

THESIS

EXPLORING NEW ART WORK: A PERSONAL REFLECTION  
ART CRITIQUE IN THE WORLD OF PRINTS

Submitted by

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## ABSTRACT

### EXPLORING NEW ART WORK: A PERSONAL REFLECTION

#### ART CRITIQUE IN THE WORLD OF PRINTS

The paper at hand seeks to critique aspects of my own work in terms of thinking process, act of making, and several contextual art concepts of the past including: comparisons to certain Futurist artists and elements of pre-Columbian Aztec and Mayan artwork. I will discuss briefly technical processes and emphasize visual concepts. In viewing several examples of my own prints and exploring the makeup of these pieces, one can better understand the delicate balance between the earthly components of past artwork and the sleeker, more geometric designs of the future. These two attributes are utilized in my work to create the tension and play derived from personal emotions. In breaking down these works into components that can be directly compared to my own influences, the genres and allusions to ancient art mingle into a single map of art and time.

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## ART MAKING

Since childhood my imagination has driven a strong passion in drawing. A blue-collar rearing endowed me with a work ethic and dedication that constantly groped for more complicated techniques, eventually advancing into the realm of printmaking. This trajectory landed me in an art-based graduate program where I have stumbled and grown for three years, nurturing both my artistic vision and personal evolution.

The act of art-making has given me a visual voice that I find most true and honest to myself, but finding that voice required a push out of my preferred way of working. The first two years I restricted myself to literal and illustrative drawing styles. I found comfort in rendering and felt the need to provide a narrative to a perspective audience. I valued storyline of the final product over my own emotions. This was satisfying to an extent, but started to feel stale. My method when creating the image was quiet and reserved, using process as a means to an end rather than an exploration. During my final year I began to make rhythmic, meditative-like drawings. They were often fast and dynamic without a storyline or preliminary draft. My narratives all but disappeared, the characters left, and my priority shifted from the audience to myself and the moment in which I was creating.

The rhythmic drawings began with an empty stone. I start to make marks intuitively, combining crayons and tusche, asphaltum and ink as I saw fit. I favored the flat edge of a crayon because the mark was bold and unfaltering. The crayon would lay pigment thick but still reveal the grain of the stone in certain areas. Although I loved drawing, I had no intent to hide the fact that this was a lithograph. Ink clinging to the borders of the stone was left to provide evidence of

the stone's mass. Crayons were scratched and melted. The dialogue was no longer between my image and the audience; it was a play between the materials and myself.

I drew rectangular and circular forms involuntarily but obsessively. The outer edges of these shapes were in contrast and created a tension. A Northern Gaze (Fig. 1) was made almost entirely of rectangular forms. They clumsily parallel one another, causing a vibration anytime the lines diverge or overlap. The geometric shapes seem to chatter amongst themselves, suggesting a solid structure but one that is organic and stirring. Similarly, Hydrophilic Dimples (Fig. 2) is composed entirely of broken circles. The arches crack and tumble against each other, teetering precariously but are stilled forever by the etch on the stone.

My work stands as visual evidence of motion and emotion. Although my mark making is meditative, it is not withdrawn from the mood I bring to the stone. The pressure of the crayon and intensity of marks speak honestly of my feelings. My illustrative work was always an attempt to lure the audience to empathy. It told the audience how to feel, persuading them in one direction. Yet my rhythmic drawings are not created to plead with anyone. They record a fundamental feeling that surpasses the petty occurrence of daily life. Many of the prints express an outward motion, a feeling of breaking forth into the pure white atmosphere. Lacking a background and environment, my images are free to expand and breathe. They parallel our ever-expanding universe and my sentiment that every thought and action ripples through the world.

At times, my images take on familiar forms. Because I never begin with a preconceived image in my head, these forms must come from somewhere in my subconscious. Marginalized Madness (Fig. 3) alludes to the female form with a large, bulging belly and two splayed breasts. I have similar, more rendered female figures in my earlier work- however they are often presented as specific characters. Marginalized Madness is not specific; it speaks not of a woman but of

woman in the broadest sense. Electrotype (Fig. 4), in its structure, suggests an unidentified dwelling next to a stream; Us (Fig. 5), three figures emerging from one another. Sometimes a narrative grows after I have completed a drawing. I create a story out of the forms I find within the work and develop an emotional attachment to these narratives. Despite where my imagination takes me, the image has already been made and I cannot impose these stories onto the prints. They are my personal stories, as each person who views the work is free to create their own.

