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## Love, labor and life: Existence through a neo-surrealist style

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**LOVE, LABOR AND LIFE:  
EXISTENCE THROUGH A NEO-SURREALIST STYLE**

**An Exhibition Paper**

**by**

**MANUEL SAENZ, JR.**

**Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Texas-Pan American  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of**

**MASTER OF FINE ARTS**

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**Major Subject: Art**

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**2003**

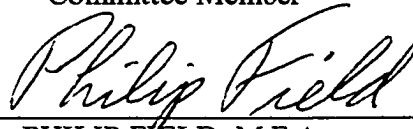
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## ABSTRACT

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The artistic work explained in this paper reflects imaginative ideas, consisting of meticulous work in a variety of media: pen and ink, oil paint, and steel. The creative process used to produce my works is based on both psychological and physical levels. Psychologically, I reflected and depended on dreams from the past to capture images from my sub-consciousness. The importance of industrial symbolism and how it was chosen and strategically placed in the work aided me to deal with my preoccupation with death, a tradition that stems from my Hispanic roots, such as observing the Mexican holiday: Day of the Dead. My intention was to push myself to create much larger scale works than I was accustomed to creating. In the process, I have documented significant, fictional scenes from my childhood visions and dreams that have affected me profoundly in my adulthood. Realizing this, I have felt a sense of urgency to produce my artistic visions. In my work, I strive to share an artistic language that is rich in expression, despite the mysterious qualities of the imagery that assist me in comprehending the mystery of existing and dealing with my mortality. This imagery is autobiographical in nature, and its use in a Surrealistic style becomes my neo-surrealism.

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## CHAPTER I: ORIGINS & INFLUENCES

Looking back at growing up on a ranch in Starr County, where I had no friends of my age, I often daydreamed in make-believe worlds. I recall many times when I stared at the clouds for hours, decoding shapes and forms, attempting to see something that really wasn't there. Great amounts of time were spent staring at the sun in order to produce visual, circular colors in my vision that lingered on for a few minutes after focusing on the intense luminosity. At the time, I had no idea that doing this act was harmful, as my mother often warned me. Nevertheless, I proceeded to seek enchantment in my imagination, being convinced that my empirical reality was not exciting enough to keep me intrigued.

My work as a child didn't show signs of any artistic potential. I couldn't color satisfactorily with crayons, nor was I interested in art. I believe that the basic art media that my parents provided me as a child has affected me greatly as an artist today. For example, when I was a student at the elementary level, I was always envious of my classmates who possessed the 64 pack of Crayola crayons, while I owned the "Jumbo 8", consisting of the basic primary and secondary colors. Today it sounds funny; but at the time it troubled the fledgling artistic spirit I had.

To understand my work, one must become familiar with my childhood hero and greatest influence: my paternal grandfather, Severino S. Sáenz, a self-employed and self-



taught carpenter, mechanic, architect, and teacher. He stepped into my life and made me proud of whom I am, where I was from, what I can think and do, and how I can make tomorrow an even more gratifying day.

My grandfather was certainly not a rich man in terms of money, but if he were to be judged by the friends and family he kept, he was far and away the richest man in the world. His talents and skills were always shared with me, particularly his drafting and carpentry abilities. His collection of tools: hammers, handsaws, screwdrivers, levels, right angles, wrenches, electric circular saws, and electric drills was impressive. As a result, I'm surprised I didn't become a carpenter! I can clearly remember sneaking into his tool shed, in the middle of the blistering hot day, spending countless hours toying with both primitive and sophisticated industrial tools. Although I was forbidden to touch them without adult supervision, he was probably simply trying to protect me from harm. My art imagery is a tribute and memorial to his human spirit.

While growing up and learning about everything, I always questioned everything in an irrational way. For example, I questioned why the letter "A" is pronounced "A" and not "F" or "Z". This, of course, frustrated my teachers; however, it was something that allowed me to experiment with the dissection of logical thinking, like that of a surrealist writer of the 1920's would've attempted.

The Surrealists were artists and writers who developed a movement in literature and the visual arts which remained strong until the mid-1940's. It was based upon revealing the unconscious mind in dream images, the irrational, and the fantastic. Surrealism took two directions: representational and abstract. Salvador Dali's and Rene Magritte's paintings, with their use of impossible combinations of objects depicted in realistic detail, typify representational Surrealism. Joan Miro's paintings, with his use of abstract and fantastic shapes and vaguely defined creatures, are typical of abstract surrealism. (Preble, Preble & Frank 426)

Much like the Surrealist movement that began as a literary movement, I began my interest in Surrealism by writing weird stories that made no sense whatsoever to the rational mind. I suppose I always had a bit of a surrealist spirit, now at this stage in my life I have successfully conveyed my ideas visually to paper and canvas.

It was the surrealist imagery of Dutch graphic artist, M.C. Escher, who actually was in fact never a member of the *Surrealists* that got me interested in continuing my role as an artist in the first place. Escher's pen and ink drawings, etchings, and woodcuts, incorporated clever optical sleight of hand harmonizing with the ideals of the movement. Escher's wood-block prints' persistent popularity certifies to their hold upon the public's imagination. And behind his disconcerting images lie the essential ideas of relativity and the laws of physics (Shlain, 156). From my own observations and conversations with teachers, I have found that Escher is probably more admired by mathematicians and scientists, more so than by artists.

