

FROM WASTELAND TO PRAXIS:
UNCERTAINTY AND CONTROL IN THE CREATIVE PROCESS

by

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May, 2021

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This document provides written support for the thesis exhibition, *From Wasteland to Praxis: Uncertainty and Control in the Creative Process*. This body of work consists of a collection of prints that represent evidence of the creative process. These art objects are evidence of decisions, alterations, and intentions that reveal my conscious and unconscious progression in achieving goals. Each print was selected and organized for this exhibition while considering how past and present circumstances and the difficulty in communicating ideas has influenced a creative process and the experience of working as an artist. This collection of work validates uncertainty, anxiety and the desire to accept and challenge precision and perfection through the act of printmaking.

I continuously attempt to understand my purpose for making prints and the process in which I make them throughout my studio practice. Endeavoring to understand the creative process is the basis for the examination of the impulses, intuition and inspiration that informs the process from conception of ideas to a finalized composition and ultimately presentation in a gallery. The intent of this research is to reveal the connection between the subconscious and the act of creating a print. The findings of this inquiry validate misconceptions as well as certainties about my creative process.

FROM WASTELAND TO PRAXIS:
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A Report of Creative Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Art and Design East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Fine Art in Arts

by

Peter Borsay

May, 2021

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DEDICATION

To my wife Amy, for everything you bring meaning to in this life;
for all your support; for all of your love

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my Thesis Committee members, Matt Egan, Dr. George Bailey, Scott Eagle, Heather Muise, and Catherine Walker-Bailey, for their understanding, patience and mentorship. Thank you to Bill Fick, Brian Garner and Brian Allen for welcoming me to the world of printmaking and teaching me how to print. Thank you to Adam Berman, Katya Hutchinson, Youngjae Kim, and Claire White for their friendship, advice, and critique. Thank you to Dr. Kate Bukoski, Linda Adele Goodine, Robin Haller, Gerald Weckesser and many of the ECU School of Art and Design faculty for their support and encouragement. Thank you to my wife Amy who helps to make everything possible. Thank you to the rest of my family and especially Dr. Rudolph Almas, my beloved uncle, for believing in me. And lastly, thank you to my mother LtCol Lois Hammonds-Borsay (United States Army) for giving me a lasting love for art; and to my father, the late Reverend Les Borsay, for teaching me compassion and determination.

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Plates photographed by Peter T. Borsay
All Plates are images of thesis work by Peter T. Borsay

INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of objectives and goals through a disciplined creative process is both difficult and personally satisfying. Achieving a well-defined goal leads to a sense of gratification and self-confidence, while an imbalance between challenges and skills leads to uncertainty and anxiety. I have felt incapable of or restricted from having fulfilling experiences when wanting to employ the creative process in the past. This was compounded by the lack of art making and printmaking in the years between completion of the BFA and beginning the MFA (2000 – 2018). For almost 18 years I made little to no artwork and suppressed creative urges in order to focus on a career in the Marine Corps. Creativity and imagination were luxuries that could not be pursued while dedicated to military service. After so much time had passed, creative impulses and inspirations had to be employed through a disciplined approach to creative activity and education.

Renewing a skill that had atrophied required hard work and discipline. There were emotional obstacles caused by self-doubt and uncertainty that had to be overcome in order for the artwork to progress. The anxiety that resulted from inexperience and false assumptions about the creative process were hindrances that needed to be replaced with new knowledge and skills. While these limiting factors seem to prohibit artistic activity, being aware of their existence meant that I could confront and resolve them through a disciplined approach to making art.

Exacting control over the creative process lessened the worry of failure and the burden of negative emotion. A remedy for insecurity is to manage challenges by setting goals and exerting restraint. Another solution is to find a satisfactory psychological state where the desire to create outweighs the anxiety of failure. This is a state of mind where the imagination and the will to act become a synchronous flow of artistic energy, where self-doubt and anxiety are overcome by confidence

and serenity. Once identified, this state of mind can be practiced and cultivated to the extent where it becomes a necessary and functional part of creating new works of art.

My current studio habits and work ethic are a result of military training and operational experience in the United States Marine Corps. The military operates most effectively through strict adherence to orders and discipline, two primary components of military operations and personal conduct laid out in military doctrine. Accuracy and attention to detail are present in everything from a Marine's uniform to conducting combat operations. These actions are essential for the military to function properly, but also direct the personal and social aspects of a military person's private life. The inculcation of principles like discipline and accuracy through experiences in the military have resulted in the pursuit of new methods and techniques of making prints and solving problems.

The following documentation is based on my printmaking experience and exploring how the concepts of control, accuracy, anxiety and uncertainty have played a part in my creative process. Prints are examined to reveal the influences, techniques and choices that were made in the studio practice and to better understand the intentions of creating the prints. Supporting art concepts and methods reveal connections between the printed images and the historical and contemporary printmaking conversation. The intent of the work is to visually communicate my creative process and experience through a series of art objects that validate uncertainty, anxiety and the desire to both accept and challenge precision and perfection. This exploration has also resulted in useful new knowledge that continues to shape my creative process and printmaking.

FOUNDATIONAL IDEAS

Making Sense of Experience and the Creative Process

My military experience with tactical planning is similar to organizing and arranging tools, techniques, and timelines to complete a series or edition of prints. Military planning involves problem solving, calculating specific factors like distance or risk, and predicting possible outcomes. This is the same way that I have approached my creative process in graduate school; have a plan, establish goals and objectives and determine an end-state; what do I want to do, how am I going to do it, and what are the expected results? Through experience, I realize now that these elements of my creative process have manifested themselves in the selected printmaking method and subject matter.

There is a concern that military style discipline may have a negative effect on my creative process by making it too rigid and not allow the freedom of expression that is desired. This is a perception that arose following feedback and critiques of past work and the pursuit of new printmaking methods. However, it is difficult to ignore the need to control the process and organize compositions in a way that is personally satisfying. The inability to achieve objectives and be productive in the studio is the result when situations are ill structured. Being organized and having a well-developed plan allows me to work more effectively and achieve goals. A controlled environment influenced by a plan of action increases my ability to adapt to changes and improvise.

Past experiences help navigate situations in the present and traumatic experiences have an effect on judgment when it comes to making decisions. Many past personal experiences are derived from negative situations rather than positive ones; situations where I was not in control; subjected to suffer manipulation, degradation, and abuse, and left feeling resentful, incapable or incompetent. I reference those situations in my creative process when choosing what to print and the method in which to print it. These decisions validate the need to control the medium and methods throughout the printmaking

experience. Control is exerted through the process of conceptualizing, planning, organizing, and applying techniques. The result of applying these concepts is an exhibition of prints focused on methods of digital printmaking

The implementation of control measures to achieve predictable outcomes has also manifested itself in the visual components of the prints. The printed images contain clearly articulated lines and well-defined colors and shapes organized on a two-dimensional surface and placed in a rectangular frame for presentation in an art gallery. Every aspect of the print is a result of controlling the process and predicting the outcomes of creative activities. However, there also exists a visual component expressing a desire to subvert symmetry and structure. This is evidenced in the chaotic looking lines and shapes that make up the compositions.

A Brief Description of the Creative Process

My creative process is a combination of ideas, impulses, decisions and actions with the intent of achieving goals or a desired end-state through the realization of an art object. It starts with imagining possibilities and answering questions and continues with the application of design elements and adaption of techniques or methods. I combine the design elements of line, shape, color space, and value to create a visual plan for the prints. Each print is a result of the manipulation of these elements and using digital approaches to make the art object.

Two consistent factors of the creative process are making decisions and acting on those decisions. Deciding what to do, when to do it, and how to do it help organize a strategy prior to stepping into the studio. Organizing these factors enables the physical act of making the art object or print. The intent of this act is to make the images and ideas of my imagination real and to express those ideas visually. As new ideas emerge and are incorporated into the act of making prints, the initial design is transformed into a basic composition of lines, shapes and colors. Continuously making decisions and the

physical activity of the creative process help to refine the composition prior to completing the art object and then framing it for presentation.

