

ABSTRACT ENVIRONMENTS

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## INFLUENCES / SUBJECT MATTER

The natural world and an appreciation of that world are the prime sources of inspiration for my work. My works may be viewed as abstract environments which contain elements prevalent in nature. The elements of line, texture, colour, and space, when placed in proper relationship to one another, stimulate a visual memory response connected to nature. For example, the overlapping brushwork in the etching "In the Steppes" (1986), might evoke thoughts or feelings of grass, while the tiny lozenges in "Foliage" (etching, 1988), could resemble leaves. Whatever concrete associations these pieces trigger, one must remember that these works are primarily studies of form, space, and texture which result in a created environment, rather than a literal reference to an actual place.

Some of my images are directly inspired by nature. For example, the original composition in "Stromatolites and Gastropods" (etching, 1986) was derived from tree branches. However, once the initial composition was established, the image evolved independent of any literal connection with branches. Instead, colour, line, and texture were developed in relation to one another within the confines of the etching plate. Colours were selected more for their spatial qualities than for their connection to life forms. The textured areas, (triangles, circles, and "snail-like" forms), were created with aquatints and extensive open-biting to contrast with the smoother surfaces of the etching plate.

Other images developed as I explored the lithographic and etching media. "Foliage" began as a simple, loose brushwork of sugarlift and aquatint.

As the image progressed I began to associate the brushstrokes and the line work with vegetation. The organic appearance of these abstract elements resulted in an image which has no connection, either visually or conceptually, with the initial idea for the print.

Ideas for images have also come from my interest in primitive and folk art. The raw beauty and simplicity of form in primitive art inspired "Rainbow Snakes" (lithograph, 1987) and "California Sheep" (etching, 1987). In the latter, the various linear elements and zoomorphic forms (concentric circles, spirals, parallel bars, and sheep) are derived from the rock art of the South Western American Indians. The study of Chinese art of the Han Dynasty (220 B.C. to 220 A.D.) sparked my interest in ornamental patterns. The subject matter and shallow space in Japanese prints and the decorative nature of Nineteenth Century wallpaper designs by William Morris inspired the decorative pattern and floral forms in "Red Fan" (lithograph, 1987).

"Rainbow Snakes" and "Red Fan" were created when I was going through a process of questioning the validity of abstract art. Creating these images made me realize that most artists, whether they produce abstract or representational images, are concerned with the same basic principles. Whether the artist uses a red apple or a red shape in an image is not the issue. In either case he or she is dealing with the aesthetic relationships amongst all the elements in the piece. What is important is how the artist represents a form, and how it is related to other forms and colours in the piece. Moving from an abstract image to a representational image then back to abstraction presents no problem for me, because I am dealing with the same aesthetic principles no matter how I work.

I admire the work of many artists and they have all played some part in the development of my work. The work of Vincent Van Gogh, Antoni Tapies, Jean Dubuffet, and James Coignard have influenced the textural qualities of my images. My use of rectilinear forms was influenced by the colour-field paintings of Mark Rothko. The more contemporary influences on my work have been artist-professors like Otis Tamasauskas and Otto Rogers, and fellow graduate students Amira Saleh, Miranda Jones, and Rodney Konopaki.

#### METHODOLOGY

The physical characteristics of lithography and etching are a vital aspect in the creation of my images. Tusche-washes, crayon marks, colour flats, aquatints, and open-biting are the principal techniques employed in my work. In both black and white lithography and etching the final print is pulled from only one plate, which has been arrived at through a series of image proofings and modifications. Since all activity occurs on one plate, it is easy to visualize what the printed image will look like. In etching the plate is altered by aquatinting, scraping, burnishing, open-biting, or mezzotinting. The etching plate is amenable to drastic changes using these techniques. In lithography the image is developed in an additive manner by allowing each wash to dry before application of another. Additional washes or crayon work can be introduced after proofing by counter-etching and redrawing. Unfortunately, the aluminum plate does not allow for the heavier, more aggressive deletions and reintroduction of image possible in etching. Because of this I am limited in the number of times I can alter the relationships upon the plate. In colour lithography the

final image is arrived at through an additive process, with each colour printed from a separate plate. After each successive application of ink, the relationships between colours, areas, and textures change. This continuous altering of relationships means that I must often reconsider any aesthetic decisions connected to the development of the image. Because of this, the final image is often different from the original conception of the piece.

