

The Practice of Remembering

Since I can remember, I've picked up bits and pieces, small discarded parts of machinery, leaves and twigs and seed pods. I carry these things with me to set where I can watch them decompose, dry or get dusty or grow. I watch how the light falls on these little set-ups. I stare and also try to catch the phenomena out of the corner of my eye. I know that I am somewhere I am particularly in tune with when I start to pick up these bits or catch myself studying the light. Belgium, yes. Tokyo, no. The ocean, always.

It's true that I've felt guilty about the habit ever since reading **Walden* in high school, but still I try to bargain with Thoreau to give artists "special collecting status". It's not the collecting that I'm after, most of these things have a shelf-life, either by way of their material or my level of examination.

I'll leave the odd arrangement if I need to keep looking. Right now, I see that I've left an old faded green plastic bucket in the middle of the hallway where east, south, west and north light fall on it throughout the day. I've spent weeks watching the color shift. I work from observation but not through drawing, rather by recalling or trying to recall characteristics. That little bucket has helped me stay grounded lately in the light of Tuscany.

In the same way, I work from my dreams. In dreams I watch objects and characters in developing situations. With some kind of stop-action feature, I can hone in on the feel and features of a figure and the complicated dream space environment. Characters make cameos over a number of nights; dreams pick up where I left off. Later I draw diagrams quickly.

I know I'm getting to the proper place and that there is a kind of integral cohesion when I start to write notes and title ideas on the margins of newsprint while I'm working. It's the text that confirms the image and the title that provides that summation.

That's what is mostly in my sketchbook – maps of dream space organization, pressed flowers and leaves, torn newsprint with text and titles, and diagrams for prints that meld the color, form and space. What's not in the sketchbook filters, bubbles and percolates. In the end the final print doesn't look like any of this, but has the feel.

When the title is clear, I know I'm close to done. I've learned that if I push past that title, I will confuse the content and should have started another print. Now, when I'm not sure I put that new information on a separate plate/stone/relief matrix.

The nature of print itself, of being able to work in layers makes this possible. I can choose when and how to overlay plate information and I can change my mind. Form and color are not linked but have their own discreet lives in trial proofs. Separate plates provide me the mechanism to not have to confront all the information all at once all the time. Otherwise, the work would technically and emotionally overwhelm me. The way grounds obscure previously etched lines on a plate while I add to their form functions in the same fashion. All of this can get complicated and rough going, but there is always that paper trail...trial proofs are like the bread crumbs back to safe harbor.

I don't deliberately think about composition or placement. I've practiced the mediation of print so that it has become close to "natural" for me and my working process. That said, when things get too "natural", I stop and make some off shoot things that I am not attached to and are not part of the print to purposefully confuse me. There is no use in getting too comfortable. Getting too comfortable obscures the feel and obstructs the path.

On Any Given Day came over time from dreams and observed forms. I can explain the function of the parts in relation to their service. This print presents a scope, or a slice of possibilities. On Any Given Day, we don't know what will happen. On Any Given Day, we can guesstimate circumstances if things remain relatively stable in our universe. Odd are even. On any given day, "any team can win".

The column of the mezzotint/spit bites are insistent forms. The feel of the look of them was clear and I was slave to making it work. There was not a lot of wiggle room, only getting what I felt down right. They sit on a column of yellow green that increasingly gets closer to yellow as it reaches the top of the paper. This yellow green column and the consistent squares sitting on it are a metaphor for every day idealized life just below the gap in consciousness. Since I print on paper that can become translucent with ink layering, I printed on the back of the squares with four layers of opaque white to ensure their consistent rise up the green to yellow column.

The middle section of the print is the plausible. It's most connected to my body. It is a different kind of depiction, visceral. There is the off center bilateral symmetry that reflects how my body feels in the world. There are parts of this area that make me pretty uncomfortable. Those parts I draw without knowing their consequence. The areas that I know that are going to be uncomfortable, like the wolf form in the top left, I end up drawing in a "prettier" fashion just to be able to get through it. My love of the likes of Bosch, northern pre-Renaissance and Renaissance come into play here. Nothing compares to how long I can look/stare/take in the Van Eyck altar in Ghent even when the cathedral is damp and cold and one must stand to keep looking. That's a gold standard.

The left panel is a constant green the color of the bucket in my hallway. It's a hospital wall institutional green. The spit bite and the mezzotint and the square combined in the right column have been deconstructed and their color is desaturated. The mezzotint is the one of the seven that could most likely take flight. There's not a lot of protection in this column. It's the way things are for this moment. It is one of the possible outcomes of any given day. It's something that could be happening even now without our conscious knowing while we do whatever we are lost doing.

That print lives in the "real" world as much as in the "virtual" is a plus. I would like here to make a distinction between what is called the virtual (digital on a lit screen) and the virtual world in my head. By virtual I mean having to imagine/remember things like what was on the plate once it is covered with opaque grounds. I mean the virtual slideshow of possible outcomes, and how to alter even those outcomes by changing, adding, subtracting colors, plates "in my brain", "in my imagination", in what I see in my head.

The practice of comparing how closely what I see in my head to what I manifest on a proof is an extension of observational drawing. One looks up then down to draw, holding the image in the mind's eye for as long as possible. That act is then repeated for as long as necessary. Each time repetition one holds the image as virtual if even for a moment. This process borders on spiritual practice. The Sufis, grounded in the ecstatic fragility of daily life, call it zikr, the call of the heart, the practice of remembering.

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