

1981

Female Figure Study

Jason F. Rockhold

Eastern Illinois University

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FEMALE FIGURE STUDY

(TITLE)

BY

JASON F. ROCKHOLD

A MAJOR PAPER IN

LIEU OF THE TRADITIONAL

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1981
YEAR

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ABSTRACT

This graduate thesis deals with my feelings and interpretation of the nude female figure in my drawings, paintings, and sculpture pieces; as well as the representations of other artists. The unique aspect about this special object is the broad range of interest it has created through the years. Since the female figure has such great versatility it can be viewed from a realistic portrayal as well as from a complete abstraction, and still be creatively effective.

My intentions in this paper are to discuss other artists and my own work in relation to the female figure. The main portion of the thesis is an expression and description of my own work. Pictures of my drawings, paintings, and sculptures are included.

My interpretation of the nude female figure is different from that of other artists simply because each individual has different views, concepts, and moral values. I was amazed at the versatility in which other artists, past and present, have used the human form as a creative expression of their art. In my work I use the figure simply for design.

My art works in drawing, painting, and sculpture have definite traits that are characteristic of my own style. There are many areas in my drawings that make up my particular style, the most prominent being the female figure. In most of my drawings only a frontal or backside view of the torso is showing. The torso, carefully placed in my drawings, is usually the focal point. The nude torso appears very sensual with the use of soft and delicate shadows which bring out the human quality in the figure. A surrounding atmosphere does

much to complement the figure. Lines, textures, and open space provide good contrast up against the soft contour shape of the figure in the background of my drawings. Photographs of five pencil drawings are included in the paper.

The style of my painting is developed from my drawings. Most of my paintings have some form of the female figure, usually centering on the torso. I simplify the figure by using less color, line, shape, and definition. My color schemes consist of four basic colors: blue, red, black, and white. White is added to all colors to develop a pastel effect.

The main concern in my paintings was to develop a simple study of the female figure that captures the soft and rounded forms, and also creates a meaningful expression. Photographs of four of my paintings are included in the paper.

I have also included in the paper pictures and descriptions of three sculptures; two redwood and one walnut figure studies.

Artists have used the nude female figure as their theme for thousands of years. There are entirely too many of these artists to mention in detail. I have chosen a few in each of the three categories that I admire and whose work I could relate to.

In the area of drawing I discuss the style of Alexander Archipenko, Pablo Picasso, Toulouse Lautrec, and Auguste Rodin.

Picasso and Rodin, along with Pierre Renoir, are three artists whose paintings I greatly admire. Descriptions of their painting styles are included in the paper.

Archipenko, Picasso, and Rodin influenced my style of sculpting. Characteristics of their sculptures are included in this work.

Other artists, past and present, have motivated me to continue my creative feelings concerning the female figure as an art form. What I tried to accomplish in my drawings, paintings, and sculpture pieces was a way of bringing out the human quality of the female figure; but more importantly was the way I wanted to do it. I wanted to develop a style that had a professional quality.

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1. PICASSO

2. RODIN

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C. SCULPTURE

1. ARCHIPENKO

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout my experience in art I have seen and collected many ideas on how other artists, past and present, have used the figure. The unique aspect about this special object is the broad range of interest it has created through the years. Artists have dealt with this universal theme and still continue to create their own ideas and expressions concerning this particular subject.

The female figure has great versatility. It can be viewed from a realistic portrayal as well as from a complete abstraction, and still be creatively effective. Considering the broad scope of this subject, my intentions are to discuss other artists and my own work in relation to the female figure. My main concern will be expressing and describing my own work.

THEME

The nude occupies a unique niche in art. To the artist it is, in one sense, himself that he is depicting, the one object in nature that he knows the most intimately and to which he responds in a unique way. This response derives directly from sexuality, and is complicated by the array of attitudes and taboos that have grown up around sex in every society in the world. There is no nude study that does not have its sensual or erotic element, however detached the artist -- or the viewer -- may believe himself to be. It is for this reason that people view the nude as they view no other art object.

Dealing artistically with this "special object" is a problem with which painters and sculptors have been struggling for more than 2,000 years. They have had to contend with changes in moral attitudes, politics, and religion, and with constantly shifting ideas about beauty.¹

The nude figure is the theme that has proven to be very successful for me in the three areas of drawing, painting, and sculpture. Today the nude is liberated. I see it and depict it with a different attitude than other artists. My impressions of the nude figure as a theme for drawing and painting differs from that of my peers in as much as my background, experiences, ideas, views, concepts, and values were developed apart from theirs.

What is amazing to me is the versatility that other artists, past and present, have used in the representation of the female figure as a means of creative expression. For example, Pierre Renoir painted his

figures with a human touch and with a sense of femininity and realism. Other artists used the figure simply for design. I fall in the latter category. Alexander Archipenko's distinguishing feature is the way he focuses particularly on the torso, and many times distorts portions of the figure. Pablo Picasso portrays the nude as it presented itself to him, usually in the open air, and seen directly from above. Auguste Rodin's figures portray motion and seem alike. Renoir painted his figures very passionately and sensually in good taste. His figures seemed very abstract for his time, and look "painted".

The common theme of the female figure provides me with the opportunity to explore and develop new and exciting means of expressions.

DRAWING

STYLE

There are many distinctive areas in my drawings which contribute to the unique style and attitude that I have developed towards figure drawing. They include the use of light, shadows, the torso, and suggestive imagery.

In most of my drawings, only the torso is showing, usually from a frontal or backside position. The torso is carefully placed in the drawing as the main focal point. The torso consists of a solid mass of shadows. The nude torso appears very sensual as a result of the use of soft and delicate shadows which bring out the human quality of the figure.

Some of the nude figures are combined with pieces of clothing, giving them a "Playboy" centerfold image. Examples of this type of drawing include a composition where the nude figure is posed in a "sexy" position wearing only nylon stockings. Another example consists of a drawing in which the figure is standing with her back to the viewer and a gown thrown over her shoulder in a provocative manner. Realistic detail of the female anatomy is achieved by drawing in pubic hair and the suggesting of nipples on the breasts.

