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Discovery Through The Art Of Making

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DISCOVERY THROUGH THE ART OF MAKING

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A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

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In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master Of Fine Arts
Printmaking

-

By
Andrew Foushee Daly
December 2011

-

Accepted by:
Sydney Cross, Committee Chair
David Detrich
Todd McDonald

ABSTRACT

Between growing up on a farm, and working in a saddle shop, I have been conditioned to understand my environment in an empirical and experiential manner. There is a certain kind of education that can only be achieved through working with your hands, and the knowledge obtained in that fashion cannot be sufficiently translated through the written word, or with the use of technology. It is important to me to keep this type of education alive.

I have disciplined myself to learning the traditional printmaking techniques of engraving and lithography for their laborious hands on qualities so that I can better understand how labor with material provokes a unique understanding of the world. Through observation, I address the slightest texture and description of a surface; I search for a relationship that may spark an epiphany, or an intuitive perception of that object or insight into reality. The mark-making systems that I develop through my continued education of the processes of engraving and lithography brings forth an authorship that is unique to me and only my hand can create.

Utilizing flat files, card catalogs, and wall placement as formats for presenting works; I am conveying a didactic quality that provokes an intimate sensation of discovery. I bring the viewer an understanding of how through meticulous observation, the objects that I represent are unique to the hand and cannot be replicated in any other way. I encourage my audience to find their own method of experiencing their environment through the use of their hands.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my grandfather Dr. Rosswald Bernard Daly. It was his love for life, and his passion for learning that helped drive me to pursue this body of work.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Tell me, and I will forget. Show me and I may remember. Involve me, and I will understand. – Confucius, 450 B.C.

...there is an intimate and necessary relation between the process of actual experience and education. -John Dewey, 1938

As society continues to progress and new technologies become available, I continue to find myself drawn to the virtue of the hand made. There is certain kind of education that can only be achieved through working with your hands, and the knowledge obtained in that fashion cannot be sufficiently translated verbally. As society continues to become more dependent on electronic and digital technologies, certain kinds of information, audio and visual, become more available to the average person. Conversely information that is obtained through physical experience slowly becomes increasingly less prominent in our lives. Abilities and experiences that were considered the norm in previous generations and could go back to the beginning of history, such as horsemanship and even starting a fire are becoming obscure to the everyday person. It is important to me to keep this type of education alive.

By drawing on my personal history, growing up on a horse farm and utilizing the experience I gained working in a traditional saddle shop, I, through working with my hands continue to learn in an empirical and experiential manner. By doing so I am endeavoring in a journey to better understand the world around me. I have disciplined myself to learning the printmaking techniques of engraving and lithography for their

laborious hands on qualities so that I can better understand how labor with material provokes a unique understanding of the world.

By drawing empirically, depending upon observation and experience, I find that I come to rediscover my subject matter in a way I had not considered before. Through observation, I address the slightest texture and description of a surface; I search for a relationship that may spark an epiphany, or an intuitive perception of that object, or insight into reality. I convey this experience to the viewer through the manner in which I draw. By utilizing meticulous detail in specific areas I bring the audience an idea of how I came to understand the subject when I drew it.

Utilizing flat files, index drawers, and wall placement as formats for presenting works, I am conveying a didactic quality that provokes an intimate sensation of discovery. This is an experiential lesson that I encourage the audience to participate in. Through the observational process of making images I encourage people to reassess how they perceive the world and encourage them take time find there own discoveries with in their own environment.

CHAPTER TWO

A PERSONAL HISTORY

I grew up on a small farm in North Carolina near the historic town of Hillsborough. The farm was ancient by American standards having been farmed by the Lockhart family since the early eighteenth century. Today the farm, depleted of any good soil, has become a boarding facility for horses whose owners lack the time or place to take care of them on their own. Growing up in this environment has lead me to understand the world in a different manner than most of America. While other kids went home after school to their contemporary houses in the suburbs, and played video games till their parents got home, I came home from school and was responsible for a long list of farm chores.

Everything around me on the farm was old, everything was used, and this required considerable attention. Repairing things was a constant part of my young life. I was always learning how to fix things. By the time I was in my late teens I developed a strong desire for craft. Being around horses all of my life, I naturally applied that craft to saddle making.