The visceral and physical parts of the process are on-going. These parts that make up the process should not be mistaken for a procedure which is a step-by-step activity where one step must take place prior to the next step. The creative process is fluid and flexible enough to make changes throughout. Once in the studio, I am constantly adapting to new decisions and influences that affect techniques or content. Decision making and action occur simultaneously resulting in improvisations that maintain the consistency of the activity. The constant adaptation to new situations and ideas make the creative process fluid, flexible, and intuitive.

The deliberate actions and intuitive decisions that are parts of my creative process are shaped by my experiences in the printmaking studio. Learning and utilizing printmaking techniques in the studio expanded the technical and creative possibilities for a print and increased proficiency. The time spent using digital approaches to the discipline of printmaking not only helped me master particular functions but increased the awareness of specific capabilities of the software and printer. Exploiting these capabilities and functions in new ways supported progress towards the established goals and increased confidence with the digital tools.

Defining Printmaking

Printmaking is, in its most basic form, the activity of transferring an image from a matrix¹ to a substrate with the use of ink. The different methods of creating the print (transference) vary widely and printmaking can be connected to other art-making methods like drawing and painting. In *A Survey of Contemporary Printmaking* (Lazymuse Productions. 2012) Karen Kunc defines the print itself as, “[T]he use of a matrix; a transferal intention, physically and figuratively, as an authentic message is carried somewhere else; and a need for Printed-ness...”, and “...crisply, contrast-y graphic forms, with edge

awareness...” My fascination with printmaking rests on the latter part of Kunc’s definition, being that of “Printed-ness” and creating graphic forms.

In many cases, printmaking is also the combination of manual and mechanical processes, like cranking the handle or turning the wheel of a printing press. Printmakers have historically embraced technological advances and exploited the capabilities of chemicals and machinery to further their exploration of print mediums. Examples of this include using acid to etch metal, photosensitive emulsions to expose stencils on a screen, and computer numerical control (CNC) routers to cut wooden blocks. Printing multiples and the wide dissemination of prints is another attribute of printmaking that distinguishes the medium from others. The combination of manual and mechanical elements, and the experimentation with technology to create art objects are things that continue to interest me about printmaking.

Ruth Weisberg is quoted in *Perspectives on Contemporary Printmaking: Critical Writing Since 1986* (Pelzer-Montada. 2018) as writing, “The artist thinks differently when working on a print.” The printed image is often a reverse, or mirrored image of the matrix which means the artist has to consider if their original intent transfers properly from matrix to paper. The artist also has to consider the number of layers that are required to complete the image, the order that layers need to be printed, and how each layer will interact with others. Experience gained from practicing printmaking methods and techniques is essential when the artist must consider how color and tone are transferred to the paper from the matrix through the digital printer. The knowledge of screen-printing methods was critical to successfully using a computer and computer software when planning out the matrix; using it as a tool to select, color, move, and alter graphic elements; and adjusting the scale which changes the quality of lines and shapes; or the way that paper interacts with ink. Refining these computer skills was similar to learning and applying screen-printing techniques.

The matrix has significant importance in printmaking. Traditionally, it is a physical surface that holds and carries ink to be transferred to paper, or a similar substrate. The nature of a matrix has been discussed by Andrzej Bednarczyk's article *The Shape of Graphic Art (im:print. 2010)*. "The material from which the matrix is made is negligible, as long as its structure permits making an impression. Moreover, the matrix does not have to be material; it may be a mathematical or a conceptual structure." For my purposes, the importance doesn't lie in how the matrix is made as much as its function as an "intermediate form" that provides content for the print. This definition of a matrix transcends traditional ideas of printmaking where a physical matrix is required, and in Bednarczyk's words, "... is an idea more encompassing than graphic art."

Describing Digital Printmaking

Using digital technology provides me the greatest sense of controlling the printmaking process. As my work has progressed to include multiple layered compositions, my method of printing the image focused on using a computer, a digital matrix and a digital printer. The computer is a tool the printmaker can use for conceiving an image, and computer software, like Adobe Illustrator, is the virtual starting point for creating the digital matrix. The University of South Florida College of the Arts, School of Art and Art History, printmaking department website defines digital printmaking as, "only an "original print" if it was created by the artist specifically as a print and not a reproduction of an image in another medium." Likewise, digital printmakers use "ink jet printers [with] a sophisticated print head to disperse archival inks in a fine mist on archival paper in order to deliver a consistently toned image."²

The digital print makes use of a pixel matrix as opposed to a physical matrix to create the inked impression of the image onto the substrate. A digital pixel matrix is used to create the state from which a print can be instanced with original intent. Frieder Nake writes about the similarities of the printing plate and pixel matrix in their ability to carry memory. "The pixel matrix is therefore a calculable and

volatile form of mechanical material memory. Congealed in the corresponding algorithm is the mental work, which had required living labour when printing with the old printing plates... In reality, however, it is all just like with the printing plate, only a hundred years later.”³

In their book, Beth Grabowski and Bill Fick consider the generative matrix to be, “... germane to digital processes.”⁴ Sylvie Covey confirms the idea of the digital matrix in her book *Modern Printmaking: A Guide to Traditional and Digital Techniques* (Covey, 2016), writing that “rigid distinctions” of the matrix may no longer apply to new printmaking technologies. When discussing these new technologies, Covey states that, “Such original prints are, in fact, still printed from a matrix, but the definition of matrix has evolved and grown with the new technology.” This supports the existence and functionality of a generative matrix in the digital printmaking process. Similarities exist between computer code and the printing matrix in their ability to carry and translate artist-generated information. Rules are applied to the digital pixel matrix and the plate that involve input, manipulation and output. Color choices, dimensions, and limitations are rules that effect the creation of a plate and a digital pixel matrix, or more concisely, the digital matrix.

Manipulating the digital matrix offers flexibility and efficiencies when adding or deleting visual information. This includes developing the initial sketches and drawings with pencil, pen and paper; transferring the image to a computer (see Figures 1 and 2); using Adobe Illustrator software to create layers, change, add / delete, color, modify; and then printing the image using high-end Epson inkjet printers loaded with archival Epson UltraChrome pigment inks. The pace at which I can make changes with the computer software offers the physical realization of printable compositions within a timeframe that suits the creative process. The ability to expand ideas and structure solutions is enhanced through the manipulation of the digital matrix and decreases the time between print series or projects.

Using the computer to develop and alter the digital matrix offers control over the process, and the more I used it, the more intuitive the process became. This is similar to Master Printer Kenneth Tyler and what he considered as “...marrying graphics to the technology of its time”.⁵ The importance of the printed image meeting my intent and having exceptional quality of line, shape, color, space, and value became more significant than the means in which it was produced. An important part of the intent is to visually validate uncertainty, anxiety and the desire to accept and challenge precision and perfection through the process of digital printmaking. As I examine my creative process, it became clear that creating a print with the assistance of digital tools like computer software and digital printers is evidence of control and accuracy in the creative process.

