

THESIS

VISUAL JOURNEYS FROM FEAR INTO FAITH

Submitted by

Marilyn Wagner Hageman

Art Department

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Fall 1997

ND
237
H148
A4
1997

COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

May 21, 1993

WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER OUR
SUPERVISION BY MARILYN WAGNER ENTITLED VISUAL JOURNEYS FROM
FEAR INTO FAITH BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF FINE ARTS.

Committee on Graduate Work

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Co-Advisor

[REDACTED]

Department Head, Advisor

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

VISUAL JOURNEYS FROM FEAR INTO FAITH

Inspired by the power and force of the horse, I have developed since childhood my most personal mark; an energetic calligraphic line. I furthered my exploration of that line through the process of lithography and the incorporation of the figure. Using it as a drawing element in the paintings coupled with color choices which cause visual vibration and the use of physical divisions, I've focused on the manipulation of implied movement. Movement and change have been key issues in the progression of my work as well as my life process. Rather than fighting the flow of energy and change, I have slowly begun to surrender to it, replacing fear of the unknown with faith in a guiding power.

Marilyn Wagner Hageman
Art Department
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, CO 80523
Fall 1997

With much gratitude I'm dedicating this work to my Mother, Paula, and my Grandmother, Marian, whose constant encouragement gave me the strength to follow my dream.

To James Dormer, without whose unyielding guidance and support this degree would not have been possible.

And to Dave Dietmann for teaching me the language of paint and helping me use it to the best of my ability.

VISUAL JOURNEYS FROM FEAR INTO FAITH

I can remember as a child always drawing. I would sit for hours and hours and draw pictures of horses. Their mouths open, their faces enraged. Then I saw DiVinci's horses, I loved them and I would often try to mimic his drawings.

Reflecting back, it seemed as though I was always sitting alone in our little sun room drawing. I remember it being a great escape when I was angry or frustrated, and I would drive the crayons with force and speed until they broke and tore the paper. I liked the horses because their tormented faces expressed their strife to escape their rider, and it looked a lot like the way the marks felt, trying to escape my body.

As I grew up I was given a lot of guidance and support for my artistic interest. I think this was largely because my grandmother's uncles were Gutson and Solon Borglum. Through the gem of Gutson's accomplishment of Mt. Rushmore, my family had seen first hand that art could be a very viable and lucrative profession. Surely they were pleased that someone in the family was enthralled with the idea of being an artist who possessed a bit of talent - a word I have grown to heartily dislike with its implications to discount the work involved. Throughout grade school I was always the "artist of my class", which was a limited achievement in a grammar school of 200 students. Nonetheless it kept my self determined attitude and ego well fed. Of course all through high school I lived in the art classes. Another girl, Marci, and I became known as the artists of the school; Marci with her incredible rendering ability and me with my drawings of angry horses.

My lust for the power of the horse led me into a heavy involvement as a rider and I entered college as a pre-vet student. That idea lasted about 6 months and halfway through my second semester, and living with an art major, I knew I had to follow my dream and

my strengths. I changed my major to art focusing on painting but doing a lot of work in printmaking and drawing. The subjects were still horses but also figures. The movement and the power still interested me and the energetic marks still worked best when they seemed to be bursting from my body without restriction, without confinement.

When I began in the graduate program I was working primarily with lithographs. The directness they allowed and the immediate gratification enticed me, seduced me. In addition I felt driven to master and control the sensitive chemical reactions which make lithography either work for you or challenge your perseverance beyond human limitation. I had never been the slightest bit concerned with minute technical detail or organization until I tried making lithographs, and it became (among other things) an opportunity to overcome my impulsive ways. Time proved I was living in denial. The constant control needed over each and every factor of the process seemed virtually impossible to me with my very spontaneous way of working. I spent over a year experimenting with subtraction methods that would precede the initial etch on aluminum plates. As to be expected, I rarely stayed within the limitations of the ultra thin grain of the plate, rubbing away with the solvents the grain which could stabilize the image. In the few instances where I was successful, the figurative images of downtown men Downtown Man II, IV; (Plates II, III) were produced. Looking back, they were the plates where I used subtraction in a very limited way wiping the plate with lithotine (a grease solvent) and redrawing in those areas with a very greasy crayon or rubbing ink.