A surrounding atmosphere does much to complement the figure. Placing the nude torso in an abstract environment becomes an important

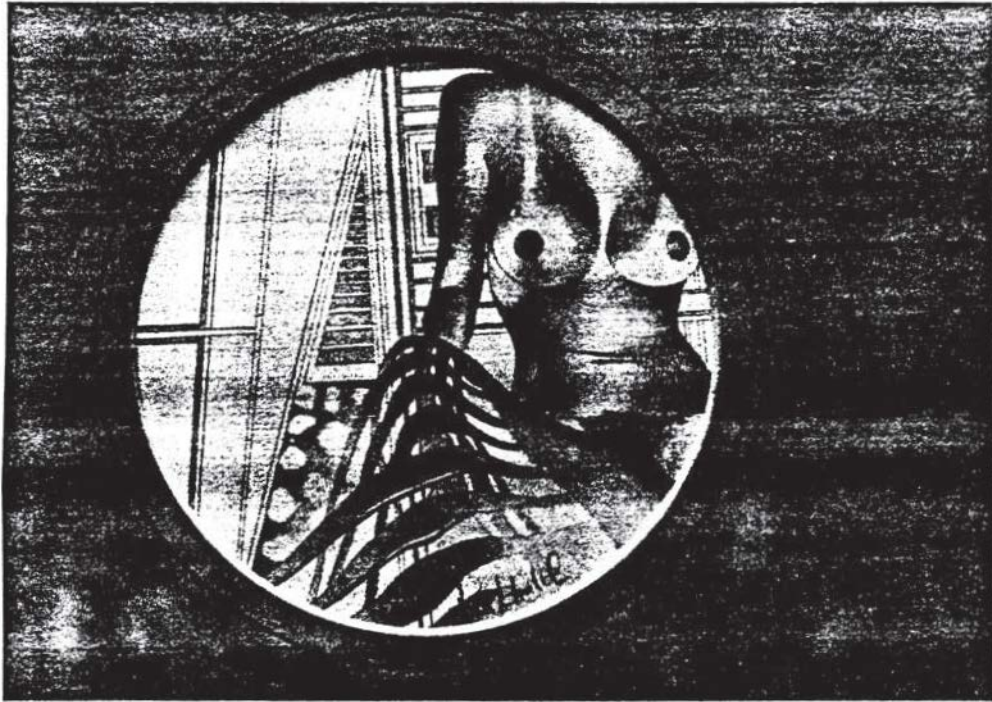
decision in completing the composition. I like placing the figure in an indoor or an outdoor environment. For example, I can suggest a closed environment, reflecting the "indoor", as opposed to the "outdoor" environment with wide open space.

Lines, textures, and open space in the backgrounds of my drawings provide strong contrast against the soft contour shape of the figures. Vertical and horizontal lines are bunched together behind the figure to create a contemporary abstract design. The lines vary in shades of grey to support the balance of the drawing.

CIRCULAR PENCIL DRAWING #1

In this drawing my main objective was to concentrate on a frontal view of a female torso. By using soft and subtle shadows I created a fleshy skin-like texture that brings out the realism in the figure. My reason for drawing the female torso was to focus on the sensuality of that particular part of the female body. Various textures work together to create a controlled environment, and also to give sharp contrast against the soft and rounded forms of the female anatomy.

CIRCULAR PENCIL DRAWING #1

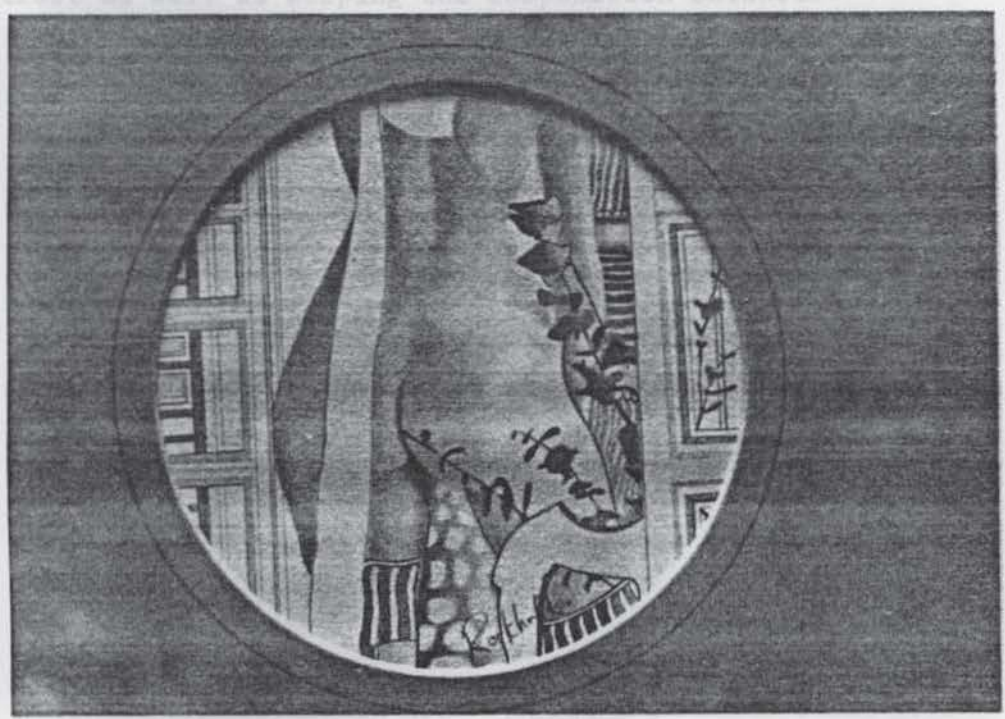


CIRCULAR PENCIL DRAWING #2

In this drawing I tried to depict a strictly sexual aspect of the subject posed in a provocative position. My intentions were to create an erotic feeling by drawing a naked backside view of a female wearing only nylons. Part of a gown is suggested, draped over her shoulder, in what I consider a "teasing" manner. Again, the figure was drawn in a realistic style. The background consists of many different textures that surrounds the figure. Flowers, along with a chair indicated in the lower right corner, suggest an indoor environment. Vertical and horizontal lines are placed closely together to develop a geometric design that provides depth in the drawing. Various shades of grey are placed carefully to balance out the composition, as well as indicate detail.

CIRCULAR PENCIL DRAWING #2

My main concern in this drawing was to elongate the torso. The figure appears as though she is crawling on her hands and knees. The main focus of this composition is the emphasis placed upon the breasts and buttocks. The background consists of lines and textures that surround the figure, and also creates an environment with a feeling of movement. Once again light and dark shades of grey work together for contrast as well as keeping the composition balanced.



