Capes And Diapers

2009

Henry Schreiber
University of Central Florida

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CAPES AND DIAPERS

by

HENRY V. SCHREIBER
B.F.A. University of Central Florida, 2001

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ABSTRACT

By fusing classical imagery with passions and vicissitudes of the contemporary world, I create images that are technically sound yet riddled with both overt and subtle humor. These paintings are intended to illuminate the futility of guilt and frustration we encounter in the struggle for identity and meaning by arousing laughter, indignation, curiosity, and finally recognition.
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INTRODUCTION

My work has evolved from early attempts to capture the “beautiful”, the “horrific” and perhaps even the vernacular “bad-ass” to an exploration of internal realities that transcends each of these. My initial attempts were somewhat successful on a few levels, but did not provide a satisfying connection between the psyche and art. After allowing my own impulses, desires, and foibles to migrate onto the canvas, an examination of my own reactions to these pieces revealed the importance of humor in my work. I was timid about exposing my innermost world, this thought triggered fear of rejection and shame.

This reaction parallels Freud’s view of the psyche and especially the battle between the id and the super-ego for control of our identities. Exploring the mind we are born with, the id which Freud described as “chaos, a cauldron full of seething excitation” in a cyclical battle with the super-ego as an abstraction of parental, societal, and religious values reveals the conflicts prevalent in a world without definitive values or at best values which are constantly in conflict within the reality of our society. The basal imagery of the primal self, the id, is the source of the humor that allows us to address the conflict in stages. Thus my choice of subjects and themes, which are often shocking and irreverent, can include: alcohol, drugs, scatological humor, sexuality, mud, diapers, dump trucks and the hero’s cape.
CERUBAUCHERY

Cherub + Debauchery = Cherubauchery; Excessive indulgence in sensual pleasures by celestial beings, often represented as a beautiful rosy-cheeked child with wings; intemperance.

Figure 1: Saturn and the Beer Funnel. Oil on Canvas. 2009

I have taken the liberty to label as Cherubs, what would be more accurately called Putti. Art historian Juan Carlos Martinez writes: "Originally, Cherubs and Putti had distinctly different roles, with the former being sacred, and the latter, profane (or mythological)."
The use of Putti was prevalent both in Baroque and Italian Renaissance Art and these periods most influence my work stylistically.

The juxtaposition of the Baroque and Italian Renaissance imagery with what would be termed “debauchery” in the contemporary world is the source of both the humor and unsettling nature of the work. The sometimes shocking dichotomy of the images creates the humor allowing a gateway through which we can address our darker sides. The most well known Putti in our own time is of course, Cupid. My cherubs are indeed created in his mold, but unlike Cupid who is preoccupied with love (and lust), they have complete access to all of our most primal urges.

My paintings are not meant to be copies of the masters nor are they attacks on past cultures or religions. They are meant to engage the viewer’s sense of humor and to spur a consideration of the forces influencing not only us but those who define our values.

My process begins with a graphite sketch, which I will use as a primary reference during the painting process. I also reference master works and utilize life drawing to make the subjects both artistic and believable. My painting is conducted in a loose manner during the early stages of development, leaving the opportunity for spontaneous creation and revision.
Figure 2: Lions. Graphite on Paper. 2008

Figure 3: Entry into Lyons (Work in Progress)
Figure 4: Entry into Lyons. Oil on Canvas. 2009
I began my graduate studies at UCF with the overall goal of enhancing my artistic skills and developing visually arresting images. This pivotal time began with my production of a myriad of character and creature sketches. As I progressed technically with computer generated art, I found that I needed to strengthen my arsenal of fundamental skills and techniques.

Figure 5: Big Red. Digital. 2006

Though I had studied drawing and painting during my undergraduate years, I choose to revisit my foundation skills especially in life drawing and painting. The narrow focus of
this period during which I spent countless hours on technique resulted in a fluidity of execution that now allows my ideas to come to life.

