. I also introduced colored pastels to set a tone for the overall piece.

For the next stage, I used masking tape to establish a grid pattern of varying width and slight changes in direction. I then applied a green and yellow wash, using what I could still see of the drawing underneath as a guide. The brush strokes followed the curves and shapes of the figure, as well as the marks and tones made in the background. I separated the figure from the background by using lighter greens and yellows inside the figure and darker greens behind the figure. After the paint dried, I removed the tape.

For the final layer, I applied a second, slightly more organized, grid pattern. I began with an orange wash to offset the green layer. I then applied thick, heavy strokes of orange, dark blue, and burnt umber in a diagonal direction.

The three layers combined create a simple, successful merging of a drawing, a wash painting, and a non-representational abstract painting.
Figure 7, *Incongruent Tranquility*, charcoal, pastel, and acrylic on canvas, 34x34
Painting 2 - *Transplanelformation*

With this painting, I decided to establish a background tone first. I painted an abstract color wash using yellow ochre, raw sienna, and burnt umber.

For the second layer, I applied the grid pattern with short pieces of tape rather than intersecting lengths. I was looking at the digital prints and wanted to more closely duplicate those effects. I drew a figure using black pastels, water, and a brush, referenced from a previous exercise. I also used purple acrylic paint to compliment the yellow background.

I discovered at this stage that I liked the image better with the tape still on the canvas. The tape became a physical layer instead of an implied/simulated layer. The problem was I needed the previous layer to show through. I also wanted the “holes” to be accentuated. To solve this dilemma, I used gold acrylic paint, with a little orange, and accented the edges of the tape, only where it was positioned outside the figure. I let the previous layer show through by repositioning the tape. In the areas outside the figure, I applied the tape in an opposing direction. For the areas inside the figure, the tape was off-set to create a “gap-print” effect. I permanently adhered the tape to the canvas using clear, acrylic matte gel medium.

This painting remains one of my favorites. Permanently affixing the tape to the canvas harkens back to my weaving process. Leaving the tape on also takes that process a step further. I can apply the tape in any direction, no longer limited to the strict horizontal and vertical grid structure. Accenting the edges of the “holes” left by the tape is directly inspired by the desire to use graphic design techniques in my paintings. These simple graphic arts solutions that create dynamic movement and depth are appealing to me.
Figure 8 – Transplantformation, charcoal, pastel and acrylic on canvas, 34x34
Painting 3 - *Encumbrance*

For the first layer of this painting I chose Pthalo Blue and Pthalo Green. I incorporated watercolor techniques to create a very fluid abstract field. I also chose to increase the size. My line of thinking was, if the studio space here at R.I.T. is bigger than my space at home, then I should be producing bigger paintings.

Hoping to repeat the effects of Painting #2, I set up a grid pattern using small pieces of tape. I applied two strips of tape touching each other, but off-set. Each row of the pattern expanded from top to bottom in a radiating form. I then started to draw/paint a figure using black and red pastels along with alizarin crimson acrylic paint.

After removing the tape, I realized the second layer was too close in tone to the first layer. The layers didn’t pop from one another. They just blurred together. As with the digital images, I wanted the paintings to have multiple, individual layers interacting with one another. I felt I needed to pull apart the first and second layers.

Frustrated with many attempts to separate the layers, I began scraping paint onto the canvas in an attempt to destroy the painting. Out of aggravation, I adjusted the nozzle on my spray bottle to the tight stream setting and began blasting the scraped on paint. This created little explosions and runs of color.

Exhausting my agitated energy, I stopped. When the painting was presented in critique, it garnered good reviews to which I commented, “I guess I had to kill it to bring it back to life.”
Figure 9 – *Encumbrance*, charcoal, pastel and acrylic on canvas, 44x44
Painting 4 – *Emanation I*

This painting started out at five feet square. I began with a green wash, using a spray bottle to thin the coverage and create fluidity. For the second layer, since my intention for this project was to integrate image-making methods, I decided it was time to physically combine painting and digital processes. I created an image on the computer and printed it out on my own desktop printer. Altogether, I printed out 30 sheets of paper. After cutting the sheets of paper in a diagonal pattern, they were collaged onto the canvas. When finished, it became apparent that the figure in the digital image had been totally obscured.

For the next layer, I applied pieces of tape in a diagonal pattern of non-organized variations of length and width. I painted a wash of white, yellow ochre, and raw sienna to complement the maroon tones of the digital print.

At this stage, I realized the painting was starting to get away from me. I felt like I was losing control. I eventually came to the conclusion it wasn’t control I had lost, it was my connection to the image. The connection that was missing was the figure. I needed to bring the figure back into the confusion. I took a photo of the painting and, with the computer, superimposed a variation of the same figure from the initial digital print.