## INFLUENCES

### Pre-Columbian

I have always been intrigued by the distinctive nature of art to chronicle time and geographical location. Ancient art speaks to me because of its raw and genuine nature, particularly that of the Mayan and Aztec cultures. Pre-Columbian art is a categorization of the visual arts of indigenous peoples of the Caribbean, North, Central and South Americas until the late 15th and early 16th centuries, as well as the time period marked by Christopher Columbus' arrival to the Americas. My lineage ties me to their history and I find awe in their earnest approach to art. These are a people who do not have the privileges we have today; they survived season to season and acknowledged death as a daily possibility. And yet, these people still allocated time, materials, and lives to create art that they believed was valuable. Carving reliefs of Quetzalcoatl took time away from tending to crops, but the Mesoamericans valued it enough to make the sacrifice.

Aztec and Mayan temples are sublime in their own sense- their scale and precision leave an impression of the splendor towards the people who built them. These ornate temples often employed an architectural style called *talud-tablero*, which consists of a platform structure, or the *tablero*, on top of an inward-sloping surface or panel, the *talud* (Fig. 6). This style of architecture is often also referred to as the slope-and-panel-style.<sup>1</sup> In viewing my work, one can identify the architectural influences resulting from my study of ancient Mesoamerica. A Northern Gaze silhouettes the *talud-tablero* structure, with the slope-and-panel-style providing a

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<sup>1</sup> Price, et al. (2010). "Kings and commoners at Copan: Isotopic evidence for origins and movement in the classic Maya period," *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology*, 29(1): pp. 15-32.

respective “base” upon which the other components of the work sit. In this sense, the work builds up upon itself in a manner reflecting the way a pre-Columbian temple would be built.

A similar use of pre-Columbian reflection can be seen in Electrotype. This work contains a combination of the talud-tablero style by utilizing a series of four different “platforms” which can be viewed as sharing borders by some or being elevated above one another by others. This effect allows Electrotype to take on a three-dimensional quality despite its construction on a flat surface. In this capacity, a direct connection can be seen between this work and the ancient pre-Columbian temples. When viewing these temples from a distance, one really cannot understand the height, dimensions and empty space that give these platforms their structure.

I have long been motivated by artists who have utilized similar styles of printmaking as well as mixed media to relay their artistic vision to their audience. Mauricio Lasansky is one such artist. Like myself, Lasansky was greatly inspired by Mexico's past, and his intaglio print, Quetzalcoatl (Fig. 7), utilizes many different styles of printmaking to create an illusion of form. Lasansky created this vivid print by using a process called chine collé (which I have incorporated in my own works) that involves the adhering of colored paper to an already established print. This process adds a depth that one medium can perhaps struggle to provide. It also provides a vivid component that paint itself could perhaps not lend to the piece.

## Futurism

In great contrast, Futurism is not a culture but an artistic and social movement that originated in the early 20th century. The style emphasized and glorified themes associated with

contemporary concepts of the future, including: speed, technology, youth and violence.<sup>2</sup> The Futurists practiced in nearly every medium of art- even gastronomy.<sup>3</sup> In essence, Futurism sought to do exactly what its name suggests; incorporate new and emerging ideas into art. It played a massive role in contemporary art as it sought to elevate the art world to its next evolutionary stage, while encouraging other artists to make the advancement.

French Futurist painter, Felix Del Marle, had a brief but significant involvement in this movement. His work Looping (Fig. 8), is a Futurist abstract image that includes a mixture of intertwined and contrasting shapes that form a greater single figure which remains the focus of the piece. With a general focus in the futurist genre upon speed and technology, Del Marle's work includes clean lines and machine-like shapes. However, Del Marle's inclusion of more abstract shapes and continuing lines that appear to be in free movement away from the base of the painting (although truly attached) allow the viewer to understand a deeper complexity to the painting as well as to understand Del Marle's eventual movement into solely abstract art.

Into the Sublime (Fig. 9) draws correlations to Futurism through the general sense of movement and repetition of geometric shapes. The haphazard placement of shapes and patterns suggest a sense of unrest and agitation. The piece certainly does not adhere to pre-Columbian standards of art and instead jumps forward in time to a different genre, including references to Futurism.

