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Evoking Regional Vestige - A Unique Legacy

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EVOKING REGIONAL VESTIGE - A UNIQUE LEGACY

by
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An Artist's Statement
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of the
University of North Dakota
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts

Grand Forks, North Dakota

December
1976

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This Artist's Statement submitted by Roberta J. Zahradka in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts from the University of North Dakota is hereby approved by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
List of Illustrations	v
Abstract	vi
Introduction.....	1
Section I. Painting.....	1
Section II. Drawing.....	7
Conclusion.....	13
List of References.....	14

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	Page
1. Vestige.....	2
2. Concentric evidence.....	3
3. The Sampler.....	4
4. Shape, Form and Pattern.....	5
5. Theolines Legacy.....	6
6. The Reportorial.....	7
7. Figure Study With A Cat.....	8
8. Wither And Fade.....	9
9. Lying Beneath.....	10
10. A Transitory Record.....	11
11. The Vacinity I.....	12
12. Vacinity II.....	12

ABSTRACT

This thesis discusses the concepts used in a series of paintings and drawings evoking an authentic view of regional environment and humanity. Included is a discussion of procedure and methodology.

EVOKING REGIONAL VESTIGE - A UNIQUE LEGACY

INTRODUCTION

The memory - provoking fragments found in the reassessment of a legacy is the subject I chose to develop in the areas of drawing and painting.

My interest lies in a piece of authentic America, dominated by the migration of an indomitable people proudly living out their lives, having been subjected to chronic abuse, oppressive heat and bitter cold. Misunderstood and unappreciated, the frontier ethnic of a rural culture represents the most left - behind area in North Dakota.

It is my intension to develop as an artist a relationship between region, humanity, simplicity and order.

Section 1. Painting

My paintings are treatments of reflection, fragmentation and sewn sculptural statements. The drawings, respond to the elemental forces - the aggregate of weathering and cultural conditions that influence humanity.

Stuart Davis¹ defined the relationship between what an artist does and what he paints: "The act of painting is not a duplication of experience, but the extension of experience on the plane of formal invention."

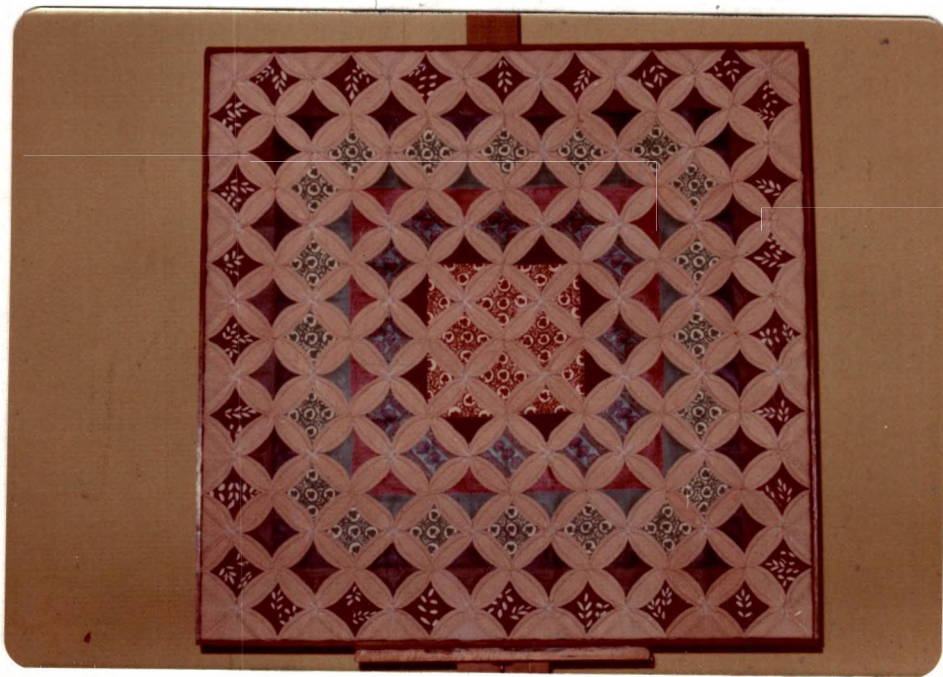
The gathering experiences evident in my paintings are not visual reflections of the past, but remnants of a participation in antiquation.