Using a printout as reference, with dark maroons and purples to connect to the original digital image, I painted the figure back onto the canvas. This still did not resolve the painting for me. After many conversations with professors and fellow classmates, one comment resonated with me, “There is no discernable, organized grid pattern holding the whole thing together.” This forced me to reexamine the prints that were the inspiration for this project.
realized part of the dynamics of the images were the use of repeating patterns of shape, except with no fill colors, just outlines. With this idea in mind, I chose three solid shapes created by the cutting of the original digital print and, using the computer, repeated the shapes in an expanding, radiating pattern. Using a printout as reference, I painted the pattern twice, first using dark green to connect to the very first green wash. The second pattern was painted with yellow ochre, to connect to the third layer, and slightly offset from the dark green pattern.

The application of the grid patterns pulled everything together, but the composition was still unbalanced. This problem was resolved by simply cropping the sides of the canvas.

This painting represents my first success in physically blending digital inkjet printing and traditional painting methods. It also achieves the aesthetic that I am working toward; exciting, dynamic, multi-layered imagery. There are flat fields of color underneath patterns of fractured figurative imagery combined with and held together by grids of repeated geometric shapes.
Painting 4 – In progress
Figure 10 – Emanation I, acrylic and inkjet print on canvas, 60x45
Painting 5 – *Emanation II*

The final painting builds on the success of the fourth painting. This time, the digital print was done first. One of the difficulties with painting #4 was getting a color in the digital print that associated well with the green field I had painted. My strategy this time was to paint a field that went well with the colors of the digital print. I chose this procedure also for the fact that I wanted to do the digital print on a large-format inkjet printer using a canvas substrate. The cost of these large-format prints restricts the luxury of making multiple proofs.

I was conscious of the fact I wanted to have the digital print carry more weight in the picture. I wanted the viewer to see the digital print and I wanted the viewer to see the figure in the digital print. After generating the image in the computer and laying in a grid pattern, I went back to my previous place of employment and printed the image on their large-format inkjet machine.

With the digital print tacked to the wall next to my canvas, I applied a wash of acrylic paint using shades of red, alizarin crimson, and orange. I cut the digital print, guided by the grid pattern, and applied it to the canvas. I soon realized my plan failed. Once again, the image in the digital print was lost by the fracturing. However, this time, due to prior experience, I was not frustrated because I knew how to fix it. After the entire digital print was adhered to the canvas, I applied masking tape in a cascading, zigzag pattern. Using varying tones of green to compliment the red background layer, the figure was again painted onto the canvas. After removing the tape, the figure was lost yet again!
In an attempt to once again bring back the figure, I painted contour lines delineating the separations between the highlights and shadows of the figure. Then I painted blue lines loosely following the grid pattern established by the digital print. My thinking was to focus on the geometric shapes and forget about the figure. I continued applying paint using a palette knife, accentuating shadows and highlights, because the overall painting was too close in tone.

Still not satisfied, I stopped and looked at painting #4. I noticed the figure was on top, just underneath a double grid pattern. I commenced to paint in the figure once again, inspired by small areas that were showing through from the digital print. These areas had small squiggly lines that are artifacts of the digital manipulations. Using an old frayed brush and wet paint, I emulated these textures, concentrating on the highlights of the figure. I chose white, yellow and green to complement the dominant reds of the background. Finally pleased with this, I painted the grid patterns, first using a dark orange, then a light orange. Upon completion, many professors and fellow classmates agreed that this was the best work I’d done so far.
Figure 11 – *Emanation II*, acrylic and inkjet print on canvas, 64x44
THE IMAGE – PART III

Content

Stephen King writes in his book, Song of Susannah, “And, once again, there is a sense that I’m not telling the story but only providing a conduit for it.” (2004, 399) This, I believe, best describes how I work. All these aspects of myself, the influence of comic books, the training as a graphic artist, and the experience as a digital printmaker are all ingredients in a mix that when they are combined and funneled through me--using my process--art gets made.

Professor Luvon Sheppard once asked me, “What is it that you’re trying to do?” The most honest answer I can give is, “I’m just trying to get to the image.” Whether it is a painting, a drawing, an image generated in the computer, or some combination of all these processes, my goal is to create images that excite me, hold my interest, and I can keep coming back to and see something different each time. This is what I like as a viewer of art, so in return this is what I hope to give as a maker of art.

In his book, Last Words, George Carlin writes about his idea of conceptual art, “Streams of consciousness harnessed into form, let loose again and harnessed back until finally you’d have something with form and structure that sprang purely from your improvisational side.” (2009, 201) This push and pull, this give and take, this losing and regaining of structure and form are all part of my process. As a result, they become part of the content. It was during my undergraduate studies I realized I had an interest in relationships. All of my entries in my picture diary from high school were about how I dealt with different relationships; but, my interest went further than just interpersonal interactions. My interest in Martial Arts led me to
study a little bit about Eastern philosophy and the balance of yin and yang. I was also fascinated by things I learned in the biology classes and basic psychology classes. I will refer back to the artist’s statement I had written: “I’ve come to see that everything in nature is bound together by relationships. Random elements interacting with one another can break down and cause discord or unite to create balance and harmony.” I still believe this but for my current body of work, it is a bit too broad and ambiguous. I am interested in the accumulation of layers and the fracturing of the images. Another artist noted for the use of overlaid layers in his imagery is Sigmar Polke. His most recent “Lens Paintings” (2006-08) are a result of his experimenting with various mediums and finding a polymer gel that remains transparent, allowing the images beneath to remain visible. Stephen Westfall writes, “…one of Polke’s most important themes is plentitude, with its promise of fulfillment on the one hand, and the threat of excess on the other.” (2009, 137) I want my paintings to be a bit overwhelming. I am fascinated by the depth and the tug-of-war that is evident when looking through the various visual interactions.