As mentioned, Marginalized Madness contains a talud-tablero in the piece's circular base. Rather than harking to Mesoamerica with the typical implementation of a platform base, I created a stair-like pattern in a circular form that alludes to the stylistic preferences of the

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<sup>2</sup> Michalowski, S. and Smith, G. (2011). "Art: abstract relativity," *Nature*, 470(38): pp. 134-138.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

Futurists. The flowing nature of the circular base is disrupted by the seemingly chaotic placement of the shapes that are stretched out above the structure's base. This play on structure allows the piece to take on a greater sense of depth and can suggest an allusion to the Futurist movement, or to ancient art.

Hydrophilic Dimples may best correlate to Futurist ideals because of its hint of chaos, unrest, and potential violence. The shapes seem to tumble and balance with no ground to catch them. They are already cracked due to some event and may break further apart.

I must acknowledge that Futurist artwork and my work have visual similarities, but we have very different intents. While the Futurists were interested in showing physical and social movement in their work, I am interested in capturing the movement that happens when I create the work. I am not trying to persuade or coerce a social movement; rather I intend to record my personal interaction with the world.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, I have a great personal attraction to drawing. I love the satisfaction of rendering something realistically or derived from my imagination. Many times did I face the question of, why print? Why, if my love of pencil and paper are so strong, attempt such a convoluted and technical process such as printmaking? I struggled with this conflict in my early work. But as my art evolved, so did my understanding of the connection between the images and medium. The rudimentary geometric shapes I created are like the lithography stone itself- ancient, natural, and strong. My marks are rhythmic and create a beat that mimics the process of printmaking. The cyclic movement of the levigator, the thump of the roller, the passes of the press- these motions result in the beat that produces multiples and continues the pattern. Influences of my own lineage are kept alive through this beat, and it makes me feel connected to past and present generations of printmakers.

The final products that make up my thesis are the remnants of an action. They are the evidence of both my emotions and marks in a given moment recorded on the surface of a stone. The prints capture something in myself- something primal but reliable- a reassurance that when all seems dark and unforgiving, there is still a rhythm to the world. On both the best and the worst days, the sun will still rise, my heart will still beat, and (despite whatever agony one has received) nature will, unapologetically, go on.