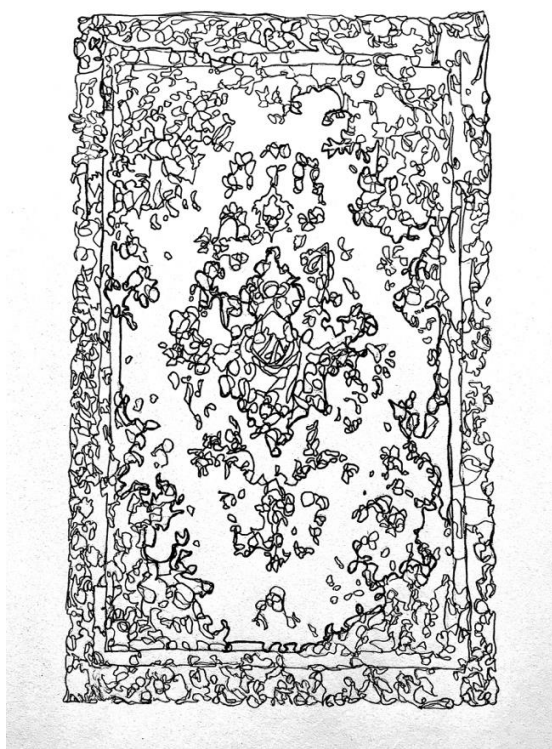


Fig.1 Peter Borsay, Drawing, ink on paper, 2020

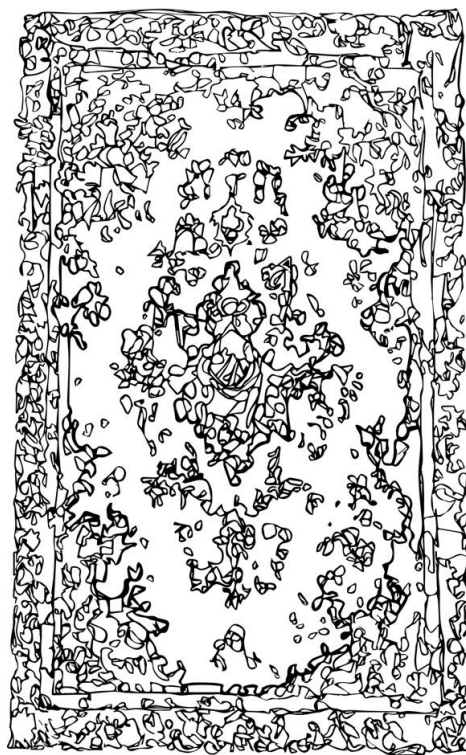


Fig.2 Peter Borsay Drawing converted to digital matrix, 2020

In the process of using digital technology, there were similarities identified between screen-printing and digital methods. Both methods required the creation of layers to build up the composition and the specific digital printers used required hands-on manipulation and detailed attention throughout the printing process to avoid misfeeds, paper mutilations and stoppages. The paper was coated by hand, flattened, and then manually fed through the printer to ensure proper functioning, just as maintaining a flat surface area is also required when screen-printing. Hand coating the paper for digital printing is similar to pulling a print with a screen-printing squeegee as the inkjet coating needed to be applied uniformly over the surface of the paper. Both the digital and screen-printing methods require constant monitoring of the ink application and adjustments to complete each print. Programming issues include verifying the correct drivers, color adjustments, scale, dpi, and print quality had to be manually set each time the printer was used. Refining the digital processes meant printing a large quantity of proofs, color tests, and variety of compositions. This experimentation allowed me to determine how to adjust the transparency levels of specific areas of the composition to create a color blending effect and the application of shadows to alter the spatial quality of specific lines and shapes. The application of transparency settings for different layers effects the hue and value of colored shapes and creates the illusion of depth as the ink layers overlap.

Using digital software and a digital printer assisted me with producing a satisfying image, but couldn't account for unexpected issues. There were a series of 'uncontrollable accidents' that are intentionally left uncorrected in the final prints. Small lines and groups of color that weren't discernable on the smaller computer screen were visible at a greater scale when printed on the paper. The computer screen is 21.5 inches, and the completed prints are between 2 to 5 times larger than the size of the computer screen. The decision to leave these marks may acknowledge that my perception of control is not total, and that overcoming every obstacle may not be feasible to achieve the desired end-state.

The time spent in the studio continuously experimenting with computer software, ink jet printers and a variety of substrates such as paper and clear film is an experience that could not be replicated by watching video demonstrations or reading instruction pamphlets. Hands-on experimentation is a continuous part of my creative process. Experimenting with different papers and color settings further expanded the possibilities of each print and series. Likewise, experimentation with hand-coating papers yielded satisfying results. Most uncoated rag papers have a tendency to soak up the inkjet pigments giving the print a desaturated appearance while coating the paper with an ink jet receptive solution can enhance the colors of the print, making them appear very similar to the colors visible on the computer screen displaying the digital matrix. Applying the solution to specific areas of the paper prior to printing allows the printmaker to combine these color effects and mixing the solution with other media like acrylic ink or extender base can increase the possibilities even further.

Describing the Concepts Embedded in the Creative Process

Anxiety, Uncertainty and Insecurity

The work *From Wasteland to Praxis* has provided an opportunity to reflect on the anxiety and uncertainty that emerges throughout the creative process. There exists a need for self-validation and the acceptance of the work by other artists and printmakers. The objective is to create visually challenging work to somehow connect with the viewer. The full intent of the printed images is to visually communicate my creative process and experience with a series of art objects that validate uncertainty, anxiety and the desire to both accept and challenge precision and perfection.

The uncertainty that arises from unpredictable outcomes brings with it an anxiety about the process itself. The indecision and anxiety that arose was the result of not knowing how to control the medium to get predictable results. One solution to this problem was to focus on the activity of making the print and generate as many prints as possible. I determined that a genuinely disciplined approach to hard work

could lead to answers. A total of 312 physical proofs and prints were made between the *Wasteland* series and the *Praxis* series. Each print was an experiment aimed at determining the degree of control required for a satisfying result. The more prints that were made, the more it became clear that having control of the creative process lessened the feeling of anxiety and uncertainty. While pursuing this investigation I realized that the images I was creating looked uncontrolled and chaotic.



Figure 3. Peter Borsay, Drawing, ink on paper, 2020

In opposition to controlling technical aspects of the process there exists an unconscious desire to create the appearance of unorganized, distorted and disconnected marks. This seemingly chaotic blend of lines, shapes and colors are a reaction to anxiety and uncertainty. This is evident in drawings (see Figure 3) which may be a subconscious reaction to past or present circumstances related to anxiety and uncertainty. The drawing technique is loosely based on the subconscious automatism / automatic

drawing technique utilized by Andre' Masson.⁶ The semi-abstract shapes and non-representational, subconscious mark making derive from art concepts (abstract art and abstract expressionist art) that place form over content. This is further evidenced by the overall appearance of the composition that attempts to distort the pictorial space with imagery that combines layers of color, line and shape.

Connection, Understanding, and Reciprocity

When looking at visual art, I am most intrigued by images that make me think or initiate a visceral reaction. It is a subtle acknowledgement of what could be considered the artist's intent. However, my reaction to another artist's work is rarely influenced by their intent once I understand what it is. Viewers and critics of my prints have perceived my ideas, concepts and images in different ways than I do. I have learned that individual reactions to the visual imagery I produce is subjective and unpredictable. As the artist, I offer the viewer an opportunity to have an experience.

The prints that I have completed are compositions that offer a sense of the complexity and multifariousness encountered when confronting anxiety and uncertainty. The intent of the work is my visual response to feelings of anxiety and uncertainty through a series of controlled actions. Each print validates uncertainty, anxiety, and the desire to both accept and challenge precision and perfection. Exhibiting the prints presents an opportunity for the viewer to occupy a space and moment, to experience the visual complexity of the compositions, and see the way that the colors and shapes interact on the surface of the paper.

There is a sense of accomplishment when an observer of my prints sees the complexity of the images and has a personal, satisfying experience. Likewise, positive feedback may help to validate assumptions about the work. A problem arises with this situation, since the desired positive feedback loop is never achievable when based on external factors. Viewers bring their own emotions, values and understanding of art concepts with them when looking at art objects making it a subjective experience.

The overall sense of accomplishment is less based on external factors than intrinsic and internal conditions. Personal satisfaction and enjoyment of the process are of greater importance than uncontrollable external factors like displaying the finalized print and having viewers see it or have a positive reaction to it. When fully immersed in the process of making art, I become focused on the task and unconsciously mute the inner critic. The mental state where clear goals, progress, feedback, and confidence in one's abilities is achieved is considered a *flow* state.

The idea of full immersion in an enjoyable activity seems to be linked to human creative behavior. The term 'flow' was coined by psychologist and author Mihály Csíkszentmihályi in an effort to define this focused mental state. In his words, flow is "a state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience is so enjoyable that people will continue to do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it".⁷ This mental state of creative activity is a highly complex form of creative behavior and a significant aspect of my creative process, and this awareness has had a profound effect on how I approach the studio practice.

Enjoyment and energized focus are experiences that take place when I am deeply involved in my creative process and is the reason that I continue to make prints. Throughout the process there are unconscious influences that include a general sense of well-being, an emotional state of pleasure, and satisfaction in the activity at hand. These positive influences remain throughout the process, from the initial conception for a print to the presentation of work in a gallery. I am inspired to continue making art because of the way that it makes me feel. What makes this phenomenon significant is the awareness that it happens, and the motivation to continue exploring the creative process.

