

Can Satire be a Means to Visual Literacy?

A Studio Thesis with Group Discussion.

Andrzej Pijet

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ABSTRACT

Can Satire be a Means to Visual Literacy?

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This studio-based research reflects on the role that satiric imagery plays in fostering knowledge and visual literacy. In order to elaborate on this subject in a constructive manner, six satirical paintings were created. The completed artworks were presented to a group of voluntary participants. Each participant was asked to answer five questions about the content of the paintings. The comments and answers gathered during the presentation of the artworks constitute the principal data for this research. The collected results suggest that satirical art can be a way of developing visual literacy. In fact, the process of deconstructing satirical imagery exposes students to a large variety of possible interpretations and can thus generate knowledge and foster visual literacy.

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To my son Marc-André

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Introduction

*Satire: the art which
“afflicts the comfortable
and comforts the afflicted.”*

H. L. Mencken (1880-1956)

(Roukes, 1997, p. 85)

The principal objective of my thesis is to explore the value of satirical art and caricature through a studio-based research project. Another purpose is to confirm the notion that satirical art and caricature can foster visual literacy through the imagery of creative metaphor. I am also looking forward to confirming the importance of introducing satirical creativity into Art Education curricula as an essential element of artistic and cognitive development.

I did six satirical paintings specifically for the purpose of this thesis. The completed artworks were shown to a group of sixteen voluntary participants. The participants were asked to answer a set of questions regarding the content of the artworks. These questions explored the educational possibilities of satirical art and caricature. The series of images was created to investigate how effectively satirical art contributes to knowledge and visual literacy.

The satirical imagery presented uses information embedded in metaphoric symbolism. I hoped that this would provoke the viewer to active, deductive reflections in deciphering my paintings. The language of humorous imagery evokes various states of

mind and, as such, shape one's critical and aesthetic sensibility.

The recorded audience responses to the questions about the metaphoric satirical narrative conveyed in my paintings formed the data for my study. Through my research I confirm the educational importance of satirical art and caricature.

I believe that the art of caricature and satirical expression have a significant advantage over other artistic forms of visualization because these forms generate knowledge as a kind of social pedagogy. This is the main reason why satirical imagery should be studied in art classes.

CHAPTER 1

Defining the Subject

The theme for this thesis originated from my professional experience as an artist and educator. It appeared to me that the satirical image is rarely understood the way an artist intends it to be. The main reason for this is due to the fact that "...we can only recognize what we know" (Gombrich, 1982, p. 151).

The question I pose, and to which I intend to respond, is based on my many years of experience as a practicing artist and caricaturist. My satirical artworks have been published in many different newspapers, journals, magazines, books, catalogues and advertising publications in different countries. I have participated in many life-drawing events in Canada and various festivals around the world for caricature. The experiences I have collected over the years I would like to share with my students by teaching caricature and the skills of satirical expression. This would benefit students who are interested in the art of satirical drawing and caricature as an educational tool.

Since my early childhood in Poland I have been surrounded by satirical art, caricatures, and all kinds of visual libraries due in part to a massive collection of various magazines, albums, catalogues, and books, which were stored in my uncle's studio and served him as references for his paintings. I was lucky enough to have easy access to such a great "encyclopedia" of satirical art. The satirical imagery from my uncle's collection stimulated my desire to learn more about the world I was experiencing. This constant exposure to visual material created in my mind a desire to become an artist able, as my uncle was, to express his feelings and observations through the visual language of satire and humor. Furthermore, through my professional activities such as caricature

animations, participation in international festivals of caricature and press drawing, I have witnessed the happiness and enjoyment expressed by the many people who participated in these events with great excitement. It is why I think that satirical art can play an important role in education curricula by teaching students to create an intellectually resourceful and challenging art that explores critical thinking and humoristic opinions on important issues in our contemporary society. My professional experience taught me that on many occasions satirical art is misunderstood because the viewer lacks knowledge about the represented subject. In spite of these experiences, I believe that the art of caricature can teach visual literacy like no other form of art.

It needs to be explained here that I am discussing satirical art and caricature according to high artistic standards, that narrative is formed through metaphorical imagery and without the presence of captions, which could play the role of a leading (meta) narrative. In my opinion, the artworks of Mark Tansey could serve here as a perfect example of such elaborate artistic quality. As a consequence, my concept of caricature and satirical art excludes any form of drawing and painting where the editorial role is to serve as an illustration of the published text rather than standing on its own. “Rockwell’s son Peter says that his father ‘believed that the picture and the observer should encounter each other directly without interference from words or interpretation’” (Barrett, 2003, p. 70). The combination of text and drawing significantly degrades the artist’s visual story, exposes the limits of his creativity and attaches a label of commerciality to his work. An image, whose only purpose is to illustrate the text, belongs to a different category of humoristic expression, namely illustrated comics and cartooning gags, where all is explained and the analytical faculty of the viewer is in consequence

limited or non-existent. In such cases the narrative of the image is imposed on the viewer rather than proposed to him/her for cognitive deduction and visual contemplation. It is why most of the important international competitions of caricature and satirical art do not accept drawings with captions from participants. It is an unfortunate fact that, in general, the understanding of the art of caricature and satirical drawings and all these important nuances are ignored, and that all forms of satirical creativity are collected under one umbrella of caricature and cartooning. So far, to my knowledge, no-one has tried to distinguish between these various forms of satirical art in order to bring about respect for and recognition of this form of artistic creativity and eradicate the generalized stigma of commerciality and lowbrow art that is attached to this form of art by the “fine art” world. This distinction is important for different categories to be established.

The word ‘caricature’ has a generalized meaning and presents a kind of distortion of reality, not only portraiture, but also other realities represented metaphorically in a satirical way. From the academic point of view, we can say that caricature is a diagram of the satirical thought represented in visual figurative data. The caricaturist creates his/her artwork by the same process of cognitive reflection and aesthetic sensation as any other artist does. The only difference is that he/she possesses a deeper deductive voice and sense of elaborate observation enabling the viewer to see how much of the surrounding reality is changed.

The criteria for the art of caricature and satire, which I have already described in the text above, belong to the category of fine arts as a form of artistic expression; “Pablo Picasso elevated caricature to the status of fine art” (Roukes, 1997, p.59). Through the history of Western Art, many artists “...used caricature as a style of painting and drawing

ranged from post-Impressionists to German Expressionists, to Modernists. Toulouse-Lautrec, Max Beckmann, Edward Munch, James Ensor, Otto Dix, Paul Klee, and Pablo Picasso are notables” (Roukes, 1997, p. 90).

Roukes (1997) states the following:

Examples of satirical humor can be found in all major movements in American art—Pop Art, conceptual art, political art of the 1960s and 1970s, earth art, graffiti, performance art, video art, installations, and so forth. Satire has invaded domains of both classical and contemporary art and has unabashedly mixed the sacred with the profane. (p.92)

The contemporary artists who correspond more closely to my perception and aesthetics of satirical art are Erró, Mark Tansey, John Curin and Neo Rauch. These artists, among many others, reflect satirically on various aspects of contemporary reality in their own way and time. When looking further into the history of satirical painting and caricature, artists like Hieronymus Bosch, Pieter Bruegel the Elder, Giuseppe Arcimboldo and Annibale Carracci were the earliest precursors of this form of artistic expression in drawing and painting. The list of artists who have followed the satirical path is very long, and each century has had at least a few.

In regard to the subject of my research, it is necessary to describe in a few words what it means to be satirical, and what visual literacy is. The description of satire according to various sources and publications differs slightly, but the one I find most useful is given by Cuddon (1999) in his dictionary.

Cuddon (1999) states the following:

The satirist is thus a kind of self-appointed guardian of standards, ideals and truth; of moral as well as aesthetic values. He is a man ...who takes it upon himself to correct, censure and ridicule the follies and vices of society and thus to bring contempt and derision upon aberrations from a desirable and civilized norm Thus satire is a kind of protest, a sublimation and refinement of anger and indignation. As Ian Jack has put it very adroitly: ‘Satire is born of the instinct to protest; it is protest become art.’ (p. 780)

The Encyclopedia Britannica on line describes satire as “artistic form... in which human or individual vices, follies, abuses, or shortcomings are held up to censure by means of ridicule, derision, burlesque, irony, parody, caricature, or other methods, sometimes with an intent to inspire social reform.” “The satire is a verbal caricature which distorts characteristic features of an individual or society by exaggeration and simplification” (Koestler, 1964, p. 72).

Koestler (1964) also states the following:

The comic effect of the satire is derived from the simultaneous presence, in the reader’s mind, of the social reality with which he is familiar, and of its reflection in the distorting mirror of the satirist. It focuses attention on abuses and deformities in society of which, blunted by habit, we are no longer aware; it makes us suddenly discover the absurdity of the familiar and the familiarity of the absurd. (p. 72-73)

It is essential to acknowledge here that the meanings of the word ‘satire’ are vast and can be understood in many ways.

By visual literacy, I mean the viewer's ability to work with the various elements that combined create a visual narrative in the composition of an artwork, and the ability to connect the meaning of the work with its appearance. It is about the cognitive perception of symbolic and metaphoric signs and forms encapsulated in the painting's composition, photographic imagery, sculpture and other acts of artistic expression. The above description corresponds to the general definition of visual literacy, which one can find in dictionaries and other published sources.

For example, Eisner (2002) states the following:

By promoting visual culture I refer to efforts to help students learn how to decode the values and ideas that are embedded in what might be called popular culture as well as what is called the fine arts [...] any art form can be regarded as a kind of text, and texts need to be both read and interpreted, for the messages they send are often 'below the surface' or 'between the lines' (p. 28).

Visual literacy is "understanding how people perceive objects, interpret what they see, and what they learn from them" (Elkins, 2009, p. 2). Christopher Crouch describes visual literacy as "...knowing how to use and access information to understanding information's social, cultural, and philosophical contexts" and it is "...an active process..." which "...involves a critically analytical reading of visual text" (Elkins, 2009, p. 195). In addition "...visual literacy is not a solitary, individual act, but part of a wider set of social practices." So, "To find meaning is to negotiate with the visual text, to engage with it on any number of levels, and to be involved in discovering how that act of negotiation itself is constructed" (Elkins, 2009, p. 196).

CHAPTER 2

Pedagogical Justification

Satirical drawing and caricature are omnipresent in today's world. The faces of politicians, actors, musicians, sportsmen, and the various characters and situations that make the news all serve as a great source of creative inspiration for artists who "speak" and "tell" their stories through the burlesque character of imagery. The humoristic perception of reality is contained in imagery that provokes amusement and anger. It all depends on the angle from which the images are looked at. These particular forms of visual communication, of content or discontent, have accompanied societies since the very beginning of humanity.

The satirical perception of reality has always been present, in one way or another, and is documented in various creative forms throughout human existence. In support of such an argument, one needs to look closely at the artifacts that we have inherited from the past. We can start reviewing this heritage going back as far as Egyptian wall paintings and engravings (Champfleury, 1865, p. 16-18, 23-31) and the time of Hippocrates (Roukes, 1997, p. xiii) The Greeks had satirical sculptures, theatre and pottery paintings. Furthermore, one should take in to account Pompeian caricature graffiti, grotesque medieval sculptures on Gothic cathedrals, Renaissance caricatures, and satirical paintings. Since then, each artistic epoch has explored the art of caricature and satirical perception. Reflecting on the amount of visual materials that are available to us for historical study, we have to admit that the human race has always had the faculty and desire to express satirical commentary.