When I began working at the saddle shop it was like walking into a time machine. The smell of leather permeated the air. The walls were covered with tools, some new but most were ancient, the handles of the tools worn black by the generations of daily use. The shop had one sewing machine that was from the 1890's and its one purpose was to sew the back spine on a riding boot. The shop was a relic of old craft, having no need for

the comforts of modern living. Few people have had the opportunity to learn and discover the things that I had access to at that shop.

Between growing up on the farm, working on old buildings and old equipment, and working in the saddle shop, I have been conditioned to understand my environment in an empirical and experiential manner. I have become intrigued by the way we learn through doing.

CHAPTER THREE

CRAFT, TRADITION, AND THE HAND MADE

My experience working at the saddle shop has had a lasting effect on my art making process. The strong connection to history within the shop through the tradition of the craft, and the age of the tools appealed to me and has instilled a method of working that has been sustainable.

Utilizing traditional techniques puts me in a personal dialogue with history. Through my experiences with craft, I discover a connection with artists and artisans from previous generations and then continue the tradition for future artists to discover. I engage in this historical dialogue with hand engraving and stone lithography.

Engraving is an important part of my art making process. The intense concentration required to effectively engrave a plate relates to the intense observation of the subject matter with which I work. The process of retaining the information I observe, and releasing the information as a mark, is forcefully slowed down due to the difficulty of incising a line into a metal plate. In my engraving of *Cedar Waxwing* (fig1.1) I utilize the immense detail that can be achieved by the burin to describe the delicate nature of its feathers. This also can be seen in the engraving of the *barn owl* (fig3.1).

The calligraphic mark that the burin makes is also an important aspect of engraving. By applying force to the burin you can change the depth of the incised line thus making the mark bolder or finer depending on the force applied to the tool. The level of sensitivity required to use the burin transforms the tool into an extension of my hand.

The relationship that this process creates becomes very intimate, and the end product is therefore an intimate drawing.

Albrecht Durer has been a major influence on my work. Durer's work demonstrates sensitivity to nature that had not been achieved before his time and seldom achieved since. He was one of the first true masters of metal engraving and had developed a system of mark making that is truly unique to him. Like Durer I develop my own unique system of mark making that voices my authorship over the image.

The art of stone lithography is another traditional process that requires sensitivity to material. The relationship I have with a lithography stone is very intimate. The stones resonate a very powerful aura of history that is unlike any other art process. Working with a surface that has been worked and reworked for over a century puts me into a relationship with artists and artisans that have worked on the very same stone. Having a similar relationship to that object that previous generations have had adds to the history of the stone as an object.

CHAPTER FOUR

ENGRAVINGS AND CATALOGS

Shaped Plates

The engravings of the *Squirrel Paws*, the *Waxwing* (fig 2.1), and the *Barn Owl* are examples of animals that are very common in our everyday surroundings, but are at the same time very illusive. When I was presented with the opportunity to observe them I took it. When I found the squirrel lying in the road I felt that I would take the time to get to really understand that animal. Instead of engraving the animal in its entirety I decided to focus on one specific part that I felt was very important aspect to the squirrel and was the most obscure to my understanding. The squirrel's hind paws are quintessential to its "squirrlyness" without them they would not be able to climb trees. Also it would be near impossible to make an engraving of them from a live and active specimen. When I began to engrave the paws I notice how the image started to emulate Albrecht Durer's drawings of praying hands.

I shaped the plate into an arch to further emphasize the preciousness of the moment when observing the paws. When I discovered the effectiveness of shaping the plates, I continued the series, with a cedar waxwing that was also deceased and a barn owl that had been preserved, by making the print of the waxwing circular and the barn owl a teardrop. These shapes can convey religious connotations that reference the spiritual. Though the engravings were not made with religious intentions, by utilizing an iconic format, they develop a more intimate space for the subjects. This encourages participants to take a closer more observant view of the engravings.

The frames of the three engravings further accent their subjects. By continuing the shape to and even larger format I further promote the essential shape of the prints and entice the audience to come in and have a closer look. The bowed frames bound together with leather reference the days on the farm and working in the saddles shop by resembling antiquated tools that always hung on the wall. The overall effect is an image and space that provokes the sensation of sympathy that I experience when I was closely observing the subjects when engraving.

The Experiential Catalog

I continue to explore the intimate nature of engraving in the index drawer piece. I employ set of index drawers to house a collection of natural objects that I collected from my day-to-day travel to and from the studio and engravings that I made of them. The objects that I am compelled to pick up have a charge or potential to them that I find very interesting. Though the objects may be considered insignificant in contemporary society I feel compelled to display them as art subjects.