CIRCULAR PENCIL DRAWING #3

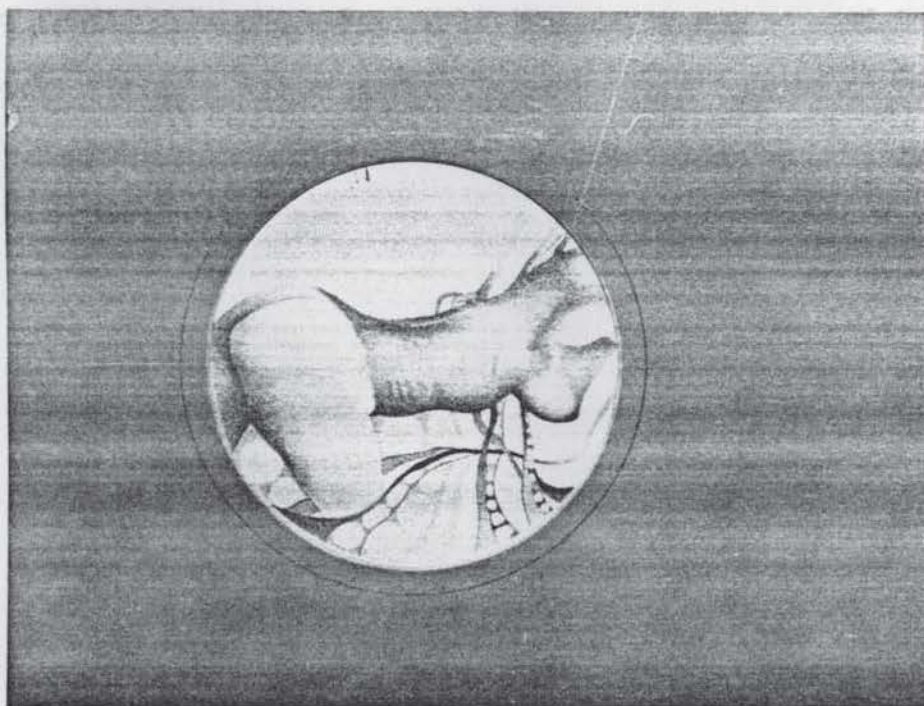
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CIRCULAR PENCIL DRAWING #3

Most viewers will focus on the top part of this drawing. It consists of a face staring through a pair of strange looking glasses. The eyes portray the face as being a female. Distorted forms of the female anatomy are placed in particular areas throughout the lower and upper halves of the composition, giving it an abstract environment. Double matting was important in breaking up the drawing, letting the

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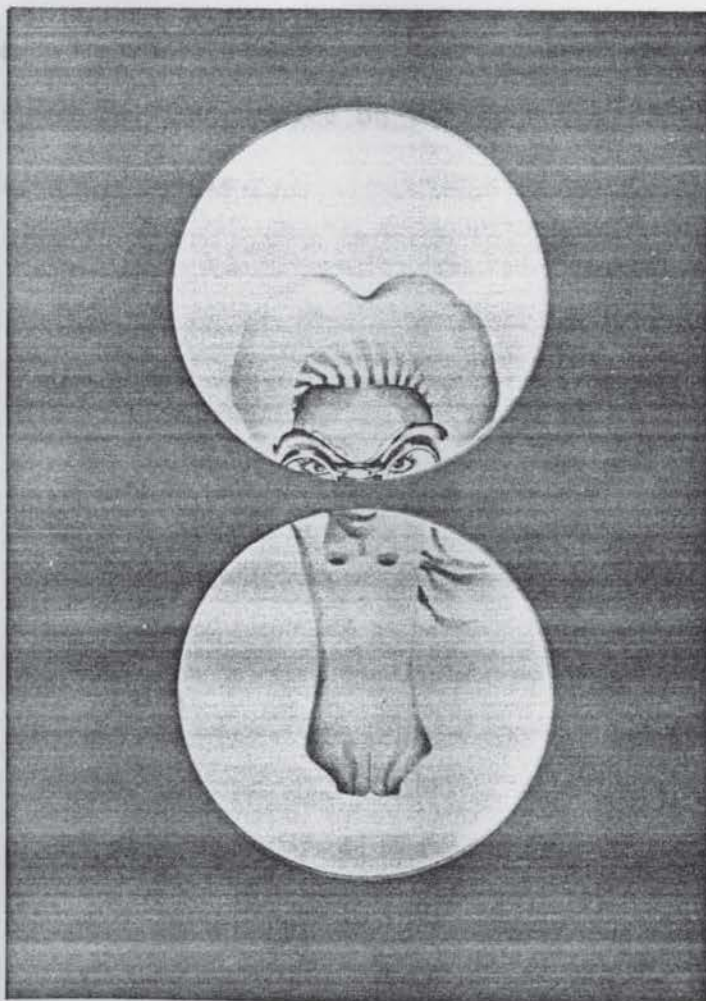
composition.

DOUBLE CIRCULAR PENCIL DRAWING #4

Most viewers will focus on the top part of this drawing. It consists of a face staring through a pair of strange looking glasses. The eyes portray the face as being a female. Distorted forms of the female anatomy are placed in particular areas throughout the lower and upper halves of the composition, giving it an abstract environment. Double matting was important in breaking up the drawing, letting the viewer ponder over the relationship between the upper and lower sections. It also added another interesting dimension to the composition.

DOUBLE CIRCULAR PENCIL DRAWING #4

In this pencil drawing I tried to capture the gracefulness of two nude bathers in an outdoor environment. Decorative plants and trees are placed around the figure to suggest a very relaxed and tranquil mood. Delicate textures are varied in light and dark tones to bring out the form in objective in this drawing making them seem as natural