In the contemporary art world the art of caricature is assigned to a lower category of artistic practice, mostly because it is labeled as a commercial art (Roukes, 1997, p. xiv-xv, 27-28). In such cases the artists who express themselves through the means of satirical artworks "...can only say what they have to say, the trouble is not with their work but those who, having eyes see not, and having ears, hear not" (Dewey, p. 109). Dewey's words reflect the existing reality perfectly. It is an unfortunate fact that most theoretical ruminations on the subject of commerciality do not take into consideration the fact that there is no art that, in one way or another, is not commercial. The artist is always expecting either to be paid for his creation or to be supported by various promoters and organizations. It all amounts to the same thing. At the end of the research process, artistic sustainability requires that the financial aspect dominating the role always be present for the artist to survive.

Satirical art is an art form, the perfect communication tool among the arts and for arts-based research practices. Caricature is a tool of satire which promotes visual literacy by provoking the spectator to think and understand what is presented to him or her in the form of a visual dialogue. The process of drawing caricatures or composing satirical paintings generates all the necessary aspects of arts-based research actions such as reflection, interrogation, conversation, deliberation and debates (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 59).

The caricaturist practices a form of visual journalism and his language of communication with the public represents his ability to express his observations through cognitive symbolism using creatively composed imagery. In such a way, the caricaturist provokes the viewer to active thinking and educative curiosity, which invites the viewer

to decipher and reflect critically on the visual narrative as a form of intellectual conversation between the artist and him– or herself.

The creation of satirical art consists of an intelligent distortion of reality, which allows the artist to explore the subject through symbolic and elaborate narratives connected to various figurative forms juxtaposed in a comprehensive unity via the process of cognitive observation. Satirical art demands that the artist possess a wide spectrum of general knowledge, and the ability to know how it can be implemented in the creative process in order to communicate the desired cognitive narrative. Satirical art is an “art” which “thinks” (Critchley, 2009) and provokes others to think too. “It is the image of thought that guides the creation of concept” (Deleuze, 1995, p. 148), and as such can and should be used in the classroom as an educational tool.

CHAPTER 3

Literary Review

The creation of satirical imagery and caricature consists of many elements brought together through the process of cognitive reflection. The literature I have been reviewing for the purpose of my studio-based thesis supplies much valuable data that I have been following very closely through the entire creative process of conceiving my artworks. An interesting aspect of the books and articles I have chosen is that they refer to different aspects of the satirical creative process, while all of them together compose an integral cognitive unit.

Arnheim (1974), in his book *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye*, reflects on various issues regarding visual perception and creativity. The author elaborates on the different psychological aspects of image creation. He tries to explain how an image is conceived and how its content affects the viewer's perception. Arnheim theorizes about the cognitive concepts of visual imagery by leading the reader through the genealogy of understanding various narrative aspects of an artist's pictorial mind. He reflects also on the art of caricature as a particular creative endeavor.

Arnheim (1974) states the following:

A caricature distorts everything and thereby notifies the viewer that he is not seeing cripples, in the manner of Velasquez's dwarfs, but more normally proportioned persons subjected to interpretative exaggeration. At the same time, however, caricaturists often vary the proportions of their characters, portraying one man as skinny, the other as plump, which tells us that they aim at the particular traits of individuals. (p. 429)

The psychological cognitive context of Arnheim's writings served as an essential reference for me during the process of theorization and the creative steps leading up to the composition of my satirical art.

In the process of making satirical art it is important to know about satirical imagery and its importance in the representation of various social issues from the different epochs of human activities. Baridon and Guédron (2009), in their publication *L'art et l'histoire de la caricature*, present an elaborately conducted historical research into the art of caricature. This monumental and indispensable book leads the reader through a massive bank of information about the development of caricature during the history of humanity. The authors concentrate mostly on French artists and mention only the most well known caricaturists from England, Italy, Spain, and other countries. However, it is an important and very well researched source of information about the origins of caricature and satirical art. The main objective of this book is to inform the reader of the important role that the art of caricature and satirical imagery played, and still plays, in the process of human perception of various socio-political, cultural and economic aspects of human existence. The well researched content of the publication, as an important source of historical references to the vast roots of satirical imagery and its various socio-cultural and political aspects, was very helpful in the process of writing my thesis.

A lot has been written about the art of caricature and satirical imagery; however Kobbe's (1918) article *Caricature* contains a very brief and thoughtful review of the history of caricature. It reflects knowledgeably, in historic terms, on satirical art, and is close to my point of view that the history of caricature, in a general sense, goes back much further than just the sixteenth century. The only difference is that in earlier times it

was exercised more in grotesque forms and not necessarily in the studio, but on the stage, like Greek theatre, for example. It is a relevant reference for the subject of my thesis.

It is interesting that the popularity of satirical imagery and caricature has been mostly ignored and pushed aside by art historians. Champfleury (1865) was one of the first to write an extended and well researched history on caricature and satirical art. He published his research results in four separate volumes. The book entitled *Histoire de la caricature antique* is the first on the subject of satirical art. It is an important source of information about the early, mostly sculptural, satirical art of the Assyrians, Egyptians, Greeks and Romans. Furthermore, Champfleury has collected many different descriptions and theories regarding the art of caricature from various scholars, writers, artists, historians and philosophers. The other three volumes in this series explore the history of caricature and satirical art during the Medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque periods. The last book covers the history of satirical art development during the first half of the nineteenth century. Champfleury's main claim is to demonstrate that the art of caricature and satire existed already in antiquity in various forms, such as, sculptural grotesque, clay objects, walls and vase painting, theatrical masks, and mural graffiti. His writings are very valuable references on the evolution of satirical art and its various forms viewed through the ages. Champfleury's thesis was confirmed also by Thomas Wright (1875) in his book titled *A History of Caricature and Grotesque in Literature and Art*.

One of the essential tasks in the creation of satirical artwork is establishing how clear the conveyed message needs to be. Deregowski (1984), in his book *Distortion in Art: The Eye and the Mind*, explores various forms of "deformations" existing in art in general, including the art of caricature. The author elaborates on the ambiguities found in

distorted imagery and their psychological effects on a viewer. He proposes to the reader a literary voyage through the human mind's ability to perceive visually and elaborates on the various artifacts and their pictorial alterations, which can be found by studying the history of art. According to Deregowski, each distorted image proposes its own philosophy of historical narrative awaiting the viewer's deductive exploration. Through the distortion of reality, each image stimulates the viewer's cognitive attention. An example of such distortion of reality is seen in any of my six artworks I did for this thesis. Deregowski's publication is an excellent reference with regard to the various creative nuances in the process of perception that takes place in the practice of satirical art and caricature.

The creative aspect of satirical expression, in principle, is based on an experience in the general meaning of the word itself. Knowledge is experienced through the process of learning and the more one knows in either a general or a specific sense, the easier it is to explore any subject creatively in a satirical or caricatured way. Dewey (2005), in his philosophical text *Art as Experience*, invites the reader on a journey through various reflective discussions regarding the experience of creative art practice. The author in his intellectual endeavor shares with the reader his thoughts on the different aspects of artistic practice by applying an analytical cognitive approach. Dewey's theorization of the creative performance consists of various perceptive platforms for the act of experience. His philosophical language of expression is clear and succinct. Dewey's virtuosity in expressing his thoughts is remarkable. He illustrates his reflections with the masterly composition of chosen words, which create an ideal and almost visual narrative ensemble. Dewey's writings theoretically reflect the process of satirical imagery creation,

which the de facto act of experience inspires. For example, each caricature or satirical image I create is based on my personal experience and the cognitive observation of the world surrounding me. Dewey (2005) stated, "...the artist's own being and experience determine what shall be expressed..." I use the knowledge and experience I have acquired in order to create a visual depiction of my perception of humanity. Dewey's philosophical reflections on the way art is experienced illuminate my own philosophical pragmatic cause-effect approach to my artistic practice.

I believe that the direct and constant exposure to satirical imagery helps one to develop a critical consciousness and the ability to express one's opinion about the image. Teaching students how satirical imagery and caricature operate could be yet another step towards one's cognitive development. Eisner (2002), in his book *The Arts and the Creation of Mind*, reviews various educational aspects of contemporary art education curricula. The book presents a solid theoretical ground by underlining the importance of art teaching for younger generations. Furthermore, Eisner directs the reader's attention to the act of teaching art, which in young adepts opens new perspectives and horizons. The author offers a series of important visual examples of drawings done by children in various grades. In reference to the subject of my thesis, the most interesting are the artworks that illustrate the metamorphic transformation of an object from one state to another. For example, the students were asked to draw the process of transformation of the running human into the running horse without losing the resemblance to both. The task was executed in six frames. Other examples include gradual transformation of a bird into a human face, and a wooden peg into a jumping frog. These exercises were executed in five frames. Such studies develop the students' imagination, which is so important in

the practice of caricature and satirical art. The secondary grade students created such artworks (Eisner, 2002, p. 140-141). Similar exercises were explored during the early Renaissance and the early nineteenth century. These representations are an important part of the preliminary practice in the process of developing a student's cognitive satirical perception. It is necessary to mention here that satire is based on transformation, but not all transformation results in satire.

The historical background of satirical art development is an essential source of knowledge about how this specific artistic expression was, and still is practiced by many well-known artists. Gombrich and Kris (1938), in their essay *The Principles of Caricature*, review the history of satirical art and caricature in relation to the various epochs of Western art development. The authors tentatively explore the morphology of caricature creation through the prism of a psychological approach. The article is a section within a much more elaborate historical study on the subject of caricature, which the authors conducted for the purpose of publishing their conclusions in the form of a book. Unfortunately, according to the information available, the project was never commercialized. However, the text, which is available, sheds interesting light on the way the art of caricature was practiced through the centuries of artistic development in Western society. In the presentation of their research Gombrich and Kris try to explain the process of psychological motivation present behind caricature creation. They demonstrate the psychological mechanisms that govern this form of artistic expression. Also, the authors offer one response to the question of why this kind of art began to appear as late as at the end of sixteen century. One of the suggested answers is that, regardless of the various traces of satirical activity as early as antiquity, it is only from

the late sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth century that the art of caricature and satirical expression began to be appreciated. It is mostly important social changes that permitted the artist to explore his freedom of imagination and his growing sense of artistic individuality. The interesting fact about this article is that Gombrich and Kris reflect on the art of caricature not only from the historic aspect of its development, but also its psychological creative aspects. The authors' research conclusions permitted me to reflect on the process of my own creative artistic journey.

The combination of the physiognomy of facial and bodily representation can create different narratives when combined with the action of movement. It is particularly important for the art of satirical and caricature representations. Gombrich (1960), in his publication *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, presents an extended research on the subject of visual illusion, its creative aspects and its psychology. Rephrasing Max J. Friedlander's motto at the beginning of his introduction to the book, we can say that art is a product of the mind and, as such, can be understood; it is psychology. Gombrich leads the reader through many examples of different creative elements, concepts and conditions that are necessary to compose an effective imaginary artwork. He reflects on the subject of illusion through a large selection of artifacts to which he refers in his text and relates to their historic periods of creation. Also, the author elaborates on the art of caricature as a specific artistic practice in which the imaginary narrative plays an essential role in the process of artistic expression.

Furthermore, Gombrich (1982) in a later book *The Image and the Eye: Further Studies in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, explores a variety of concepts and writings about the art of painting and portraiture, including his thoughts on the art of

caricature and satirical creativity. The author reflects on the different viewpoints of visual perceptions contained in the pictorial representations of the artists' illusory creative realities, which are available to be deciphered by the viewer's contemplative mind.

Gombrich (1982) states the following:

The most extreme of this exploitation of the instability of vision is portrait caricature. It is also the most instructive, because the caricaturist need not be a great artist to seize upon those invariants, which are all we generally remember of the appearance of politicians or actors. In distilling this framework into a simple code, he shows us the formula and helps the public figure to secure recognition. But the caricaturist can also transform his victim. He can single out characteristic invariants, which we have yet never used for recognition, and in thus focusing our attention on these features, he teaches us a fresh code. We then say that the caricaturist has made us see the victim differently—we cannot help thinking about the caricature whenever we meet the man (p. 29).