By using an old card catalog to house the objects and my representations of them I present a didactic experience to my viewer (fig 4.1). Contemporary artist Mark Dion is a significant influence to how I present my work. Mark Dion explores the sciences of archeology, anthropology, and natural history to question how society obtains information. In his work, Dion developed a process of collecting and sorting found objects that, depending on the project, he presents as artifacts. His process of collecting and sorting is very methodical and refers to a scientific methodology. Dion displays his collections in installations that resemble the curiosity cabinets of nineteenth century

amateur scientists. He also installs representations of his research stations and laboratories in order to give his audience a first hand look into his process.

Though I do not use a scientific methodology of collecting and archiving, I do take advantage of the authority of presenting work in a manner similar to that of Dion. By doing so I provoke an experience that is to inform the observer in an educational way of how I come to rediscover my subject matter through the act of hand drawing and engraving. I find it important to take time to observe my surroundings.

In the process of engraving the plexi-glass plates, I treat them in the same manner that I would any other intaglio plate. I card the ink in and wipe off the excess revealing the engraving. Instead of printing the plates, I lay them into the drawers that I fabricated into light boxes. The lights underneath the plexi-glass illuminate the engravings. This functions in two different ways. The light-boxes help bring the engravings to life by illuminating them internally presenting the exquisite nature of the engraved line, and the unique quality of handwork. The light box also acts as a metaphor to the sensation of enlightenment that I gain by creating the individual engravings. By placing the actual found objects that I engraved from in the catalog I present a comparison of the immaculate detail of the real thing as compared to the detail that my hand created. The act of showing my engravings along with the found objects develops a dialogue between the real and the representational. I prompt the viewer to understand through meticulous observation, reflecting on that observation, and making a decision of how to represent that observation, the objects that I represent are unique to my own hand and cannot be replicated in any other way. The mark-making system that I develop through my

continued process of engraving directly from observation brings forth an authorship that is unique to me and only my hand can create.

CHAPTER FIVE

THROUGH THE HAND, REDISCOVERY OF THINGS I THOUGHT I KNEW

The Saddle

The saddle (fig 5.1) is an object that I am very familiar with. Spending a great deal of time constructing and deconstructing, repairing and cleaning saddles I am very experienced with how they operate within the world. With all of this knowledge I never before actually drew a saddle. I became very interested in how a saddle would translate when I began to draw it and how I would come to understand the saddle differently when I was finished. The experience was most rewarding. Utilizing stone lithography I achieve the subtle textures of different kinds of leather and recreate the stitching very well. By hand drawing and rebuilding the saddle on a two-dimensional surface I rediscover the saddle in a manor that I did not know before. Going through the process of articulating the slighted details in the leather and rendering every stitch forces me to reconsider how I perceive and object that I have known all of my life. The exercise of drawing the saddle led me to consider other subjects that I could rediscover.

Horse Deconstructed

Having worked with horses for all of my life I am well aware of how unpredictable they can be. Horses though often wanting to please, are animals with strong instincts. When those instincts are triggered they will respond with great physical strength. Because of this horses have become a strong and charged figure in my work. Horses represent a strong emotional being that can be very unpredictable. To me the horse evokes sensations of empathy, and compassion.

In spending so much time in such proximity to horses, I perceive them very differently than most people. Due to their large size my association with horses is fragmented into parts (fig 6.1). Each part of a horse conveys a different kind of experience. The parts then become individual pieces that represent a unique experience on their own. In Walton Ford's piece *Nila* he also breaks down a large animal into parts, that being an elephant. Walton Ford in his interview on [art 21](#) states that he was inspired by the parable of the blind men and the elephant. In the parable each blind man grabs hold of the elephant holding a different part. When each is asked to describe the elephant, each blind man had a different response due to each individual's experience. My horse prints can also relate to this parable, in that each print brings forth a different kind of experience. I also believe the intent of my work relates closer to artists such as Jim Dine who constructs imagery that has strong ties to his personal history. Like Jim Dine I develop a vocabulary of imagery that is strongly tied to my identity, history and experiences.