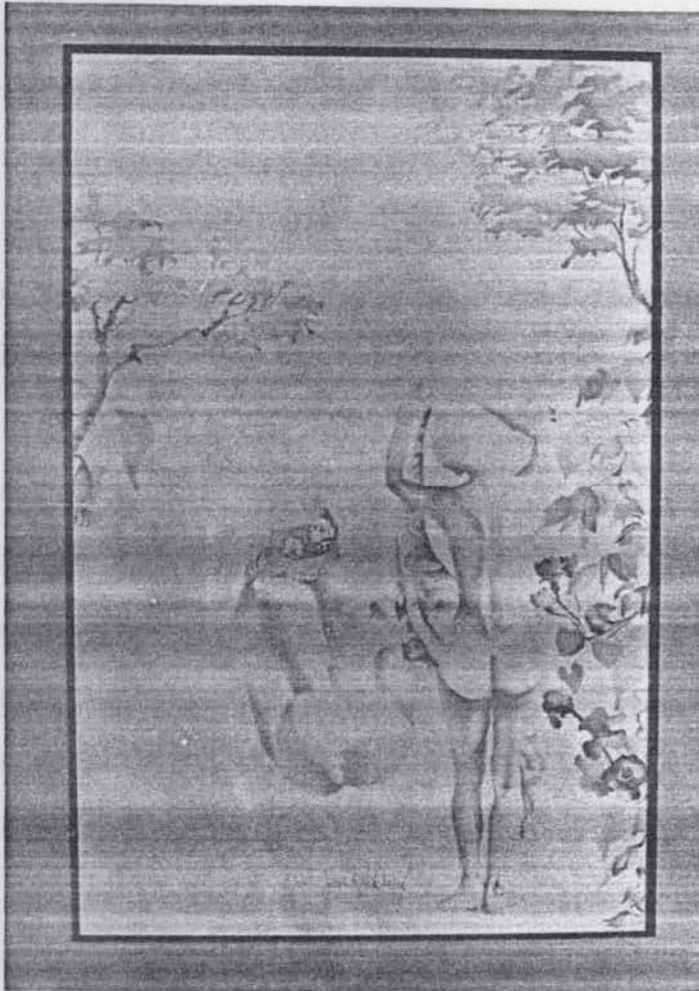


PENCIL DRAWING #5

In this pencil drawing I tried to capture the gracefulness of two nude bathers in an outdoor environment. Decorative plants and trees are placed around the figure to suggest a very relaxed and tranquil mood. Delicate textures are varied in light and dark tones to bring out the detail in the composition. My main objective in this drawing is to concentrate on two nude bathers, making them seem as natural as possible.

PENCIL DRAWING #5

PAINTING
STYLE



My paintings
 same subject
 utilize the
 torso. The
 backside view
 shapes, and
 blue, black,
 a pastel effect

By using
 "lightness"
 Experimentation
 that gave the
 are used in
 bringing out
 are painted

seems to be floating in space with soft contour lines that provide movement in the composition.

My main concern in the paintings was to develop a simple study of the female figure that captures the soft and rounded forms, while creating a meaningful expression. Each figure has a bluish-grey color

th use the
 of my paintings
 ing on the
 frontal or
 color, line,
 our basic colors:
 lora to develop
 etings have a
 tranquil mood,
 transparent effect
 pastel colors
 and delicate,
 as of the figures
 merge. The figure

PAINTING

STYLE

My paintings are an extension of my drawings. Both use the same subject matter as well as the same style. Most of my paintings utilize the female figure in some form, usually centering on the torso. The figure is positioned on the canvas from a frontal or backside view. I simplified the figure by using less color, line, shape, and definition. The color scheme consists of four basic colors: blue, black, red, and white. White is added to all colors to develop a pastel effect.

By using less line, and soft-tone colors, the paintings have a "lightness" about them. This creates a peaceful and tranquil mood. Experimenting with this color scheme I developed a transparent effect that gave the paintings both depth and dimension. The pastel colors are used in the figure, keeping the main concept soft and delicate, bringing out the sensuality of the female anatomy. Some of the figures are painted so lightly that the figure and background merge. The figure seems to be floating in space with soft contour lines that provide movement in the composition.

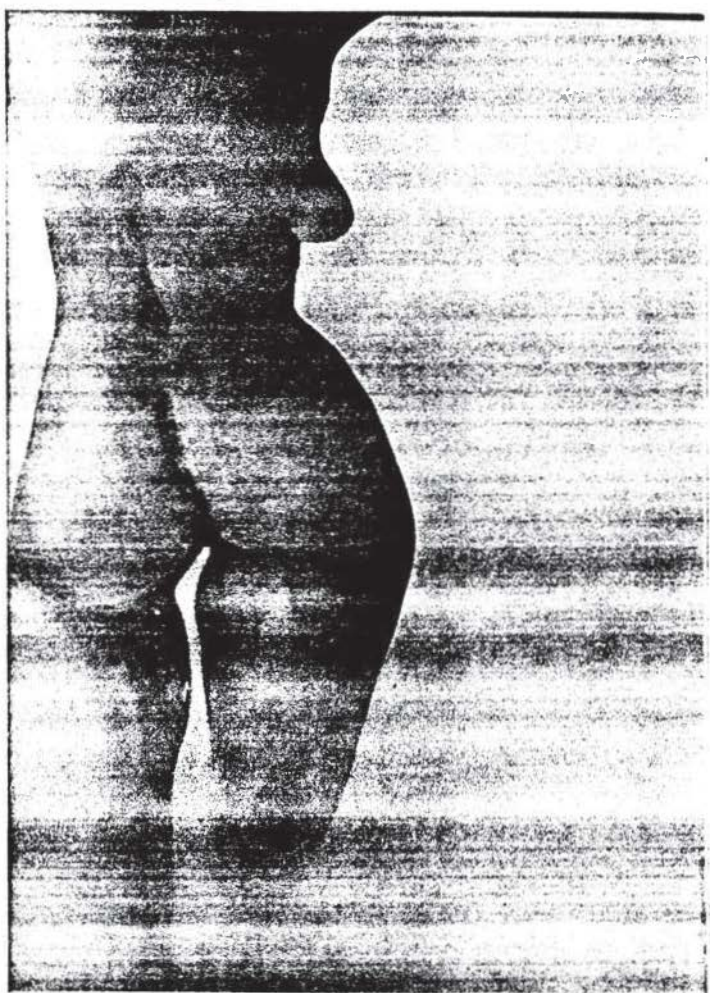
My main concern in the paintings was to develop a simple study of the female figure that captures the soft and rounded forms, while creating a meaningful expression. Each figure has a bluish-grey color

tone that is surrounded by a massive white background. This white background gives a viewer a feeling of "space".

PAINTED FIGURE #1

This particular figure was painted with several different shades of pastel colors that blend together to create a subtle effect. Light and dark tones are combined to create shadows, and also indicate vague detail of the female anatomy. This helps to suggest a realistic figure. The figure is surrounded by a massive, white background, which delineates the figure more clearly.