The motivation for that particular group of images came from a stack of drawings I had done that week on the downtown Denver Mall. As I watched, everyone seemed to be rushing around as though they were driven by a force outside themselves, yet operating so independently of each other. I found their energy coupled with their isolation from one another quite intriguing.

Although my interest with the figure seemed to be growing, I continually reverted back to the horse as well. Again I always chose subjects that seemed as though they were trying to get away, as though they were fighting confinement or control. Whenever I would draw them, the marks happened with such speed and drive that they'd go off the edges of the paper and the subjects would seem to be bursting from their space,

My interest in movement and change, drawing and re-drawing continually lead me to frustration with the print process, and, in addition, I wanted more and more to explore color. While I had done some color work with the lithographs, to do so again required extensive controlled preparation. So as you might guess I began to look to alternative mediums. I didn't have to look far, for the desire to paint had been haunting me and I often would look forward to graduating so that I would be free to paint. When this became obvious to my advisors as well as myself, I began painting almost exclusively. I had truly fallen back in love and for the first time in a long frustrating period I felt as though I had discovered a direct way of expressing my inner vision.

Some of the consistencies in the work are truly conscious choices (color manipulation, compositional changes to affect balance, the use of divisions and textural variations), yet in fact *most* are not. And only as I look back over a year of painting and several of printmaking I can make the following observations about the body of work:

Marks, mostly linear are to imply movement - anything rigid causes me unexplainable unrest. No line or shape is comfortable being contained, and as lines define objects, the objects themselves try to break away; either from a central focus or from the edges as they try to limit the subject's vulnerability to the situation. Where *divisions* are used in the canvases they give the image "breathing space", freeing it to some extent from confinement, or allowing a portion of the painting to get away. This is perhaps best

illustrated in My Mother's Chair (Plate V). All of the linear marks which define the chairs lead to an edge or a division. The division between the white wrought iron chair and the other two chairs and table acts as a force attempting to move or push away the chair. The white iron chair does in fact metaphorically represent my mother, while the other two I see as changing views of myself. The movement implied in both My Mother's Chair and in In the Garden, (Plate VII) is aided by *multiple perspectives*. This upsets the stability or rigidity of the tables and chairs and alludes to a passage of time. The range of time in My Mother's Chair is relatively short and refers to a period of several years, whereas, in In the Garden the reference is to different eras hundreds of years apart. The red chair I think of as very medieval in it's color and line and very much of a self portrait in it's style and position. The grey table and chair are very representative of my childhood, specifically the backyard and garden of Joan, a close friend of my mother's. This was perhaps the most comfortable time for me as a child and I can say with conviction that is the reason I placed the grey chair securely inside the top edge of the canvas.

The still life images allowed me to realize that I have begun to trust my immediate responses with color and line to a great extent. And that I could now apply this faith in my process to even the most rigid objects, enabling them to be transcended from lifeless forms to active personal statements about the people in my life with whom they have been closely associated.

In all of the paintings, the *Color* choices are relationships which cause vibration and unrest as in Red Air, (Plate IX), and to create overall atmospheric color fields. These choices establish an emotional "setting" for the narrative element as well.

In Red Air, the painting illustrates the difference between physical and emotional abuse whether allowed or self inflicted, and the importance of self-acceptance and self-

love. While the two figures occupy the same environment, the emotional unrest of the image (I used the confrontational reds and colors closely related to them to achieve this) suggests that the two figures will not occupy the same space for much longer, or that even now their togetherness is perhaps just memory.

In Red Air and in "All Truths Wait in All Things", (Plate VI) (Walt Whitman) the figures represent real identities in my life.

In "All Truths Wait in All Things", the figures relationships to each other changed as the painting progressed. The gestures and the positions were not consciously manipulated prior to being painted, but rather were a result of automatic drawing and intuitive response to the space. The drippy blacks and greys were chosen to display an aftermath of somberness while simultaneously the gestures imply a feeling of peace and resolution - provided the divisions between the panels are maintained.

All the of work embodies movement and seeks change, a parallel to my life process. Not all, but many of the constants I live with are the result of fear. By replacing fear with faith I can begin to open the door to opportunity, choice and change. The degree to which this can be viewed as a positive process is directly related to the degree that I am willing to acknowledge a power and a wisdom greater than myself.

