Epoch Locale.

Jonathan Hounshell
East Tennessee State University

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Abstract

My explorations around the world are intertwined with my excavation of the layers of art history. My discoveries about the traditions of the printmaking medium are fused with the heritage I inherit as an artist. This is what is put into my current body of work. With this supporting manuscript, I hope to inform about the technical aspects of my unique aesthetic and to entertain with the ideas behind my current body of work by making connections between my personal visions and experiences and the significance of the artists and craftsman who inspire me.
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Introduction

I’ve always been interested in capturing the world around me through art, poetry, and the camera lens. As a collector of nostalgia, I see image making as akin to the collection process—a preservation of moments. My participation in this moment, on this day and in this place is just a segment of a larger ambit along which humanity is revolving and crisscrossing. It is in this way that I feel that history is repeating itself and perhaps my incessant collecting will someday be a tangible link in someone else’s search through time. This inkling has followed me in my many travels and persists throughout my artwork, which reflects our conception of memory, instance, and the passage of time.

My artwork is haunted by poster art of several genres. It’s tinged with the nuances of old advertising and filled with some of my travel experiences over the last decade. Each step taken through these world cities held a reverence to those individuals who have walked there before me, hundreds of years before.

There are traditions in the use of photographic image exemplified by key figures in art history that have helped me formulate my aesthetic. The process of making this series involved the tools of today’s professional designer coupled with historic processes of printmaking and celebrates how the modern artist can manipulate the techniques of the past.

My continuing desire for exploration, my theories and the art process itself share the notion of a loop of time where the poignancy of the moment is wound together with the places I’ve visited—Epoch Locale.
I was born in a half step between generations. My parents were born in the great depression, spending their childhood without running water and electricity. Dad was reared in Lee County, Virginia and my mother has lived all her life in the Tidewater area. My father left the mountains, traveled all the way across the state, and met my mother where they both worked in the shipyard in Newport News, the town in which I was born. My mother worked for Dad’s brother in the art department. Uncle Clyde was an accomplished watercolor realist. My mother is a fine realist in the same genre—that of the illustrative representation of aging buildings, of colonial history—in oil, watercolor, pen and ink. Their artwork possessed a “Field-and-Stream” sense of 1950s optimism and prosperity that is just one of the important parts of the fabric of who I am. I can see it in dated graphic design. It’s the dusty books in family archives, in the periodicals in antique stores and it’s something to which I feel strangely connected—as if I’m born out-of-place, out-of-time. The nostalgic cameras on the shelves of my home all point at me and carry the memories of decades I should have journeyed through.

My family and my uncle’s family moved from Newport News to Williamsburg when I was still a baby. There, I grew up with the smell of my mother’s art supplies and the aromas of my uncle’s studio with the dried up brushes and the wood mallard decoys. This was always a comfort.

My father went on to have a career with the US army at the antebellum Ft. Monroe, and as a boy, I carried around a tiny black government-issue notebook writing stories in it as soon as I learned to form complex sentences. Newport News, Ft. Monroe, Colonial Williamsburg, Jamestown, Yorktown—just like the watery fingers of the ocean, history surrounded me and was passed down to me from my parents. You can trace Virginians back 230 years on my father’s side and nearly 400 years on my mother’s.
So in my subconscious there exists a layering of the past and it comes out in my poetry, in my art and perhaps is why I can stand silent in an abandoned building and hear the bustle of the five-and-dime or sense the smells of the railroad boomtown diner. I take very few steps in my travels around the world’s cities that do not hold a reverence to those individuals who have walked there before me, hundreds of years before.

My wanderlust began with a childhood friendship with a rounder named Magnus whose mother was cultured and whose absent father sent back stories of sailing around the horn of Africa along with other adventurous rumors. We collected coins from around the world, spun LPs of Pink Floyd, and talked about lands far away. Combine this with the real history of parents who’ve lived through some of the most dynamic times in world history and you’ve got the makings of an aesthetic and a mindset steeped heavily in the belief that we are all connected somehow, and that history is repeating itself.

My interest in creative writing initially brought me to Virginia Intermont College which in turn helped me realize that I was an artist above all else and that creativity inside of me was more than just language. While I studied art there, the most spontaneous practice to channel my creativity was photography but ironically I took only one class in photography. VI took me to Mexico City. VI took me to London. I brought these cities home with my camera. I felt so comfortable looking though the viewfinder that the every day activities of life became exercises in composition and color. I developed an appreciation of history and civilization to the extent that the places I visited all became a way to connect with history no matter how grand or how mundane.

I fell in love with Parisian poster art and began emulating it.

I kept writing poetry.

I never stop taking pictures.

My career as a graphic designer and my interest in history and travel has brought me to my current artistic exploration—a combination of photography, printmaking, drawing, and sometimes poetry that explores the passage of time and the importance of place.
I have traveled, through England, France, and Germany; Italy, Spain, and Ireland; Mexico, Honduras, and Ecuador; Romania and places in between. Somehow I feel that each epoch of my life merges with the great moments of history and each locale I find myself in, I'm strangely meant to traverse.

I find it fascinating that I have now settled in the region that my father left behind to start a new life in Newport News. Together we've covered the state exchanging places so to speak. But whether in the tidewater of Virginia or the mountains of Tennessee, my life has been filled with deep-rooted coincidences. I have seen many moments where my past comes back again full circle. Images, music, phrases and people fall into a sort of mechanism in which my own anthropology spins along hundreds of grooves and every once in a while the mechanism skips and it spits out a piece from the past when it circles twice over it.