PAINTED FIGURE #1



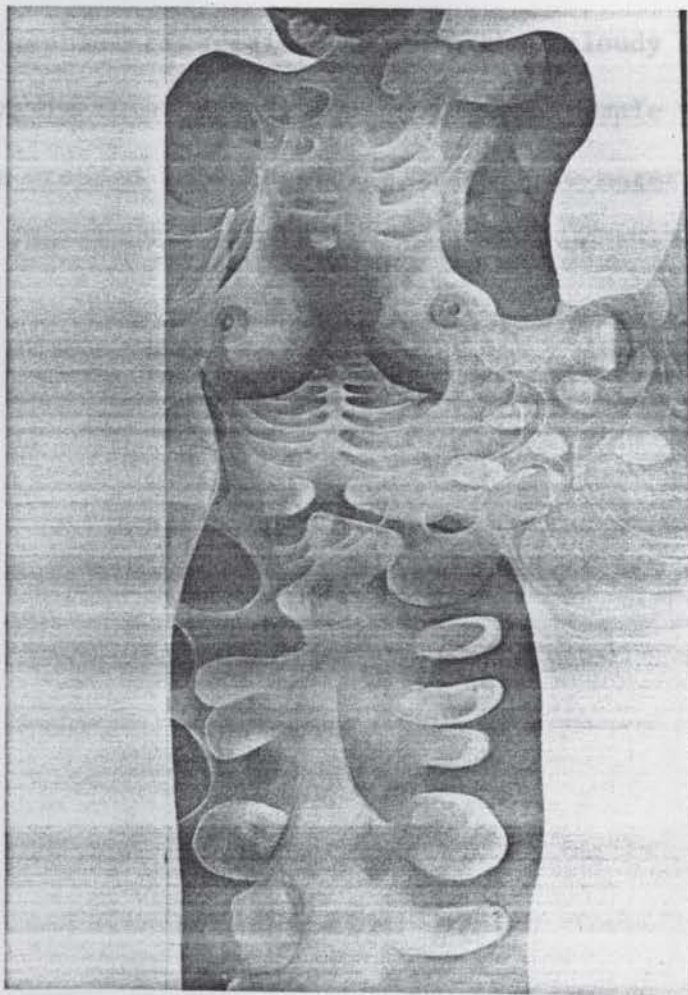
PAINTED FIGURE #2

This painting portrays a frontal view of a nude female resembling a body with a skeletal-like quality. By suggesting the bone structure of the human anatomy, it appears as though one is viewing an x-ray image. By using several layers of white paint in specific areas, the necessary transparent effect was created. The focal point centers around the upper portion of the figure, where the breasts and rib cage are exaggerated. The connecting web-like texture to the right of the figure adds another mysterious area in the composition. Again, the figure is painted in pastel colors, and surrounded with a white background, creating sharp contrast with the figure.

PAINTED FIGURE #2

In this painting I created a lacy and transparent white texture that is draped over a frontal view of a nude female torso. Sensuality was heightened by using soft and subtle pastel colors. I exaggerated the breast area, indicating a healthy, well endowed

female. The
main objective
through space
to overpower



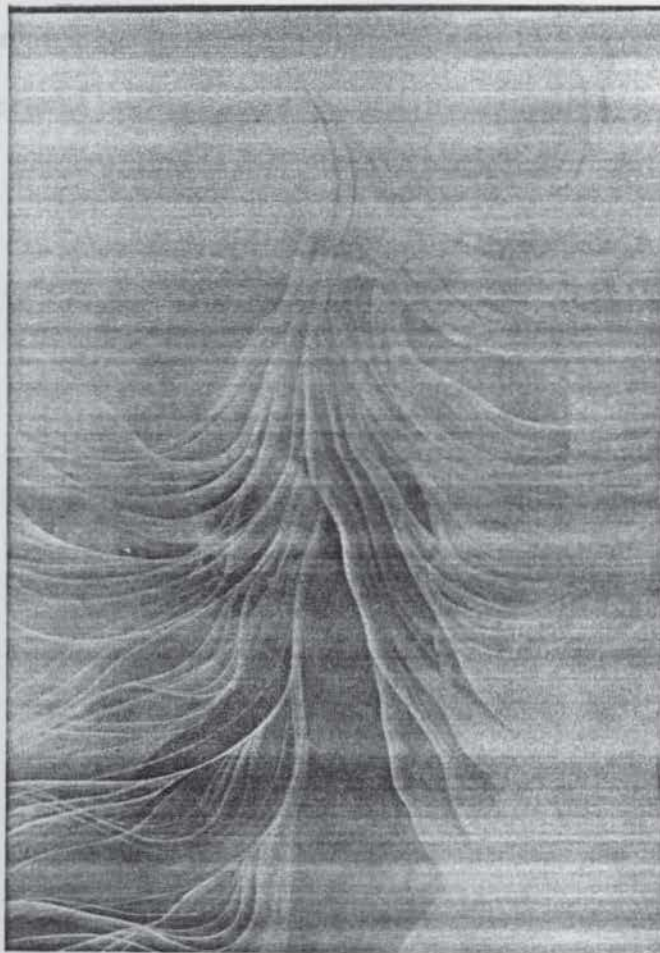
cloudy atmosphere. My
torso floating
al that seems
figure.

PAINTED FIGURE #3

In this painting I created a lacy and transparent white texture that is draped over a frontal view of a nude female torso. Sensuality was heightened by using soft and subtle pastel colors. I exaggerated the breast area, indicating a healthy, well endowed female. The partial figure is seen through a cloudy atmosphere. My main objective in this painting was to show a female torso floating through space wrapped in a controlled lacy-like material that seems to overpower the figure, but still shows some of the figure.

PAINTED FIGURE #3

This painting consists of an abstract object floating in a controlled environment. Hints of figurative areas are suggested, but never brought into focus. The main focal point in the painting is the web type texture which is wrapped and twisted in a tight confinement around the object. The object appears to be in a massive shadow. The paint work necessary to