Control, Trust and Validation

Planning and organization are essential parts of my creative process. This is evidenced by the drawings and sketches produced as a preliminary plan for a finished print; deciding which image to print and how to print it; the number of prints in an edition; and the number of editions in a series. Determining what to do and when to do it is as important as how to do it. Planning and organization are also necessary functions for efficient and effective studio practices.

Discipline and accuracy are also important factors working in the printmaking studio. Discovering the similarities between printmaking and my previous experiences in the military helped me adapt to the new environment of the printmaking studio and overcome challenges that this new environment posed. Printmakers approach activities such as mixing inks, adjusting the pressure of the press, measuring the dimensions of the print and others in a disciplined way, using what they have learned over time to effect present circumstances. Organizing the printmaking environment can also reduce the risk of mistakes, inaccuracy and wasted time.

The continuous activity of making prints confirmed a certain assumption about my creative process: that my confidence increased with the increased ability to manipulate digital processes and manage printer functions which was a result of constant studio work. Likewise, the sense of enjoyment and satisfaction with the process increased as these capabilities became intuitive. A thorough review of notes, critiques and recorded observations about the work clarifies that control and accuracy reduce the amount of anxiety and uncertainty. This awareness led to a belief that disciplined creative habits and the organized process were essential for a sense of flow to occur. The more that these creative habits were exercised and investigated the more they became clear.

INFLUENCES

Early Influences

From an early age I was inspired by the work of comic book artists like Jack Kirby and Geof Darrow. The compositions that these artists made use line, shape, color, space, and value to craft a narrative. I was amazed by the iconic images of superheroes and fantastic environments, and the dynamic way in which they were drawn with bold outlines, sharp angles and soft curves. The comic panels they created were filled with line, shape and color depicting energy, action, and fantastic icons. My instinctual reaction to the images compelled me to imitate these artists and make my own comic drawings. This early inspiration of dynamic graphic images is evident in many of the prints I've created.

Strong family support for a well-rounded education included my exposure to fine art. My interest in visual art was inspired by paintings, drawings and etchings collected and displayed in family homes. At the encouragement of art instructors, the cultivation of drawing and sketching practices became habitual and a means of problem solving for art projects. Making drawings was one of the few things that was interesting enough to pursue at length. Going to museums and looking at art helped further this interest in wanting to create personal art objects. Showing the work to others helped create a connection with the viewer that was otherwise difficult when I tried to express my ideas verbally.

Myth and Literature

T.S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land* (1920) is, among other things, a reflection on myth and the effects of World War I on European culture. Eliot knew that Europe and its people would never be the same after the death and destruction experienced during the war. Likewise, these events caused a profound change in Eliot's writing. The poet's notes about *The Waste Land* reveal its connection to the myth of the Fisher King⁸: a wounded king and his inability to heal himself and the land he was

connected to. After witnessing the destruction in Europe, Eliot linked the mythological kingdom and the actual wasted land that comprised the destroyed and devastated post-war cities, towns and countryside.

It was a surprising revelation that Eliot's poem and the myth of the Fisher King related to my own uncertainties and anxiety which may be a result of conflict and despondency I experienced while in the military. The themes of storytelling and fractured culture, combined with references to stained glass windows, were also inspired by a lecture given by University of Toronto Professor Nick Mount.⁹ The themes of this lecture encouraged me to produce the images that make up the Wasteland series of prints (first and second states). This was the initial realization that I was visually communicating things about my creative process and experience with a series of art objects that validate uncertainty, anxiety and the desire to both accept and challenge precision and perfection.

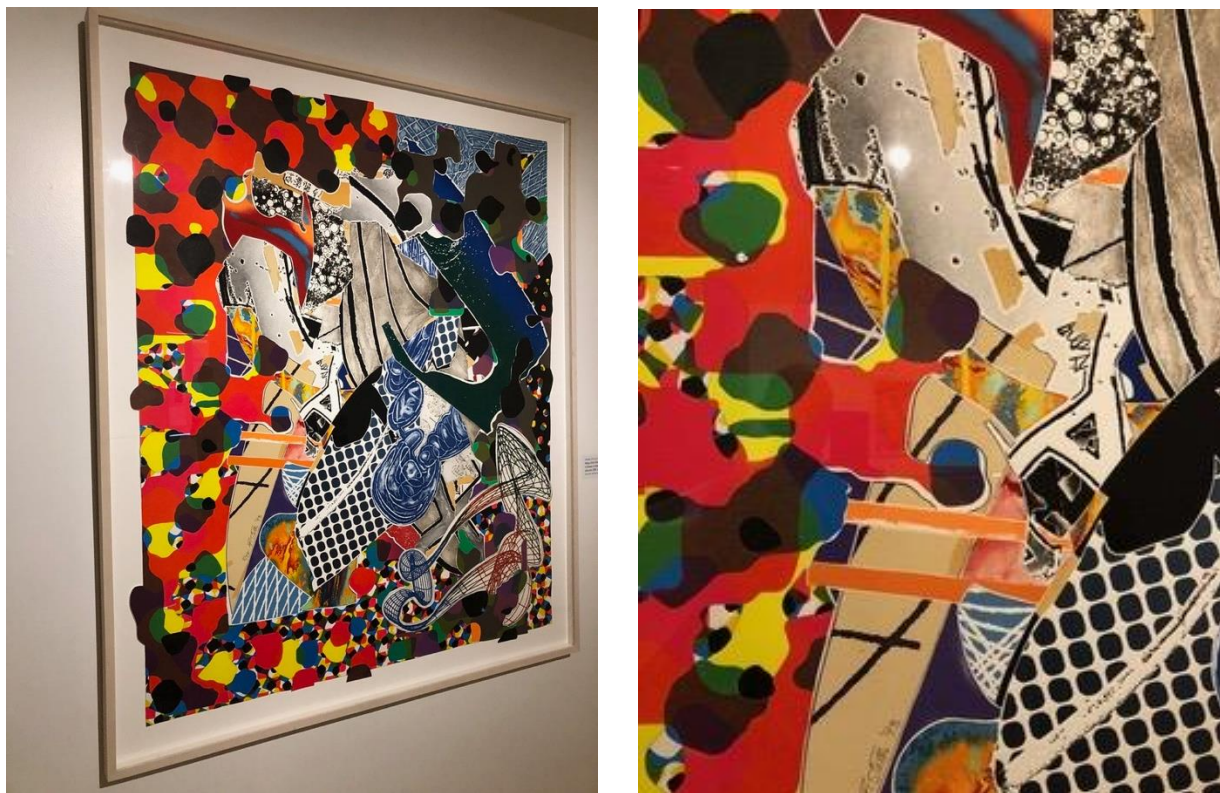
Frank Stella's Prints

Frank Stella's *Moby Dick: Deckle Edges Series* (1993) are prints that remain a significant influence on my work. Stella and his collaborator, master printer Kenneth Tyler, pieced together and planned out the collages that informed their printing matrix. Printing the matrix required detailed planning, a team of assistants, specialized printing equipment and accuracy to produce the series. The lines, shapes, colors and space that Stella manipulates when designing his matrix are elements that I also manipulate when developing matrices. When reading about Stella and Tyler's collaboration on the *Moby Dick: Deckle Edges Series* I was able to identify an intuitive aspect to their process; because of their experience and familiarity with materials Stella and Tyler thought and acted in an instinctual way when working on projects. Both artist and master printer intuitively understood how to develop the initial collage (that would then inform the matrix) and how to construct each element of a print.

Frank Stella and Kenneth Tyler would piece together "preliminary collages" of imagery as a plan for each print when collaborating on Stella's *Moby Dick Deckle Edges series* (1993)¹⁰. The collage

informed the development of a physical matrix and guided color choices, measurements and layers. Stella was also able to, "...explore the fullest expression of the artist – himself – “at the controls” by establishing collage, and navigating its spatial incongruities, as a requisite step in the creation of his prints.”¹¹ Similar to Stella’s intent with the collage, my ‘digital collages’ developed on the computer place me at the controls of my process.