Gombrich proposes to the reader a perfect tool for elaborate exploration, and a reflection on the multiple faces of the psychology of artistic creativity through the history of pictorial art. He leads the reader through various examples by introducing us to different codes of visual perception, which help the reader to read and understand various forms of visual perception present in different art forms and available to us from the historical point of view. It is an essential source of relevant references for the creation of my artwork for the purpose of my thesis, and understanding its symbolic code of meaning.

In many cases of satirical artistic expression, the artifacts are not always perceived as caricature. Only with a close reading of the symbolic elements in the composition of an artwork can one discover its satirical narrative intent. Roukes (1997), in his publication *Humor in Art: A Celebration of Visual Wit*, briefly explores the history of humoristic rendering in its various forms beginning as early as the Sumerian (c. 2000 BC) and the Egyptian (c. 1360 BC) periods and ending his review at the present time. It is a very well researched and visually illustrated concise look at the development of satirical creativity. The author concentrates primarily on the essential information about the cultural development of humoristic imagery. The book's editorial structure can serve perfectly for educational initiation into humoristic expression in art. Furthermore, at the end of his book Roukes proposes a series of exercises to practice the art of humoristic creativity. The author's main objective is to inform the reader about the omnipresence of humor and satire in every form of artistic activity. The pictorial examples given to prove his point are numerous and refer briefly to the most important periods in the history of humoristic art development. Roukes makes us realize how important humoristic expression has always been in art throughout the history of human existence and still is today. The art of caricature and satirical expression takes up most of the space in the book and the written information is brief but very concise.

Roukes (1997) states the following:

Visual satire is a kind of oxymoron: It makes you laugh, but it isn't funny. In its mild form, *social parody*, it seeks to amuse by poking fun at the society's idiosyncrasies—its fads, fashions, behavior, and affectations. In its more trenchant form, *political satire*, it turns into a stinging assault (p. 83).

Roukes's publication is an essential source of references for exploring various approaches present in the art of humoristic and satirical visual expression.

The viewer's interpretation of any artwork, especially a satirical one, depends on the ability to distinguish the metaphoric incongruity of various symbolic elements in the composition through the process of their cognitive deconstruction in order to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion. The ambiguous character of satirical imagery and caricature significantly complicates the "right" interpretation of such creative activity. Barrett (2003), in his publication *Interpreting Art: Reflecting, Wondering, and Responding* comments on why the process of interpretation is so important, because "...different interpretations of a work lead to different judgments of it" (Barrett, 2003, p. xx).

Barrett (2003) also states the following:

When we interpret a work of art, we engage meaningfully with the work of art, intellectually and emotionally. We *perceive* the work and very likely *receive* the work—our version of it—and make a response to it, privately and publicly. When we interpret a work of art, we construct a version of that work in our minds, for ourselves. When we build a version of that work, we learn about the work itself, we appreciate its insight, its particular view of the world and of human experience. We get a glimpse of the world through the artist. (p. xvii)

Elsewhere in his text Barrett explores various aspects of the process of interpretation itself by leading the reader through well researched visual and theoretical content. His reflections help us to understand the complexities of the entire process of interpretation.

CHAPTER 4

The Method

To explore the ways in which satire could be a means to visual literacy, I decided to create some satirical images of my own to see how they would be interpreted. The approach was chosen and motivated by my many years of professional experience as a satirical painter and caricaturist. Furthermore, the use of satirical art as data for my research reflects my curiosity and desires to explore the possibility of "...creating visual models in order to assist data analysis and interpretation; and creating art as a part of the representation of data" (Leavy, 2009, p. 218). Satire, as a form of expression in visual art, engages the viewer in an act of critical reflection leading to a knowledgeable conclusion.

Leavy (2009) states the following:

As a pervasive social product, visual art is a significant source of information about the social world, including the cultural aspects of social life; economic and political structures; identity issues at the global, national, group, and individual levels; and many other issues. (p. 218)

In order to collect the necessary data to confirm my claim that satire could be a means to visual literacy, I decided to structure my research project by following three essential steps:

- Creating artworks based on theoretical and practical research.
- Showing the final paintings to a group of chosen audience members for discussion.
- Reflecting on the responses obtained in analytic qualitative writing.

I decided to create six satirical artworks that would reflect my inherent knowledge

about issues of contemporary reality by suggesting their absurdities. The artworks illustrate a varied satirical understanding of chosen contemporary subjects. None of these paintings had any explanatory captions. The body of art was specifically conceived to serve an educational purpose. Each artwork contains a certain number of symbolic references which, combined with metaphorical composition, should inspire the viewer's curiosity to acquire new knowledge, or reconfirm knowledge one already has. Each painting was constructed in such a way that its narrative refers to not just one but a few different concerns that, combined, lead to an educational conclusion. Through satirical imagery, I tried to create a "...research language..." (Sullivan, 2010, p. 157) that could be read by the viewer and provoke a meaningful discussion on the represented subject. In making these satirical images my desire was to "...explore...places and spaces in ways that disrupt existing boundaries" (Sullivan, 2010, p. 158). Through the deconstruction of each artwork's symbolic elements, the viewer can learn about the creative logic behind them. Furthermore, the audience members could explore other possibilities on their own in regard to the same subjects. I believe that a practical demonstration of how to reflect satirically on any subject can help to explore and promote visual literacy. My years of experience in presenting my work to the public informed my approach to the paintings. The proper deduction of the visual content of any visual satirical statement depends on the viewer's ability to make cognitive connections between the objects composed in the metaphoric narrative. The role of the satirical artist is to be able to create an artwork that is going to provoke curiosity in the viewer's mind, and at the same time make the artwork's interpretation resourceful and constructive. "To interpret a work of art is to make it meaningful" (Barrett, 2003, p. 1). To facilitate the act of interpretation, it is

essential to express the artist's concerns by means of elaborate visual language. The participants were asked five questions regarding the subject of the artworks presented in order to stimulate discussion. The responses received are the data that I use to propose that satire can be a means to visual literacy.

CHAPTER 5

The Creative Process

The act of creation is based on opinion. Making satire is based on an opinion that is emphasized by metaphoric distortion represented in a visual manner. The "...satire shades into social science; and this in turn branches out into the tragic allegory [...] or into poetic Utopia" (Koestler, 1964, p. 73). In order to create an artwork, which would effectively express my opinion about various socio-political and cultural concerns of the contemporary world, I decided to rely on my experience as a practicing artist. It is the first time I looked at my creative process in a scientific way through the eyes of a researcher. Usually, during the creative process, I immerse in the subconscious emotion concerning the subject in question, and the images that appear (see figs. 9, 10, 11). I sketch and modify them until the final version corresponds to what seems an appropriate outcome of my intellectual reflective research. However, for the subject of my thesis I needed a series of artworks that would have various symbolic references so as to offer the viewer a more complete satirical representation on the subject in question and, as such, have an educational character. Reflecting on one's artistic practice through the journey into the unpredictable, creative sphere of the artist's mind is a fairly challenging intellectual adventure. This is especially so when such cognitive excursions concern the art of caricature and satirical expression. As a practicing artist, I never thought about reflecting on the process of caricature creation through the prism of "scientific" method. "Of all arts that of caricature has the most universal appeal. To be effective it must be broad and obvious, and must be capable of being readily understood at once by prince and peasant, by emperor and clown [...]. Caricature has always existed and will always

exist, for it is the laughter of art” (Kobbe, 1918, p.314-315, 317-318). Satirical imagery attracts the viewer’s attention by consciously deforming the perception of an individual or situation. In my opinion, if we take a “scientific” approach, we can describe the art of caricature in the form of a diagram of intellectual metaphorical data, which illustrates how caricature purposefully distorts reality. In such a way, satirical artists provoke the viewer to active thinking. The visual narrative is an invitation to the viewer to engage in conversation. Rephrasing Schopenhauer’s phrase: “A work of art must be treated as a prince. It must speak to you first” (Gombrich, 1939, p. 564-565). We can say that the art of caricature is only good when it speaks to us first through its reflective visual content.

Here, I need to define what the word ‘caricature’ describes in my understanding as a practicing artist. In general, it refers not only to the distortion of facial features but also to troubling facts or situations regarding various subjects. Unfortunately, to most members of society, and in some cases to some artists, ‘caricature’ means facial deformation, and even the English dictionaries use such a narrow description. So far, the best description of the word can be found in French dictionaries such as *Le Petit Robert*, whose definition all publishers should embrace. In the French language ‘caricature’ has a broader sense and facial distortion has a name: ‘le portrait chargé,’ which could be translated in English as a ‘loaded portrait.’ This precision concerning the definition of the word caricature includes the process of rational thinking.

In the process of my creative journey, I tried consciously to implement the four basic components of Gardner’s spatial intelligence as cited by Marshall (2007), namely observing, making connections, conjuring, and transforming. Marshall, in her article, “Image as Insight: Visual Images in Practice-Based Research,” cites Gardner’s discourse

on spatial intelligence, which perfectly illustrates the various segments of the satirical art and caricature creation process.

Gardner (1983) states the following:

Spatial intelligence entails a number of loosely related capacities: the ability to recognize instances of the same element; the ability to transform or recognize a transformation of one element into another; the capacity to conjure up mental imagery and then to transform that imagery; the capacity to produce a graphic likeness of spatial information; and the like. (p. 176).

Graeme Sullivan (2010), in his most recent book *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in Visual Arts*, contextualized the process of Visual Arts Practice as a field of academic research. Sullivan, in the triangular diagram he created, shows the interdependent actions which take place during Visual Arts Practice, and which also reflect the cognitive character of satirical art and caricature creation. He depicted a profile of four essential activities, which constantly interact with each other's area of collected data in order to complete the visual outcome of the conducted research. The image below (see fig. 1) represents a simplified version of Sullivan's diagram in order to illustrate the process of satirical art creation.

Visual Arts Practice (*Creating*) interacts with Interpretive Discourse (*Reflecting*), Empiricist Inquiry (*Designing*), and Critical Process (*Critiquing*) in order to summarize the entire operation of artwork construction. The elements specified do not reflect the linear accumulation of knowledge but they interact with themselves in no particular order. What I mean by this is that the triangular sections do not always interact with the

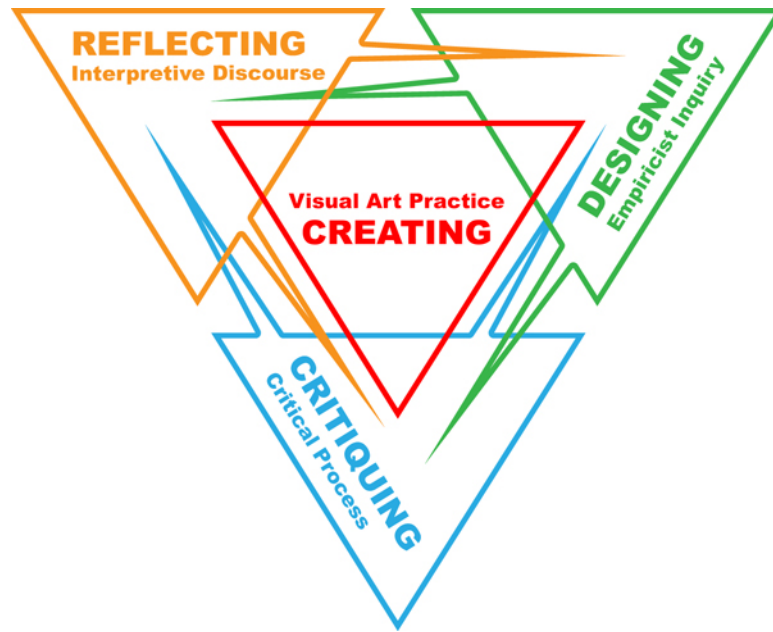


Figure 1. Sullivan's model of the Creative Process.

centrally situated triangle signifying the process of *Creating*. They also interact between themselves. The outcome of all these cognitive interdependent interactions is the conclusive artifact, which in this case is the satirical artwork. “In pursuing these kinds of quests artists cast their minds to issues, ideas, and experiences that reveal imaginative insights, yet the process resists capture by the freeze-frame of clinical analysis” (Sullivan, 2010, p. 152). The experiment of creating a satirical art with “scientific” consciousness permits the realization that “knowledge is gained through the speculation, accumulation, analysis, and confirmation of facts, and the utility of empirical approaches,” which “remains the cornerstone of scientific inquiry” (Sullivan, 2010, p. 36). In this sense, the process of making satirical art can be viewed as a science of humor where the comic act embeds a summary of different conclusions inspired by the act of reality distortion. Sæverot (2011) cites in his article: “Rhetorical Caricature: An Educational Reading of Nabokov’s Treatment of Freud,” Climacus’s phrase: “Caricature is comic [...] by means of the contradiction between likeness and unlikeness” (p.92). Furthermore, the art of

caricature as a comic act is “present in every stage of life [...] because where there is life there is contradiction, and wherever there is contradiction, the comic is present”

(Sæverot, 2011, p.92).