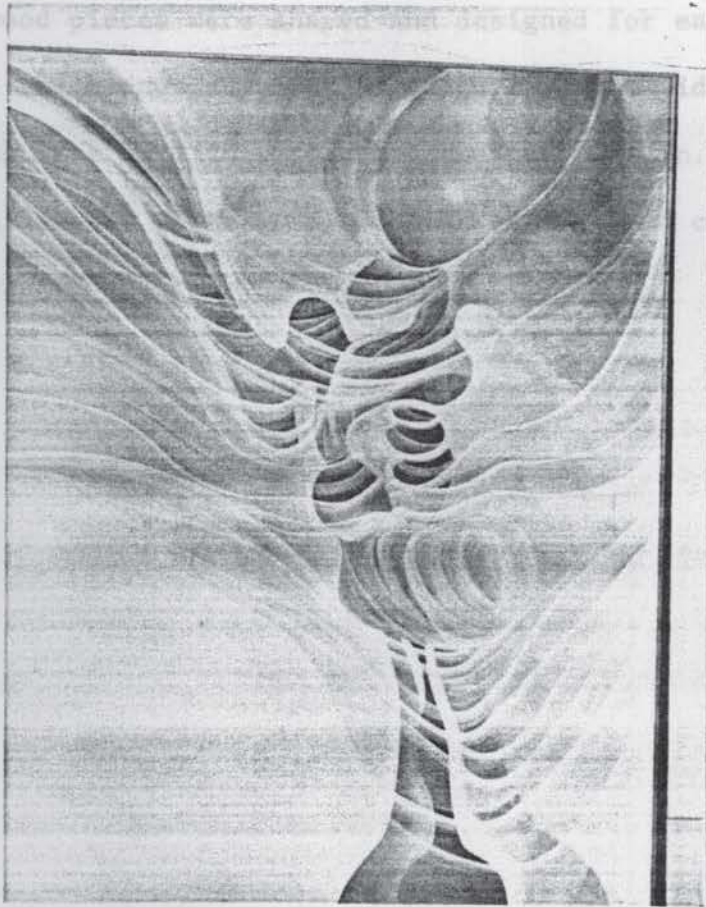
PAINTED FIGURE #4

This painting consists of an abstract object floating in a controlled environment. Hints of figurative areas are suggested, but never brought into focus. The main focal point in the painting is the web type texture which is wrapped and twisted in a tight confinement around the object. The object appears to be in a massive shadow of bluish-grey clouds. Many layers of paint were necessary to create a transparency in the composition.



PAINTED FIGURE #4

This particular sculpture is a study of the female figure. The figure appears to be in a reclining position. There are three main sections to the sculpture: the head, torso, and legs. Although not physically connected together, they are visually united by their relationship to one another within the composition. Thirty-eight separate reduced plates were designed for each particular area. All of the plates are made of wood. Solid and open areas are used to create contrast. The figure is glued on a dark background which is the darker color.



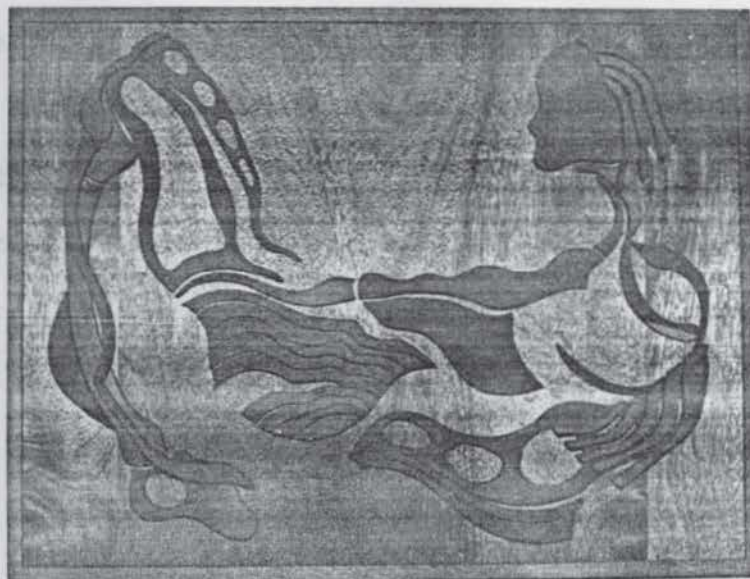
REDWOOD FIGURE SCULPTURE #1

This particular sculpture is a study of the female figure.

The figure appears to be in a reclining position. There are three main sections to the sculpture: the head, torso, and legs. Although not physically connected together, they are visually united by their relationship to one another within the composition. Thirty-eight separate redwood pieces were shaped and designed for each particular area. All of the pieces are approximately the same width. Solid and open areas were used for balancing the composition. The figure is glued on a lighter piece of plywood, creating good contrast with the darker colored figure.

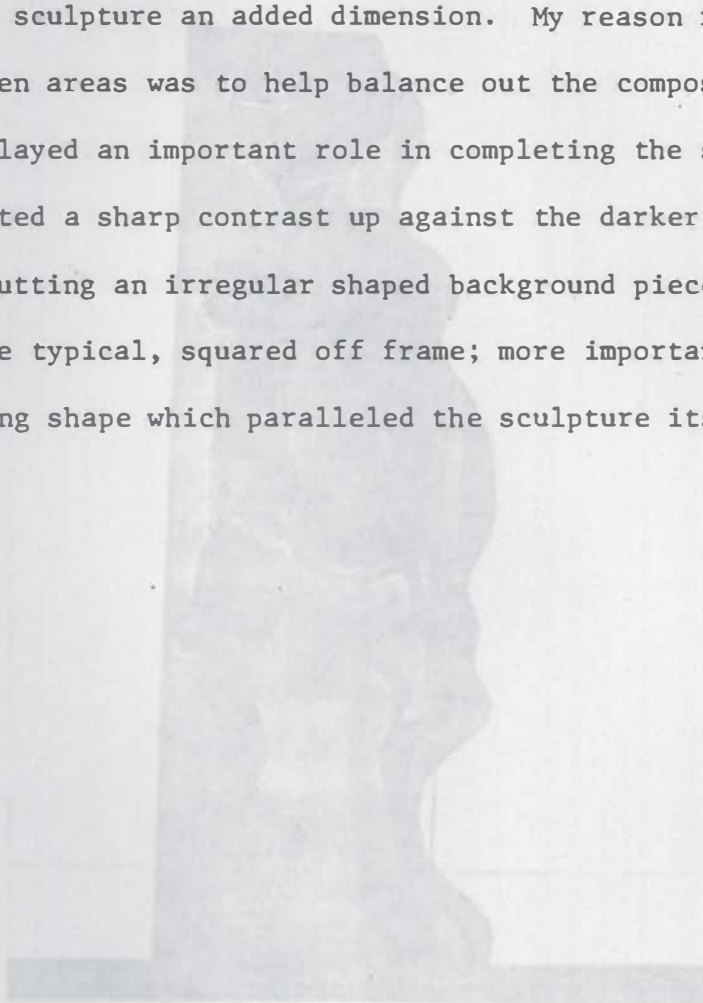
REDWOOD FIGURE SCULPTURE #1

This sculpture creates an image of a female figure through the use of abstract parts which creates a unified design. The frontal view of the figure has curved and rounded shapes, providing the figure with movement. Textures were used in places to add interest and give the sculpture an added dimension. My reason for using solid and open areas was to help balance out the composition. The background played an important role in completing the sculpture, and it also created a sense of depth. My reason for using textures was to get away from the flat surface and add so interest.