There are seven prints in the set, which consist of the muzzle, the eye, the ear, the crest, the hooves, the stifle, and the croup. Each print gives a unique experience. That experience is conveyed through the manner in which I represented it. The Muzzle, for example, is drawn in a manner that expresses the sensitivity that a horse's mouth has. The mouth of a horse is likened to our fingers, a horse can decipher the smallest variation in texture with its lips (fig 6.2). I reticulate the lithographic crayon to render the softness velvety nature of its skin, and the sandpaper like quality of the horse's lips. This description is very different from how I represent the hooves. The hooves are rendered in

a way to show hardness of the hoof wall, the flesh of the coronary band, and the silky smooth hair that grows around the fetlock. The hooves are also composed to show the weight of the horse (fig 6.3). In the series I utilize Lithography for its ability to demonstrate a wide range of marks. By starting each image with broad and aggressive gestural marks and then refining the marks into an intimate detailed area I demonstrate different levels of completion. I give the viewer an insight to how an image is formed by working through the material. By placing the images on the wall in relation to the anatomy of an actual horse, I present a new and unique depiction of the animal. A representation of how I perceive a horse from my own experience rather than the pragmatic depiction of the animal.

The horse project is a key example of how knowledge is obtained through experience. The composition of the piece and how I came to the decisions on how to draw the specific parts is directly related to the significant amount of time that I have spent with the animal. There is no other way to obtain that knowledge. Only through direct hands on learning is the relationship that I present possible.

CHAPTER SIX

PARTICIPATION

Drawing Table

In *Empirical-learning desk* (fig 7.1) I utilize a set of old flat files to become a storehouse of imagery that sparked personal interest. The images are a compilation of my tools, tools that belonged to my grandfather and great grandfather, plants and animals that I am very familiar with, and some animals that are completely foreign to me. In the transparent index I utilize chance as a means for the viewer to explore the possibilities of associations for themselves. The participant can move in and through out the piece freely developing personal associations between the imagery. Like Jim Dine I have an interest in relationships between disparate objects. Though the work is intuitively made, the composition within this piece is not random. It is an index of images related to my personal history and interests. This piece becomes a glossary of charged images that provoke the viewer to contemplate.

Presenting the flat files in a workbench format, or that, which could be viewed as a school desk, suggests that the piece has a utilitarian and didactic purpose. By placing lithography stones on the table, I invite partakers to experience a hands-on tradition that I invest in. It becomes a drawing station were participants can then take the time to draw and develop their own compositions based on the subject matter that I present them with. This like my other work becomes a window into my understanding and also becomes a tool for a didactic experience.

Conclusion

Through working with my hands I am in pursuit of a specific kind of knowledge that cannot be discovered in any other way. As society continues on its journey into the future, people become more dependent on mediated technology to aid them in their daily lives. Though there are great benefits to the advancements and scientific breakthroughs that contemporary society has achieved, it is important not to disregard the importance of education through physical labor. Human kind has procured an abundance of wisdom through the skills of the generations before ours. It is important to me to maintain that wisdom.

By disciplining myself in the traditional crafts of metal engraving and stone lithography I delve into an educational experience. I make use these hand crafts invented by the generations before me as a tool to rediscover the world that I live in. By displaying my work in a didactic manner I encourage my audience to come and participate in my learning experience. The discovery that is achieved through the discipline of observation, reflection, and execution by the use of ones own hands is a unique adventure that cannot be understood in any other way. I ask my audience to take a little time out of their life to truly observe the world that they live in, and to celebrate the physicality of their environment.

FIGURES



Fig 1.1
Squirrel Paws
Engraving 6" X 4"
2011



Fig 1.2
Squirrel Paws
(In frame)
Engraving Bent Wood Leather
59" X 20"



Fig 2.1
Waxwing
engraving
9" X 6"



Fig 2.2
Waxwing
(in frame)
engraving bent wood
26" X 26"



Fig 3.1
Barn Owl
engraving
16" X 7



Fig 3.2
Barn Owl
(in frame)
engraving bent wood leather
53"X 20"



Fig 4.1

Catalog of Understanding

Found card catalog, plexi-glass, Fluorescent lights, engraving
42"X 34"X 17"



Fig 4.2
Catalog of Understanding
(detail)



Fig 4.3
Catalog of Understanding
(detail)



Fig 5.1
Saddle
lithography
30" X 22"



Fig 6.1
Horse Deconstructed
lithography
120"X 108"



Fig 6.2
Horse Deconstructed
(detail muzzle)
lithography
16"X 9"



Fig 6.3
Horse Deconstructed
(detail hooves)
lithography
26"X 21"



Fig 7.1

Empirical Learning Desk

Found flat files, wood, plexi-glass, lithographs, lithographic, stones paper
82"X 36"X 37"

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