The *Moby Dick: Deckle Edges Series* (see Figures 4 and 5) is Stella’s way of referencing the frustration he felt when explaining abstraction to the general public. Art historian Pat Gilmour says the white whale of Melville’s story represents abstraction’s “inability to tell a story” in Stella’s work.¹² The loss of a relatable figure prohibits the viewer from being able to self-identify within the work of art. However, the Moby-Dick series does tell a story of abstraction overcoming its “inability” by capturing the spirit of first-person narrations. The great white whale in Moby-Dick represents, “... limitations in the quest for human knowledge; escaping visibility as it slides beneath the ocean surface, offering only partial views of its body, this ephemeral creature cannot be accounted for with certainty.”¹³ As Stella explains, “The whale is an image for me but it's an image waiting to be filled up”. And also, it's a number of images, and then there's the business of combining the images.”¹⁴



Figures 4 and 5. Frank Stella (American (b. 1936); Moby Dick Deckle Edges Series: *A Bower in the Arscides* (Axsom 219), edition 8/38, 1993; lithograph, etching, aquatint, relief and collagraph; 58 1/4 x 49 5/8 inches; Collection Jordan D. Schnitzer and the Schnitzer Family Foundation; © Frank Stella. Photographs by Peter Borsay.

Similar to Frank Stella, there is an unmistakable impression that the concepts attributed to my work are difficult to explain. The complexity and interweaving of ideas, inspirations and influences seem to be challenging and inaccessible. This intricacy of concepts and their manifestation in the printed image challenges limitations in my quest for knowledge and experience. By confronting these ideas and embracing this complexity I am also challenging the anxiety and uncertainty that comes with expressing oneself in a public forum. The prints and concepts that form this work expose elements of imperfection and vulnerability in the creative process, however minute or complex. Through the use of bold colors, intricate shapes and transformation of space in the compositions I confront these imperfections and vulnerability in a similar way to the prints that Stella made with Kenneth Tyler.

THE PRINTS: *FROM WASTELAND TO PRAXIS* EXHIBITION

The prints that make up the exhibition *From Wasteland to Praxis; Uncertainty and Control in the Creative Process* are intended to visually depict the concepts of uncertainty, anxiety, precision and control as part of the creative process. Initially, the intent was to visually depict my understanding of myth, literature, and self-analysis in the form of stained-glass motifs, symbols, and representational and non-representational shapes. However, as the work progressed my understanding of the creative process included the need to control the creative process and execute each print with precision. Changing the lines, shapes, colors and transparency of each print composition produced a sense that I was freeing myself of the limiting factors of control and precision because of the way that the compositions looked. If the compositions have a chaotic appearance, then each print must be conveying, or somehow communicating, ideas about anxiety and uncertainty. The varying degrees of control exercised and evident in the process contradicted the impression that I was somehow subverting control and precision and thereby free of their limiting aspects. What I have created are printed art objects that contain evidence and an acknowledgement of the controlled and subjective creative process that intends to express anxiety and uncertainty.

Wasteland Series, Second State

The second state prints of the *Wasteland* series were inspired by the first state prints of the *Wasteland* series. The second state prints mark an awareness of positive transformation in the creative process. Both states of the *Wasteland* series are influenced and inspired by myth and literature. There are metaphorical, poetic and emotional aspects to the images that are both present and yet unresolved. The first state of prints in the *Wasteland* series is described in detail in the Appendix. *Past Impressions* (Plate 1) in the second state of the *Wasteland* series is an alteration of *Impressions of the Past and What Has Come Before* (Plate 14) in the first state. The composition uses layers of opaque and transparent

shapes that overlap and create a sense of depth. Iconic images recede underneath the opaque layers and the bright colors contrast greatly with the dark hues in the foreground. The central image has been pushed behind the fractured framework and obscured by jagged shapes as if contained and inhibited. A sense of mystery is implied in the use of non-representational shapes and lines which adds to the complexity of the composition. The exception is in the placement of the red rabbit icons which are meant to represent imperfection, vulnerability, and fortune as qualities of both the artist and the creative process.

The background imagery of *Past Impressions* is transformed from the previous *Impressions of the Past and What Has Come Before* print so that the stained-glass motif is broken up into layers of colored shapes. The open space created between the colored shapes enhances the sense of disconnected and broken up shapes, providing a sense of anxiety and uncertainty. The appearance of a unifying framework has been subverted and replaced with pieces of a fractured structure that is no longer solid and firm. The composition now suggests a fracturing of unifying elements and breaking up of the preconceived ideas of myth.

Reconciliation (Plate 2) is an alteration of *Healing the Sick and Dying* (Plate 16) from the first state of the *Wasteland* series. Like *Past Impressions* (Plate 1), the arrangement of the stained-glass structure is fractured and fragmented. Featured prominently in the central part of the composition the space suit and wings overlap and simultaneously blend in with the non-representational shapes in the sub-layers. The central image of the protective space suit and wings represent self-preservation and desire for autonomy and independence.

The sheep skeletons and red rabbit shapes are less obscured than other parts of the print, with the open spaces between shapes creating a visual space that again suggests a breaking-up of the composition. The symbols meant to represent myth appear to hover above the fractured background. The

sheep skeletons at the top of the print represent the impermanence of life and accepting the transient state of existence. These images also serve to reflect the indifferent quality of the natural order and humankind's inability to control it. The four red rabbits representing imperfection, vulnerability, and fortune are doubled from those in *Past Impressions* (Plate 1). An idea of 'reconciliation' from the title is not meant to be easily distilled from the combination of images in the print. The act or process of reconciliation is a common theme in myth and often marks a turning point or change in the cycle of events. Understanding and accepting vulnerability, impermanence, and the desire for independence are all part of reconciliation.

Thinking and Dreaming (Plate 3) presents the viewer with a complex combination of colorful layers. As in the previous prints (Plates 1 and 2) the non-representational shapes appear fractured and make up a loose framework for the rest of the composition. A central image of a human face and neck are created by contrasting the color of lines and shapes with multiple layers of line and color. The image behind the face and neck is made up of transparent purple curvilinear lines which increases the contrast between the central image and the background. The eyes of the face contain no apparent pupils, but still seem to look directly out of the composition as if to acknowledge and engage the viewer. The central image is reminiscent of ancient Greek and Roman sculptures of Plato, Aristotle, and Homer and is meant to express both thinking and dreaming.

The colored shapes that make up the composition's framework are twisted to one side as if teetering in the background. The complex framework that holds the composition together represents the conscious elements of the creative process while the curvilinear lines and fragmented non-representational shapes suggest the creative unconscious. Both elements of conscious and unconscious creative activity exist simultaneously in a chaotic environment that disintegrates behind the combination of layers. The two goldfinches in the upper third of the composition now appear to be escaping the

fractured environment instead of occupying a structured space. These figures represent ideas of independence and autonomy similar to the wings contained in *Past Impressions* (Plate1)

In completing the second state of prints in the *Wasteland* series I was able to resolve the issues of 'meaning' and communicating ideas through images that were apparent in the first state. The second state prints better depict images that relate to the ideas of fractured compositions and complex, abstracted icons. Through the use of iconic images and symbols the ideas of conscious and subconscious creative activity are combined with visual expressions of imperfection, vulnerability, and impermanence. Simultaneous to conveying ideas, the prints that make up the *Wasteland* series contain evidence of the control and accuracy implemented in the process to meet a specific end-state and goal.



Plate 1. Peter Borsay, *Past Impressions*, UltraChrome pigment print, 37.5 x 17.5 inches, 2020



Plate 2. Peter Borsay, *Reconciliation*, UltraChrome pigment print, 37.5 x 17.5 inches, 2020



Plate 3. Peter Borsay, *Thinking and Dreaming*, UltraChrome pigment print, 37.5 x 17 inches, 2020

Solutus Series

The use of figurative and representational elements contained in the *Wasteland* series of prints have been discarded in the *Solutus* series. A primary goal for this series was to create something recognizable yet mysterious, and unknown yet familiar. Each composition intends to subvert symmetry while appearing unified and structured. The *Solutus* series is my first visual meditation on Frank Stella's *Moby Dick Deckle Edges* prints. Similar to Frank Stella, my prints confront the picture plane and concept of abstraction while considering the space and two-dimensional flatness of the paper. These compositions include a degree of separation from images that represent actual things in the world. The *Solutus* and *Legitimo* prints (Plates 4 and 5) represent an attempt to move further away from ideas about myth and literature and towards ideas of disorder and questioning the need for structure. While the subject matter intends to subvert organization and symmetry, the line, shape, and color are applied specifically with an awareness of how these elements interact on the picture plane. The process is controlled and specific while the images look chaotic and unrestrained. The images are loose and contain a quality of turbulent instability. Ambiguities and distortions in the case of line and shape overlap and blend together as if in the process of transforming uncertainty into accuracy.