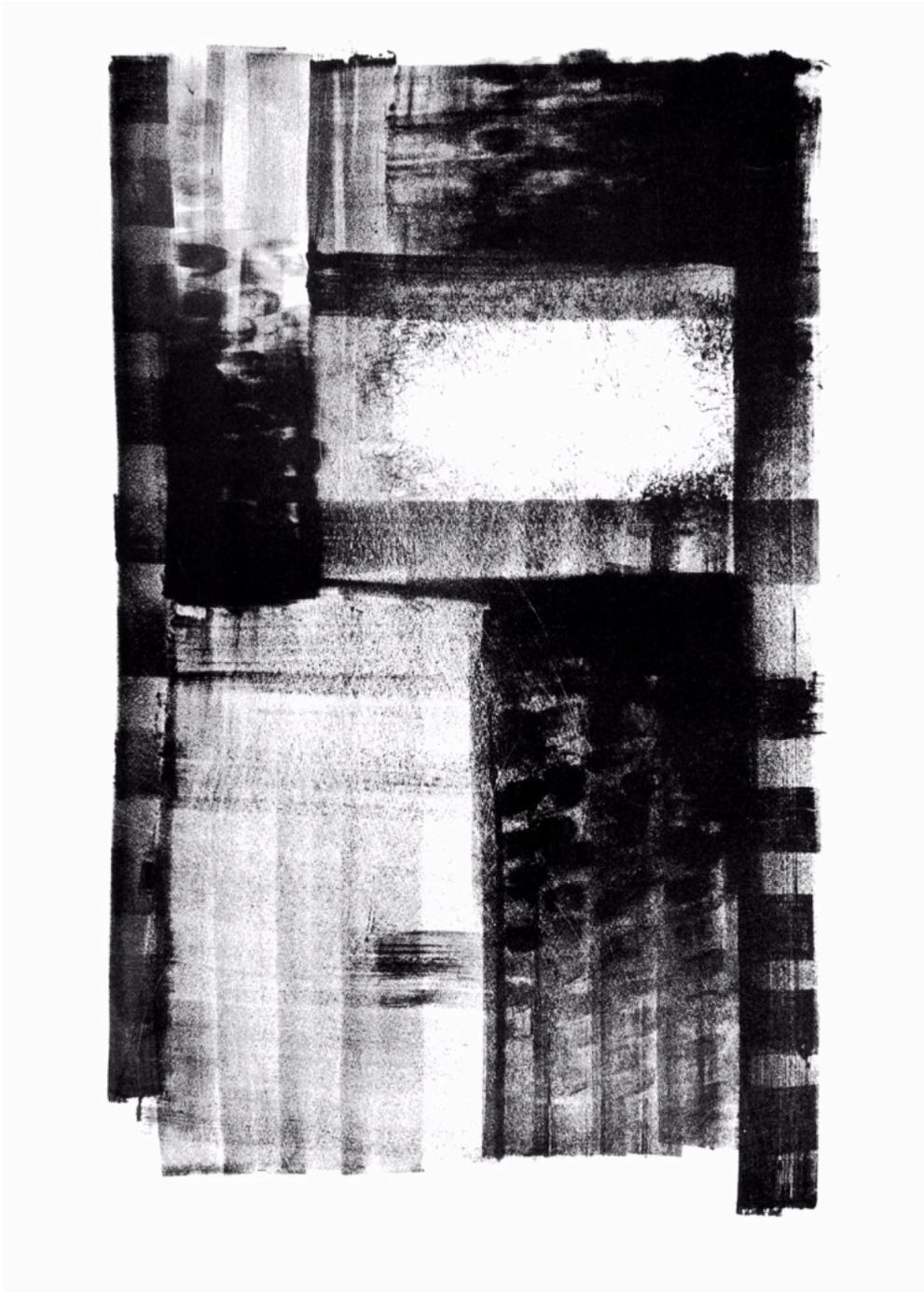


Fig. 1, Michael De La Cruz, A Northern Gaze, lithograph, 2013, 16" x 23".



Fig. 2, Michael De La Cruz, Hydrophilic Dimples, lithograph, 2013, 12" x 18".