I had one of these full circle moments in the attempt to name my self-promotional web site. I searched inside of myself for an interesting phrase. The 37th parallel stood out in my mind. It had a nice ring to it. And, of course I wanted to find out it's significance and discovered something I never knew—the 37th parallel intersects the east coast in a ship building naval town called Newport News.
It’s strange to me now, but the first painting I remember ever impacting me was Fragonard’s Young Girl Reading. I was in the sixth grade and we were on a trip to the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. I stopped in front of it and stood there for what seemed like forever (to a sixth grader). This was the first time I ever remember being mesmerized by art into a stare that tunes out your surroundings until the other senses—hearing, smell, touch—become abstract in the impact of visualization.

If I try to look back over my artwork and try and understand this paintings influence, I’d have to stretch my imagination and memory for a clear explanation. Perhaps it’s the solitary female subject, which can be seen in my early oil paintings. Perhaps it’s the quiet drama it possessed. I still remember her hand, a few fingers curled while holding her aged book and maybe it, in itself, embodied my future infatuation with collecting weathered objects from other times.

In the National Gallery I also remember being impacted by Degas’ sense of composition and I remember Eduord Manet’s Gare St. Lazare, the woman’s gaze, and the brush strokes from which she was constructed. Manet would later become one of my favorite artists. I’ve seen his paintings in London galleries and have adored them in books. The initial reasons for noticing his work escape my memory, but since then I have taken as example, his flattening of the picture space and the use of heavy outline—Olympia, The Fifer, Surprised Nymph.

On a trip to London’s National Gallery of Art I found myself mesmerized and held in rapture again by a single painting, The Execution of Lady Jane Grey by Paul Delaroche. I was amazed at the realism of the fabric, the hay surrounding the chopping block, her porcelain skin, and her expression. I think the theatrics of a single woman’s story impacted me. Delaroche seemed to show the tragedy of beauty and youth so masterfully. Even if Delaroche’s
scene bent the facts of history into a dramatic artistic interpretation, this process is what makes well known the obscure and heroes from the well known.

Stylization of the subject, the contrast of flat areas and color in contraposto to areas of articulated volume began to show up in my paintings after the summer of 1996, upon my graduation from Virginia Intermont. I had been looking heavily at American illustration, taking from particular examples in a William King Regional Arts Center exhibition—N.C. Wyeth and those of the Brandywine school were among them. I had grown up infatuated with other countries and so the epic drama of these illustrations, the bold colors and the stark outlining took root. I again saw that quiet drama in this artwork. Victoria Manning in her essays on N.C. Wyeth notices this as well when commenting on his illustration New World Traveler for Charles Kingsley’s book Westward Ho! She says, “The painting is a fine example of how Wyeth imparts action and drama with minimal color and physical motion, within the strictures of the limited color allotted for printing.” Manning also gives Wyeth the credit of achieving the sense of dramatic action by using strong patterns of light and shadow (Manning 49).

“In a book or magazine,” says Elizabeth Hawkes, “as in movies and television, visuals excite the imagination. Pictures, whether painted or on film, make visible the characters, costumes, locale, and dramatic action of a story” (Manning 13). Hawkes establishes a correspondence between illustration and the more modern concept of a movie still, “Action is arrested for a moment, as if waiting for the next sequence of shots” (Manning 13). I was seeing these dramatic pauses that day in William King Arts Center in front of the paintings by N.C. Wyeth. These dramatic pauses and anticipations were in turn holding me still like a single movie frame, as if caught in a moment of epiphany—one of my self-termed “full circle moments.” I was being inspired in a way similar to my experience in front of Paul Delaroche’s painting of Lady Jane. The story and the sense of the importance of place were instilled in me after I left that exhibition.

I began to look heavily to poster art of the turn of the century and began to emulate it in my paintings. I sought to use broad areas of flat color with areas where I painted in oil in a realist and volumetric manner, and they all contained the solitary female subject combined with a symbol of personal experience. Either the female
figure was treated with volume and my experience imagery flat and graphic or vice versa. I was experimenting with the idea of a contradiction between the second dimension of the painting surface and the illusions of the third dimension. I was intuitively picking this up from poster art. What I did not know at the time was that my great exemplar, Manet, had made only one poster: *Chats’ Rendezvous* in 1868. But, the emphasis on the decorative and the two-dimensional that was especially important in the posters of the 1890s can be seen to have its origin here with Manet’s poster, says Dennis Cate in an essay on the French poster (Kiehl 59-60). The poster artist Chéret, a prolific figure of the early poster craze, battled with the two dimensionality of typography and his busy three dimensional scenes like that of *Bal du Moulin Rouge*, 1889 in which he gives shadow to the type in an attempt to incorporate it into the scene’s depth. On the contrary, Cate points out, later artists like Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec used the two dimensionality of the poster itself to their benefit by emphasizing it in posters such as Lautrec’s *Moulin Rouge, La Goulue* where he eliminates that modeling and the shadow. The floor tilts up rather than recedes. Effects like this and the bold outlines with the flat colors “continually reassert the supremacy of a frontal plane upon which words, performers, spectators, and lights are all parallel” (Kiehl 67-68). In my search through examples of this art form I had always overlooked Chéret and studied Lautrec intently due to the preference I had for Lautrec’s clever flattening of the scene up against the picture plane. I began doing this in my paintings and later it would appear in my printmaking.

I looked further at Joseph J. Gould illustrating *Lippincott’s* covers, Edward Penfield illustrating covers of *Harper’s Weekly*, large street posters like *La Rue* by Steinlen, and numerous travel posters by artists like Leonard Richmond. Ervine Metzl characterizes Edward Penfield as establishing a “style of his own which combined Paris chic with London poise and artistic refinement: but all his figures had that clean-cut look which identified them as Americans” whose action was strong and simple, and well into the foreground (65). In my gravitation to the cosmopolitan lifestyle, I saw myself almost inside these posters that combined all the fashionable elements of the different world cities, which I had visited, and those in which I dreamed of living one day. But, deep down I knew that I couldn’t ignore my family heritage stretching across 375 years of American life no matter how infatuated I
was with the European chic. Like Edward Penfield’s posters, my interests were mixed with styles from both sides of the ocean.