The prints can be seen as a metaphor of regenerating the self. There is a sense that unexplored elements of pattern and shapes are merging in an effort to create a unified whole. Ideas of anxiety and control are combined through layers of warm reddish hues overlapping cooler blues and greens. The complex design isn't being taken apart, but instead seen in the process of coming together. The vibrant, swirling compositions maintain their structure without the use of symbols seen in the earlier series. The *Solutus* series of prints celebrates the personal significance of the creative process; exerting control and restraint; using technique accurately; and being fully immersed in the activity of making the print.

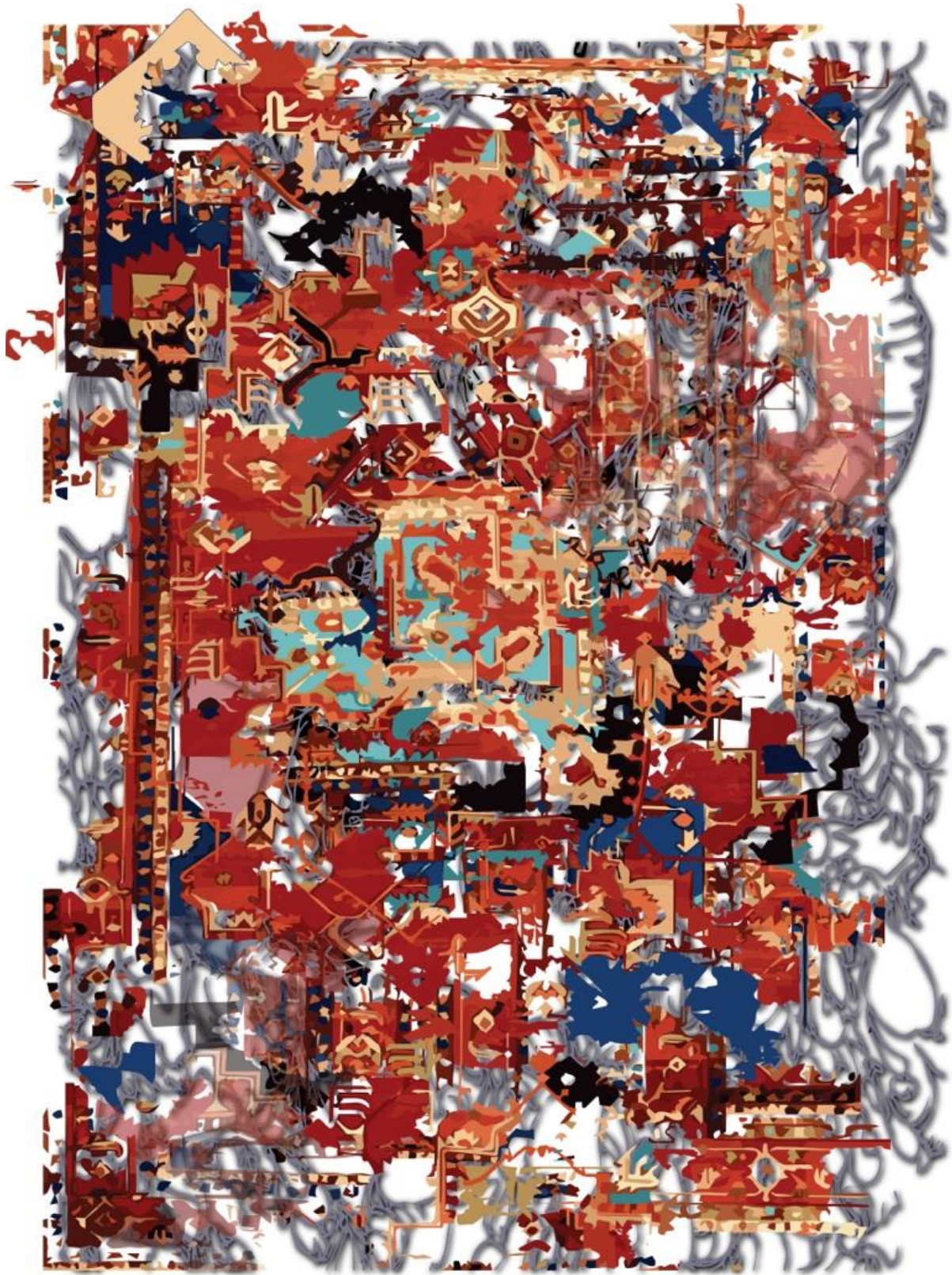


Plate 4. Peter Borsay, *Solutus*, UltraChrome pigment print, 48.75 x 37.5 inches, 2020



Plate 5. Peter Borsay, *Legitimo*, UltraChrome pigment print, 49 x 37.25 inches, 2020

Laetus Series

Laetus, Latin for 'joy', is a series of prints that continues to experiment with spatial considerations and distorted shapes (Plates 6 to 9). Using what I had discovered by the earlier investigation of the *Wasteland* and *Solutus* series, I manipulated the original pen and ink drawings to create complex and abstract compositions. Sharp and distinctive patterns and graphic images were created as drawings and then transferred to the digital matrix. Elements of the drawings were colored, reordered, and scaled in the digital matrix with the intent of printing the matrix to a surface so that it appears concentrated and clear. The varied size of shapes and shadows give the image a sense of depth. In the finalized compositions the curvilinear shapes combined with oversaturated colors appear to advance and recede from the surface of the paper.

This series marks the realization that evidence of *flow* in my creative process was becoming more apparent and recognizable. The creative process started to become spontaneous and automatic through focus and involvement in the activity. Complete involvement in the creative process produced an optimal experience that seems effortless yet requires highly disciplined mental activity and concentration. Being conscious of merging action and awareness assisted in the analysis of the creative process.

Each print in the *Laetus* series uses the same color scheme and similar shapes, reordered, layered, and adjusted to create unique compositions. The swirling complexity of shapes and colors defines the emotive qualities of anxiety and uncertainty while suggesting qualities of control and accuracy by being centered and clearly defined on the paper. The compositions reflect movement and energy as a visual metaphor of the creative process. Although complex, these compositions offer the viewer a sense of simultaneous anxiety and joy that I experience in the creative process.



Plate 6. Peter Borsay, *Nexis*, UltraChrome pigment print, 25.5 x 33.25 inches, 2020



Plate 7. Peter Borsay, *Occulix*, UltraChrome pigment print, 25.5 x 33.25 inches, 2020



Plate 8. Peter Borsay, *Craxis*, UltraChrome pigment print, 25.5 x 33.25 inches, 2020



Plate 9. Peter Borsay, *Vaxius*, UltraChrome pigment print, 25.5 x 33.25 inches, 2020

The *Laetus* series marks the initial use of InkAID inkjet coating solutions to coat the paper prior to printing. This technique assisted with printing colors that looked similar to those developed on the computer screen which also informs the digital matrix. Hand coating the paper introduced a manual element into the process and added subtle, unintentional imperfections which are apparent in the completed prints. When the inkAID is manually applied and then dries it creates a slight texture that is not uniform, uneven, and looks similar to brushstrokes. It was important to retain this element in the prints since it marks a distinction between what I have made, and prints meant as reproduction fine art.

Praxis Series

In the final series of prints I combined the figurative and representational elements from the *Wasteland* series with the abstract elements of the *Laetus* series. The intent for the *Praxis* series is to visually represent ideas of order and chaos by synthesizing imagery that spanned the entirety of my investigation of creative process. Overlapping colors of various opacity appear entwined with shapes that recede and advance from the surface.