To approach the artist’s creative process “scientifically” means “...scientific method is used to codify knowledge...” (Sullivan, 2010, p. 32). We can distinguish two primary operations interacting with each other at the same time. In the process of creation of satirical painting, the artist is constructing and deconstructing the situation in question and its reality at the same time. The creation of any figurative artwork demands that an artist be in complete control of his/her perceptive senses, such as the coordination of what is real and what his/her imagination dictates. The success of such actions depends considerably on the artist’s cognitive skills. An artist, before he/she begins to draw or paint, needs to learn “to see,” how and what to look at, and how to process the visual data, which his perceptive senses might be able to capture. It is a very challenging intellectual adventure during which an artist exercises all his cognitive and technical faculties in order to construct a distorted reflection of reality or a person. “Human appearance, and especially the face, constitutes as tight a package of innumerable contributing variables as might be found anywhere in cognitive research” (Gombrich, 1982, Egon Brunswik’s statement, p. 120).

In any artistic practice, the process of distortion is much more complicated than just the pure depiction of reality without any filter of anamorphic projection. Furthermore, to create a logically distorted reality the imagination needs to be fully exercised in a mindful way. The artist needs to use “scientific” lenses in order to paint a satirical perception of any subject, which transfers each situation into important data. All essential elements of

the artwork's composition become scientific facts. The artist's role is to explore these different elements creatively in a process of possible distortions available to him/her in order to complete the research for various imaginative possibilities. The artist-scientist constructs the final image from the many and varied conclusions he/she is able to draw in the process of a reflective scan of the situational imprints, which according to his/her personal perception, correspond to the artist's vision. The entire process of creating a satirical painting or caricature is akin to a creative psychoanalytic method of reading and transferring the data into a visual form of conclusive artwork. To create satirical imagery or draw a caricature is nothing more nor less than a palm reading, a map of different lines and surfaces interconnecting with each other in a speculative manner in order to create the visual summary of this interactive chaos of volcanic eruptions and deductive senses constantly crossing the artist's mind.

According to Sullivan's statement "...artists have always been deep thinkers" (Sullivan, 2006, p. 30-31) and with regard to various creative approaches, Sullivan's theory divides artist researchers into three main creative groups: artists who "think in medium," those who "think in language," and those who "think in context." The art of caricature, as a part of visual experience, is created by an artist who thinks in context, which means: "...artists who think in context are interested in creating critical artistic encounters that change the way we think about things around us" (Sullivan, 2006, p. 30-31). This is what satirical and caricature art is about: to educate society about contemporary reality, which is difficult to see because of everyone's fast paced life in today's contemporary world. When looking at the satirical interpretation of one's socio-

political and cultural reality, at least for the moment we are able to contemplate it in regard to our respective context.

Sullivan (2010) states the following:

If a primary purpose of research is to increase awareness of ourselves and the world we live in, then it seems plausible to argue that understanding is a viable outcome of inquiry. The possibility of gaining new understanding involves investigating issues that have personal and public relevance.

Research of this kind is imaginative, systematic, and inclusive and includes drawing on all kinds of knowledge, knowledge, and reasoning. If a goal of any inquiry is to be able to act on the knowledge gained, then it is reasonable to expect that understanding is as significant as explanation as an outcome of research (Sullivan, 2010, p. 97).

CHAPTER 6

The Data Collection



Figure 2. Photos of the Picture Display and Discussion Space.

I presented the completed artworks to the participants on Wednesday March 20, 2013 between 11:00 AM and 12:15 PM in meeting room EV-1.631 at Concordia University, 1515 St. Catherine Street West. The entire session was audio-recorded and a

transcript was made. The participants in my project were chosen from my acquaintances among the Art Education Graduate students at Concordia University. One participant (#11) was from the Design Department. As my friend, he expressed his interest in participating in a discussion of my artwork. Fifteen participants were present in person for the artwork presentation and discussion. One additional person participated by correspondence responding to questions about my paintings in writing. The audience was composed of eight male and eight female participants. The gender equality was entirely coincidental. The presentation began with a short introduction that preceded the question time. I invited the participants to take fifteen minutes to browse through the artworks on display. In order to engage the participants in a constructive discussion on the artworks presented, I prepared a set of five questions that I asked everyone during the question period. This question and answer period provided the data I needed to answer the question raised in this thesis.

I first asked each participant to respond to each of the six paintings placed on display. However, following the same procedure for each question and artwork would have taken much more time than originally estimated. Consequently after the second question, I asked the participants to comment freely on the artworks of their choice and the issues presented in the paintings. Even so, it took 75 minutes to complete the survey.

Before the event started, a few participants asked if the paintings had titles. I responded that, as a figurative artist, I rarely give titles to my artworks in order to allow the viewer to make his/her own free interpretation. It does not mean that any of my artworks can be interpreted in many ways. As the creator of my artwork, my wish is that everyone will agree with my suggestion on how to interpret what I did. However, such an

approach would not be realistic. I therefore try to compose my artwork in such a way that the imagery of the painting will lead the viewer to identify my chosen theme, which to me is only one. For the purpose of this presentation, I did not provide any titles for the artworks in order to leave room for the participants' interpretation.

The participants asked if they should respond to the questions in writing or verbally. I responded that oral responses were preferable. However, I encouraged each participant to send me by e-mail any later reflections they might have in regard to the artworks presented. I received two additional comments, which are integrated in the discussion in the following chapter. The participants were #2 and #16.

In order to preserve the participants' anonymity, I have assigned to each person taking part in the artworks presentation and discussion a number in place of his/her name.

It is important to mention that, during the entire presentation and discussion of the paintings, the viewers were all together in the same room. Everyone heard the other viewers' comments and responses to the questions. This might have triggered ideas and responses from other audience members. At the same time, some viewers might not have made themselves heard.

To conclude the presentation of the six satirical artworks, I briefly described to the audience each artwork's subject and the symbolism of the elements composing each painting. At the same time I informed the participants of my own interpretation of the presented artworks.

CHAPTER 7

Discussion

To investigate my claim that satire can be a means to visual literacy, I started with quite an extensive literary research review, which inspired the entire creative process and composition of my satirical artworks and the interview with the audience about my paintings. The series of artworks I created comprises many symbolic details which contain ironic imagery constructed from multiple visual narratives. This is what can lead the viewer to various possibilities of interpretation that largely depend on the spectators' own experiences and their cultural background. The attempt to understand visual symbolism and to make connections between different compositional settings is already an educational action in itself. The act of reading the meaning of any artwork involves the capacity to process and connect cognitively all the visual information embedded in the symbolic imagery. Imagery, presented in a context, projects certain critical statements. In this collection of satirical paintings, composed for the purpose of my thesis, every element in their composition, including the colors, carries a message, a message that needs to be deciphered by the viewer in order to understand what all the artworks are about. It is a cognitive puzzle that a constructive approach can put together in the form of a comprehensive conclusion. The context of my paintings does not mean that each of these created artworks has many different interpretations. The de-facto interpretation of figurative imagery most of the time is unique but composed from different cognitive layers that leave it fully charged with sometimes "troubled" associations. When finally put together at the end, these associations form one clear reading but with an enlarged spectrum of comprehensive understanding. It is like a river fed by many different

sources, which increases in volume as it flows towards the sea. My creative approach is exactly the same. At first view, one may have the impression that there are many different ways to read the visual content but, after closer investigation, one main reading is going to appear, one reading but composed of many layers. The paintings illustrate how meaning is created from many symbolic elements. This is where the educational part comes into play.

The creative act of painting the six satirical artworks started on the pages of my sketchbook (see figs. 9, 10, 11), which I always have with me and where all my ideas for paintings, drawings, and other thoughts are visualized first in the form of rough lines made by pencil, sanguine, or other media. When I have a clear idea of what I am going to do, one rough sketch is sufficient for me to begin to paint. However, in a case when I have doubts I continue with more elaborate drawings. In the following text, I will describe the paintings in the order I created them. Each description will be completed by the participants' comments and interpretations that each of the artworks inspired.

In the first painting (see fig. 3), I wanted to express in a satirical way my academic efforts towards my road to the Master's Degree. At first, I wanted to draw just myself sitting on a large labyrinth snaking and climbing through the sky through the clouds. However, I modified my first thought by adding the members of my Thesis Committee in order to add a little "spice" to the satirical narrative, as I usually like to do in most of my artworks. I represented the members as transmitters of academic knowledge. I depicted the two female Committee members as putti, who always surround me with valuable help and advice. I painted the Committee Supervisor as a statue of Mr. Harvard, which decorates the square at Harvard University where the Committee Supervisor studied. It

was always my dream to study at Harvard University, and when I visit the Cambridge Campus from time to time I always go to see the Mr. Harvard statue and polish the



Figure 3. Painting No. 1.

statue's shoe in order to make my dream come true one day. I placed myself on the knee of the Committee Supervisor to symbolize all the help I was receiving and I still do over the years of pursuing my graduate studies. The memories of my grandfather inspired me to choose such a position. When I was a little boy, every Saturday evening, my grandfather kept me comfortably on his knees as we listened to music or theater performances on the radio. These wonderful moments are very dear to me. I am wearing

the academic gown to underline the academic relationship with the Committee Members. I have on my head an academic cap decorated with the peacock feather symbolizing my Polish roots. Traditional Polish clothing uses the peacock feather as a decorative accessory, especially in the region of Cracow, which was the royal capital of Poland. I set all the elements of my composition in the sky and the clouds to symbolize the academic dream I am pursuing with the kind help of my Committee members. I also added partly visible picture frames to symbolize my desire to continue the academic “voyage” in pursuing other diplomas. The entire labyrinth shape that winds away symbolizes the hardships and unexpected events shaping my road towards the realization of my academic dreams.

Surprisingly, the symbolism of this artwork received remarkably few comments by those present at the final showing, probably because the composition uses well known personalities from the Art Education Department and therefore posed a politically “delicate” problem. However, the participants admired it and shared some laughs and smiles. Participants #7, #9 and #16 expressed the most elaborate comments on this artwork. To participant #7 this image reflected “...Western knowledge...” and “...hidden knowledge...” He is right in both statements. The putti, clouds, empty frames, labyrinth, and the complex representation of the academic personalities are, in fact, the result of artistic experience and studies in the Eastern educational system based on Western academic traditions. In Eastern Europe, such symbolism is familiar, and all the elements mentioned have assigned specific symbolic meanings, which depend on the context to which one applies them in all forms of artistic creativity. Participant #9 deconstructed the symbolism of the maze to mean my journey through university, which is exactly what I

wanted to express, for this is, in many ways, a satirical depiction of my academic experience. Participant #16 commented that this image represented "...knowledge being passed on from teacher to the student," which is also correct. The book resting on the Committee member's knee forms a link between the educator's hand and mine. It symbolizes the transfer of knowledge. What should be noticed here is that these three statements combined give a more dimensional description of the artwork than each of them separately.