Some of the main elements of successful poster designs were what I was trying to put into areas of my artwork. Metzl identifies these elements: stark stylization while bringing the advertisement message across boldly, swiftly, and in big masses of color with as few colors as possible (23-124). I kept this in mind as I played with the second and third dimension in an almost collage like manner combining my own experiences into pseudo advertisements.

A career in graphic design added to this infatuation with advertisement aesthetic and my interest in history gave it a thematic genre. In trips to countries like Mexico and Ecuador and even some European nations I discovered an aesthetic to outdoor advertising that was frozen in nostalgia by the slowed rate of economic development. Though the business of design, in many ways, has benefited from digital advancements and improved advertising infrastructure, I think much has been lost in America. I respond more to the painted signs along the Pan American Highway in today’s South America, or those along Hwy 11 in yesteryear’s United States. Even the politics of Communism and the arrest of industrial advancement gave to graphic design what I perceive as a strangely refreshing hermitage—holding on to the old ways while the West moved on. This time capsule effect and the perpetuation of nostalgia really has drawn my attention in recent months to Eastern Europe and the former USSR, particularly photography in poster art of the avant garde and of revolutionary propaganda. Added to this is my admiration of Robert Rauschenberg’s artwork and his juxtaposition of imagery in his silkscreen series.

My most recent work comes from the combination of these interests, evolving through them almost chronologically as the genres, themselves, passed through world history. Continuing the introduction of personal experience into culturally recognizable settings—like that of world cities or monuments—I’m into the passage of time and the sense of place, geographically and historically.
My infatuation with heavy outline surrounding and sanctifying areas of delicately rendered portraiture from surrounding flat color appears in my figurative studies at ETSU. And, in my art history studies here, I've come to learn this style is called cloisonism, like the stained glass in Westminster Abbey, the Tower Chapel, or Salisbury Cathedral, places where I also found myself standing quiet and profoundly moved. I recognize this cloisonism outlining in the work of Paul Gaugin, in some of Picasso’s Rose Period paintings and the posters of Alphonse Mucha. Mucha’s posters contain graphic areas of flat color abutting the portraiture under the banners of art nouveau typography. The theatrics of the swirling hair and fabric all weave into the histories of the popular culture of other time periods to which my imagination hearkens heavily. I can’t look through a collection of his work without being moved deeply in an unexplainable manner. Alphonse Mucha and many of the poster artists of the “Belle Epoch” played a part in the influence for that “stained glass aesthetic” of my figurative work, but the photographic transfers of some of my current work take on this cloisonism in a new manner. Surrounded by the stark and busy ink patterns of my silkscreen imagery are the ethereally softer photographic characters sanctified like spacemen traveling through what appears to be a famous place but which has been distilled into a flat bedlam of shape and texture.

My interest in the passage of time and the importance of historical locale brought these interests—of individual and personally iconic people—into this new body of work that follows a sequence format. Into this I poured poster art, advertisement and my own experience and my own history in respect to world history. Insisting that these memories be solely my own, I am using and adapting my own photographs of the places depicted in these triptychs and multiples.

From all the places I’ve been, Romania seems to seep out into my art the most. My sequences are now circling back to the communist aesthetic, with poignant significance. I look back on a particular sequence of mine containing a tiny car going down a Romanian side street. With this piece I think I have started to subconsciously rely on the absurdity of early photomontage, which I’ve only recently studied in depth in the poster design of the first three decades of the twentieth century. From this point I continued to use this aesthetic in the artwork that
followed, whether my subjects were from the east or the west of the rusting iron curtain. “The new poster relies on photography,” said Maholy-Nagy circa 1926, “which is the new storytelling device of civilization, combined with...typefaces...and brilliant color effects, depending on the desired intensity of the message” (Ades 64).

In Revolutionary Russia, the regime needed to arouse and educate in a manner that communicated visually for a vast country of many languages and rampant illiteracy. The use of photomontage was quite useful and the aesthetic of propaganda films began to influence the poster art with image splicing, close-up views, the juxtaposition of images and even double exposure (Wrede 28). Artists like Anatol Belski, Yakov Guminer, and Gustav Klutsis combined photographs through the old design processes of cut and paste which has a look that intrigues me, especially since I have the latest knowledge of the computer processes that long since “perfected” this commercial art. In keeping with my interest of bringing history back to the forefront, I want to achieve looks similar but not directly to related the propaganda of Gustav Klutsis who preferred “large, grainy, crudely reproduced photographic images and combined them with strong red backgrounds to achieve a revolutionary effect” (Wrede 30).

In Dawn Ades opinion, some of the best posters in the second half of the 1920s were created for the Russian cinema such as Anton Lavinsks poster for Battleship Potemkin (84) which is a great example of the aesthetic I’m drawn toward of the large bold flat areas and the strangely and often crudely inserted photograph.

Good Western European examples of this genre began appearing in the mid 1930s and Stuart Wrede cites some of the pioneering examples of the introduction of photography into the poster such as a BMW motorcycle poster by Popp Keircheim and an ad for Olivetti typewriters by Xanti Schawinsky (Wrede 33). These posters are also prime influences on what I want to achieve with my travel sequences. To this day—amongst the computer age—Olivetti still makes chic little typewriters. From typewriters to transportation, these are the gems of human history that I seek to dig out like the little Romanian car that kept the same body style for 30 years.