*All words too shallow
All thoughts too human
All expectations too limited to know*

Only to feel is to know

On Angels wings our dreams are carried

Live in Faith

PLATES



Plate I; *Horse*, Lithograph 36"X24", 1990



Plate II; *Downtown Man II*, Lithograph 36"X24", 1990



Plate III; *Downtown Man IV*, Lithograph 36"X24", 1990

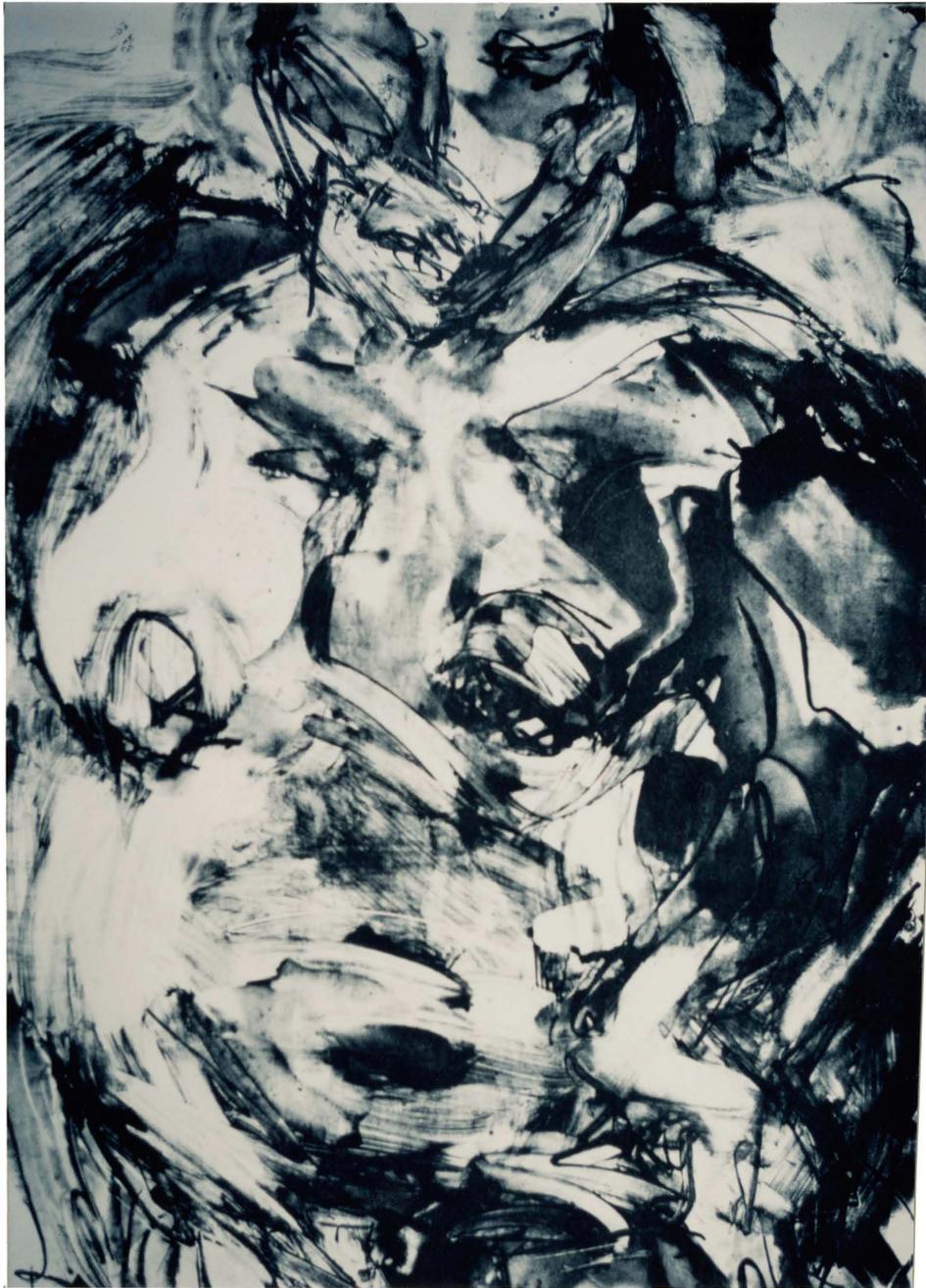


Plate IV; *Woman*, Lithograph 36"X24", 1990