Figure 6: Figure Study (Female). 2007

Figure 7: Figure Study (Male). 2007

My first creative application of these skills was to create a complex, provocative (or in my day-to-day vernacular, “bad-ass”) drawing using two figures that I had initially composed during a figure drawing session, a sketch from a photograph, images of death, and a unifying design element.
Figure 8: Ride the Snake. Graphite on Paper. 2007

The initial reaction to the drawing was much stronger than I had anticipated and I moved forward with plans to move into painting on a large scale, away from the smaller drawings and digital characters I had been working on previously. The plan for the drawing was a diptych measuring 32” by 43” using acrylic paint.
I expected the critique of the diptych to be positive and was looking forward to it. It didn’t go as expected at all; I would describe it as horribly excellent. The critique focused on underlying themes and issues that I was quite unaware that I was dealing with. This forced me to evaluate and analyze the symbolism and imagery in the paintings. The viewers’ responses were diametrically opposed to my intentions especially regarding the role of women. My understanding of myself as an artist and what I want to communicate
with my art had fundamentally changed. I knew without any doubts that my work and the symbols I unconsciously had selected at the time spoke to people on a profound level. The responsibility was mine to determine what I wanted to say. I wanted to be myself (slightly--or perhaps--moderately debauched) and create art that explores the conundrums I face in life with humor.

Figure 10: Ride the Snake. Acrylic on Canvas. 2008

The conversion of the male half of the diptych to reflect aspects of my own psyche was not difficult and the result satisfied me both symbolically and visually. I cut the female half of the diptych out after realizing that I could not with honesty and clarity address
emotions or topics that I did not feel or understand. The process marked the single most important step in my artistic development.

After this discovery, content came easily to me. I only needed to look at myself or people who I knew to find inspiration. Fun, vices, debauchery, love, family, friends, good judgment, bad judgment – all the ways in which we as humans try to determine the best way in which to live our lives - were and are at my disposal.
UNDER THE INFLUENCE

Throughout my studies, I have been drawn to certain artists. Whether it is their approach to art making or the actual art they produce, these artists heavily influenced my art education and production.

The work of Eugene Delacroix has fascinated and inspired me since my first exposure to his uncanny ability to maintain accurate proportion and sense of balance while conveying amazing fluidity and motion. Delacroix was a master of both color and composition in of the classicists, but he evaded the goal of simplicity within that tradition. The genius and beauty of his paintings lie in his ability to combine the quality of classical draftsmanship with the Romantic notion of depicting horror, chaos, and beauty on an emotional level. My goal is to achieve the uncanny “looseness” and movement while maintaining precision in form typified by Delacroix.
Delacroix was greatly influenced by Peter Paul Rubens, as am I. Rubens produced dynamic images by creating a sense of motion, powerful use of color, and his willingness to move beyond classicism and convey emotion. One facet of his work that intrigues me
is his exaggeration of characters and anatomy to create a livelier image and to convey emotional aspects of his subjects.

Figure 12: Peter Paul Rubens. The Fall of Phaeton

I have also been influenced by the work of Henry Fuseli. Like Rubens he uses exaggeration to create and heighten the emotional effect of his work. He shuns realism and taps into archetypal imagery to convey the disturbing and sometimes humorous states of mind. The tone of his work and his subjects address inner turmoil or struggle and often reference the mythological to achieve this.
Figure 13: Henry Fuseli. The Nightmare
POSTMODERNISM

While I am reluctant to categorize my work, the correlation between postmodernism philosophy and my focus as an artist is striking. The structure and order of modernism is subverted in the postmodern world. With increasing globalization, exposure to differing cultures, the divergence between Judeo-Christian values and modern realities of media and entertainment the structure upon which we build identity in contemporary society is often created at an individual level. We may choose from an endless menu of how to conduct our lives and select those values and behaviors that we desire. Societal, familial, and religious vales are in constant flux. We live in a world of paradox and the dissonance this creates within our psyches is the emotional territory of my work.
CONCLUSION

My work has grown from a premature perception of quality and lack of artistic meaning to stylistic and purposefully composed statements which remain true to the topics that I wish to address. Exploring that which makes me unique yet is paradoxically universal to the human condition is the driving force of my art.

The teachers and influences from the past both personally and artistically have helped to mold my work. However, I believe an essential element in the development of any artist (myself included) must be attributed to serious introspection and exploration of those emotional forces which are sometimes difficult to fathom.

Within my current body of work, I have an unlimited number of concepts and visual manifestations for near future works and additional series. As I mature, my stance on life and whatever issues I deem important will evolve, and my subject matter will reflect that. Humor is my gateway to open the discourse on that universal struggle which is an essential part of being human.
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