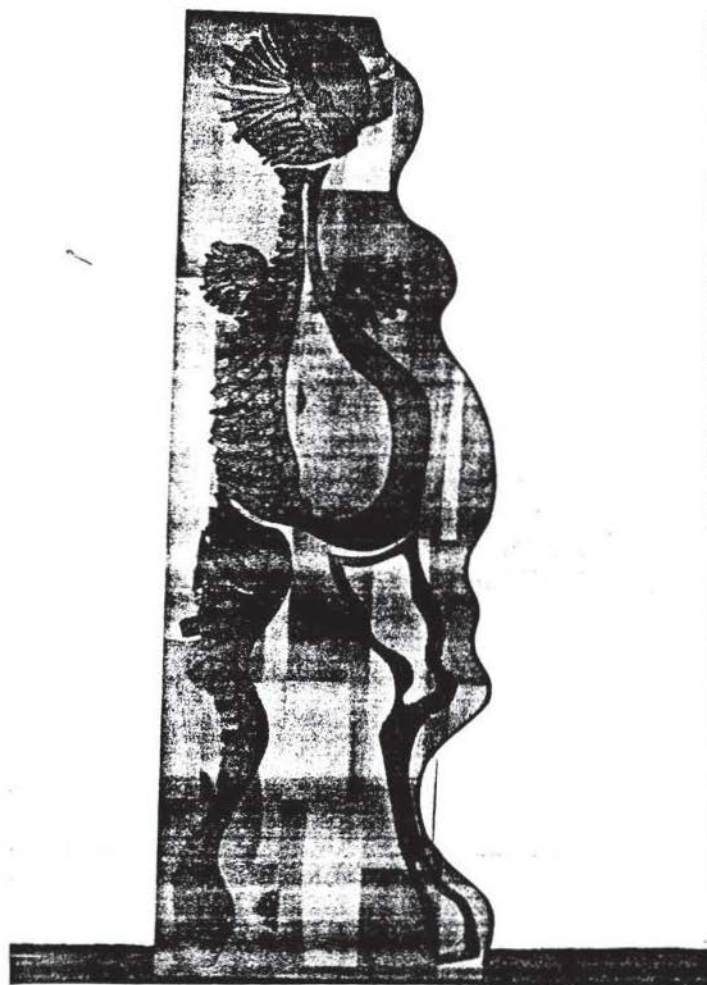


REDWOOD FIGURE SCULPTURE #2

This sculpture creates an image of a female figure through the use of abstract parts which creates a unified design. The frontal view of the figure has curved and rounded shapes, providing the figure with movement. Textures were used in places to add interest and give the sculpture an added dimension. My reason for using solid and open areas was to help balance out the composition. The background played an important role in completing the sculpture, and it also created a sharp contrast up against the darker figure. My reason for cutting an irregular shaped background piece was to get away from the typical, squared off frame; more importantly, it added an interesting shape which paralleled the sculpture itself.



REDWOOD FIGURE SCULPTURE #2



WALNUT FIGURE SCULPTURE #3

The intent of this sculpture is to highlight the soft and rounded forms of the female breasts and torso, and to create a realistic view of the female anatomy within the limits of the media. This piece is designed from two separate pieces of walnut. The upper half consists of the female figure; the lower portion, an abstraction of the lower half of the female anatomy. The two pieces of wood were sculptured with a mallet and several different chisels and then laminated together. Sanding was very important in getting a smooth surface which highlighted the natural grain of the wood.

WALNUT FIGURE SCULPTURE #3

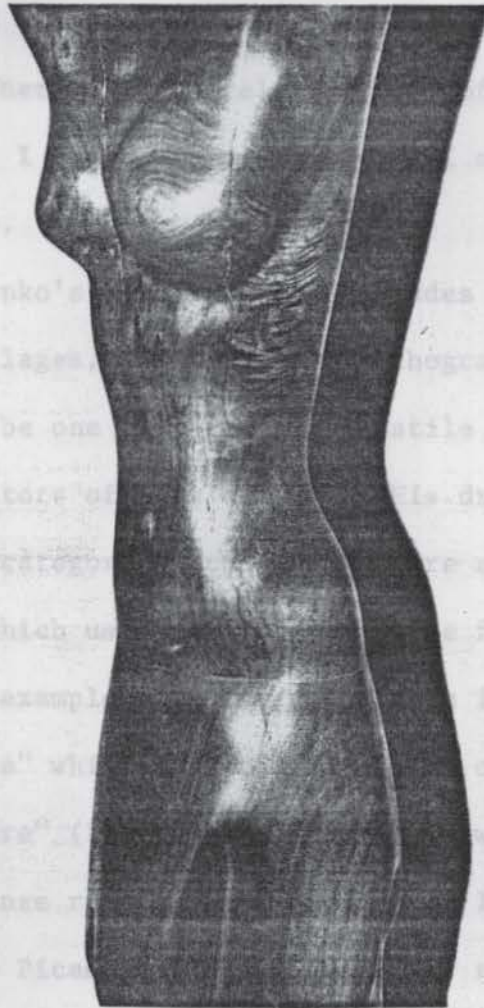
OTHER ARTISTS

DRAWING

Artists have used drawing for thousands of years. The drawing to mention in detail. I work I could relate to.

Alexander Archipenko's sketches, studies, gouaches, pastels, collages, photographs. He was considered by some to be one of the most versatile and acute draftsmen among the master sculptors of his time. His drawings and prints fall into two general categories: those which are studies for sculptures and those which are studies for further research. An example of the latter is the sculpture of 1935 "Torso in Space" which was transferred to the bronze in 1953. "Seated Figure" of 1959 was transferred to the bronze in 1959.

Even though Pablo Picasso copied some of the works of earlier artists, he was always original. His one obsessive theme (the female figure) is handled in different styles through separate periods. His work is very lively and animated. Again, a great number of his female drawings and paintings were projects for later sculpture pieces. His drawings appear to be doodles, made up of lines



OTHER ARTISTS

DRAWING

Artists have used the nude female figure as their theme for thousands of years. There are entirely too many of these artists to mention in detail. I have chosen a few that I admire and whose work I could relate to.

Alexander Archipenko's work on paper includes sketches, studies, gouaches, pastels, collages, etchings, and lithographs. He was considered by some to be one of the most versatile and acute draftsmen among the master sculptors of this century. His drawings and prints fall into two general categories; those which are studies for sculptures and those which use existent sculpture for a source for further research. An example of this can be seen in the sculpture of 1935 "Torso in Space" which inspired the print of the same name in 1953. "Seated Figure" (1913), his earliest known print, later was transferred to the bronze relief "Abstraction" of 1959.