Appropriating images from the media, other propagandists like John Heartfield and Dadaists like Kurt Schwitters, in my opinion, formed a foundation aesthetic for the art of artists like Robert Rauschenberg, another of my favorites due to the juxtaposition of imagery that can be seen particularly in his silkscreen paintings.
Rauschenberg told Dorothy Seckler in *Art in America* in 1966, that when he first saw an exhibit of Schwitters works, he felt as if the whole exhibition was made just for him (74). Max Kozloff’s impression of Rauschenberg’s work in a 1963 exhibition said that the art goes past Schwitters into art history—cubism and its multiple points of view, Surrealism as well as Dada. Having adored much of Rauschenberg’s artwork for some time, I find it poignant to learn that there are art movements wound into Rauschenberg’s silkscreens that I instinctively tried to weave into mine: Synthetic Cubism, propaganda, and Dadaism.

This seemingly disparate group of artists that influence me could be linked by the use of photographic imagery. They have been known to have a personal “library” of images to choose from when creating their paintings or designs. Rauschenberg’s personal library of images comes from hiring professionals to create his silkscreens of photos that he appropriated from *LIFE, SPORTS ILLUSTRATED*, and *National Geographic*. Silkscreen was once an industry standard for fine art reproductions. John Heartfield was known to have a library of thousands of images and orchestrated the darkroom expertise of professional photographers to work out his imaginative assaults on the Nazis. The backbone of this aesthetic whether it belonged to Schwitters, Heartfield, or Rauschenberg seems to be the machine of professionals, photographers, printers, et cetera involved in commerce. Even today, instead of how Heartfield’s darkroom created the smoky noir of his anti-Nazi propaganda, artists like myself may use the latest image altering software to embody their vision. In a similar decadent manner as Rauschenberg, I’m somewhat abusing the intent toward the quality of imagery that is often expected when one uses electronic image editing for commercial art.

I seek to create an almost layering of misappropriated imagery trying to tell a story—a strange juxtaposition of the elements that belong to the memory of the place and people but bent a little. Rosalind Krauss cleverly worded her interpretation of a similar layering effect in Rauschenberg’s artwork, “snapshots, postcards, news photos, comic strips, or poster fragments are layered into the surface like so much material, suspended within the pictorial matrix like biological specimens floating in fluid under glass” (40). Max Kozloff likens this suspension of the image to something caught in between the infinity of facing mirrors—a “fossilized echo” as he called it (214). I am inclined
to latch onto this concept coined in phrase by Kozloff. There’s a frozen expansion of a particular memory in my current work—an expanded echo of a single moment, in motion but also only a finite and stationary fragment of the incessant string of events that make up our lives or even our recollections that fade and metamorphose in the vaults of our minds. Three frames of a movie played over in my head, which are only attached to reality by the documents I’ve made of them—the photographs of people and places that I then further confuse by my technical processes. Therefore, in the tradition of a story, of layering and of juxtaposition, I hope my own work can be linked in a heritage of aesthetics like that of Rauschenberg’s silkscreen paintings in which the “whole procedure is reminiscent of the flashbacks, subliminal blips, filters, cut-ins, pan shots and dissolves of the modern film” (Kozloff 215) forcing us to read it as if it were unfolding on screen.

Discussing what was currently In the Galleries (Arts Magazine) in December of 1963, Donald Judd characterized Rauschenberg’s paintings as looking “like a montage summarizing life in the twentieth century” (60). Max Kozloff writing for The Nation suggests that this manner of image reproduction by Rauschenberg is a comment on how we once received our news from the outside world (back in 1963)—“automating all communications as mechanized afterimages” (213). Using today’s accelerated mechanization of imagery, I want my series to be like a montage summarizing some of my experiences at the turn of these centuries.

“No artist I know takes such a polyvalent and imaginative inventory of modern life” say Max Kozloff, “a mind agog with a welter of current events and vulnerable to the relentless pressure of the urban environment” (215). Rauschenberg himself believed that painting is “reporting, as a vehicle that will report what you did and what happened to you” (Swenson 67) and Rauschenberg’s art reported the state of things in the early sixties—A time capsule of image capture to be appreciated by future artists using the media image. I love Rauschenberg’s concept and I hope to do the same for the past decade of my own life in this series of silkscreens and block prints with image transfer. The titles of my triptychs reflect this. Traditionally in a print the title, edition number, and signature with date are hand written along the bottom of the image. I take this tradition and merge it with my sense of documenting the moment. Instead of titling, I may simply state the locale. Instead of an edition number, I
may place the numerals of hours and seconds that subsequently change from one panel to another. Most recently each panel of the sequence becomes a personification of a lyrical fragment written by me to reminisce the event. Only by lining up the parts of a triptych, for example, would the viewer be able to read the whole prose or poem associated with the subject event.

Whether you call it collage, photomontage, or assemblage, Rauschenberg perhaps began a tradition of the objectification and appropriation of the commercial photographic image that would gain a new appreciation and adaptation by artists of future decade like John Baldessari or Sigmar Polke.

Baldessari’s Black Dice 1982 is an arrangement of nine equally sized etchings on Arches paper. Baldessari took a still from an old movie of the same title and divided it twice vertically and twice horizontally (Van Buren 16) to make up the juxtaposition of fragments. The finished product has areas of flat color, areas of grainy photographic nuances, and positive negative interplays of shapes. “Experimenting with similar issues of control and withdrawal, Baldessari today randomly sorts through the piles of movie stills he has collected” (Van Buren 16). Baldessari also was interested in the passage of time making one installation out of nothing but the photographs of the back of trucks taken from his convertible as he traversed a specific segment of highway, documenting in an almost scientific but visually artistic manner.