The experimental approach developed in the painting, The Vestige, blends acrylic paint and sewn canvas in a planar style. The objective was to find a technique that would treat the correlation as an equation of the tactile with the visual experience. Between the initial phases and its present appearance, the assemblage underwent considerable change.

¹Stuart Davis, "Must An Artist Know Landscape In Order To Paint It?" American Artist, September 1976, p. 12.

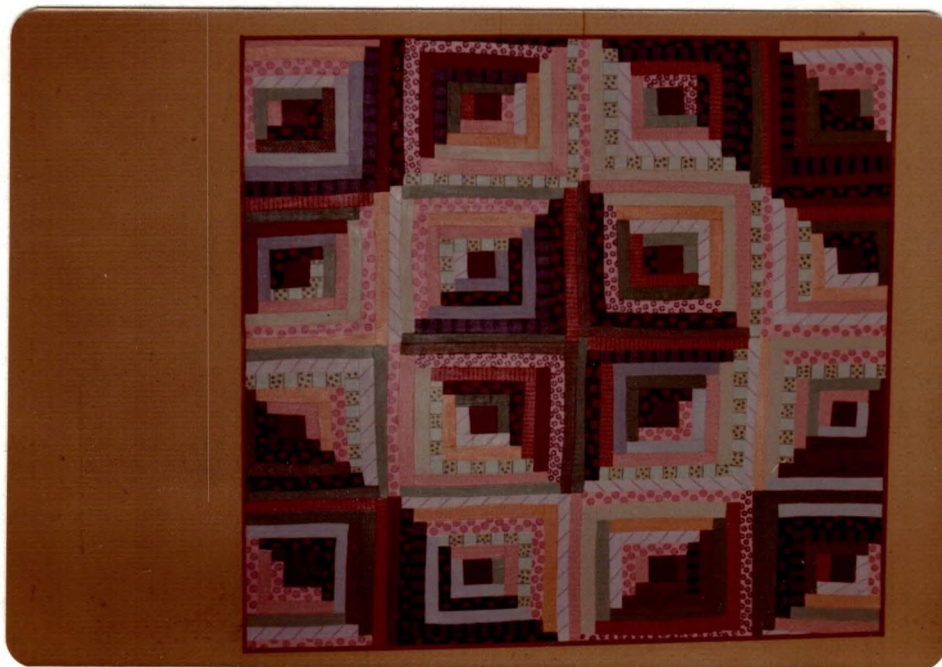
The technical problems I encountered included difficulties with the canvas weight, assembly time, and patternization.

The stained canvas was cut into nine inch squares, reduced by stitching to four inches forming a repeated textural pattern. Although the canvas inserts are painted; fabric design and color are reflective of early quilting remnants.



The Vestige Acrylic 34" x 34"