Salvador Dalí's art changed my life. I find it hard to imagine someone less Surrealistically inclined than this Spanish painter. Enraptured by love, mysticism, sexuality, and dreams, he produced a series of realistically drawn, but artfully disordered images. Each contains the artist's self-referential pictorial. Many are like navigational charts to be used to negotiate the treacherous subterranean currents of the subconscious. "The difference between a madman and me, is that I am not mad." (Cevasco, 5)

The body of my work illustrates man's struggle to progress against the elements of time and nature, just as I struggled with the loneliness of being raised in an isolated, spacious area without any peers with whom to spend time. And even though my artwork touches on the idea of the art of living, very few of my works have any human forms

presented. In 1996, when I had an exhibition of my artwork at the Laredo Center for the Arts in Laredo, a Mexican art critic brought to my attention that my paintings lacked a “variety of color.” My rationale was very simple: I was restricted to employing a limited amount of color as a child, and even now, I find myself to be very fearful and cautiously hesitant of placing marks of color on a perfectly beautiful white canvas. The thought of tarnishing something so pure disturbed me and still I didn’t understand how to use color. It was my Achilles heel: my weakness.

However, because of studying some of the greatest graphic artists of all time, such as Rembrandt van Rijn, Albrecht Dürer, Hieronymus Bosch, Pieter Bruegel, and M.C. Escher, I became very comfortable in dealing with the continuum of grays, black, and white that was at my disposal. Drawing with graphite or with India ink became a great friend. I remember checking out some 20 books on famous artists from the James C. Jernigan Library in Kingsville, the day that I became an art major. From that moment, I knew that the only way I was going to be “competitive” or respected as an art major, I was to study the masters. I spent days and nights reading and emulating imagery that I felt was astonishing, because that’s what I wanted to be able to achieve as an artist. With these influences, the autobiographical nature of my work took form. My addition of an autobiographical content separated my work from the Surrealist artists of the past. With this in mind, I refer to this body of work as neo-surrealist.

### Influence of Industry

Feeling content with my drawing abilities, I was anxious to record my own unique ideas and visions. Everyday on my way to and from San Isidro School, we used to drive

by a huge industrial park in La Gloria, Texas, which could be seen for miles. Even at night, from my bedroom window, the incredible amount of lights that tracked along the pipes and engines produced an image of a great metropolis of sorts. It was very fascinating to me. Sometimes, from even five miles away, I could hear the engines roaring as I watched billows of white smoke exit the colossal smoke stacks that stood so high.

### Influence of dreams

By keeping a sketchbook near my bed, I've made it a point to document many dreams. Quickly, after waking from a peculiar dream, I quickly sketched visions found in my subconscious. This way, I'd be able to render and keep a collection of images presented in my psyche to be employed as subject matter for my artwork later. I now identify well with the industrial tools used in my artwork that appear in my thoughts, knowing that they are faint memories of objects that were significant to my relationship with my late grandfather, Severino S. Sáenz, who was a carpenter. I'm not sure how he'd react to my use of the tools that he loved and depended on so much for the sake of his family's livelihood; but, like him, I love and depend on them.

As I continue to exhibit my work, I have grown accustomed to viewers reacting with "I don't get it." It seems to be a normal reaction when it comes to most surrealist artworks. Sometimes I, too, have found it nearly impossible to comprehend my own enigmatic dreams. Creating art in the style of the Surrealists comes naturally to me as I continue to explore this realm of imaginings. The element of irrationality is necessary in surrealist art because we systematically and deliberately attempt to create art that cannot

be understood. (Shlain, 147) When I use my mind's eye to create innovative images, I often filter out "normal" scenes and replace objects with other ordinary objects that would not ordinarily be together. These objects are placed together in the same scene. The work develops into something strange and mysterious. The majority of my work is a documentation of intense dreams that I've experienced. Why I dream what I do may or may not be a subconscious effort. Regardless, these dreams are important in helping me develop my body of work as well as a distinctive style.

### Psychological influences

Sigmund Freud's psychological concepts of unconsciousness and the answers to mysteries behind philosophical images of the mind were seriously considered by André Breton and the Surrealist group. This assembly gathered to proclaim their omnipotence of the unconscious mind, thought to be a higher reality than the conscious mind. (Shlain, 174) Their goal was to make visible the imagery of the unconscious. They were indebted to the shocking irrationality of Dadaism, the fantastic creations of Chagall and Klee, and especially the dream images of De Chirico. They also drew heavily on the new psychology of Sigmund Freud.

The query that is raised about my role as an artist who taps into the bloodstream of surrealism resonates with a common question: why artists would purposely create something that is so difficult to understand? My answer to that is I thoroughly enjoy listening to the many various interpretations the audience may get from the same image. The possibilities as to the perceived meanings of my drawings and paintings may be vast. For me to cause people to think deeply about art makes my art worthwhile. I have

integrated the physical realms of mankind: interiors and exteriors of buildings and the “without a friend in the world” landscape.

### Synthesis of influences

The image of the *hammer* represents the tool used to construct or attach two objects together with the use of nails. The other purpose of it is to symbolize power, religion, government, or GOD, as it has served the role as an idol in my dreams. Although I first drew the *hammer* in 1994, I had abandoned it as a subject in my drawings. But I focused my work on the theme of the *hammer* in order to touch on the idea of industry and civilization and the fundamental nature of my artwork became clearer than ever. The *nails* represent society. They are followers of their icon: the *hammer*. Just like people, the nails are drawn in a variety of shapes and sizes, from tall to short, from thin to fat. They are lively forms that I find out of the ordinary. The role of *saw blades* came into fruition quickly after re-accepting the *hammer* into my world of art. Suddenly, tapping into my psyche of ideas and producing them on paper became as exciting to me as I was when I was the ever-so-curious child, so eager to learn and experience life.

## CHAPTER II: 2D PROCESSES

As an artistic medium pen and ink drawing is more personal and more appropriate to my type of direct expression. Unlike other mediums where easels, kilns, silk-screens, clays, paints, or printing presses are involved, pen and ink materials are small enough to carry in the bare hand. All one needs is ink, a drawing pen, and a surface upon which to work.