An exhibition of Sigmar Polke’s work closed just last year at the Tate Gallery on the banks of the Thames. It was showcased on their web site and he is celebrated as being innovative enough to make him hard to categorize in the art world. In his early work, in the 1960s Polke painstakingly imitated the dotted effects of commercial printing by painting each dot with the eraser at the end of a pencil. He challenged this mechanized imagery by exaggerating the printing mistakes, the unreliability of color registration, and created meaningless patterns as can be seen in Girlfriends, 1965 (Anonymous).

Throughout his career, Polke has used newspapers as inspiration or as source for this artwork. His series in the mid 1990s Druckfehler (Printing Mistakes) shows his fascination with the random mistake versus the original image. He again enlarged and distorted the rasters of the newspaper photos layering his visuals through layers
of resin and mesh providing a “filter” through which to gather the information (Anonymous). Through the web site’s description of this process, I am reminded here of Krauss’s comments on Rauschenberg’s layering and the embedding and sandwiching of images.

The exhibit brought together works inspired by many sources—newspapers, satellite photography, 19th century illustrations, and others—right in cue with traditions of collage—from Schwitters, to Rauschenberg, and onward to myself. This can be seen in Polke’s painting History of Everything II, The Hunt for the Taliban and I Live in My Own World, but it’s OK, They Know Me Here all completed in 2002-2003. These are Polke’s “Machine Paintings” in which he uses computer-imaging technology to produce his work (quicker than the pencil eraser, no doubt). Images of medieval desert horsemen appear in the paintings alongside degraded satellite images capturing Afghans on horseback. The combination of this imagery is to me a strange link between age-old history, technology, and the temporality of man in the scope of instant annihilation of modern warfare. The images are arranged in Baldessari-like grids in some cases, or just large pieces in the famous Polke-dots of enlarged image rasters beyond distinction into abstraction.

This is what I want to do. I want to create a poignant loop between the past and the present in the imagery as well as the art process itself. Not only do I seek to visually contradict flatness and depth but also to juxtapose the reality versus the surrealism of the photograph in combination with other compositional elements. I want my images to stand for something directly and intertwine with but at the same time remove themselves from the composition and even from their own meaning.

These interests of mine find roots in the artists I’ve mentioned. Like N.C. Wyeth, I want to tell a story. Like John Heartfield I want to juxtapose the photograph. Like Robert Rauschenberg, I want to layer and conflict depth with flatness of silkscreen. Like Sigmar Polke I want to celebrate the patterns of commercial printing and to stretch them to a new intrigue of exaggeration.
Beginning with a simple photograph from my travels, I will collect others images of the people involved in that trip—all of whom were actually there with me. I scan these photos and use the computer first as historical artists may use a sketchbook. I work out the ideas, interchanging sources, cutting out characters, and overlaying photographs, skewing, cropping, and organizing. When my idea materializes on screen I use the software to reduce some of the photographs to patterns most applicable to printmaking matrixes and others into what I will photocopy and enlarge and transfer back onto paper using a solvent and the press. In a sense I am taking a memory and the documents of that memory then dissecting it, distilling it, and then reassembling it onto paper again through a mix of fine art and computer based processes.

For the traditional printmaking components of my image, I have been using mainly silkscreen, a little lithography, and some relief printing. These processes are well established and documented. But, the following discussion may be more informative for artists because this process of photocopy transfer used as a final aesthetic is not widely known. Therefore, I will seek to explain my discoveries in this area, which have been even more enjoyable for me than any other traditional printmaking media.

My primary solvent of choice for the photocopy transfer is acetone, which may be a familiar name to even the average person (since it’s the main ingredient in nail polish remover). Acetone is useful if a fast, smooth, and consistent image is desired on the paper from the original color or black and white copy. This solvent is most effective for me if used on the press for the transfer. Some artists work the acetone transfer by hand but the sizes at which I work make this difficult because acetone is a hot solvent, meaning it evaporates very quickly. The broad pressure and relative rapid nature of the press bed helps the large images, which are often pieced together from
four sections—each 11 x 17 inches in size. Having to piece the image together from four photocopies produces a number of seams, which I could correct but I’ve learned to either accept or manipulate this in order to work with my subject matter and my aesthetic.

My other solvent of choice is actually a medical supply. Wintergreen oil is a liniment but, like acetone, it breaks down the toner of the photocopy so that it can be transferred to the paper. But, wintergreen oil works much slower and often the longer you delay the act of applying pressure, the better the transfer. This extended time frame allows me to use a blunt object like a bone folder to apply the pressure in a series of many scrubbing and mark-making gestures. This technique, in turn, gives the photographic image a hand drawn effect like that of a pastel drawing, depending on how thorough or heavy your pressure marks are applied. Black and white photocopies break down easily with the solvent are transferred beautifully with average effort. Color photocopies are more difficult. The dark areas tend to take longer to breakdown and if too hastily transferred, the image could appear negative when the shadows fail to transfer.

For color images, either from acetone or wintergreen oil, it’s easy to go back in with real pastel and alter the image. This is mainly due to the way the image “soaks” into the paper and allows the receptive nature of the paper for dry drawing material to remain. I have used this additional technique to hide seams, strengthen weak transfer areas, or to change color where I want, and the pastels blend in well with the transfer.

Black and white photocopies take on a charcoal appearance and can have some beautiful tones in them even when the original is quite full of contrast. Color photocopy transfers take on a washed-out soft appearance like that of old 8mm home movies. I’ve learned to use these results in many different aesthetic situations. This works well with my aesthetic, combining areas of realistic delicacy with areas of graphic stylization and flat color ink, so the photocopy transfer process has become an integral part of my artwork.