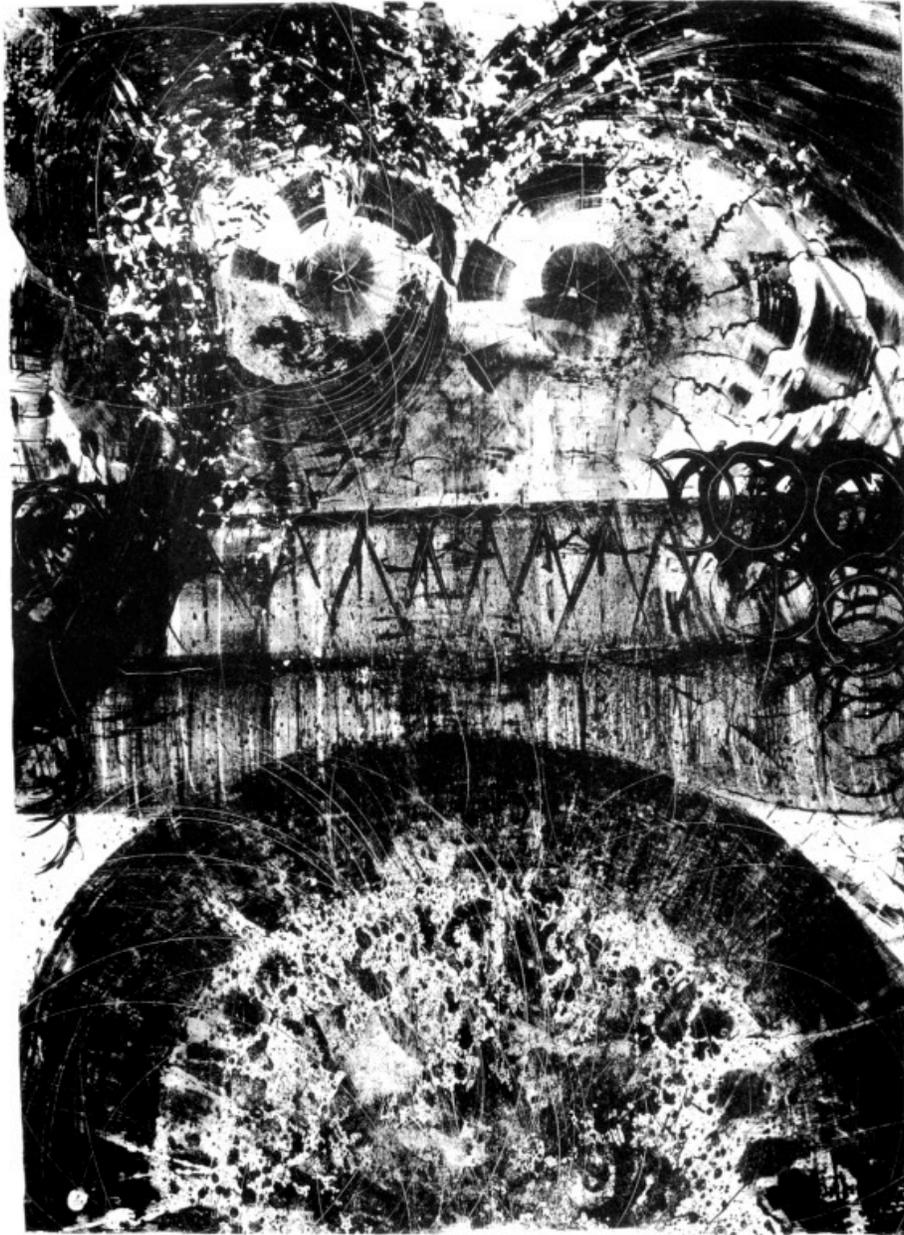


Fig. 3, Michael De La Cruz, Marginalized Madness, lithograph, 2013, 16" x 23".



Fig. 4, Michael De La Cruz, Electrotype, lithograph and chine colle, 2013, 16" x 23".



Fig. 5, Michael De La Cruz, Us, lithograph and chine colle, 2013, 11" x 17".



Fig. 6, Talud-Tablero Aztec Temple, Guatemala.



Fig. 7, Mauricio Lasansky, Quetzalcoatl, etching, 1972, 75.5" x 33".



Fig. 8, Felix Del Marle, Looping, charcoal on paper, 1914, 24 5/8" x 18 3/4".

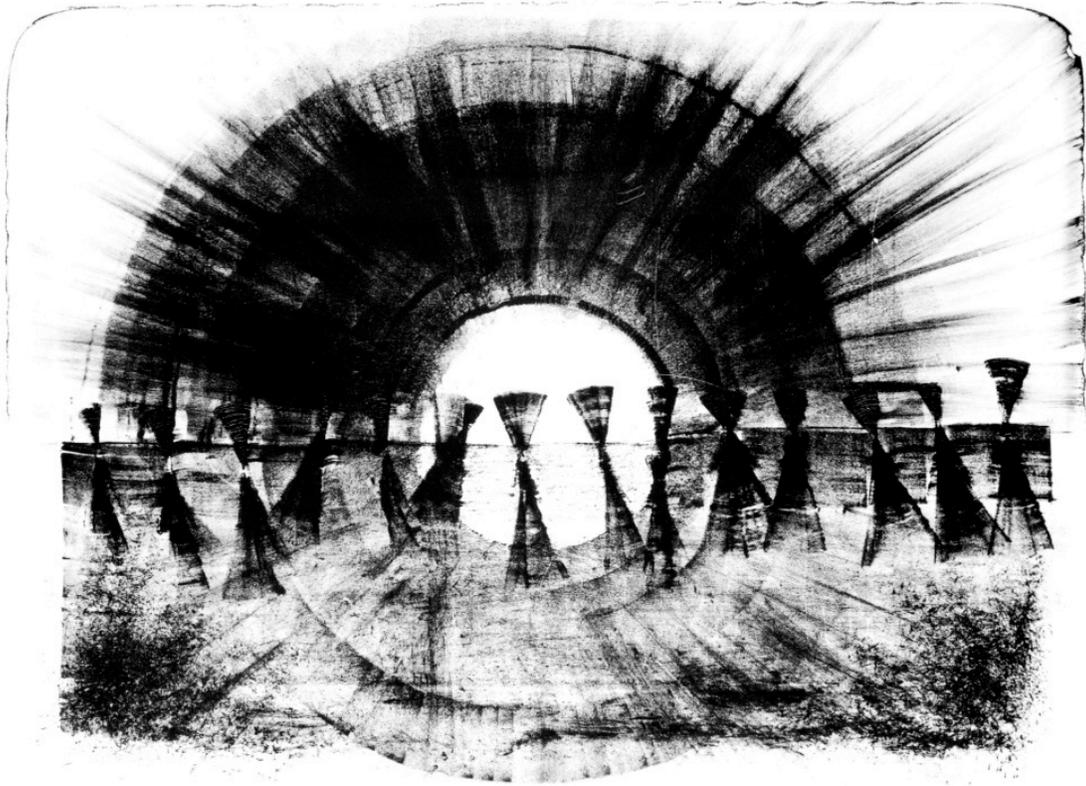


Fig. 9, Michael De La Cruz, Into the Sublime, lithograph, 2013, 18" x 24".

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