I work chiefly with the Rapidograph, a trade name for a technical pen made by Koh-I-Noor and its German parent company, Rotring. The technical pen is a relatively new tool (invented in the 1950's). The Rapidograph technical pen comes in thirteen different point sizes. The most useful pen sizes for me tend to be 4x0, 3x0, #0, and #2. The size of the point affects the precision and texture. I have found that the smaller the pen and the larger the drawing, the more sophisticated the overall effect, such as in The Workaholic's Dilemma (Appendix, Figure 9).

The techniques of pen and ink vary widely according to the effect desired by the artist and the purpose that the drawing will serve, whether it is an end in itself or a preliminary to some other medium or form. Most often, if not always, my pen and ink drawings are an end in themselves, as opposed to drawings that serve as merely sketches to be used for paintings.

The vocabulary of pen and ink that I utilized includes hatching, cross-hatching, scribble, and stippling: Hatching is a method of achieving tone. These techniques

interested me because of their relation to art history, in regards to printmaking: engravings and etchings. The prints of Northern European Renaissance artists, Pieter Bruegel (1525-1569) and Hieronymus Bosch (1450-1516) and prints relating to the Spanish/Flemish tradition greatly influenced my drawings both in technique and imagery. In hatching, a light tone is produced by a series of short, parallel strokes. Crosshatching uses two or more sets of contour or parallel lines that are stroked in different directions and intersect. By varying the size and closeness of the lines, I was able to indicate tones and suggest light and shadow in drawing. A scribble line is a mark that loops and twists about in a loose, whimsical manner. It may move in any direction and be as long or as short as desired. Scribble lines are popular for making quick field sketches because they produce images quickly and are loose enough to allow some room for correction.

Finally, stippling is a branch of French Impressionism in which the principle optical mixture, or broken color, was carried to the extreme of applying colors in tiny dots of small, isolated strokes. Forms are visible in a pointillist painting only from a distance, when the viewer's eye blends the color to create visual masses and outlines. In pen and ink work, a dot is produced by holding the pen nib perpendicular to the paper, touching the pen to the surface without raising or dragging. The result is a black mark. Texturing an area with stippling will give it a dusty, gritty, or velvety appearance. Dots are useful for depicting subjects like the clouds found in "The Eclipsed Mind" (Appendix, Figure 17).

Stippling is both the most tedious and at the same time forgiving technique. It takes a while to shade an area, dot by dot. On the other hand, a few dots out of place are seldom noticed.



## Layout

I always begin my drawing by creating a one-inch border with a ruler or yardstick along the edge of the paper. Using a #2 pencil the subject is lightly drawn resulting in a light framework on which to build a more accurate drawing. Next, corrections are made and lines that are no longer needed are erased. To prevent embossing lines into the surface of the paper, I cannot stress enough how important it is to keep all pencil work very light, using very little pressure. Once this is done, there is a visual guide for the use of ink.

Once satisfied with the overall appearance of the basic drawing, I lightly pencil in suggested highlights and shadows. Next, ink is stroked. Hatch, crosshatch, stipple, or scribble line techniques make the drawing. Finally, once all ink work has been completed, sometimes taking 40 to 80 man-hours, all pencil marks are erased and the piece is signed.

## Value

In drawing, value is the degree of lightness on a scale of grays running from black to white. Artists working in India ink work with a range of values. In drawing, white is achieved by the absence of black marks on a white surface. When white areas are intermixed with black marks, gray values are formed. As more marks are added the degree of darkness in the gray value will be greater. Black is achieved when the marks are so close together that the white surface no longer shows. Ordinarily, I incorporate the use of a nine-point value scale as a visual guide for light and dark areas. Working with middle grays can be dangerous. The extreme values, the darkest darks and lightest lights,

are easily identified and developed. It is the middle grays that are easily lost and the most likely to infringe on the precious white spaces. Careful thought in applying pen strokes is imperative and essential.

Starting in the darkest shapes and saving the white spaces is fundamental. Negative white shapes should have a purpose. Quitting inking when I'm confused, tired, or tentative is the right thing to do. When I work at my drafting table, I stand up a lot, stepping back from the work in order to see its visual impact. With crosshatching in particular, tonal patterns are hard to see close up. Close to the work, I am tempted to concentrate primarily on the pen stroke rather than on the value it creates.

I evaluate my work by viewing it with different lighting. Sometimes looking at work in low light tends to simulate contrast and deep values. Often, when I get my art under strong room light, I realize I haven't yet attained the values I've sought.

### Painting

When painting, I approached the canvas by attempting to build the picture, rather than paint it. I believe that a good painting is not simply paint applied to a surface. Even the most casual sketch by an accomplished artist is seen as growing out of the paper or canvas, just as an architect or engineer builds his work from the foundation up. For my paintings, I usually referred to my sketches or writings in my journals for ideas.

Prior to 1998, I painted with acrylics by applying desired colors directly to the white canvas, using the Alla Prima method. It is a simple technique, but I found that this approach limited me as a painter. Then I began utilizing under-painting methods in oil. I'd begin my paintings in a neutral gray tone, quickly and thinly and block in my

composition, using black, white, and gray tones, to get the desired value relationships between my objects and their background. Once dry, I'd refer to my preliminary sketches executed with colored pencils for the basic colors and their warm, cool, and neutral variations. The color values had already been established on the canvas with the under-painting.

I worked in variations of thick and thin paint, using thick paint for masses or solids that tended to come forward, and thin paint for shadows or areas of deep space. Later, I applied thin coats of paint over the thicker painted areas for striking results, such as in "The Fly-South Holiday" (Appendix, Figure 4) and "O.B.E" (Appendix, Figure 12). For these paintings, I chose larger canvases because they provided me more liberty to communicate my ideas with greater impact.