Ironically, Robert Rauschenberg shied away from this aesthetic combination just as he was beginning his series of silkscreen painting. He had been working in with photo transfer in his drawings but when he tried to
incorporate it on canvas with the brilliant color of paint he felt that the pastel quality of the transfer could not compete with any painted effects. Roni Feinstein—in his book Robert Rauschenberg: the Silkscreen Paintings 1962-64—quotes Thomas Garver, “The paleness of the transferred image could be all too easily overpowered by any additional painting applied to canvas” (42). Photographs and the collage aesthetic were important parts of his art, so he turned to silkscreen to produce photographic images onto canvas with his other painterly expressive techniques. They now could compete in this new series (Feinstein 42).

Rauschenberg began using the process in 1959, and Feinstein denotes this time period to be when photographic images, so central to the silkscreen paintings, first assumed a major role (42). His technique—that he invented in Cuba (Kotz 98)—was different from what I have worked-out. Rauschenberg moistened the image with a solvent, placed the image face down on a sheet of drawing paper, and rubbed the back to impress the image on the paper surface—as I would do—but he moistened magazines or newspaper illustrations with a turpentine or lighter fluid instead (Feinstein 42). Instead of a broad bookmaking tool like I use, Rauschenberg used an empty ball point pen, drawing it back and forth on the paper (Kotz 99) seemingly in one direction.

Mary Lynn Kotz in her book Rauschenberg Art and Life describes the year 1959 as a time when Rauschenberg wanted to combat the ridicule given to some of his artwork thus far. He sought to do a series of works on paper—drawings—illustrating Dante’s Inferno, which would be a new and more serious challenge—narrative art. Rauschenberg knew he could do abstract art, he later explained, “but could I do anything else?” (98). He decided to make one drawing for each of the poem’s thirty-four cantos combining Rauschenberg’s own pencil and crayon drawings and water color painting with transferred images from magazines such as LIFE and Sports Illustrated—and this process became his primary method of drawing (Kotz 98-99). In the series the images used to represent the characters were absurd but politically poignant. Kotz lists them as images of mechanized war, space-age exploration, and politicians implementing Italian racing cars as centaurs, gas-masked Africans as demon squads, uniformed policemen as the clergy and rockets as Dante’s hell fires. The drawings took Rauschenberg eighteen months and involved the most intensely disciplined work of this life, isolating himself in a rented storage room in
a Florida fishing village. Upon exhibition, they gave Rauschenberg some of his first substantial praise from the art establishment (Kotz 99).

Other artwork using the transfer process were *Construction* (transferred images to a three dimensional wood structure) 1958 and *Calendar*, 1962—that transitional work that caused Rauschenberg to be dissatisfied with combination of transfer on canvass with paint—leading to the use of photographs from silkscreen and not transfer (Feinstein 42). Later work exhibited the transfer process to fabric.

Apart from the differences in solvents, the process described by Feinstein and Kotz is a lot like mine. The greatest exception was that Rauschenberg used images of mass media (which was the preference of several facets of Pop Artists) not his own photographs from his own experiences like I’m doing now.

With the technology of copy machines and digital images today, I don’t necessarily need to rely on magazines or newspaper clippings like Rauschenberg. But still I liken it to these pop artists who’s aesthetic relied on flatness, the use of commercial printing processes, and mass media imagery (Feinstein 21). This comparison is on the basis that my computer, the programs I use and even the photocopy are used extensively in the commercial printing and design world, which I’ve had the privilege of belonging to for six years or more. And using my own photography works easily within my knowledge of these art-business tools.

Despite these differences, the end result of my process on the paper sounds to be very similar to Rauschenberg’s results. “The transfer drawings had a delicate, evanescent quality and were rendered in pastel tones,” describes Feinstein when comparing them to Rauschenberg’s exploration of lithography soon after his initial jaunt with the transfer (43). Lithography (whose joys and heartaches I’ve also explored) uses the limestone as the plate to hold an image, which is inked and run through the press. I chose to abandon the lithograph process after two semesters. Rauschenberg was also steering well clear of lithography in 1959. He emphatically stated, “The second half of the 20th century was no time to start drawing on rocks.” Yet Rauschenberg later attributed lithography to be a big influence on his paintings (Feinstein 43). I could not stick with lithography because I found it
to be so much work for the color I wanted to do. I share a part of Rauschenberg’s heart when I read his interview with Calvin Thomas, “I’m such a pushover for color,” Rauschenberg told Thomas (Feinstein 13).

In lithography, each color needs a separate stone, which increases the work. But, each stone, theoretically, can be used over and over again very much the same as silkscreen. However, in the Rauschenberg’s transfer drawings, Feinstein notes, each image is unique since the source material is destroyed in the process (43) and this I can attest to—I’ve filled many waste paper baskets full of minty-smelling papers. But, my process involves computer files that can be printed again from my computer and enlarged on the color copy for a new transfer subject identical to the first. This, though, is costly and laborious and I am not all together interested in making many copies of my triptych series. I prefer them to be unique also, in and unto themselves.

Above all the processes, my increasing interest in the varying application of photography is kindred to Rauschenberg’s artwork even if the aesthetic and the sources of our imagery differ. Feinstein identifies the themes in Rauschenberg’s work to be multiplicity and the variety of contemporary life (22). I can relate to multiplicity in my sequential attempts and the images of my travels are stolen instances of the lives of anonymous contemporaries.

Feinstein also states that photographic reproductions—such as transfers—by definition are images of things twice removed rather than the things themselves (41). I enjoy this concept in my attempt to reinvent my own personal history into an avant garde, pseudo anthropology. The photograph is an imitation of reality and the reproduction of this reproduction is further removed from reality. I believe it could reach the point at which it may define its own reality and form a new narrative hung in the fabric of time.

