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The Human Effect

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The Human Effect

An Undergraduate Honors Project Presented

By

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To

The Art Department

Approved:

Project Advisor

Date

Chair, Department Honors Committee

Date

Department Chair

Date

The progression of my own work has developed through the use of historical references as source material. Originally I was working in the green house making contour line drawings of overgrown plant life taking the line quality from these drawings and progressing them into abstracted environments. By letting the work span multiple pieces of large paper the work became interactive with the viewer. The large scale allows the viewer to feel consumed by the



environment. Additionally the element of chance was added, similar to the process of action painting, by splattering gamsol into black masses, giving the illusion of explosions. Working back into the prints with a second media such as hot glue or an oil stick, began to create a physical surface seen in the work of Pollock.

It then became important to me to incorporate the figure more directly. This is where I came up with my honors proposal to work with a figure and environment relationship

that was at the pinnacle moment of freedom and consumption. Drawing from the gestural and expressive line of the German expressionist Kathe Kollwitz, I looked to her work as a source for solving the challenge of how much of the figure to render and how much too let melt into the environment. I also examined the work of de Kooning and his practice of “no environment” really focusing on the transition between figure and ground becoming fluid and undecipherable.

The fictional environments in my work are representations of the man-made world we live in- spiraling, whirling, filled with opportunities and mishaps. I looked to Kollwitz's expressive mark making to emphasize the emotion of her figures. I am manipulating the use of line and mass to extenuate the physical stress placed on the figure, thus making the viewer feel the stress and weight placed on the body. The tension between the figure and the ground is at the tipping point of the figure succumbing to, or overpowering their environment. Being able to find the balance between naturalism and the gestural, expression of the figure is the key factor in determining the success of the piece.

Unfortunately I do not believe that I was able to make this aspect occur in my first semester's collection of work. There was a disconnect between the figure and the environment. Beginning with the literal figure and then trying to impose the abstracted environment was counterintuitive for me. Yet what remained was the gestural mark and the use of chance. Under the guidance of my mentor Stephen, I made the decision that having a totally representational figure and abstracted environment was holding back my work. So for the following semester I began working from a live model, doing quick gestural drawings. From these drawings I used the figure to set up the overall composition and influence the line making in different areas. The areas of the figure that I wanted to express



tension is where modules of repetitive line and form become the focal points. This allowed me to make interesting compositions that still have noticeable attributes of the figure while making a more convincing transition between figure and ground. In my latest drawings I discovered a new technique of using a wet paint brush to make a lighter black over a blacked out area of charcoal. While still having control over the placement of line I appreciated the chance that came with how the ragged edge of the line developed when absorbed by the velvety charcoal.



Another practice that I adopted this past semester is the use of action painting by Jackson Pollock, to build a physicality into the areas of black masses of my prints. This compulsive process of layering rhythmic, gestural line to build space is a commonality between my work and Pollock's. The role chance plays in Pollock's work is compelling and relevant to my own process. Pollock imposes order onto the seemingly random gestural application of paint by selectively choosing which movements to keep, to pursue, and which to edit so that the overall

piece is structured through informed chance and imposing order into a chaotic application and layering of paint. This is especially happening in my drawings as I build up areas of charcoal and then erase back into them, creating lush surface that is continuously changing between ground and subject. My latest drawing is based on Michelangelo's *Pieta*, the sculpture of Mary holding Jesus after being taken down from the cross. The drawing is centered on Jesus's strained abdomen and chest for source material of tension. I'm playing with light emerging from within the form and using contour line to create volumetric shape.





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