As I pay attention to these visual interactions, the question arises, how do they relate to me? Therefore, how do they relate to the audience? How does the figure fit in with all this visual noise? The contemporary German painter, Neo Rauch includes figures in his paintings. When asked during a public conversation what his figures meant, he “candidly admitted that he couldn’t always say for sure, but sometimes his figures are there simply because the picture requires it, in really formal terms: color, balance, scale, and proportion.” (Volk 2010, 142) Like Rauch, I use the figure to accentuate formal elements in my images. However, the figure also serves as my connection to the work. I use it as a symbol for humanity. I use both male and
female forms because the human race is made up of both males and females. That's just life as it is--nature. By not including facial details, I allude to a larger identity than any single individual. This lack of distinctiveness allows the viewer to have a more personal reaction, rather than the image dictating “who I am, and therefore, who you are.”

The question was asked once, “Why did you choose to scrape and splatter the paint onto the canvas in that layer?” I replied, “I wanted some random elements in there because that’s life. Life is full of randomness.” We as human beings are surrounded by distractions. Life is a constant bombardment of demands for our attention. Our daily routines constantly shift between organic and inorganic experiences, spaces, and environments. This is what my images portray. As I am working, blending the media, and mixing up figurative representation with abstraction, losing the figure and then finding it again, I am struggling to find myself--to find my center. In turn, this becomes the audience’s struggle. Just like life, these images challenge the viewer to search for their own humanity among the clamor of everyday existence. Therein lies the commentary. Because the figure is obscured, it might take awhile for the audience to see it, and in some cases they never see it. When the audience does see it, a moment of discovery is created, a moment of satisfaction, when everything comes together. That is what I am trying to do, what we ALL are trying to do, with varying degrees of success, to bring a sense of balance and harmony to the disorder of being.
CONCLUSION

I am very pleased with how the paintings turned out, as well as the prints. The only critique of my part of the show is that I should have asked for more space. I wanted the audience to see the correlation between the prints and the paintings. Unfortunately, the amount of room needed to fit all the other students’ works limited the floor plan. Consequently, the prints were installed around the corner and separated from the paintings. Still, overall, I agree, the paintings needed their own space.

As far as the audience’s reaction is concerned, judging from comments made, I have succeeded in my goal of creating those “moments of discovery.” Many people have told me it took them awhile to notice the figure, and when they say the words to me, a smile comes to their face. That alone gives me satisfaction.

As for what the future holds, a whole world of possibilities has opened up for me. With just this direction, I think I would like to work on refinement. In the fourth and fifth paintings I adhered a digital print to the canvas. In subsequent layers, the digital print got lost. Taking this further, I would like to let the digital print have more visual impact. With the digital printmaking process, I would like to just do more. I want to explore further the possibilities of different combinations of subject matter and image making. Another area I would like to investigate is the idea of making the layers become more three-dimensional. By using foam core between the different layers, the images would enter into the realm of relief objects. Another solution would be to use transparent digital printing media to overlay images.
One of the experiments that garnered interesting results was the process of applying a watercolor wash to glossy inkjet paper, then, printing a figure on top of that. Because the watercolor can’t absorb into the glossy paper, it is re-activated when the printer’s ink is applied and creates very compelling interactions. I have also learned many alternative screen printing techniques. All of my previous experience with screen printing has been in commercial production. I would like to apply my knowledge to producing fine art screen prints and incorporating them into my paintings and digital prints. This could be accomplished by producing prints and applying them, or printing them directly, onto the paintings.

On the practical side, the inspiration for applying to graduate school in the first place was to be able to teach on the college level. There are three colleges within a half hour’s drive from where I live. I have contacts with all of them through my previous place of employment. I realize I won’t be hired immediately, but that won’t stop me from submitting my resume’. I love to teach art for the same reason I make art--I enjoy the interaction--and the look on a student’s face in that moment of discovery. I want to share those experiences when students lose themselves only to re-discover themselves in the process.
IN CLOSING

"Artists have an obligation to be on route--to be going somewhere. There's a journey involved and we don't know where it's going and that's the FUN. We're always seeking and looking and going and trying to challenge ourselves. And without sitting around THINKING of that a lot, it drives us. Keeps us trying to be fresh, trying to be NEW, trying to call on ourselves a little more."

--- George Carlin.

“One word can describe these paintings, optimistic. Much of your previous work had a definite sense of melancholy that I simply do not see in these paintings. These are more optimistic.”

--- Ben Zimmerman, Clarion University roommate from 1994 to 1997.
SOURCES