These compositions expand on the metaphor of regenerating the self. The ideas of order and chaos can be compared to control, accuracy, anxiety, and uncertainty. Non-representational shapes coincide with representational shapes and symbols that denote chaos and order respectively. The compositions continue the use of layers of warm reds overlapping cooler blues and greens that serve to represent anxiety and uncertainty. The slight hint of pattern emerges from the composition in a gesture of unification. The compositions capture that moment as line, color, and shape are merging and struggling to become one. These images offer an impression of chaos and control existing simultaneously and through continuous conflict reflect the internal struggle of the artist.



Plate 10. Peter Borsay, *Praximul*, UltraChrome pigment print, 54.75 x 42.75 inches, 2020



Plate 11. Peter Borsay, *Praxis Fabulum*, UltraChrome pigment print, 44 x 37 inches, 2021



Plate 12. Peter Borsay, *Praximus Imprimo*, UltraChrome pigment print, 41 x 40.75 inches, 2021

The *Praxis* series marks an increased satisfaction and confidence with techniques. Printed at a larger scale than the previous series, they also represent a culmination of the ideas and inspirations that make up the entire body of work. Using digital tools like the computer and printer along with techniques that offer control and accuracy has now become an intuitive process.

CONCLUSION

Creating the prints *From Wasteland to Praxis* has allowed me to reflect on my creative process and studio practices. The prints in this exhibition were created by combining traditional drawing and computer synthesis techniques, and a digital printmaking method. The impact of using these techniques is not just the resulting body of work, but a better understanding of how to employ these capabilities further. These explorations have revealed new avenues for where my work can progress with both traditional and new technical methods. I now consider this work part of a continuing effort to explore all aspects of my creative process and printmaking practice.

Reflecting on the creative process has furthered my understanding of what it means to be an artist and printmaker. Throughout making the different print series I have acknowledged limitations and confronted insecurities about my creative process. I have revealed that my creative process is about more than creating images. It is a process of self-acceptance and validation of personal experiences that shape my thoughts and actions. Investigating the anxiety and uncertainty that result from a lack of art making experience allowed me to discover how control and accuracy help alleviate these emotional reactions. I see evidence of discipline and determination in these art objects that have as much to do with anxiety and uncertainty as they do control and accuracy.

The challenges and mental stimulation of making a drawing, altering a drawing to create a digital matrix, layering images, and printing have made me a better printmaker. The combination of ideas, exchanges and activities that come about in the process of making a print sustains my interest in the medium regardless of which method I use. Printmaking has also increased the pursuit of new knowledge and skills and allows me to make visually challenging work. Through the medium of print I am best able to communicate my experiences and creative process.

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APPENDIX

Each of the prints from the series titled *Wasteland* are influenced and inspired by myth and literature. Each print is created by layering and combining representational and non-representational shapes, symbols, and motifs. The stained-glass motif acts as a framework for the composition while representational shapes and symbols are placed throughout. Initially, these combinations of line, color, shapes, and symbols served as a means of communicating the idea of myth and fractured culture. The concept intends to offer and inspire the viewer with something mysterious and otherworldly. I envisioned each print to be placed in windows where light would illuminate semi-transparent colored shapes and brighten the overall appearance of the image.

Wasteland Series, First State

The first *Wasteland* series of prints position altered parts of stained-glass design motifs to use as a background with representational shapes and figures in the foreground. I started with sketches, old drawings, computer images and previous print work such as screen-prints and lithographs that I used to create a digital matrix. With the use of Adobe Illustrator software, I created a workable 2D (digital) framework (background) that I could then layer imagery and shapes onto or underneath. This included faces, birds, rabbits, wings, protective suits, hands, skulls and skeletons, each a representation or symbol of my past experiences with anxiety, uncertainty and control. When combining these images into a final composition I had the feeling that I was creating something unique that could represent the storytelling or myth portrayal function of stained-glass windows, developing architectural and design objects that function physically and metaphorically as a means of inspiring the viewer.



Plate 13. Peter Borsay, *Wasteland* series, first state. 2020

In the process of creating each print I multiplied layers of imagery and manipulated and transformed them into well-structured and symmetrical compositions. The dark lines and shapes form borders and sections to order the composition and mimic the lead framework of actual stained-glass windows. Each print is the same or of similar dimensions with the appearance of three sections joined together in a linear construct. Shapes and symbols are aligned with one another creating balance throughout each composition. The use of computer software assisted in the specific placement of pictorial elements within the digital matrix.

Wasteland series of prints, first state

The first print, *Impressions of the Past and What Has Come Before*, (Plate 14) brings together the representation of motifs and images of eastern and western mythology. The universal role that myth plays in human life is suggested by layering symbols and images associated with polytheist and monotheist belief systems. These traditions share a history of storytelling and myth through the use

of images and symbols that in a contemporary, non-theist or religious context to represent mystery and the unknown.

The finished composition uses the symmetry of a faux stained-glass window to create visual harmony and balance similar to that found in the stained-glass windows of western education institutions, libraries and faith-based structures. This suggests that eastern and western mythology may be combined in a structure that unifies the images in a type of matrix that intends to transfer a pictorial message to the viewer's psyche. This faux stained-glass window now presents a visual narrative made up of icons and symbols that may be interpreted subjectively by anyone regardless of cultural background. Through this unity of visual elements, I am presenting an idea that myth may serve to connect different cultures and societies.

The red rabbit icons represent imperfection, vulnerability, and fortune. I consider these icons to be a visual metaphor for how these ideas are present throughout the creative process. Other icons and images are meant to represent positive and negative influences on the process. The icons create a common theme throughout the *Wasteland* series and many appear in multiple prints. These images allude to common symbols found in myth and are intended to connect myth with the prints.

In the second print, *New Traditions from Old Rituals* (Plate 15), I have again used the stained-glass motif and incorporated a representation of hands, skulls, rabbits and a transparent curvilinear design. The hands rendered in primary colors reference comic book art that has influenced how I draw. The hands reach out of the composition, fingers splayed in a gesture as if physically conferring something upon the viewer. Behind the hands is a transparent curvilinear design that takes on a mysterious unknown quality. The composition, like the one before, suggests the mystery of the unknown and the power of an unlimited imagination. The outstretched hands were inspired by the drawings of

comic artist Jack Kirby. In some small way I feel that I am paying homage to the artists and art that inspired me to draw when I was young.



Plate 14. Peter Borsay, *Impressions of the Past and What Has Come Before*, UltraChrome pigment print, 122 x 47 inches, 2020



Plate 15. Peter Borsay, *New Traditions from Old Rituals*, UltraChrome pigment print, 123 x 44.5 inches 2020

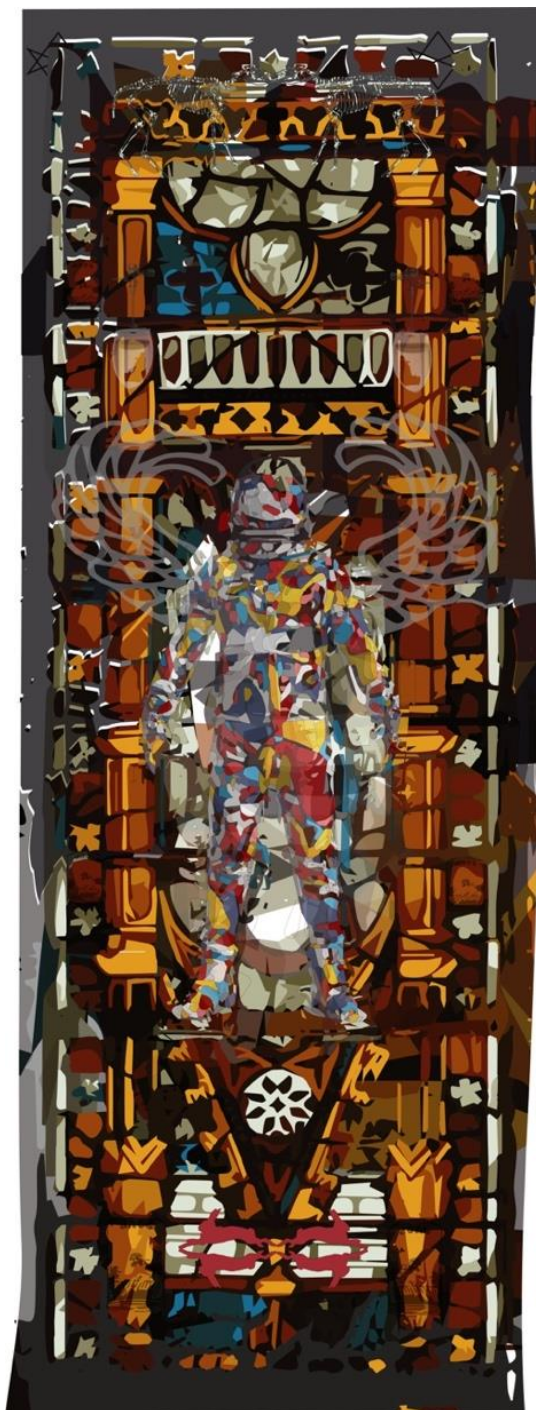


Plate 16. Peter Borsay, *Healing the Sick and Dying*, UltraChrome pigment print, 122 x 45.75 inches, 2020