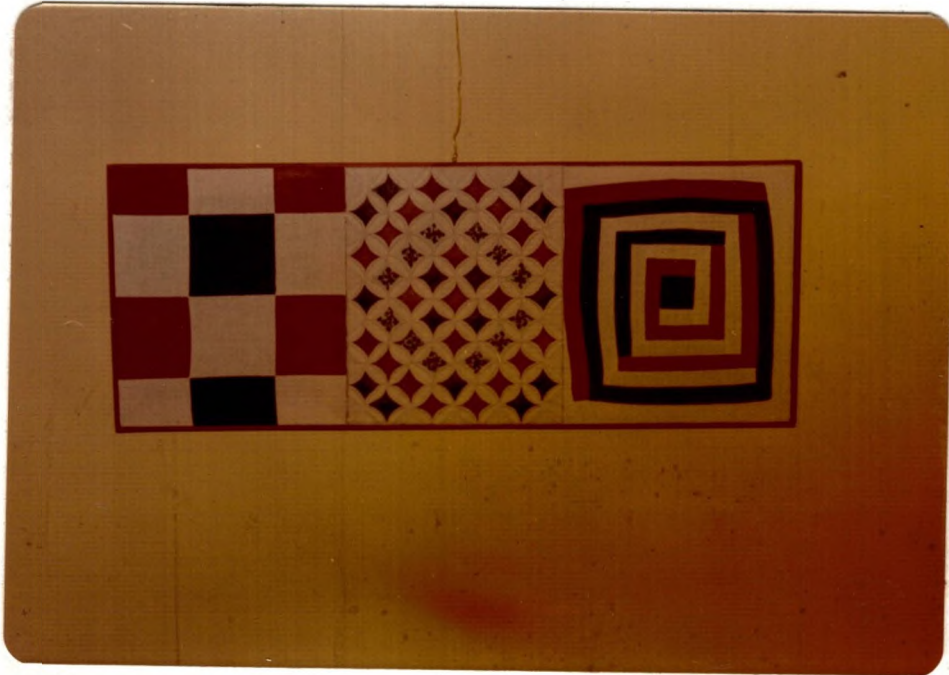
Concentrating on another experimental assemblage, I combined sewn canvas and acrylic in a traditional quilting pattern, called the log cabin block design. At close proximity, perception would be mainly of fragments, of color patches and color vibrations. At a greater distance the color areas and fragments would come into complete visual focus, yielding a relatively stable image of the light and dark blocks arranged to form concentric diamonds.



Concentric Evidence, Acrylic, 51" x 54"

I completed three small paintings before enlarging the ideas to canvas.

The Sampler, is this collection. A result of the three earlier pieces.



The Sampler, Acrylic, 39" x 48"

For the painting, Shape, Form and Pattern, also derived from discarded fabric, I chose a shaped canvas to organize the work within the outer edges of the image and introduced a variety of projections from within its internal surface. The visual objective entails geometric forms, hard edges and a variety of tonal variations.

The methodology was achieved by first painting the entire surface and developing a sound design. After several areas were blotted out with masking tape a second layer of paint and new design was added. The procedure was repeated until the entire canvas had been painted. Masking tape was then removed revealing a hard-edged sampling of patterns and geometric forms.



Shape, Form and Pattern, Acrylic 46" x 60"

Theoline's Legacy has all the serenity and simplicity related to the asymmetrical arrangement. The box functions in a capacity to induce recollections of old possessions, places and acts as an inventory of domestication. Each cell is part of the form of presentation. Since five sides of the box are enclosed, the sixth side is an open invitation to the viewer. The experience is to gain a capacity for feeling.



Theoline's Legacy, Mixed Media" 26" x 34"

Section II, Drawing

My approach to drawing is the culmination of experimentation with paper, form and patterns. The drawings, respond to the elemental forces - the conditions that influence humanity.

In working towards this montage, I found it necessary to incorporate a visual remembrance of a life-time. Additionally, the direction of pattern and placement of the figures creates a movement to what might have been a very static composition.

I chose to combine three sketches, which were the most appropriate to the mood of the drawing, utilizing portions from several angles and expressions so often exemplified by the migration, and a rural life style.



The Reportorial, Pencil, 24" x 30"