I’ve long since enjoyed playing two dimensions against illusion of three dimensions and I now can cite Rauschenberg’s ideas as coherent to mine. “Rauschenberg played knowing games with photographic illusionism [throughout the silkscreen series] controlling the degree to which each of the images represents a pocket of space” (Feinstein 46). He had developed devices like graffiti and printed words to hold the flatness of the surface in the transfer drawings for he was unwilling to tolerate depth (Feinstein 45).
I have no beguile for depth, and I approach the transfer in a more premeditated and systematic way compared to Rauschenberg. He used neither transfer nor silkscreen uniformly but rather revealed the process by emphasizing the edges of the screens and the individual swipes of the squeegee (Feinstein 47). My methods use the silkscreen in a controlled manner to create a strict space—even if graphically flat. Yet, I also enjoy some of the process-oriented mistakes that show the hand of the artist. For Rauschenberg the strokes of the silkscreen “countered the illusionism inherent in the photographic images” (Feinstein 45). For me I disguise the strokes of the squeegee because I enjoy the smoothness of a well-applied ink image and how its flatness and surface perfection contrasts the irregularities of the pastel, hand-hewn look of the wintergreen transfer or even the smooth ghostlike gossamer of the acetone transfer. Unlike the incomplete and directional scribbles and the excited placement of the transfers like in his series for Dante’s Inferno, I want the whole photograph to appear and to exist in a space that adheres to the rules of scale—no matter how absurd in content or appearance. I prefer no device to flatten out the photograph. I want them to calmly conflict with each other—the two-dimensional silkscreen that tries to allude the third dimension versus the photograph of a three-dimensional reality, now degraded into two dimensions.
As I’ve mentioned, I seek not to make an edition of prints, but instead a set of three prints that represent an interval of time and these successive numbers are written at the bottom of the print instead of an edition number. As I came closer the completion of this body of work, I put a further twist on this tradition of writing the title, edition number, and signature on the bottom of the prints. I began to make lyrical passages describing the events in each triptych. Instead of the month, day, year, hours, and seconds changing from one to the next, a full thought is expressed across the set. When the triptych is lined up in order and displayed as a congruent unit, the full passage can be read.

So I’ve employed several styles of expressing the passage of time in each triptych. As well, I’ve created varied intervals of time. Some sets may express only the passage of a few seconds with the simple act of people coming and going, like 5 Seconds Below Montmartre, 21 Seconds of London Sun, 4 Bridges into the Tour, or 4 Kilometers Off Course. Others may express minutes like 3 Minutes in Spain, or perhaps several hours like in 2 Hours Late, or even the passage of years as can be seen in 27 Years of Communism and 3 Trips to Europe.

Whatever the time interval, however, a consistent structure is set into all of the pieces in the exhibition. There is always a constant and a variable. In most, the places I’ve traveled to become the background that does not change from panels one to two to three. These locales are the constant. The people coming and going through this environment are the variables. They come in and pass out of the scene, changing as they swim through the
complex texture of marks that give the illusion of a three dimensional space. One piece however switches this concept but does not violate it; *3 Trips to Europe* portrays one person over the course of 5 years of travel where she is the constant and the place, conversely, is the variable.

I enjoy this setting up of a matrix of ideas and then turning it in on itself by tweaking the concept that I set into place. This comes out in my titles and poetic narratives fabricated into some of the triptychs. With my reverence for the history of the place and my intrigue in how humans go about there courses, I’ve made poignant and riddled references to the importance of the locale or my personal experience of the journey.

Take for instance *21 Seconds of London Sun*. Not only can the viewer discern the simple interaction of people at the Tower of London over the period of 21 seconds, a vague joke is presented about the infrequency of seeing the sunshine in the city. Perhaps only a few moments out of the day would the sun show its face. Across the bottom of the prints strings a line of prose from one panel to the next expressing the event of a storm and its aftermath.

*27 Years of Communism*, on the contrary, only states the place, the year, and the name of a small Communist made automobile as it comes at the viewer down a street in Romania. The pun is only understood if the viewer realizes that this little car never had a significant style nor technological change over 27 years of its production. The car looked the same in 1964 as it did in 1991, hence the years are written on the prints instead of the few seconds it my have taken the car to travel down the cobblestone street.

A few triptychs are closer to a mere documentary nature. A travel memory is retold as in *4 Kilometers Off Course* and *50 Pesos for the Taxi Driver* or even fabricated like in *3 Minutes in Spain*. But whether it’s a real memory, or a false narrative, every one of these artworks contains photography solely captured on that trip. Whether they are strangers on the street, or well known traveling partners, they are people I saw walking around in the scenes amongst the objects that I may have touched. I enter humorous and clever subtleties like the clock behind the character in *3 Minutes in Spain*. Several disparate photographs, taken in Spain, were compiled together into a depiction of an event half true and half false. Indigenous to the main photograph is a clock sign standing in the
background. This convenient element happened to be there in a photo I wanted to use from my albums and it number display was begging to be digitally altered in each panel in order to show the passage of time.

In nearly all of the works, numbers of both quantity and time are important. *3 Trips to Europe* has an extended title of *(1 Honeymoon, 1,230 Left-Handed Kilometers, and a 9-Day Fever)*. These references are only understood if the viewer knew that the character is my wife as she travels on the honeymoon for one trip, rides in a car in Ireland on a six day vacation, and agonizes over a husband on a third trip as he suffered from a 9 day fever in Romania. Further entwined into the mesh of numbers and references, more information is written across the bottom of each for even more literal and lyrical explanations of the visuals within each panel.

In this body of work, there are not only distinct personal experiences of my own epochs, but the importance of place plays a significant role as well. I can very well visit a place steeped in a history of human experience and to express this, I created *5 Seconds Below Montmartre*. It illustrates my visit to a place wound well into the culture of the famous Parisian art scene, the Moulin Rouge. As an artist myself, I reveled in the fact that I can walk the same streets as many of the artist whose work inspires me.