Figure 4. Painting No. 2.

In the second artwork (see fig. 4), my intention was to satirically express the human unconsciousness of wrongdoing not only to nature but also to ourselves in a satirical way. The young couple represents a young generation of self-absorbed individuals walking unconsciously into the sunset of their earthly existence. They wear clothes patched with

leaves of various trees. The sewn leaves symbolize two things. They refer to the trees, once alive and blooming with life and color, but whose leaves now exist only in our memory. The other meaning reflects satirically on the insufficiency of action taken by humans to patch up the abuse to nature. The couple symbolizes human ignorance in the desert of paradise lost. The various colors from light yellow to orange, red, and brown are the colors of autumn. The tree stumps represent not only cut trees but also all the lost species we once had. The biblical story of the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve briefly enjoyed their existence, inspired this entire composition.

The tenth participant commented that the artwork was very dark and serious. It is true that this painting represents an allegorically distracting “truth.” Participant #16 stated that the image represents the destruction of the environment by a careless humanity, and to participant #1 the painting showed the environmental trap. Both participants understood exactly what I wanted to express. Meanwhile, the second participant described the image as “...terrible hidden in a beautiful one.” This is the paradox of the human species too.

The biblical story describing Moses and the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai inspired the third artwork (see fig. 5). I was looking for an idea that would satirically comment on the complexity of the administrative process that we as humans experience in socio-political and cultural structures. I decided to use a crowd of giant men composing a maze representing a spider’s web in which all we humans are caught. It begins at birth. Already early in life, each of us needs to find a way out of the web in order to get what we desire from life. In a general sense, the painting illustrates how we as humans function in the social order “imposed” on us symbolically by God. This

artwork can inspire a few different interpretations, which in the end lead to the same general meaning. The symbolic elements in this composition are the sky, clouds, mountain, maze, crowd of giants, colors, and the red character. The sky represents the limit of our possibilities. The clouds represent the dreams of achievement. The mountain



Figure 5. Painting No. 3.

represents the journey of life. The maze represents the struggles we endure. The crowd of giants in blue suits represents the administrative systems (whatever they are) that we are all exposed to right from birth. The blue color of the suits symbolizes the coldness and blindness of the contemporary capitalist structures of the socio-political, cultural, and economic order. The small character in a red suit with a folder in his hands, symbolizes

us as humans. The red color of the suit symbolizes the energy we all have, or need to have, in order to reach the top through all the obstacles during our lives. The opening in the sky at the top symbolizes the end of our struggles, but it may refer to possible success, or death.

The first participant commented that this painting is about one person trying to find his way out through the indifferent blind crowd, and this is close to what I intended. The second participant remarked that the imagery refers to socio-political issues, which is also correct. Participant #15 underlined that it is the only painting where there are only men. That is right as well. My intentions were to depict satirically the social structures by which the world is governed, where men still decide the place of women in an “advanced” contemporary society. Participant #16 responded that this image represents us as the blind followers of the socio-political system we live in, and this is also true, but do we have another choice?

The most discussed and controversial artwork (see fig. 6) and the most “mysterious” was the fourth painting with the yin and yang symbol as a central narrative point. In this composition, my intention was to show the difference between woman and man. Yin and yang suggest two complementary opposites whose mentalities differ. The social divisions between the two genders artificially dictate man’s point of view influenced mostly by religious tradition blaming the woman for committing the first sin, which resulted in the expulsion of Adam and her (Eve) from the Garden of Eden by an angry God. Furthermore, for some artificial reason, the woman has to assume the entire responsibility for raising children as well as taking care of the family in many cultures, even in the most ‘advanced’ countries. These thoughts were my main inspiration for this

artwork. In order to cover all my concerns mentioned above, I constructed the symbolic narrative from many elements. The yin and yang refer the viewer to two opposite sides. The woman and the man represent the two genders approaching each other in order to lead the viewer to the main narrative of the imagery. The woman and the man are coming from different directions. Their roads cross and form the “X” that symbolically refers to the first scientific findings that chromosome “X” is responsible for the masculine gender.



Figure 6. Painting No. 4.

Only some years later did more elaborate research prove that, in fact, it is the “Y” chromosome that is responsible for the masculine gender. This is why the “X”

symbolizes that masculine principles rule the entire world, but with the possibility of change (chromosome “Y”). The woman is coming from under ground, or hell. The man is coming from the sky to symbolize his artificial superiority over the female gender. At the same time, the two opposites symbolize the difference in their mentalities. In my opinion, man is always a dreamer detached most of the time from earthly reality. Woman, on the contrary, is much more grounded, and most of her actions are pre-calculated. The fish represented on each side satirically emphasize the different perceptions of the environment the man and the woman both live in and share. For example, the woman holds her pet differently from the man. The man takes everything for granted so if something happens, he will be pulled by the leash from the direction he is going. However, the woman at any moment can just let go the leash and continue on her way. As one can see by the way I placed the white stripes, they give the man priority to cross this imaginary intersection. The woman stops at the stop sign in the form of a pen from which a drop of red color connects it with the red road which indicates that man wrote the law of privilege which can always be rewritten. In addition to all these symbolic references, the color divides the painting into the pinky-red part and the blue-brown part.

The interpretation of this painting started with participant #12. According to him, the interpretation of all my artworks was quite easy except, for this one (see fig. 6). This makes it more interesting. The amount of detail and references makes it complicated to interpret. However, the longer this participant looked at it, the more his interpretation of this artwork started to change. He discovered that there is more than he previously thought. The first participant made a similar statement saying that it is the “...most complex and compelling...” artwork because the longer one looks at it the more there is

to discover. To me this means that my art provokes the viewer to reflect, and it was and always is my intention to initiate an intimate dialogue with the spectator through satirical and creative imagery. Participant #16 remarked briefly that the painting represents "...the contrast between the human preserving and destroying nature." I agree that this image might be interpreted that way when ignoring all the other symbols. This often happens when one bases one's interpretation of the content of an artwork on a first impression. It might sometimes inspire another conclusion than that expected by the artist. What I mean by this is that, by painting many symbolic details, I as the artist am at the same time assuming that the symbolic meaning of these details is going to lead the viewer to the desired interpretation (the one I intended). To the tenth participant, the artwork appeared as a science fiction image which could illustrate the story of the most recent novel he had just read. Also, to him, a satirical painting should be funny whereas this painting is very serious in his opinion. In order to consider this painting as satirical, he would need to study it a little more. I agree with his notion: in order to read any artwork, especially satirical, one needs to have more time to unravel its real meaning and follow all the symbolic indications in order to understand how the artist constructed the visual narrative. The seventh participant elaborated on this painting in terms of how binary issues were embedded into the symbolic content of this artwork. That certainly is right. He also referred to this image as ironic. I agree that satire is also irony, and irony might or might not be humorous. In my creative satirical explorations, irony is always present and might give an impression of black humor. Humor, which makes one reflect, and think.

The eleventh participant interpreted this painting by reading step-by-step all the symbolic meanings in the entire composition by asking himself always the question “why?” At the end, he found the meaning of all symbolic elements that compose the painting. In artworks composed from many detailed elements, it is not always necessary to know what each of them symbolizes in order to interpret it correctly. It can be done by cognitive deduction of the practical utility of the elements used in the composition in order to connect each piece in a reasonable conclusive narrative. This is what the eleventh participant did. For example, he interpreted the artwork by applying logical connections between the painting’s symbolic elements such as the stop sign transformed into a writing pen or the pedestrian crossing’s white stripes, and referring it to any other element of the composition. The use of a deductive approach can lead to a relatively correct interpretation of any artwork in question.

Life, and the act of living it, inspired the fifth painting (see fig. 7). My intention was to find a way to illustrate in a satirical way the process of going through one's life in general, so it could be understood by anyone. To me, living our lives resembles a labyrinth of choices, as we need to make decisions at almost every moment during our life experience. How we live and the consequences of our decision making process concern everything we do in life. We are all constructing a road through life by trying to find the best way through the maze of choices. I think that the labyrinth/maze best reflects the process of living. Each of the characters in the painting is carrying an apple as a bag. The apple as a symbol has many meanings. However, most of the time it symbolizes life, eternity, wisdom, knowledge, love and longevity. The best known



Figure 7. Painting No. 5.

symbolic meaning of an apple is temptation, the first sin committed by Adam and Eve. Regardless of the fact that the Bible does not specify what fruit was eaten, the apple did cause Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden (Kopalinski, 1990, p. 112). In the painting, the apple has an eye. An eye symbolizes the world, knowledge, vigilance, omniscience, God and curiosity, among others (Kopalinski, 1990, p. 271). Many times in life we base decisions on our previous experience. The eye is a window to the world. The entire background of the painting represents clouds that descend to transform into

puzzles. The clouds represent dreams and desires, and the gradual descending and transformation of the puzzles represent the practical realization of such dreams. The puzzles symbolize the human struggle with nature. Living one's life is a puzzle, and how successful we are depends on our ability to find the next piece that fits in the direction we would like to go. In this artwork, I painted two characters approaching each other from different directions, one woman, the other a man. This is, because, albeit of different genders, we share the same desires for a successful life. It symbolizes also the cultural, religious, political, and other differences experienced. My intention was to say that, regardless of our differences, we all have desires that we think would make us happy and accomplished individuals.

This artwork (see fig. 7) was the most appealing to participant #6. She stated that to her the image provoked an uncanny impression. In this case, the uncanny is also satire. It is also hard to get the meaning, because of its ambiguous character. The suggestion by the eleventh participant refers to the deductive system of interpretation and how it can reduce the ambiguity of this image and make it easier to interpret. Participant #6 underlined the importance of color in this painting. According to her, it corresponds to the artwork's subject. She also remarked that this painting represents life as a "jigsaw puzzle." This point of view reflects my own perception of life. Meanwhile, the sixteenth participant interpreted this image as a labyrinth splitting in two directions but, in fact the reverse is true; one creates the road of life by decomposing the labyrinth until one achieves one's life goals. This could be the desire to find the right person to live with, or any other aspiration that we pursue. At least it is what I wanted to represent. Furthermore, the same participant suggested that it symbolizes also that education is the key to a

successful life. I agree with this idea, as the road to education is one of many complicated labyrinths to go through in life.



Figure 8. Painting No. 6.