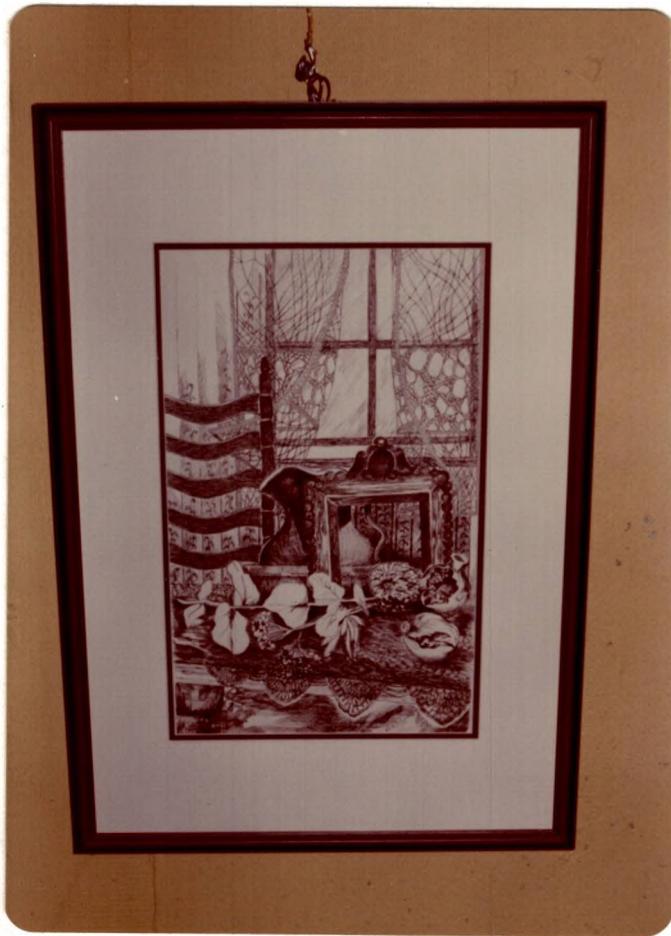
The value changes are progressive, taking into consideration the flow of pattern strokes and the positioning of light and dark areas. The arrangement of values and patterns dominate the composition.



Figure Study With A Cat, Pencil, 28" x 36"

The foreground was rendered quite boldly in some areas. Because of the necessity to retain the abundance of detail in the middle and background, I used a radiograph pen with number 00 pen point.

Included are areas of close detail and texture, while others are in simple outline.



Wither and Fade, Pen and Sepia Ink, 20" x 30"

The course, heavily textured surface rendered in the collage, Lying Beneath, aided in the depiction of texture and debris found in the uncovering of a junk pile. The texture gave an added dimension to the abstract quality I wanted to develop.



Lying Beneath, Mixed Media, 23" x 48"

While trying to develop a photographic rendering, my objective was to gain a visual understanding of the composition, thru the arrangement of photographs. I like to think of hands as one of the most expressive parts of the figure. The hands prove to be of vital significance in the completed visual concept.



A Transitory Record, Mixed Media 30" x 24"

I have included two experimental drawings rendered on acetate. The Vacinity series, adopted from vacant farmsteads owned by my family. The contrast between acetate and the subject matter could be questioned; however, my intention was to develop the illusionary effect of the background. The acetate was beneficial in letting this happen.



Vacinity I. Pen and Ink, 15" x 18"

Conclusion

My thesis has discussed the two areas of artistic expression researched in this artist's statement.

All the experiences encountered along the way became part of a personal reflection. It is something that has evolved and grown. These inherited aims are emotional, symbolic, social and a deliberate disclosure of myself through the visual imagery in my art work.

In developing an opinion, as to what I believe an artist to be, I have concluded that without the use by the artist of particular materials in particular ways - there would be no possibility of exploring objective expression of the artist's personal vision and sensibility. The materials and techniques of art become the artist's mode of expression. The most important ingredient - to express one's honest self.

I have chosen graphic renderings as a means of expressing my psychological dimensions. They are derived from an individual appreciation of remote loneliness. The media is suited to the representation of a static treatment. This allows me to work with accuracy and the delicacy of line and feeling.

In contrast, my paintings reflect the expounding use of acrylic paint and corrugation of canvas. The experimental approach was fascinating and I became totally preoccupied with the constructional attitudes involved in the paintings. Apart from any utility they may have the work was extremely satisfying. Aesthetically, the concept originated from fabric and quilt remnants.

The manipulation from the historical and functional frame of reference to the problem of creating a symbolic design was the only formal organization of the work itself. The viewers only association, stimulated by the original tradition, was to view the reversed relationship and experience the abstract forms that impersonate the models.

I have presented by statement, my work and if I had to state a goal, my aim would be the revivification of our past, a visual experience that should not be discarded.

REFERENCE

Davis, Stuart. "Must An Artist Know Landscape In Order To Paint It?"
American Artist, LIII (September 1976), 12.