MY SENIOR PROJECT SPRING / FALL 2009

by

Anthony D. Vogt

Submitted to the School of Art and Design in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Fine Arts

Purchase College
State University of New York

January 2010

Accepted:

__________________________________________
Murray Zimiles

__________________________________________
Cassandra Hooper
Architecture in its essence is the space which we inhabit. Whether it be man made skyscrapers and cathedrals or the natural landscape, we move within the confines of these spaces guided by their inherent physical boundaries and their cultural context. An artist such as Giovanni Battista Piranesi was highly aware of the spaces which he created, not only because of their richly detailed renderings and understanding of geometry and light but also because of the cultural ties to Roman architecture which he drew inspiration from. However, they are over romanticized, displaying improbable spatial proposals which were impossible feats of technology for their time. Our current technology would make any of Piranesi’s architectural etchings seem easy to create in comparison. Edward Burtynsky, a highly skilled photographer, documents the truly awesome yet destructive scale in which we use our technology. He showcases the need for these spaces in the 21st century and how they have exponentially grown with the increase in our population, demanding far more resources than what is available to us. In addition he exposes to us how we take our resources for granted, how they are used in our everyday lives and where they come from. And yet, Burtynsky retains that sense of romanticism that is also found in Piranesi’s etchings. Their perceptions are linked as they display man’s ego inevitably collapsing on itself in all its ludicrousness.

These are the spaces and ideas that I translate into etchings and drawings. The tools I use are a combination of archaic and state of the art technology. Although new technology allows us to create things faster and more efficiently I
find these old processes impossible to replicate and thus endearing. I find comfort straddling a line between chaos and tranquility much akin to the sonic works of the Canadian artist Tim Hecker, in which a void is filled with beautiful textures that are both harmonic and distorted simultaneously. It is these elements that I try to achieve in my work; a celebration and slander of gravity, physics, institutional fraud, absurdity in romanticism and the implicative lack of truth within.

My work began by exploring similar spaces, using my imagination to create fantastical studies of our world set far into the future. I romanticized the notion that the implications of our civilization will at some point cause irreversible damage to the natural world due to many political and ecological factors. These works find a distant relationship with my current body of work in that certain aspects and ideas within my old work are extracted and focused upon. The level of reality is heightened in terms of rendering and photorealistic results but is paralleled with a defiance of logic and gravity, among other factors. For instance, line quality and texture are meticulously crafted from a viewpoint using dimension in order to create a believable sense of space and weight in the composition. This is then contradicted by the lack of a traditional ground-plane as objects, which appear to have immense weight, sit on thin air and fall through it at the same time.

Architecture, in most of my work is used as a vehicle towards expressing a broad spectrum of ideologies. It is a potent metaphor used to convey how the
space we stand in affects us and how we affect it. In two of my works I sought to use symbolic images of architecture such as mosques and cathedrals in attempt to expose the true nature of these institutions. One piece depicts a cathedral crumbling into and through a non-existent ground plane, the joke being that these institutions are built on fallacies that were founded on centuries and centuries of selected scripts in order to create their own version of the truth. The other piece piles many cultural structures designated as religious temples or places of worship into one work of architecture in attempt to represent these beliefs as one in the same as their origins began (arguably) from the same source. My goal however is to not to slap the viewer in the face as I find insulting a persons beliefs an ineffective method of presenting a new view point. Doing so would result in polarizing the audience and limit me to upsetting one crowd and preaching to another. Other works I have presented seek to bring awareness to ourselves, our environment and how we affect one another in a very broad sense. The etching, “Implications” portrays the result of one structure physically affecting another in a domino fashion as they topple and crash into each other. Despite the fact that these are literal illustrations of architectural buildings, it should be recognized that these are structures in a metaphorical sense and can easily be applied to human ecology amongst other ideas.

The attention to detail through intricate lines, geometry and lighting are used in order to achieve a concise aesthetic illustration. This ensures recognition from the viewer as they can at a basic level enjoy the artist’s labor, diligence and
precision that went into creating the work. The perspective and viewpoint then allow a sense of place within my composition; it is where my viewer enters the piece. In the etchings the viewer typically enters a space near or below ground level with the subjective object towering in front exerting a feeling of grandiose scale. I do so in order to exaggerate and romanticize the nature of the subject matter as it transcends us in scale but at the same time criticize these notions as the structures collapse and disintegrate. They also build themselves into something more than they can be all as they sit on a fictional plane which does not exist. To elaborate on this notion, works of romanticism often exaggerate the truth and nature of a subject or event in order to dramatize and evoke emotional reaction within viewers. I take advantage of this too, but do so in a context within the subject that highlights or points out the absurdity of it. For example, the top of a skyscraper seemingly floating in thin air as the lower contents of its structure plunge free-fall into a void. The absence of gravity, scarcity of logic within the nature of the buildings deconstruction are intentionally done in order to highlight an exaggerate, just as a work of romanticism would, its improbable nature and intense emotional content.

However, in the collages a different approach is taken as the viewpoint and perspective rests far above the wandering landscape much like an aerial view. The viewer is thus shown a spectacle, a large scale overview of our landscape as we have sculpted and abused it. The process of photo collage then pulls the viewer into carefully placed fragments of our real world. These snippets of reality
form a unique vision of our environment seen through my eyes, unhindered by man’s transformation of the natural terrain in a quest for exploiting the earth’s resources.

In conclusion the 3 years I have spent refining both my process in terms of aesthetic dialog and as a matter of presenting ideas through images and illustrations have taken long strides. It began with a long standing interest in architecture and developing computer game based environments. This reappeared as I tried to find a voice through my main medium of Intaglio. I decided to take a more socio-political approach to the work even though there was still an element of science-fiction and fantasy in the earlier works that was present in the game design I had done in the past. However, the work I have done for the past year has been the result of looking at works of important artists from the past and as well as the present. It is this knowledge that I have received that allows me to convey my ideas as mature illustrations and as pieces of fine art.