### LINE

Line plays a formative role in all of my compositions. For example, in "Erosion" (etching, 1987) the original line composition was combined with light and dark value and texture to create an image about decay and change. Line is used to express a variety of moods in the piece: bold and aggressive, as in the lower left hand corner of the central area, and delicate and undulating, as expressed by the line extending along the top of the white area.

"Interactions" (etching, 1987) deals with the interplay between line and form, the relationships between one type of mark and another, and the transitions between light and dark. Within the composition, line divides space into individual forms, each with its own characteristics. The smaller form on the left contains a pattern of loose brushwork which separates the light and dark values. The smaller square surmounting this area is divided into dense black and bright white. In contrast, the larger form to the right contains a gradual shift from dark to light. The linear elements, unlike the compact layering of brushstrokes on the left, exist

as independent forms. These relationships establish the visual balance and aesthetic harmony of the piece.

## TEXTURE

My images reflect my interest in the physical textures present in nature. Numerous contrasts spread before us: a network of tree branches, the coarse, deep ridges in tree bark, weeds covered with snow, and a clear sky. My aim is to capture the essence of these textures and translate them into a personal artistic statement through the printmaking process.

This interest in texture originated while I was at the Banff School of Fine Arts in 1983. There I became interested in the compositional nature of rock surfaces and rock formations. My direct experiences with the inseparability of texture and form came from a transfer rubbing of a large rock. As the surface of the transfer paper was rubbed with a grease crayon, the textures and the form of the rock began to emerge. The final image became an abstraction of nature. The texture and form of the rock were removed from one context, that of a three dimensional object, and placed into a new context, that of a two dimensional surface. I continued this conscious development of texture in the lithographs "Untitled: State II" (1985), "Untitled: State III" (1985), and "Tapestry" (1986). Of these three works, "Tapestry" demonstrates a progression from the simple transferring of a texture to the complex integration of many textures. Additional plates containing flat areas of colour and layers of crayon work and waterwashes were combined with the initial rubbed texture in order to enrich the surface quality of the image.

In the spring of 1986 I altered my method of working, as exemplified by "Orchestration in Red" (lithograph, 1986). The print reflects a shift away from the stratified alignment of space and form evident in "Untitled: State II", "Untitled: State III", and "Tapestry". The tighter rhythms of form present in the earlier works were replaced by larger, more open areas. My use of new materials also affected the types of textures present in later works. The textured surfaces in "Orchestration in Red" result from my use of Xerox toner and tusche waterwash, physical textures pressed into partially dried Xerox toner, and the use of a variety of crayon lines. Marks began to appear as independent forms existing throughout the spaces and over the dense surfaces of the image. With increased use, the marks assumed a greater importance as forms in themselves, becoming an integral part of my work.

#### COLOUR AND SPACE

In 1985 I began working with a number of different colour states in an attempt to create space on a two dimensional surface. The lithographs "Untitled: State II" (1985) and "Untitled: State III" (1985) use the same key plates for the basis of the image, but in each print different colours are used. Space is therefore developed through the combination of texture and colour. In "Untitled: State II" the strength of the black texture is contrasted and balanced by the stark white areas of the paper and the vibrancy of the pink, yellow and blue. The colour relationships in "Untitled: State III" are less aggressive than those in "Untitled: State II". The horizontal blend of pastel colours establishes a distant space. The transparent colours place the vertical forms in the middle ground,

while the stronger blue, orange and green project the central form and the border into the foreground.

In 1986 I expanded my colour range by using reds, yellows, oranges and greens. Complementary colours were juxtaposed so that forms would have a strong visual impact. These changes are evident in the lithographs "Tapestry" (1986), "Protractor" (1986), "Sahel" (1987), and "Red Fan" (1987). In these works, each successive colour is selected in relation to the colours already existing in the image. Sometimes this selection is intuitive. At other times the colour is determined through a conscious process based on what effect is to be created and which colours will best establish the spatial relationships within the piece.

#### SUMMATION

My images gradually emerge as the surface of the plate or the print is built up over time. Layers of aquatints or coloured washes are added, subtracted, and distilled until a balance has been struck between line, value, colour, and texture. Movement is guided by the passage from a smooth to a textured area, and by the shifts from one colour to another. The visual passages within the art work resemble visual passages in nature, such as the transition from a clear sky to the textured layering of leaves, and the passage from soft grass to hard pavement. We are constantly viewing an environment rich in both colour and textural experiences. It is only natural that I, as a part of this environment, bring these experiences into my art.