### CHAPTER III: ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF WORK

“The Fooled Apple Orchardist.” In this image, I illustrated a scene from a dream that I had regarding an experience with my late best friend, Joseph G. López, in which we played a wonderful trick on a rancher who was overly protective of his one apple tree (Appendix, Figure 1). Because of his devotion to this tree, I portrayed the tree as being half tree and half man. The image of the well-dressed gentleman in a suit tremendously conflicts with the idea of the attire worn for ranching or farming. This painting shows the conclusion of a dream in which Joseph and I raised ladders up to the tall branches of the apple tree, and rather than detaching the apples from the branches, we bit off chunks of each apple and spit them into pails. The joke then would successfully take place when we’d see the reaction of the apple orchardist in the morning discovering the violation of his precious tree.

In the painting, “The Abandoned Conversation.” the scoured interior of my grandparents’ forlorn home after they passed away is portrayed (Appendix, Figure 2). In this setting, a lone goblet of wine rests on the surface of what appears to be a windowsill; however, the hanging wire presents the idea that the window is actually part of a painting hanging on the wall. This raises questions as to what the role of the window is. It’s a double-image playing the function of both window and painting in order to puzzle the viewer, in order to make the viewer think. The tint of the wall is a likeness to the actual color of the interior of my grandparents’ home. The wooden floor also is accurate to

their flooring. This painting is very important to me, because it symbolizes the day that both of my grandparents would no longer be able to consider the house they loved so dear, the residence where they'd always lived, home. One Thanksgiving, our family decided to stroll my grandfather in his wheelchair to see the house he'd built and lived in for more than 50 years. My father drove to Mission, Texas, to bring my grandfather to Santa Ana, to return home for a few hours to visit, after his living in the nursing home for approximately a year. Unfortunately, my grandmother, Eloisa G. Sáenz, was unable to visit. She was a resident in the same nursing home and was immobile after breaking her hip a few years earlier. Within seconds of entering the house, my grandfather broke down in painful emotional tears that instantly affected our emotional state as a family. It was one of the saddest moments of my life. It was also the last time my grandfather would ever be home again. In essence, "The Abandoned Conversation," symbolized the unfinished and many discussions that we would've shared.

The painting "The Cultivation of the Old Laborers" demonstrated metamorphoses (Appendix, Figure 3). The mystifying landscape is spacious in its panoramic setting. A foreman is supervising the performance of his workers as they tend to bizarre trees, which alter into human hands. The title of the painting was metaphorical as to what the human hand symbolized. It was the labor of the worker. Growing up in San Isidro, I was constantly reminded of how lucky we were to not have to work as hard as the generations of my family before me who had no choice but to pick cotton in the fields, in the middle of the day, under the intense heat of sunlight.

In a painting produced in the summer of 2000 entitled "The Fly-South Holiday," (Appendix, Figure 4) the image of the tree/hand further connected the observer with the

tale of "The Cultivation of the Old Laborers" (Appendix, Figure 3). This time a weathered Mexican landscape was presented in the intense warm colors of the summer season. It is the location for which a group of Canadian and American birds have decided to call a temporary home, much like Winter Texans do in the Rio Grande Valley during the cold winter months, in order to avoid the unbearably cold weather further north. I drew dozens of sketches of my left hand for this work. I have always been fascinated by the expressive possibilities of the human body and found myself to be the most readily available model. When I study myself carefully, I feel as though I've created a visual statement about how it feels to exist.

"The Entry and Exit of 24 Hours" portrays a door that symbolized entering and exiting, beginning and ending (Appendix, Figure 5). In this work, I removed an antique door from my grandparents' home. It became a sculpture in which the viewer would walk around the door rather than actually using it normally. It's an irrational idea. One side of it depicted a day scene in which I painted the sky and sun with warm colors. I also painted an enlarged doorknob and keyhole using burnt umbers and siennas. The other side depicted a night scene in which I used ultramarine blue and pthalo blue. Both sides have oversized doorknobs and keyholes, which are identical to the rustic doorknob plate of the actual door. Completed, I was able to express my visual idea of the cycle of a complete day. The critical part of producing this sculpture was to create a base for the door in which it would give the impression that it was simply balancing itself on top of the wooden staircase base. To do this, three holes were drilled underneath the door and on to the top of the base. Three steel rods slipped into the drilled holes in the door and then they slide directly into the holes in the base.

The pen and ink drawing "The Navigator's Quest for Truth" was an image from my memory of one of the strangest dreams I ever had (Appendix, Figure 6). I portrayed myself as the navigator in the small boat, sailing along, searching for something that can't be found, leaving an industrial world behind. In this drawing, a curious sea serpent eventually discovered my presence in the water. However, as startling as the this sea creature should have been, I was completely unaware of the creature and things right in front of me due to my always trying to see deep into the distance or the future. The sea creature represented the idea that we are not alone, even though at times we perceive ourselves to be. Most would believe that the sea creature is a threat; however, I disagree. Objects associated with industry replaced the normal objects that should have been there. Oars were substituted with nails. The sail of the boat is a hammer. A mountain in the distance assumed the shape of an exposed circular saw blade. One of the interesting situations in this work is the illusion that nails have been hammered onto the surface of the sky; this contradicts reality. The angles of each nail are reproduced as they diminished in size within the drawings in the smaller frames, which showed a sequence from the smallest to the largest, from the past to the present.