Even though Pablo Picasso either imitated or redid some of the works of earlier artists, he was always original. His one obsessive theme (the female figure) is handled in different styles through separate periods. His work is very lively and animated. Again, a great number of his female drawings and paintings were projects for later sculpture pieces. His drawings appear to be doodles, made up of lines

and dots, characterized by swiftness and spontaneity.

Toulouse Lautrec was considered mainly as a poster designer and an illustrator. His pictures depicting the female figure are never vulgar or lewd. He never tried to shock. Because of his sketchy style, some artists and art critics believe Toulouse Lautrec's drawings lack quality. A viewer can see considerable animation and movement in his drawings. Prostitutes were often used as models. Lautrec made no attempt to glamorize these females. He showed them for what they were, in his mind, ordinary and usually unhappy human beings. For Lautrec, only the figure counted; landscape was a mere accessory.

Auguste Rodin admired the human body and used it as a theme of his work. He did not concentrate on facial features; something I also stay away from. Actually, none of his drawings show great detail. This could be due to the fact that he worked at phenomenal speed to achieve spontaneity. He has thousands of drawings preserved in a museum in Paris that have never been shown.

His drawing technique required special virtuosity; he would trace an outline, often with one unbroken stroke of his pencil, without taking his eyes off the model. Later, to give the figure volume, he would fill in the outlines with a brushful of watercolor. He relied on what he call his "sincere observation" to enable him to pass over useless details and seize upon the truth of the whole. This truth lay in expressing the language of movement.²

OTHER ARTISTS

PAINTING

Pablo Picasso always portrayed the nude with a turn of the imagination and it never ceased to be a source of exploitation for him. Picasso painted few nudes between 1945 and 1953. Suddenly in the winter of 1954 came a spate of about eighty drawings which tackle the theme of painter and model with a surprising single mindedness. This was a preliminary to the big paintings of nudes which in the next few years would free themselves from all private ties. The nude was no longer confined to the studio; she left the inside to pose in the garden, and later in the open landscape under a pine tree or on the beach. All of his pictures devoted to the nude have one thing in common, the body is usually seen directly from above and is brought as far as possible into a foreground plane.

Auguste Rodin was an oil painter, like most of his contemporaries. He actually had a great skill with a brush and some feel this might be more widely known today if his fame as a sculptor hadn't overtaken. He constantly observed figures and was very familiar with muscles in movement. It is evident that he respected anatomy and that he admired the human body.

From the earliest paintings of Renoir it is evident that he used two familiar loves of his; one being the soft and rounded forms of

women's bodies, and second, the glowing, limpid colors playing off against one another. I feel that his paintings are more intense than either his sculptured or drawing pieces, due to the vitality of their colors. He painted brilliant female nudes, many of them after he was sixty years old. Few shadows, velvety bodies, animal faces, alluring but placid expressions, are all characteristics of his female paintings. Also characteristic of his nudes is the landscapes, usually in open air.

Painting was Picasso's main vocation, although some people have as much admiration for him as a sculptor as they do for his painting. The subject of his work was usually a female nude. These paintings were usually a result of numerous and varied studies. He favored heavy females for his models. The painting of a nude known as "LaBelle Hollandaise" is a well known example of a first attempt to convey sculptural qualities of human form in painting with subdued colors, as he later did in the early 1920's with colossal nudes.

While Renoir's nudes are alive but passive, Archipenko's are far from being passive. Even though his nude abstractions may seem bizarre, they are all resulted from a keen study and observation of the female form. His obsession with the nude female body followed his whole career. The center of interest always focuses on the torso and he makes sure the gaze is driven to the torso by some means. He elongated the body in somewhat the same manner as El Greco.

OTHER ARTISTS

SCULPTURE

Even though the human figure was a long familiar sculptural subject, Archipenko added a new life to it. The figures he used were seldom frontal. They turn, twist, and bend. He used his deep knowledge of anatomy, yet he departed from the accepted canons of human proportions. His departures never created an inhuman figure. He wanted to establish a new kind of style, while escaping from the traditional rut of modern academic sculpture. He used a variety of materials for his sculptural pieces.

Picasso's earliest known sculpture is a small bronze entitled "Seated Woman" done in 1901. This was done a long time before he finally had a full-scale retrospective of sculpture, in 1966, after he was eighty-five years old. Female figures were represented in many of his sculpture pieces. He had the power to realize the massive, rounded strength of nude with tenderness and charm. He abandoned sculpture at one time for almost twenty years. His work was divided into five categories: first, modeled sculptures which relied on volume and surface tension; second, cubist relief constructions which indicate objects in space and are built into transparent conceptions of form; third, wrought iron constructions and molded plasters done in the late twenties and early thirties; fourth, sculptures of war and post years

where he used found objects combined with plastic and cast in bronze; fifth, sheet iron and monumental sculptures.

It was Rodin who did much to convince the best young sculptors of the still unexplored possibilities of the nude. His nudes, especially in his partial figures, represented themselves only, the human, the being. The ordinary spectacle of nudes gave Rodin the ability to read the expression of feeling in all parts of the body. Even though some of his pieces were considered depraved and scandalous at one time, they are not viewed as such now. He respected anatomy and admired the human body. He persisted in sculpting unclothed figures. Some of his statues rank among the most erotic, such as "Le Baiser" (The Kiss), "Idyll and Eternal Springtime" in which the sexual act seems near at hand, and "The Ascendancy", in which the act is in process. These sculpture pieces were not always thought of in the same way as they are now. At the Chicago World's Fair in 1893, "The Kiss" was put away in an inner chamber as unfit for public showing. His work always raised a storm of controversy.

CONCLUSION

Other artists, past and present, have motivated me to continue my creative feelings towards the female figure as a subject matter. My intentions as an art student included the broadening of my creative and technical knowledge of what other artists had accomplished using the female figure as subject matter, while increasing my own ability as an artist. What I have tried to accomplish with my own interpretative style is to bring into focus through my drawings, paintings, and sculptures the human quality of the female figure. Hopefully I have succeeded and perhaps in doing so have provided a basis from which I can continue to explore the endless possibilities of the female figure.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Time-Life Books, ed., The Great Themes (New York: Time-Life Books, 1970), p. 130.

² Hale, William H., The World of Rodin (New York: Time-Life Books, 1969), p. 156.

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