Plate V; *My Mother's Chair*, Three Canvas Panels, 60"X84", 1992

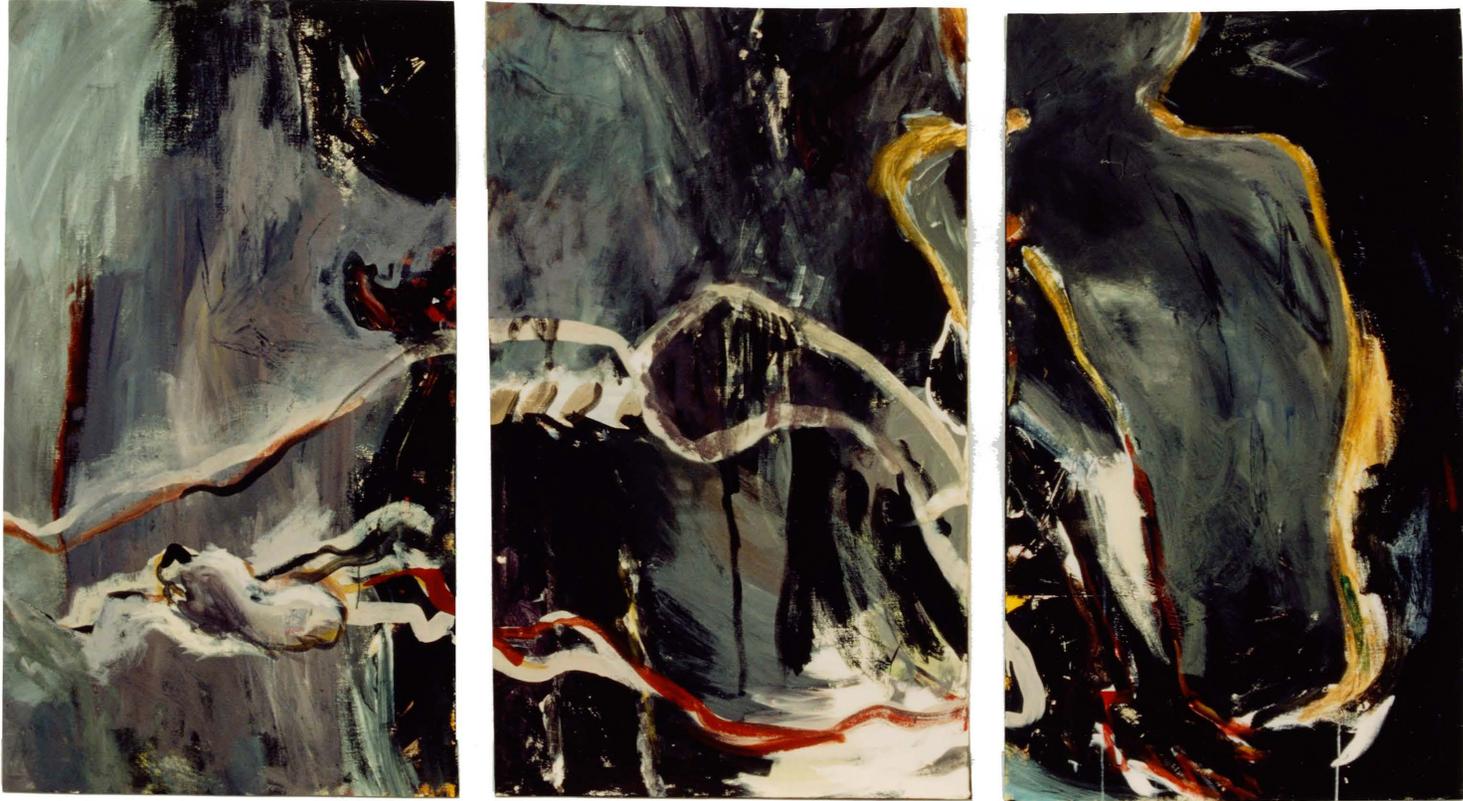


Plate VI; *"All Truths Wait in All Things"* (Walt Whitman)
Acrylic on Three Canvas Panels 65"X91", 1992



Plate VII; *In the Garden* Acrylic on
Two Canvas Panels 72"X96", 1993



Plate VIII; *Woman*, Acrylic on
Three Canvas Panels 108"X42", 1993



Plate IX; *Red Air* acrylic on Canvas 68"X 90", 1993