"The Industrial Season" is a pen and ink drawing in which I captured the spirit of one of the scenes from a dream I had depicting engineering and manufacturing in the industrial sense (Appendix, Figure 7). In the dream, I vividly recalled a large battleship made of steel, placed in a murky sea in which nails and saw blades are protruding from beneath the surface of the water. To add to the peculiar-ness of the battleship, an industrial refinery, which looked much like a standard building, sat on top. Once again,

just like in *The Navigator's Quest for Truth* (Appendix, Figure 6), nails were hammered onto the surface of the sky.

"A Stroll Down Amnesia Lane" was the first drawing I did in which I used scribble line (Appendix, Figure 8). This drawing reminded me of the walks I used to share in the afternoons with my mother and father as a child. To enhance the effect of this drawing, the shapes of all the palm trees were warped; they now tend to be pulled in to the center of the picture. The title *A Stroll Down Amnesia Lane* was an image from my past that resurfaced while experimenting with a hypnotic type of mental exercise. I remembered an evening, when I was a child during which I was walking with my mother, Ana Maria R. Sáenz; I didn't want to let go of her hand because I was afraid of losing her. This drawing symbolizes my need for her life.

During the production of "The Workaholic's Dilemma," (Appendix, Figure 9) I was devoting all my time to drawing. My wife made a comment that actually triggered me to create a work that would reflect our lives at the time. She said, "You work so much, you may as well be dead!" With that in mind, I envisioned myself in the form of death, sitting at my drafting table. I depicted the image of myself in skeletal form, referring to the situation I was dealing with at the time: selfishly devoting all my time to my art. On the wall was placed a nude-profile illustration of my wife, hunched in a melancholy state. The saw blades in the drawing symbolized the dangers of neglecting my relationship with my wife and my art. Fortunately, my wife is more forgiving than my art is.

The drawing, "The Progress and Decline of Civilization, Simultaneously," (Appendix, Figure 10) became the second part of the "self-portrayal as death" series.



This work allowed me to investigate the behaviors and results of society. This work deals with the balance of opposites. The image of the *hammer* is employed and serves as the role of an idol, because in my imaginary industrial world, the nails' represent the people. Because of the *hammer*'s authoritative character, it rules over the nails. It is being hoisted to an upright position by the nails. At the bottom left, I portrayed myself as a skeleton, as a witness to this uncanny reality. The skeleton, although usually symbolizing death, represents mankind in this work. We are all skeletons underneath the skin and muscles. Skin and muscles eventually deteriorate; however, our skeleton remains. Skin and muscles denote individuality while skeletons are universal. The scoured landscape is at the mercy of nature and man. With age, things deteriorate. With time, change is necessary. With that in mind, our world is always creating and destroying, living and dying. The cycle continues.

The third and final piece of the series, "The Voiceless Man's Memories of Merely Existing," touched on the notion of man altering nature, and industry altering man and nature (Appendix, Figure 11). In this drawing, I represented myself in the image of the skeleton who reflects on a past-life in which things that should've been said and done were avoided. As a result, because of the silence practiced while living, I refer to the skeleton as voiceless. Furthermore, because more of a difference should've been made while living, the phrase "merely existing" is used because I believe that too many people who are given the gift of life fail to take advantage of the opportunity and "merely exist" without purpose. The trapped people in the hourglasses illustrated the point that many people are simply going through the motions and waiting for their time to come, waiting for their sands in their hourglasses to reach the bottom. The crown-of-birds over the head

of the skull referred to the image of Jesus Christ wearing a crown-of-thorns. The birds in this drawing symbolized hope, in that they are progressive, always flying forward, never backward. Finally, the cracked gears and pipes at the bottom demonstrated that the presence of industry had a profound effect on my life, through child and adulthood.

The painting "O.B.E. : The Vision of Dreaming," (Appendix, Figure 12) portrayed another aspect of my unique relationship with my wife, Eliza. The painting was very different from most of my industrial influenced drawings. Here, my wife was shown in a nude pose, sitting upright on our bed, focusing on the natural light that is being illuminated off the wall. O.B.E. stands for "Out of Body Experience." It's a state of mind in which one can spiritually leave one's physical body and see things from a spiritual sense. My wife was quite interested in this phenomenon some years before I actually painted this image. After several attempts and failures, she gave up on the concept of O.B.E.

The steel sculpture series was a change from the traditional two-dimensional media with which I was comfortable. This work is a contemporary example of distortion of scale such as was used by Claes Oldenburg. With this sculpture, an attempt is made to challenge cultural assumptions as did the Dadaists, Neo-Dadaists, and Pop Artists. I began with the skeletal steel sculpture in the image of the *hammer*, standing at over twelve feet in height. The idea of creating an industrial garden consisting of a large hammer overlooking nails and saw-blades pushed me to attempt to bring my drawings and paintings that depicted an industrial theme to 3-D life. I was provided a framer's hammer as a model to follow in order to produce this grand sculpture. Because of the

role as a foreseer of all other industrial objects in my drawings, I titled this sculpture, "The Idol." (Appendix, Figure 13)

Three steel saw blades, "The Consequences of Risk-Taking." (Appendix, Figure 14) standing on bases to accompany "The Idol" were produced. As in my drawings and paintings in which I portrayed the image of saw-blades, I employed them to symbolize the presence of danger, because of their sharpness. In my youth, before cutting wood with our electric saws, both my father and grandfather always reminded of accidents involving people close to our family who had unfortunately lost fingers by being careless with an electric circular saw. Ultimately, I grew to respect the electric saw in regards to the risks involved. Tools are not toys, plain and simple, as my grandfather and father used to say.