Quite possibly my signature piece in the body of work is not a triptych at all but is an installation of 12 smaller panels that have distinct importance of locale. This set again appears to be celebrating a simple human act such as smoking a cigarette. But deeper and more entangled meanings can be deciphered if the viewer contemplates and reads the extended lyrical paragraph that jumps from one panel to the next. If you study the character in the story, she appears so young and it becomes about the wastefulness of youth. But as this meaning goes across, underneath I intended the commentary to be even more poignant. This may be revealed if the viewer knows the importance of the town of Derry, Northern Ireland. The title, *13 going on 32* at first suggest a young girl growing up quickly, but beyond this number interpretation lies the fact that 32 years have passed since a fateful day in Derry when British troops opened fire on unarmed demonstrators, an event that fueled the enragement of the IRA and the decades of violence to follow. When you also consider how old this city is (its walls were never breached since the
reign of King James) you may pick up on the irony of neon signage on ancient buildings. So now the young lady is not only wasteful youth, her life may be a tiny and unknowing vapor that passes in a place that time has weathered harshly. She may be only concerned with how she needs to dress and act in order to fit in with her girlfriends. What’s important to her—her epoch—seems like flash of light in the dark shadows cast by the aged walls of such a locale.

Though all of these meanings and connections are woven into my work, I can’t expect everyone to figure them out. But that downside is actually a valid point of the whole exhibition. I may take a cab to El Centro in Mexico City, but think of all the people who rode in that one taxi out of all the other taxis. They all had desires and visions. They had families and friends with hopes and dreams. And I have not a clue what any of those dreams were, but we all shared that small space within a giant city and in the scope of humanity, what a finite concept that is.

It was lockdown—10 pm
—Sunday at the south gate of Derry
in the enveloping orange of the neon signs
on a 16th century facade.
Taking a drag, she wore a mini skirt
and cowboy boots of colored leather
just like all the adolescent girls
converging like flocks of pigeons
in the desolate and dark corners
of a divided city
waiting
for what she thought was America.
In Conclusion

So, in coming full circle with all my influences and ideas, I must ask myself one question. If I’m truly interested in history reinventing itself as it repeats, then what hasn’t been done yet? What can I bring to the art world that transcends the masters and the innovators of my medium? Something I have that they all can’t or could not represent were Jon Hounshell’s experiences—the people I know—faces along my journeys—images I have captured with my memory—my days, my months, my years—what makes me, me. I can be impacted by visual styles but what fuels the factory is totally my own.

But as the mechanism of time, history and place clatters in its incessant motion, the ellipses of my journeys still bisect those of my predecessors. The cities I walk through, some of my heroes have walked there before me. The processes I use, my mentors once used. The sounds of my tools once filled their ears. The colors I choose have excited the eyes of millions since the dawn of humanity. I hope to bring enough to the world to make my own mark in the timeline. I hope to dig up enough from beneath the surface of our experience to build upon the past and to reach for something new. Somewhere between the layers of images, of memory, and of history run the chords that link us together.
Bibliography


Vita
Jonathan Hounshell

Education
A.A. in Graphic Design | Virginia Intermont College 1995
B.A. in Fine Arts | Virginia Intermont College 1996
M.F.A. Studio Art (with concentration in Printmaking) | East Tennessee State University 2004

Undergraduate Honors and Organizations
Presidential Tuition Scholarship 92-96
Nomination for the Ideal Intermont award 1995
Alpha Chi Honor Society member
Dean's List 4 years
Who's Who Among Students in American Universities and Colleges
Marjorie De Friese Memorial [full cost] Scholarship for excellence in art 1995.
Suma Cum Laude A.A. Degree Graphic Design 1995
Suma Cum Laude B.A. Degree Fine Art 1996

Teaching Experience
Advertising Graphics | ETSU School of Communication | Fall 2002 and Spring 2003
Drawing Fundamentals | ETSU School of Art and Design | Fall 2003
Color Theory | ETSU School of Art and Design | Spring 2004
2D Design | ETSU School of Art and Design | Fall 2004

Recent Exhibition Participation
2003 4 x 4 Miniature Masterpieces, Johnson City, TN
2004 26th Annual First Tennesse Art Juried Competition and Exhibition
2004 4 x 4 Miniature Masterpieces, Johnson City, TN
2004 Virginia Intermont Alumni Exhibit, Bristol, VA
2004 Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign Art Auction, Dactyl Foundation, New York, NY
2004 MFA Solo Exhibition, Reece Museum, Johnson City, TN
2004 Member of the Salt City Dozen Print Exchange, Syracuse University
2004 1st Annual Salon Show, Art Resource Gallery, Johnson City, TN

Professional Experience
Hillhouse Graphic Design

Design Awards
Citation of Excellence 1998
Tri-Cities Metro Advertising Federation
Call for Entries 1998
Citation of Excellence 1998
Evergreen Resort Mousepad
Citation of Excellence 1998
Old Salem Visitor’s Guide
Citation of Excellence 1998
Tusculum College Viewbook
Citation of Excellence 1998
Barter Theatre Season Posters
Citation of Excellence 1999
Barter Theatre Season Brochure
Citation of Excellence 1999
Barter Theatre Annual Report
Citation of Excellence 2000
Old Salem Annual Report
Citation of Excellence 2000
BMS Autofair Poster
Gold Addy 2000
Virginia Intermont Arts Brochure
Gold Addy 2001
King College Campaign
Silver Addy 2001
Virginia Intermont Arts Brochure
Silver Addy 2001
Barter Theatre Annual Report
Gold Addy 2002
Old Salem Annual Report
Silver Addy 2002
Celtic Air CD Package
Gold Addy 2003
Old Salem Visitors Map
Gold Addy 2003
Old Salem Cookie Tins