My observation of social behavior inspired the sixth artwork (see fig. 8). At every level of our social structures, we let ourselves be manipulated by various institutions and organizations, be they secular or religious. All kinds of offers and services, starting with the birth of an individual and lasting until death, bombard society on a day-to-day basis. The constant advance of technology makes the invasion in every sector of public life extremely efficient and annoying. Throughout the history of humanity, we have created authorities such as gods, kings, banks, politicians, and many others. We manipulate others or others manipulate us. It is the reality of human existence and we do not even bother to change anything: we just accept the structure as the fathers and mothers did. It is so normal that to imagine life without it seems extremely utopic in many ways. To illustrate the subject of human beings' submissive character in a satirical way, I decided

to apply the mythological story of the Trojan horse. The trap in the form of the horse constructed by the Greeks at Odysseus' suggestion was a brilliant idea to mislead the vigilant Trojans. As a consequence, Troy vanished from the map with its population destroyed or taken into slavery by the Greeks. I composed the image of four human figures and one metamorphic representation of the Trojan horse. The three characters in the foreground represent a family, mother, father and child. In the background, a man is astride a horse. As a rider, I placed the rider in the horse and not on the horse. This position symbolizes the Trojan story, in which the Greek soldiers were hiding in the wooden horse until the Trojans fell asleep, whereupon the Greek soldiers poured out of the horse to open the city's gates and let in the Greek army. The rider in my painting has a set of microphones in front of him that symbolize man's leadership. Persuasive public speaking is an essential tool to many leaders marshaling support for their actions among their respective socio-political groupings. Around his head, I placed an aura, which is disintegrating into the background in the form of small squares. The aura surrounding the man's head refers to spiritual leaders. In this way, one person symbolizes both the secular and the religious authorities, or institutions. The male rider is directing the three characters in the foreground with the help of the black glasses placed on their faces to obstruct their vision. Each pair of glasses becomes a leash helping the rider to control the movements of the family. The rider is pulling the male and female characters from the back, while the young character pulls the rider in the opposite direction. This symbolizes the fact that the older members of society are easier to lead than the younger ones. The youth represents fresh blood, and as such has a much more rebellious attitude towards the old social structures. To indicate this, I depicted the character as the one who is pulling

ahead showing his resistance to the rider's intention to control his movements. He still has the black glasses on but it is the beginning of a disagreement. The couple and the boy form an "X," which symbolizes the unknown outcome. The horse has wheels with tires attached to the springs with hydraulic shock absorbers symbolizing the contemporary automobile like a vision of the Trojan horse. The dispersing squares reflect symbolically the limitations of humanity. I used bright colors in order to symbolize the energy of the depicted actions and also, to emphasize the gender difference, the woman in pink and red, the man in blue, and the youth in green to depict the color of a "freshman."

Participant #16 interpreted this painting as similar to the artwork depicting the mountain composed of the maze (see fig.5). She found that it metaphorically symbolizes societies blindly following the political powers without asking any questions. I agree that this is a very important layer of interpretation, which could be extended to the entire social structure. We are all very easily manipulated in different ways. Political manipulations are as old as all of humanity, but in contemporary society these activities extend to every aspect of human lives; now, politics is everywhere.

This is why the advertising agencies are blooming; advertising sells everything to anyone without questions being asked. We believe blindly in everything written on products, and seen in television ads and accept that commercial imagery is invading our everyday environment by promoting products through our phones and the Internet. Maybe it is because we like to have someone to guide us at all times through the jungle of the socio-political, economic, and cultural structures. It feels safer that way. We do not have to think, we just follow what the system tells us.

The entire display of the satirical imagery received the most comments. Participant #3 stressed that the artworks represent “contemporary mythology” and “...mythology-influenced environments.” I entirely agree with these statements. I tried to look at contemporary reality through the prism of myths. In my creative artistic activity, I always refer to various mythological narratives in my artworks in one way or another. All participants confirmed the mythological influences in my paintings. Another aspect that the majority of participants noted was the presence of ecological issues. I agree with this notion but only in the broader sense. Only the artwork with the tree stumps (see fig. 4) reflects strictly on environmental issues and the protection of nature. Furthermore, in the painting with the yin and yang symbols (see fig. 6) the image of the man’s fish does indeed refer to the destroyed environment but only to make a stronger distinction between female and male mentalities. Participant #7 stated that the composition of the artworks reflects the influence of Western knowledge. Also, the image representing me in the company of my thesis supervisors (see fig. 3) represents hidden knowledge, as a result of living in the Eastern block. It means that information is channeled to the viewer through a set of symbolic codes. Furthermore, the seventh participant emphasized that each of the paintings presented manifests my personal relation to the depicted subject. All three remarks are true. Whatever I do, I engage personally with the subject I intend to depict. Concerning the knowledge aspect in my artworks, I always try to present to the viewer a story composed of many layers, which should lead to one major interpretation of my artwork. Participant #8 mentioned a very important issue in reference to the paintings. He said that the use of satirical imagery in the contemporary practice of fine arts exposes one to “... a harsh critique [...] about the work being considered to be illustrative or

representational.” Some viewers might have the impression that my artwork is illustrative in nature, but I do not necessarily agree with such a perception. If by illustrative they mean that the artwork is too obvious, this is not true in my case. An artwork is obvious when understood the way the artist intended. All the symbolic references have to be disclosed and deconstructed in order to get a total meaning of the image. However, I agree that everyone is free to interpret any artwork the way they feel about it. In consequence, once the art is out, the artist has to live with the possibility that his artistic production could be read in ways he did not intend. In my opinion, artists as creators could be divided into three distinctive types: artist as activist, artist as decorator, and experimental artist. The activist type is an artist whose art reflects on the socio-political, economic and cultural issues in contemporary society (Erró, Tansey, Currin, Rauch). The decorative artist is the one who in form, color, line, and other kinds of artistic expression focuses mainly on just one subject, the esthetics of his/her own creation (for example: still life, landscape, flowers, ornamental art, etc.). It is an art whose main objective is to depict the beauty of nature or unspecified expressive forms. The experimental artist is the one who creates an artwork based on abstract thought, which he/she tries to depict in visual form in order to share it with the viewer (for example: video, computer, electronic, and performance abstractions). I see myself in the first category, as an activist. Through my art, I try to educate the viewer about the world in which we all living. It rings a bell to arouse awareness and protest. Because of the nature of my creativity, my artwork is not commercial in comparison to the other two categories of artistic activity. However, some theorists and viewers might think the opposite.

Participant #12 found most of the artworks as "...pretty straightforward," except the one with the yin and yang symbols (see fig.6). Concerning this comment I already positioned myself in the paragraph above regarding hasty interpretations. The third participant remarked that in most of these artworks "...the characters are coming and they are going somewhere." It is true that I like to compose my paintings with the representation of characters in movement. It is to indicate symbolically the passing of time. Participant #7 reflected on the representation of details in the artworks "...I assume that the rendering, the details, the mimicking of reality, maybe a more representational art mode, is very important to the communication of your ideas and maybe adds another layer of meaning." To participant #12 it is the elaborate painterly quality of the artworks that made him return to these paintings. In response to these two comments I admit that I like to see in an artwork the quality of technical rendering. This is why, in my paintings, I like to play with the technicalities in such a way as to create my own reality. The second participant stated that the universal symbolism of my artworks allowed her to relate to all the situations depicted. I believe that it is possible for everyone to relate to at least one of the situations that I depicted in these artworks because they were inspired by real life.

The majority of participants agreed that the interpretation of my satirical paintings is both individual and communal. The individual interpretation depends on one's experience, while the communal relates to the experiences of the whole group. Participant #7 remarked that the interpretation of these paintings is culturally specific and age-specific. "Cultural being in a Western context, age being that a lot of people of my age and younger are not familiar with the classical symbols, of let's say mythology, or Western knowledge..." However, within the academic circle, young people can be

“...familiar with the traditions of knowledge that inform these pieces.” I agree with this statement. We have fewer and fewer young people who can read symbolic meanings based on the classical roots of Western knowledge. Participant #9 stated that each of these paintings contains symbols that he can recognize, but “It does not say one specific thing. You can just keep reading into it.” In my opinion, each element of the composition in the paintings should lead the viewer to a deeper narrative meaning of each chosen piece. Participant #14 asked if, through the amount of details in each painting, I wanted to inspire his own interpretation or lead him to the “right” interpretation of a chosen piece. The answer to this question is that the amount of detailed symbolism in the artworks should lead the viewer to the interpretation that I intended as an artist. However, depending on the personal experience of the viewer, all the pieces presented can have different interpretations. For example, the painting with the landscape of cut trees (see fig. 4) can also represent love issues but, after careful reading of all elements in the painting, it would be more appropriate to read it as an environmental piece. This is why it is important not to be hasty when interpreting an artwork, but to reflect carefully in a deductive manner on each element of the composition in question. Participant #10 stated, “I think that art is about what and how you make it, and most people might never read what the artwork technically is all about...” It is true in conceptual or abstract art, where any reading of the artwork is possible and will depend on the viewer’s cognitive sensitivity to the line, form, material, composition, or color. In figurative satirical art, in order to convey certain socio-political or cultural statements, the composed narrative of such artworks has to be accessible to the viewer. The spectator's understanding of such artwork depends on his/her ability to read all the symbolic references in the artwork.

However, I agree that an artist needs to be ready for unintended interpretations of the artwork. In this context the second participant made a very interesting statement: “I think your artwork is like your kids: once you put them in the world they go off on their own, and you might like it or you might hate, but it is completely out of your control.” I agree that in most contemporary artistic venues this statement is true. However, in reference to the objective of elaborate visual satirical creativity (Erró, Tansey, Currin, Rauch), in my opinion, this is not always the case. Participant #16 commented “...that with a successful artwork the viewer is able to interpret a few key elements that were intended by the artist, and that there are other elements that are open for the viewer's interpretation not intended by the artist. If the viewer has a completely different interpretation from the one intended, it means the artist failed to communicate via his work.” I agree with the first part of this statement. However, with regard to the second part, in satirical painting the artist emphasizes the clarity of his intention by using a symbolic visual narrative based on classical knowledge. The successful reading of such symbolism depends on the viewer's cognitive abilities and says more about the viewer than about the artist. Participant #2 made a general statement about the entire collection of the presented satirical artworks by stating: “I do believe your work is critical, therefore, can be considered satirical. Although it is not always funny, it is always ironic, and clear, socially involved, literal, and educative.”

To conclude, the responses that I was able to collect from the presentation of my satirical artworks were very informative in many ways. It was interesting to hear how the participants interpreted the same paintings and their symbolic imagery from various perspectives, but still arrived at similar, or the same, conclusions. I believe that my

research shows how useful satirical art can be. Looking at this form of artistic creativity from the educational perspective, the inclusion of satirical art practice into the art education curriculum would stimulate the student's cognitive exploration. The integration of satirical creativity in the art education system could provide art students with additional knowledge about how to read and use visual symbolic nuances to compose an elaborate satirical visual narrative, which could be discussed knowledgeably in art education classes. Such activities as constructing and deconstructing satirical metaphorical codes would help students to learn about different cultures and their symbolic language. It is important to expose students to satirical "abstract" thought as an essential form of their cognitive development.

The direct practice of constructive humoristic creativity would inform students about all creative steps, which are necessary in order to create an intelligent comic art using a rich multicultural mosaic of different symbolic meanings. Furthermore, introduction to the analytical interpretation of satirical artworks would instruct students about the morphology of satirical creativity. Organized presentations of satirical imagery would provoke and inspire the interpretation of artwork and lead to constructive discussions, which would extend the students' knowledge about the means that could be used in satirical visual narrative. The satirical interpretation of an event or situation differs from any other artistic form of creative exposure. The humoristic point of view imposes on the artist the necessity to use incongruent settings in order to construct visual satirical narratives.

Mark Twain already recognized the complexity of humoristic creativity. Twain said the following: "There are several kinds of stories, but only one difficult one—the

humorous” (Roukes, 1997, p. 143). In my opinion, Twain’s comment reflects the idea of satirical art creation. A visual artist who is expressing his concerns in a satirical way writes his story with images. Any artist can paint, draw, and make a sculpture in a less or more skillful way. However, not all visual artists are able to make people laugh, and even less express their ideas through the agency of coherent satirical symbolism. A constant search for new knowledge is an essential activity of any visual artist aspiring to follow the satirical path.

Roukes (1997) offers the following advice:

To young artists aspiring to expression in social or political commentary:

Ideas come from information.

Keep informed of current affairs.

Further your education. Take additional courses; read up on historical events.

Develop your drawing skills. Keep a sketchbook and draw continually from everyday subjects.

Develop your sense of humor; study the work of editorial cartoonists and satirical artists, both past and present (p. 94).