The painting, "The Artist's Studio at 3 A.M.," (Appendix, Figure 15) illustrated the use of metamorphoses and/or juxtaposition in that the legs of my studio chair are live fish. A spin-off from "The Workaholic's Dilemma," (Appendix, Figure 9) this painting was similar in composition. In this painting, a blue female nude is rising from the ground. A tiny vine begins to come out of the work and actually begins a pattern of dangling vines throughout the work. Saw-blades, buildings, and nails are on the surface of the drafting table. An arched hole at the bottom left of the painting shows more vines coming out from a world behind the normal one. This image has had many different meanings throughout my works.

The pen and ink drawing, "The Great Flood of Elsewhere," focused on the idea of a plumbing problem gone wrong, in which rescue efforts with airships is necessary (Appendix, Figure 16). In the top-center stands a tub, with a few nails looking down at what has become the great flood of their world. This drawing expanded on the industrial

concepts used in many of my previous artwork. Half of the drawing is sky; the other half is water. Depicting the sea in stormy conditions posed a challenge. By being loose with my pen, I used quick oblique, parallel, curved strokes to create waves. The ominous sky was executed in hatching and cross hatching. This drawing illustrated my concept of the land of elsewhere, the imaginary place where the hammer, nails, saw-blades, and other industrial objects live together in harmony. Elsewhere was a place I created during my childhood, when I played with a hammer, nails, and saw-blades in the dirt. I would role-play with these objects and create situations.

Finally, in the drawing, "The Eclipsed Mind," I created a self-portrait, which depicts a scene of three worlds divided: the night, the day, and the imaginary (Appendix, Figure 17). At the bottom is one world in which a mountain region sits behind the self-portrait. In the middle, a saw-blade floats in the center. Two clouds, on the right and left of it, show the contrast of the texture of the metal blades and the soft gaseous clouds. The top third of the work depicts a night sky, in which an eclipse is occurring over the buildings illustrated in two-point perspective. These three worlds represent my reality. At night I sleep and dream. During the day, I'm awake, but I envision irrational ideas. The third world is where my reality and dreams assemble, and through my art become representations of my existence.

## CONCLUSION

The reaction to my life offered by the drawings, paintings, and sculptures I created for the exhibition: "Love, Labor, and Life: Existence Through a Neo-Surrealist Style," depicts a rejection of the normal world and embraced one that thrived on the peculiar. Neo-Surrealist distortion marks a break with the usual and is, in result, a plea for the surrender of all prejudgments limiting the purpose and meaning of things around me in a stirring world. The plea is devised in terms as varied as the industrial objects such as the hammer, nails, and saw blades I incorporated into my work – objects that can be taken by the hand but do not yield to the needs of a rationally ordered universe, as we know it. Such industrial objects represent my goal to make fine art volatile. This perceptual explosion, which it occasions, will clear away the old world and prepare the new. So distortion, transformation, metamorphoses were methods I employed to actively weaken the demands of the rational and to introduce the potentialities of the irrational.

Furthermore, in all of my work, strength of mind was essential in order to produce worthy results. My work is absolutely driven by a determined and ambitious spirit. However, sleep seems to give my spirit its power and freshness. In dreams I am able to visualize surrealist environments to be employed for my work.

The greater part of my work has aided me in coming to terms with my childhood, one that I wouldn't trade for the world. Despite some of the issues that I dealt with as an adolescent, I'm certain that I wouldn't be who I am today if it were not for my

determination to create something positive with the gifts bestowed upon me. Living in my natural environment distorted my imagination and allowed me to perceive a super reality in my dreams. All things considered, these conditions have proven ideal for my work.

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## APPENDIX



Figure 1 – “The Fooled Apple Orchardist”



Figure 2 – “The Abandoned Conversation”



Figure 3 – “The Cultivation of the Old Laborers”



Figure 4 – “The Fly-South Holiday”



Figure 5 – Front and back of “The Entry and Exit of 24 Hours”

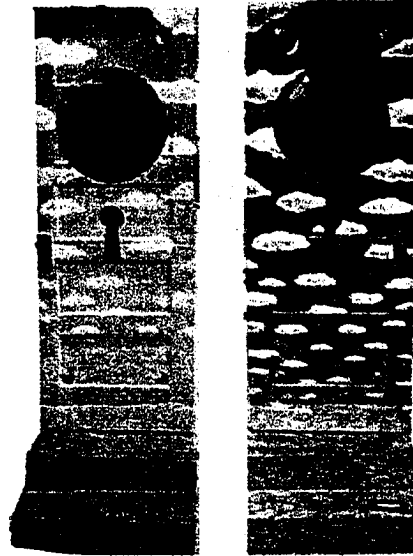


Figure 6 – “The Navigator’s Quest for Truth”

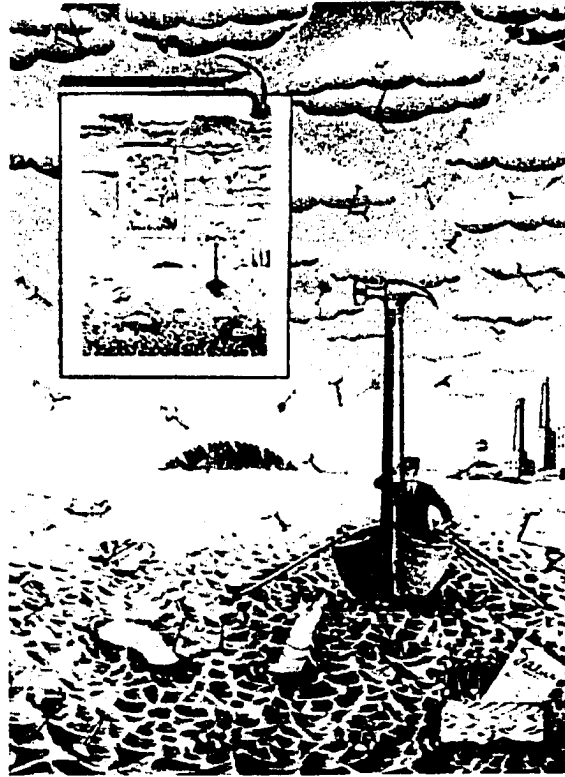


Figure 7 – “The Industrial Season”