Healing the Sick and Dying (Plate 16), intends to acknowledge the desire to go beyond human limitations. The central figure in a protective suit references the exploration of the unknown while the wings suggest the idea of transcending barriers and constraints. These concepts are present in the myths and history of both eastern and western origin, which includes the ancient Greek and Egyptian phoenix, the writing of Thomas Paine, and the Analects of Confucius – *Kong-Fuzi*. The transparent quality of the figure and wings are juxtaposed with the opaque background giving them an ethereal quality that intends to represent dreams or the unconscious. At the top of the composition are images of two sheep skeletons. These skeletons represent how submission to institutional norms, such as strict adherence and inflexible mindsets, leads to the atrophy of creativity and limits the imagination.

Possibilities and Future Dreams (Plate 17) depicts a face and neck covered with curvilinear lines and shapes. This is the first instance of what may be described as presenting images of ego or self. Despondent and emotionless, the face stands in stark contrast with the rest of the image. The human features intend to represent the creative conscious while the curvilinear lines and shapes intend to suggest the creative unconscious. The curvilinear lines and shapes engulf the head and neck obscuring some features while highlighting others.

Giving Hope and Compassion (Plate 18) contains transparent, semi-representational and partially abstract iconic shapes that suggest difficulty in seeing things clearly and concealed messages that require lucidity and understanding. The composition is inspired by the idea of undertaking difficult tasks and challenges, which is a common theme in myths. The structure of the faux stained-glass window suggests doorways and thresholds that must be crossed as the mythical hero continues their journey. The ideas of hope and compassion are seemingly indistinguishable through the images in the composition. The layered and obscure line, shape, color space, and value suggest a difficulty with effectively communicating ideas.

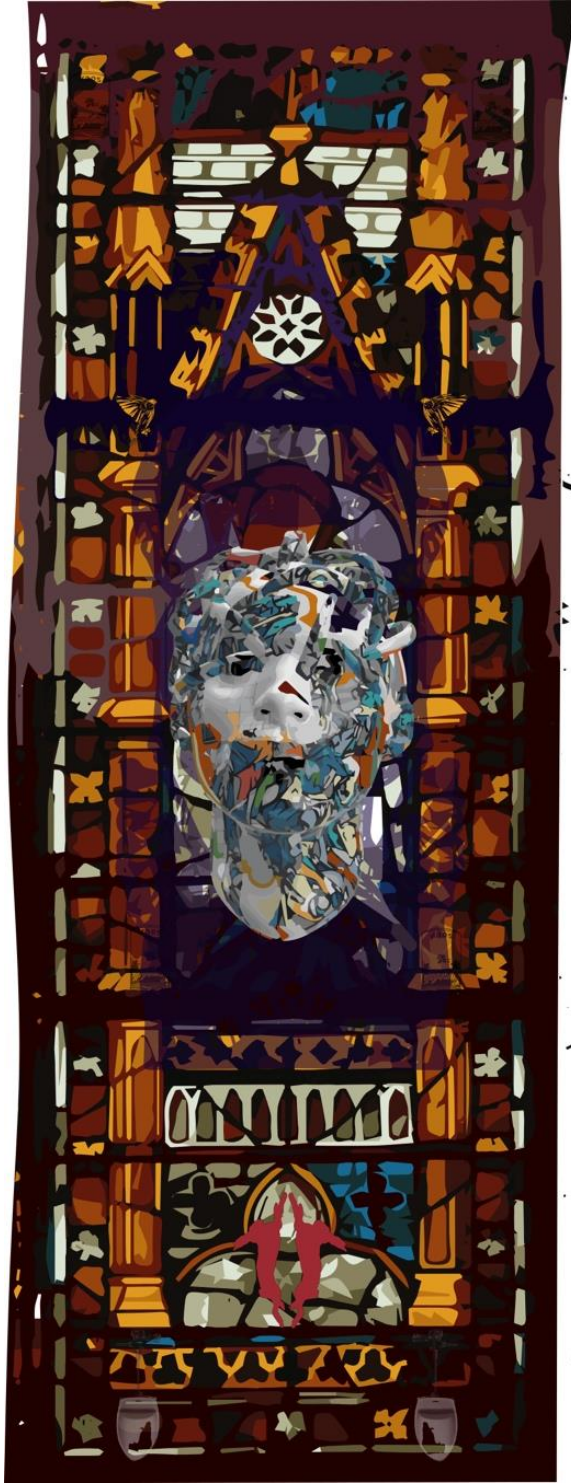


Plate 17. Peter Borsay, *Possibilities and Future Dreams*, UltraChrome pigment print, 122 x 47 inches, 2020



Plate 18. Peter Borsay, *Giving Hope and Compassion*, UltraChrome pigment print, 122 x 46 inches, 2020



Plate 19. Peter Borsay, *The Peace that Passeth Understanding*, UltraChrome pigment print, 123 x 45 inches, 2020

The Peace that Passeth Understanding print (Plate 19) contains two images of a hummingbird in juxtaposition with one opaque and the other transparent, facing opposite directions. The intent is to suggest creative activity and implementation of a creative process and the opposing elements of conscious activity and unconscious creative impulses. The juxtaposed figures imply motion and action and indicate the physical nature of making art. The idea of myth is represented with the transparent figure and facial features at the top and bottom of the composition respectively. The top figure is intended as a symbol of personal enlightenment and transcending feelings of self-doubt and nihilism. The facial features at the bottom of the composition signify the illusion of self and ego-driven desires.

The foyer windows of the Leo Jenkins Fine Art Building (Plate 20) were chosen as a means of displaying all of the prints in the series simultaneously. Exhibiting the prints in this manner imitates stained glass windows and provides the opportunity for the prints to be viewed from two directions: inside and outside the building. Natural daylight illuminates the print from the outside while electrical light illuminates the prints from the interior of the building. These vantage points open up the possibility for viewers to have a visceral reaction to each print and the series as a whole.

When discussing these prints in critiques it became apparent that what I wanted to communicate about myth and my creative process were not effectively translated with the images that made up each composition. It was determined that writing a different description for each print would only serve to alter its intent and could not further the investigation into the themes of myth and creativity. As a way to resolve this issue I decided to change the imagery. What followed was an alteration of each print's compositional elements that break apart the linear structure and stained-glass motifs while preserving some of the symbols and images from the first state of the *Wasteland* print series. In the process of making these changes I discovered new things about the desire to control the digital medium and how

this affected the choice of methods and techniques which led to creating the second state of the *Wasteland* series.



Plate 20. Peter Borsay, *Wasteland* Prints Displayed in Windows of Jenkins Fine Arts Building, 2020

NOTES

- ¹ Matrix: A physical surface that can be manipulated to hold ink, which is then transferred to paper. Most, though not all, matrices are able to print the same image many times. Matrices used in printmaking include blocks of wood, sheets of linoleum, metal plates, sheets of Plexiglass, and slabs of limestone. From the Glossary of Printmaking Terms, International Print Center New York. <https://www.ipcny.org/glossary>
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