Through satire, students would develop the maturity of their critical view of irresponsible actions of socio-political, environmental, and economic establishments. “One of the contributions that all teachers, but perhaps especially art teachers, can make to the cognitive development of their students is to frame tasks that challenge them to think in new ways” (Eisner, 2002, p. 143), and the exposure of students to the satirical creative perception of their contemporary reality is certainly one such task.

I think that the satirical artworks presented here and the collected responses regarding their interpretation provide evidence of the importance of exposing students to satirical artistic creativity. I believe that this entire experiment was a great learning process, not only for me as the artist and researcher, but also for the participants. I think that the analytic exchange of different ideas and perceptions enriched all of us, and at the same time proved that satire can be a means to visual literacy.

First Ideas



Figure 9. Preliminary sketches (paintings 1 and 6).



Figure 10. Preliminary sketches (paintings 1, 2 and 6).

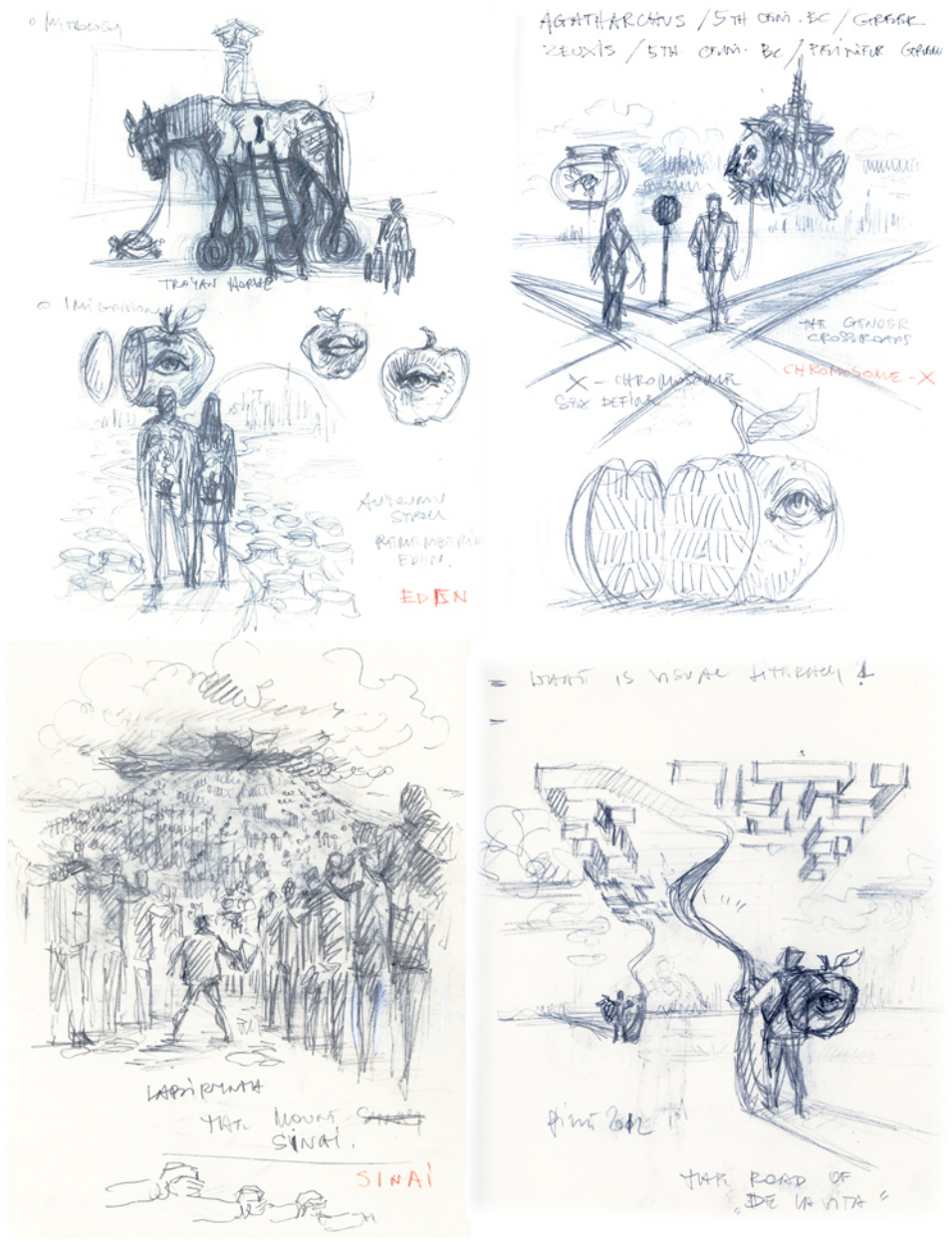


Figure 11. Preliminary sketches (paintings 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6).

The Process of Painting



Figure 12. Painting No. 1.



Figure 13. Painting No. 2.



Figure 14. Painting No. 3.



Figure 15. Painting No. 4.



Figure 16. Painting No. 5.



Figure 17. Painting No. 6.

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Appendix A

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Consent to participate in the Thesis Project: Can Satire be a Means to Visual Literacy?

This is to state that I agree to participate in a program of research being conducted by (Andrzej Pijet), Department of (Art Education), Concordia University (andre@pijet.com, 514-237-1713).

A. PURPOSE

I have been informed that the program of the research is as follows: to investigate if the satirical art has educational values and should it be taught?

B. PROCEDURES

Participant will participate in an exhibit of six satirical artworks. The participant will be asked to respond to the predetermined questions in relation to the artworks they are going to see. The process will be audio recorded with participant's permission. Otherwise hand-written notes will be taken. Participant's identity will remain confidential, except to the researcher. All hard-copy data will be stored in a secure location and digital files will be saved in a locked hard drive. Data will be kept for the period of five years time and then destroyed.

C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

There are no risks to participating in this study. The participant will benefit from the visual experience how certain contemporary issues could be represented through a satirical point of view.

D. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

- I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at anytime without negative consequences.
- I understand that my participation in this study is CONFIDENTIAL.
- I understand that the data from this study may be published.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT.
I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

NAME (please print) _____

SIGNATURE _____

If at any time you have questions about the proposed research, please contact the study's Principal Investigator:

David Pariser, Department of Art Education, Concordia University (514-848-2424 ext 4642)
Email: d.pariser@gmail.com

If at any time you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics and Compliance Advisor, Concordia University, Dr. Brigitte Des Rosiers, at (514) 848-2424 x7481 or by email at bdesrosi@alcor.concordia.ca

Appendix B

During the presentation of the artwork, which took place Wednesday, March 20, 2013 between 11:00 AM and 12:15 PM in the meeting room EV-1.631 at Concordia University 1515 St. Catherine Street West, the participants were asked to answer the following questions:

1. The narrative imagery of the artworks presented might suggest more than one interpretation. What is yours?
2. When interpreting the artworks, where did you begin? How did you proceed?
When did you stop?
3. Would you agree that the process of interpreting these artworks is an endeavor that is both individual and communal?
4. Do you agree that satirical artwork is made of multiple references, which are drawn from many cultures and enter into mutual relations of dialog, parody, and contestation?
5. Some theorists think that the only right interpretation of an artwork is the one proposed by the artist. Do you agree with this notion, or do you think that the viewer should have the freedom to his/her own interpretation?

Appendix C

This is the summary of the transcript from the audio-recorded presentation of my satirical artwork, which took place at Concordia University in the Seminar Studio EV. 1.631, on Wednesday, March 20, 2013, from 11 AM to 12:15 PM.

The narrative imagery of the artworks presented might suggest more than one interpretation. What is yours?

Participant #1 decided to answer the question focusing only on one painting (see fig.15), which she interpreted literally by referring to the maze formed by the huge human figures among which one small person is trying to find his way through a blind crowd. The second participant remarked that all the artworks have more than one interpretation but in reference to the painting chosen by the first participant (see fig.5), the composition reflected socio-political issues. The same participant remarked that because "...we are coming from different backgrounds we understand politics in different ways, and maybe just from different ways are coming different interpretations." Participant #3 compared the subjects of the paintings (see figs. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8) to "contemporary mythology" and stated that they are "...some sort of mythology-influenced environments." Participant #4 also confirmed the mythological aspects. Much more formal interpretation came from the fifth person who remarked that each painting has its own color values synchronized with the subject it represents. The fifth participant also stated "...my understanding of your perspective is placed into the Deleuzean interpretation that is going on in each of these..." artworks. This is why the 5th participant had "...more questions than answers..." about the presented paintings. Participant #6 underlined "...the ecological theme that runs through everything, and the relationship of

the natural world versus the technological world, and what that creates.” The participant also mentioned the use of color to emphasize the visual impact of the presented artworks on the viewer. Furthermore, the 6th participant considered the color volume in each artwork as a part of the paintings humoristic narrative.

Participant #7 noted the artworks’ “...relationship to knowledge, specifically Western knowledge,” in particular the paintings’ hidden knowledge as a consequence of living in a country under political influence of the Soviet Union. To the seventh participant it is particularly evident in the artwork in which I presented myself in the company of the academic board of the Art Education and Fine Arts Departments (see fig. 3). Participant #7 also found that my personal relation to the depicted subjects is present in each “...piece individually.” Participant #8 focused mostly on the painting’s illustrative narrative and its perception by the practitioners of contemporary art. The illustrative satirical imagery in the fine arts contemporary practice provokes “... a harsh critique [...] about the work being considered too illustrative or representational,” but “...the force in that is that you tell the story really well [...] the humor, the satire as per say...” represents “...the crude social critique.” Participant #9 reflected further on the artwork representing my way through the academic experience (see fig. 3) stating that it represents “...the symbolism of the maze, as a way of making your way through university, or making your way through theory, or reading clues of what and where, or just try to grab all the knowledge.” Participant #10 elaborated in particular on a few chosen artworks (see figs. 3, 4, 6 and 8). He found that these works illustrate the theory of the subject of my thesis, and its satirical content is “...quite dark.” “I found these like a

big allegory. [...] It is like trying to find knowledge written in the education system, but I do not find it very funny. I find it very disturbing...”

Participant #11 responded to the question through the prism of knowing me as a practicing artist since the time I was working for *La Presse* and other publications. At that time, my artwork was linear and executed mostly in black and white. The participant found the use of color in the artworks (see fig. 4 and 6) “...as taking whatever...” I “...was doing [...] for the past many years to another level, and another way of expressing, specially the entire part on ecology and environment...” By doing so, I am “...symbolizing what we all know [...] in formal [...] huge visual impact.” Participant #12 found most of the paintings interpretation “...pretty straight forward. The only one that...” is “... more difficult, in terms of interpretation, and as such [...] more interesting is...” the artwork representing a woman and a man separated by the yin and yang symbols (see fig. 6). However, after a close reading of all elements composing this image, the participant realized that there is more in it than previously thought, and in consequence his interpretation started to change. As he began to discover more details in the painting, the clearer his interpretation of the artwork became. He found the female character the most intriguing and mysterious. Participant #16 addressed comments directed to each of the six artworks respectively (see figs. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8). With regard to the first image (see fig. 4), the participant responded that it represents “the destruction of the environment brought on by human carelessness.” The next image (see fig. 5) was interpreted that as people following the socio-political powers blindly, with no questioning what is said to us. According to Participant #16 the next artwork (see fig. 8) metaphorically visualizes the same situation as depicted in the previous painting

discussed (see fig. 5). The three remaining artworks were interpreted very briefly. The one with the representation of the labyrinth in the sky (see fig. 7), which transforms itself in two separate roads, suggests that education is the key to a successful life. The fifth artwork (see fig. 6) depicts the contrast between the human preserving and destroying nature. The painting interpreted last (see fig. 3) was summarized as "...knowledge being passed on from teacher to student." This concludes the answers obtained to the first question.

When interpreting the artworks, where did you begin? How did you proceed?

When did you stop?