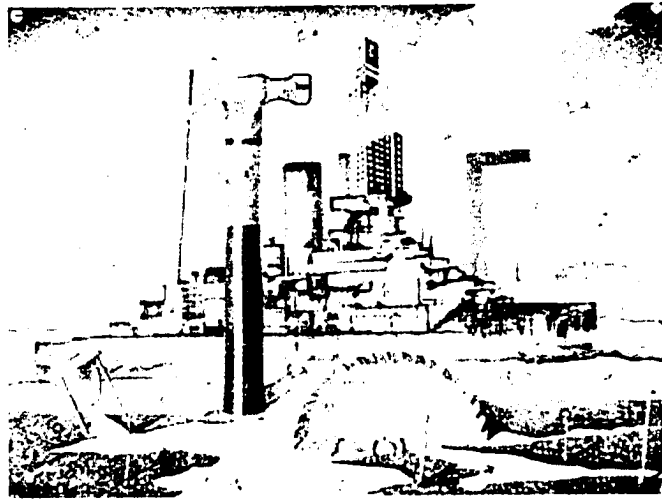


Figure 8 – “A Stroll down Amnesia Lane”





Figure 9 – “The Workaholic’s Dilemma”

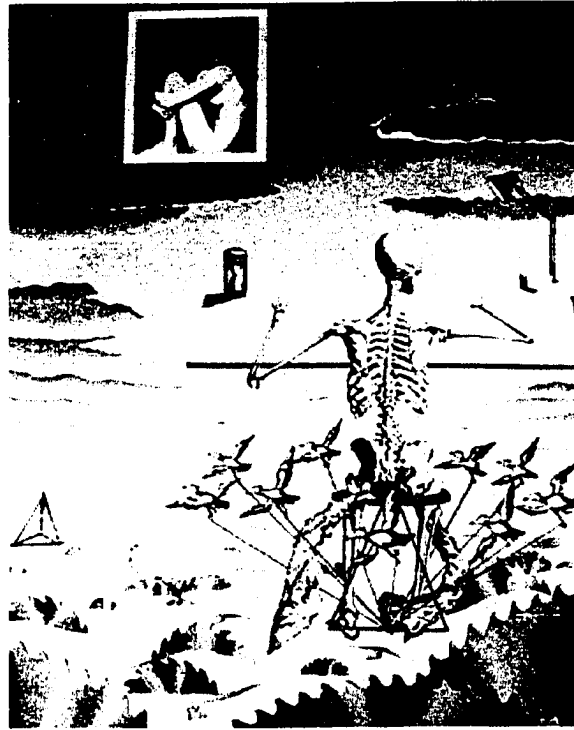


Figure 10 – “The Decline and Progress of Civilization Simultaneously”



Figure 11 – “The Voiceless Man’s Memories of Merely Existing”



Figure 12 – “O.B.E.” (The Vision of Dreaming)



Figure 13 – Detail from “The Idol (Steel Hammer)”

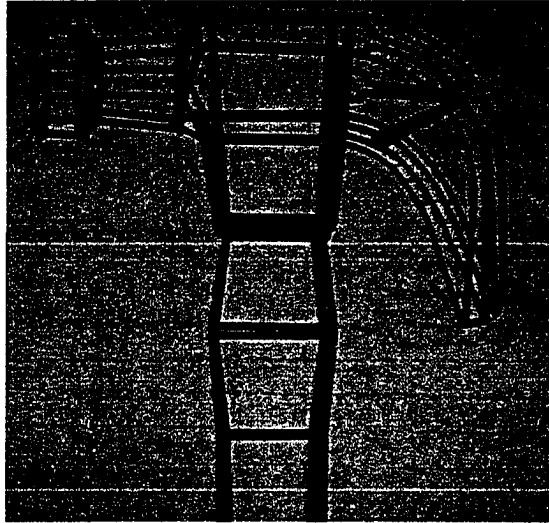


Figure 14 – “The Consequences of Risk Taking” (Steel Saw Blades)

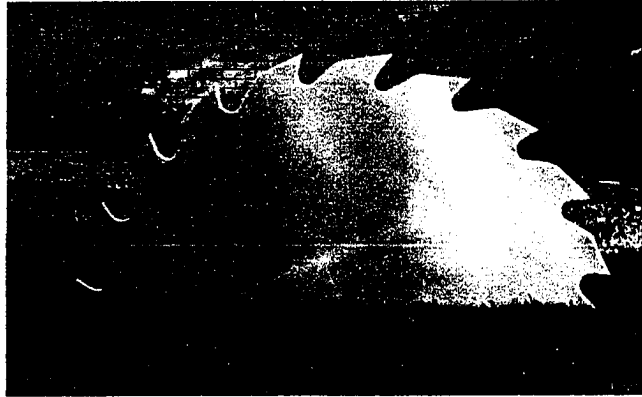


Figure 15 – “The Artist’s Studio at 3 A.M.”

