

AMERICAN HABITATS

By

Michael Florian Kondel

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

Purchase College
State University of New York

January 2010

Accepted:

Murray Zimiles

Sponsor

Cassandra Hooper

Second Reader

My work is derived from my experiences. Diverse living situations and experience have influenced my work, my personality, and have made me who I am. Through travels and experiences, an individual gains an understanding of a life much more realistic than the one they thought existed. One sees the sometimes-harsh realities of what life turns into once the young adulthood has passed and the familiarity of friends and faded. Being alone in a world that does not accompany failure or success is a tough truth that you will be forced to face. You meet people and start seeing the differences in an upbringing that may have been a result of having money or social status. Once you have left your region, people do not know you or the person that you may have been at home. This can be considered as a clean slate, or a series of misjudgment, that makes you realize that people see you as how you present yourself. You become a product of the environment you have created, no matter where you decide to live. People judge other individuals for all the wrong reasons.

When I left my home and was alone I realized this very quickly. It was then that I saw the realities of life and began to meet people and families that had their own set of priorities. This nostalgic America that I once knew in the small town of Gaines MI was remembered as sort of perfect place. Sure everybody feels comfortable at home and there are

many places like this dotted across this great country, but each individual only knows their own hometown. When I left my hometown I truly left. At first I almost wanted to rid myself of what I had learned and start clean but quickly realized that where you're from and the values you have learned shapes and prepares you for survival in a place that is not yours. I now realize I became a little confused and hid my individuality. I felt that I might have to adapt to a life that was not mine however, in time realized that I really did not have to. This helped me reinforce my own personal strengths. It was this realization and how I handled myself that made me compare my upbringing to others.

After a couple of moves across country from Michigan to Arizona and then from Arizona to New York I began to judge people by their appearance and how they handled themselves. This may sound a bit crude but I now realize this was a safety measure that I intuitively used. I encountered many different types of people though my travels and most of them were not saints by any means. In Arizona I lived with two meth addicts for a short time and then moved in with a family that treated me as their son. Through this family I was introduced to and socialized with elite families of Scottsdale, Arizona and also traveled with another family of migrants to their small village in Mexico. Then the move to New York

brought me to a whole new echelon of people who looked at me as if I were in a Petri dish, wondering where the hell I came from. Through friends I experienced high times and attended many fancy social gatherings. This also made me look at myself once again as I tried to adapt to their ways of living realizing that this was mentally and physically not honest. It was then that I realized I had lived or experienced most aspects of the American dream.

As time went on I wanted to begin a project that was true to me. I quickly found out through meeting many people my age and even older that no one had experienced what I had, and if they had they weren't able to step back and look at them through a critical eye. This led me to try to inform other individuals, especially those who have been well off since birth that, there are people out there who don't fit into your life and, yes, they actually live differently. I began categorizing the judgments I had made over the last few years and came up with nine different genres for the American family.

These genres are often the result of stereotyping but stereotyping that has been decided based on lots of research. There is the creative bachelor, an individual who is independent and lives in the now. I see this person living in a loft with many girlfriends and somewhat of a laid back

carefree attitude. As carefree as he may seem, we know he had his shit together and put his life into order early on. Next, the single, hard-working father who strives to provide order and a way of life, but often only barely succeeds in putting food on the table, weighing each dollar he makes.

The single, promiscuous mother lives carefree, letting her kids roam around and leaving them to their own devices while she uses drugs and has men in and out of her home, totally neglecting her children and leaving them to survive on their own. The rich, neglectful parents let their kids do what they want while they focus on themselves and their own schedules.

In comparison, the religious, naive parents think they know their kids and feel that they provide for them. Meanwhile, there are many secrets in the family though everything seems just dandy, the lord will help them through their problems, right? The loner sits in his place falling deeper into his problems while thinking of the times and life that he once thought he would lead.

The nomadic traveler is somewhat of a storybook character. He travels everywhere living short segments of life in different communities, each one having its own set of relationships. After creating these stereotypes I realized there are a lot of people who don't have a home and that makes for a story as well. Such as those who have mental problems, drug addictions or simply had too much fun. Last I chose to do one

sculpture about a specific location, Flint, MI. This is a place that I know well and this place shapes the individuals that come from there. It is a place where industry has failed and the people are left with nothing.

These art works take shape as small-collaged sculptures almost resembling dioramas. The imagery is taken from mass media, mainly Life magazines. At this point in my art-making, I wanted something more refined than hand-drawn material, and I felt this would make for a much more realistic sense of the individuals about whom I was commenting. The environments are hand-made and the finishes on the materials help add to this “life-like” arrangement. Craft is very important in these pieces. I decided to work small enabling me to concentrate on my craftsmanship. The cost of materials and the engineering that went with my previous large-scale works obstructed the meaning of the pieces. At this point I decided I would use modern digital technology and my knowledge of printmaking to scale up the small sculptures to a confrontational size, the way I initially imagined them. I photographed each piece twice focusing on two different facets of the family genre I present in my sculptures. These photographs were transferred onto silk-screens and printed rather large scale. Having a fascination with old printed matter I decided to hand paint these large silk-screens to resemble a lithographed postcard from

the early 1900's. By applying thinned out oil paint washes to a grayscale image the effect came through very well. Each color was subdued by the amount of dots per square inch and resulted in different values of color. The colors still retained their luminosity because of the white paper on which they were painted, and also set behind the silkscreened image that was printed first.

Looking at the work as a whole, I see this project as nostalgic snapshots of American life. This is the life I know and one that other people can relate too. The average observer lacking art training can look at these images and grasp their context. I felt it was important to not obscure the content and not focus too much on subconscious thought or expressions. Sure, there are aspects that are open to interpretation and those parts needed to be included so I could still retain a bit of mystery. Some of the images become very iconic, such as the beautiful blonde soaring amongst heavy industrial structures or the hard-working father carrying George Washington's face to a weight scale. Each sculpture has been photographed twice and each of those photographs can become their own story. Having the "viewer walk away with their own interpretation" is countered by strict guidelines, which allow the viewer to share and relate to the message I am communicating.