Participant #3 remarked that in all the artworks "...the characters are coming and they are going somewhere." This is where the participant begins to interpret each artwork. Participant #1 started to read the paintings by deconstructing the symbolism using a "...robotic approach." Participant #7 interpreted the satirical imagery applying the deductive method. He starts with the question as to why there are so many elaborate details when the symbolism of the depicted elements of each composition could be expressed in a much simpler way in order to convey the message. This is why he said "...I assume that the rendering, the details kind, the mimicking of reality, maybe more representational art mode, is very important to the communication of your ideas and maybe adds another layer of meaning."

Having more than one painting to comment on, participant #9 was first trying to find the connection between the artworks. In this presentation of satirical images, he found the maze to be an element that appears in all the paintings in a more or less evident way. By collecting all these symbols together, he was trying to find a conclusive meaning

for each artwork. Participant #7 added that in four artworks out of six everything is floating and the landscape is suggested rather than actually present (see figs. 3, 6, 7 and 8). In the two other paintings (see figs. 4 and 5), the landscape is more settled. Participant #13 began to look first at the colors, which agree with the subjects represented in the paintings' imagery, and then continued the cognitive journey through the conscious and subconscious symbolic connections.

Participant #12 followed the line of thinking of the seventh participant. He stated that what keeps him returning to the imagery of the artworks is their elaborate painterly quality, which he would not have done if the symbolic message had been conveyed in a much simpler way and with less effort. As remarked by the participant #7, it is the time and effort put into the depiction of the various elements of the composition of all these paintings that capture the viewer's attention. He states "...the fact that these have meaning and quality, the fact that there is an obvious effort, and thought put into the tones, and the colors and etc. brings you back to them." Participant #1 expressed her opinion about the satirical imagery by sharing similar perceptions with participants #7 and #12. Furthermore, she stated that the paintings reflect the environmental trap (see fig. 4) we are in all. She concludes, "...we are part of the solution only we are not the solution."

Participant #2 stated, "...an important part of interpretation is appropriation..." The universal symbolism used in the paintings allowed her to relate to all these situations "...as a person, not as a social individual." When one interprets an artwork, one appropriates its symbolism by giving it a new personal meaning. In other words, the participant #2 interpreted an artwork through the prism of her personal associations with

it. Participant #10 took a similar but more independent approach fearing he may have a problem to get the meaning of an artwork from the first look, he began to interpret the artwork in question by associating its content with what his memory could retrieve from his most recent experiences. Consequently, he created his own story without trying to find out what the artist wanted to convey. For example, the artwork with the yin and yang symbols (see fig. 6) brought to mind a science fiction novel he had read recently. After inventing his own story for the artwork in question, he would try to get deeper into the symbolic details of which the image is composed. Then he compared his own account to the story represented in the artwork at which he was looking. Participant #5 had a rather formal approach to the artwork interpretation. First he read the colors, "...the brighter the color, the more involved the interpretation..." His first reaction was to the color and composition, then finally the symbolism. He stated: "I am going to work immediately, just all I can get of it, and the symbolism I do not have to interpret." Participant #16 commented "...by looking at all the elements in the image I then made connections between these elements..." reflecting on the symbolic meaning through her own cultural references.

Would you agree that the process of interpreting these artworks is an endeavor that is both individual and communal?

To participants #5 and #8, and a few unidentified voices from the group, the interpretation of these artworks is more communal than individual. Participant #12 asked "Why?" Participant #8 responded, "It is for the public." To participant #13, the interpretation of these artworks is both individual and communal. Participant #2 stated: "You cannot separate them." Participant #13 agreed. Participant #2 added that it was a

tricky question. Participant #7 remarked "...that to interpret these pieces it is culturally specific and age specific. Cultural being in a Western context, age being that a lot of people of my age and younger are not familiar with the classical symbols, of let's say mythology, or Western knowledge, and all these things." Furthermore, he mentioned that even in newspapers, when artists use mythological references, very few people understand what it is about. This is why artists, have started to use a different symbolism in political cartooning in order to communicate with the audience. However, he underlined that within the academic circle "...we are familiar with the traditions of knowledge that inform these pieces. So it is relatively easy for us to hint and pin the idea, but for a different group it could be a different interpretation." Participant #16 stated that the process of interpretation of these paintings is rather an individual effort and depends on people's "...cultural references for reading symbolism."

Do you agree that satirical artwork is made of multiple references, which are drawn from many cultures and enters into mutual relations of dialog, parody, and contestation?

Participant #7 remarked that the artworks presented contain multiple references to binary concepts. Also, he stressed that the artwork containing the yin and yang symbol (see fig. 6) could reflect the Deleuzian theory of rhizomatic relations between binaries and, as such, cross the boundary between Western and Eastern symbolic imagery of quite different socio-cultural concepts. Participant #10 associates satire with the somehow comic representation of the issues addressed. To him, all these artworks are rather serious, especially two of them (see figs.4 and 6), one showing the landscape without trees the other showing two opposite natures, woman and man. It seemed to him that, in

order to find these artworks satirical, he needed to study all the symbolic associations a little more. Participant #6 answered the question with another question asking me what is my perception of satire. To all participants in the artwork presentation I stated my concept of satire as already described in Chapter 1 of this thesis (see pages 6 and 7).

Participant #7 remarked that an important part of the satirical visual statement is also irony, which "...does not necessarily need to be humorous." He directed the participants' attention to two of the artworks on display (see figs. 4 and 6). He asked, "...can the concept of human law really survive without nature?" Participant #11 concentrated his questioning on one artwork (see fig. 6) that he approached from the perspective of his own cultural background. Applying a deductive method, he disclosed a meaningful context, making references to different subtle details and in this way carried out his cognitive investigation by always asking the question "why this?" and "why that?" When one questions the details, one can get the answers and at the same time align one's cognitive perception with the artist's intention to convey his message. For example, "...the longer one looks the more symbols, or things happen. We discover this sign, a stop sign facing the woman, so she has to stop, and it is attached to the brush. So it is a brush of the artist, who is stopping the woman, and why the man has free passage on [...] pedestrian, and he comes from the sky, and she comes from hell. What is going on, so, if one starts reading this way [...] and tries to interpret your own way, and tries to figure out what he is really saying." Participant #10 remarked: "The way the man is holding the leash is very different." Participant #11 nodded in approval.

Participant #6 elaborated on the question asked in a more philosophical way, focusing on one artwork in particular (see fig. 7). She compared the artwork to an active

painting; to her, the image provokes an uncanny impression. Furthermore, in the participant's perception, the idea of uncanny is the satire, and this is why "...it is much harder to get a handle on the meaning." The painting "...represents ambiguity" and "nature as being a jigsaw puzzle." "The actual painting and the color work with the meaning." It is not a "...kind of arbitrary choice. It is a very basic choice in terms of painting." Participant #9 stressed the very interesting fact that all these artworks start with a symbol that he can recognize, but "It does not say one specific thing. You can just keep reading into it." Participant #6 remarked that these are the characteristics of satire. Take the artworks of Rowlandson, Hogarth or Daumier. What makes them "...still interesting to look at today?"

Participant #14 indicated that the whole discussion explores different levels of interpretation of all the paintings on display. What is relational might be also interpreted formally, so even "...a younger audience might appreciate them for their formal qualities." Regarding the variety of symbolic meanings, as, for example, in the artwork depicting a walking woman and a walking man (see fig.6), one needs to look at so many details in order to perceive the message conveyed, and one's interpretation depends "...on who is in the group, one might dialog on it quite different." In all the artworks, one can take many directions in order to grasp one's own understanding of it. Taking into consideration the number of detailed references, participant #14 asked how much I wanted him to be influenced to look for his own interpretation, or was my intention to lead him to "...get to the correct message?"

Participant #2 remarked that the question asked has two parts, which go well together. For example, "...like satirical and artwork, like every artwork is made of

multiple references, and it really excludes your idea of interpretation, I mean individual and communal, many cultures, multicultural relationships, and dialogue. I think all works of art have dialogue.” According to participant #2 “satirical” refers to the second part of the question, which is “parody and contestation.” To her, the artworks I presented should be discussed in the context of contest. Also, in her perception, the “...satirical work is not always artwork in the important way we talk about, these are usually things you see in the media cartoon news. So how does it affect the fact that we are looking at it as art mostly in the academic context?” Participant #16 agreed, “...that satirical artwork is made of multiple references, which are drawn from ...” her “...own cultural understanding and enters into mutual relations of dialog, parody, and contestation.”

Some theorists think that the only right interpretation of an artwork is the one proposed by the artist. Do you agree with this notion, or do you think that the viewer should have the freedom to his/her own interpretation?

According to participant #10, the answer to the first part of this question is “No.” He stated: “I think that art is about what and how you make it, and most people might never read what the artwork technically is all about...” So as an artist one has to accept this reality, even when he/she thinks that their interpretation is the only one that is right. Participant #15 agreed with this statement. Also, he wanted to know why the artworks did not have titles. “What dictates the choice to give a title, or not? Does title projects an answer to the artwork?” I briefly explained that, for the purpose of this discussion, I did not want to influence the interpretation of the artworks by giving them titles. Furthermore, I rarely give titles to my artworks because I think that they speak for themselves.

Participant #12 agreed with the comment expressed by participant #15, and responded to the question by reflecting on the artist's intention: is the artist's intention to get his message across or he does not care what the viewers are thinking? He observed: "So I think, on one hand everybody can have their own interpretation. Naturally, we can bring completely different outside notions to our reading of the piece. On the other hand, if we are talking about whether a work is effective from the point of view of the artist's intention, then the question of how it is interpreted by many people is essential."

Participant #15 asked: "...is your intention to provoke a individual interpretation and a new narrative of your works?" Furthermore, participant #15 made a very interesting point about the act of interpretation. He stated: "I enjoy the most whatever people bring and how they choose to deconstruct. Either they have the tools or not." He continued that in a general context of art interpretation, it is interesting, and this is particularly true in abstract art, how "...people want to put symbols to recognize things that are not there."

Participant #2 added: "I think your artwork is like our kids: once you put them in the world, they are on their own, and you might like it or you might hate it, but it is completely out of your control." Participant #15 remarked that, from all the artworks I presented, only one was composed entirely of men (see fig. 5).

Participant #1 found that the "...most complex and compelling..." painting was the one with the two fish (see fig. 6). On the first impression, she saw just "...life and death..." but, on closer examination, she began to interpret all the elements that compose the painting and her "...interpretation turned to captivity, ownership, possession, destruction, appropriation, and consumerism." "In all these images, the men and women you portray appear healthy although in business apparel. Part of a system." Participant #1

also commented the artwork with the tree stumps (see fig. 4). “Man and woman consume nature but in a sense they are nature. They are like a species of an ecosystem out of balance. While trying to live and sustain ourselves comfortably, we are destroying the other living aspects of the environment. It is ironic, and a contradiction that many of us feel yet can not recognize much the futility of escape.”

Participant #16 stressed, “...with a successful artwork, the viewer is able to interpret a few key elements that were intended by the artist, and there are other elements that are open for the viewer's interpretation not intended by the artist. For the viewer to have a completely different interpretation means the artist failed to communicate the overall meaning of his work.” Participant #2 completed the last written question by stating that her favorite painting was the one with the couple walking through the trees stumps landscape (see fig. 4). “I love the image of the leaves sewn on the garments! It is so poetical! The cut trees.” “I do not see this piece as participant #7 does. For me, it is not about human love. It is about human selfishness. The couple represents North American yuppies, those that consume everything that they are supposed to in order to be “successful,” without being able to look beyond their noses, without realizing that every decision they make affects everyone else, everywhere. I like it, because it is a terrible image hidden in a beautiful one. I do believe your work is critical, therefore, can be considered satirical, although it is not always funny. It is ironic, always clear, socially involved, literal, and educative.”