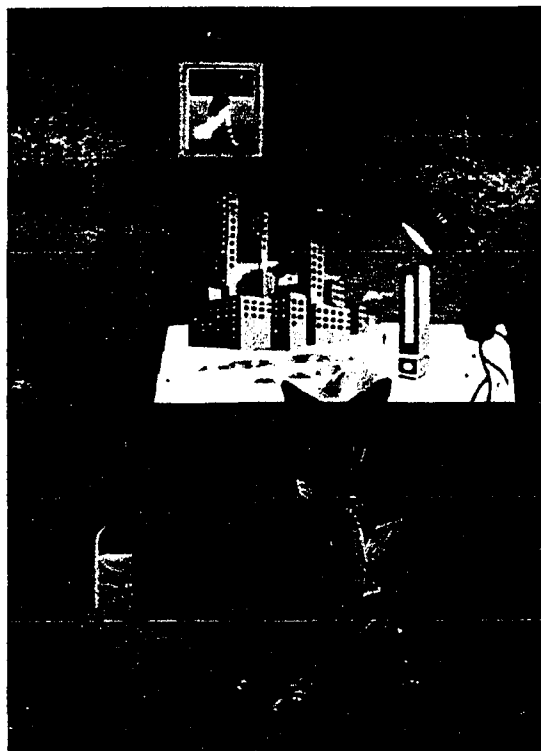


Figure 16 – “The Great Flood of Elsewhere”

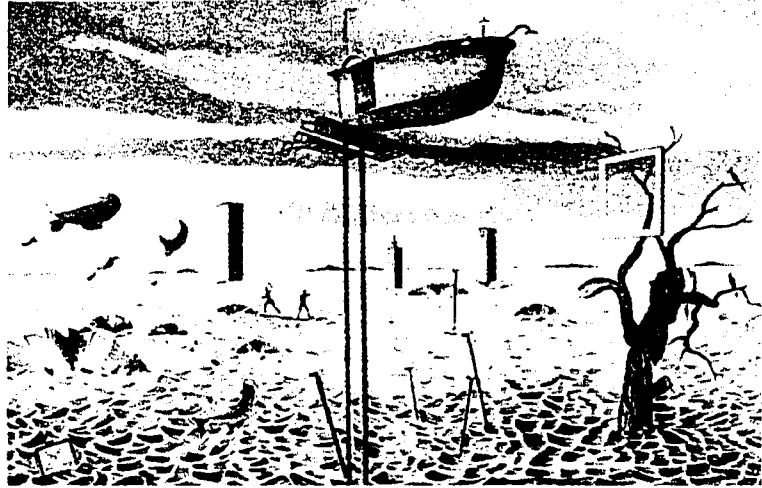
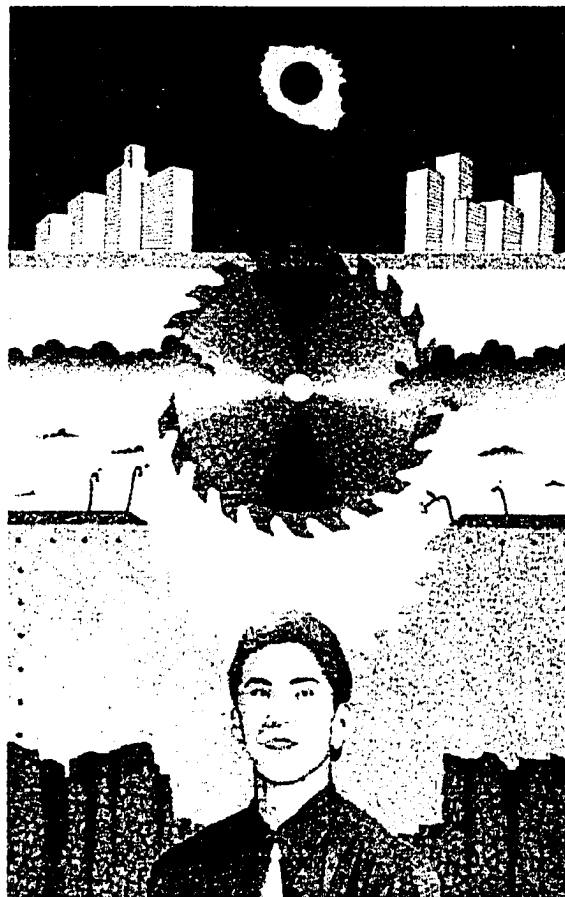




Figure 17 – “The Eclipsed Mind”



## VITA

### EDUCATION:

1998-2003 MFA University of Texas Pan American: Major: Art  
1993-1994 MS Texas A&M University-Kingsville Major: Art  
1989-1993 BFA Texas A&I University Major: Art Minor: English

### PROFESSIONAL:

2003-Present Part-time Art Instructor for The University of Texas-Pan American, Edinburg, Texas  
1999-Present Dual-Enrollment Art Instructor for South Texas Community College, McAllen, Texas  
1998-Present Secondary Art Teacher at Edinburg North HS, Edinburg, Texas  
1996-1998 Secondary Art Teacher at J.B. Alexander HS, Laredo, Texas  
1994-1996 Secondary Art Teacher at Hebronville High School, Hebronville, Texas

### EXHIBITS:

MFA Exhibit- "Love, Labor, and Life: Existence Through a Neo-Surrealist Style"  
University Gallery, University of Texas Pan American, 2003  
Solo Exhibition-"Dreams and Reality" The Laredo Center for the Arts, 1996  
MS Exhibit-"Beyond Truth" Ben P. Bailey Art Gallery, Texas A&M University-Kingsville, 1994  
Solo Exhibition-"Surrealist Twist", BFA Show  
Ben P. Bailey Art Gallery, Texas A&I University, 1993

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"Review of Culture" McAllen International Museum, 2001  
"Graduate Student Show" Riofest, Harlingen, Texas 2000  
"The First Graduate Student Exhibition" Clark Gallery, University of Texas Pan American

### PRESENTATIONS:

2000 Guest speaker-UTPA Art History Class  
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Active member of The National Art Education Association  
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