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ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

The College of Fine and Applied Arts

in Candidacy for the Degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

THE WAY TO THE ABSOLUTE

by

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May 24, 1991

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INTRODUCTION

Nowadays more and more people, especially who live in large cities, suffer from a terrible emptiness and boredom, as if they are waiting for something that never arrives. Within modern civilization,its people lose the meaning of their lives, values, and they find themselves in morally decayed. My main purpose, through the medium of art, is to express the complexities and paradoxes of human existence in modern industrial societies- not from a pessimistic, but a skeptical perspective.

Alienation, depersonalization, loss of identity in this world by bureaucratic rules and regulations are central problems of all modern industrial societies. The rise of modernization gave freedom, while at the same time giving birth to a society in which the individual feels alienated and dehumanized. The chaos or gap between the individual's aspirations and the individual limits of his society gives him some adaptation problems. In the first case, an individual adapts himself to certain external circumstances, and this situation creates something new in him, arouses new drives and new anxieties that are sometimes irrational and harmful to the development of men.

The individual has to accept the mode of life rooted in the system of production and distribution peculiar for any given society. In the society, a number of powerful regulations develop which motivate the actions and feelings of the individual. The individual may or may not be conscious of these regulations, but in any case they are forceful and demand satisfaction once they have developed. The individual today is brought face to face with the most fundamental choice between robotism and humanism. The economic and political scene is more complex than it used to be; the

individual has less ability to look through it. In some way, the process of the development of mankind means growing isolation, insecurity, and growing doubt concerning one's own role in the universe, the meaning of one's life, and with all that a growing feeling of one's own powerlessness and insignificance as an individual.

The individual has been thrown out from any definite place where he can overlook and manage his life and the life of society. He is driven faster and faster by the forces that originally were created by him. In this situation, he does everything with abstractions, more and more remote from concrete life. In a further sense, we live in figures and abstractions; since nothing is concrete, nothing is real and everything is possible, factually and morally.

" We are not anymore in the center of the Universe, we are not anymore the purpose of Creation, we are not anymore the masters of a manageable and recognizable world - we are specks of dust, we are a nothing, somewhere in space - without any kind of concrete relatedness to anything. We speak of millions of people being killed, of one third or more of our population being ripped out if a Third World War should occur, we speaks of billions of dollars pilling up as a national debt, of thousands of light years as interplanetary distances, of interspace travel of artificial satellites. Tens of thousands work in one enterprise, hundreds of thousands live in hundreds of cities. " [1]

The vastness of cities in which the individual is lost, buildings that are as high as mountains, constant acoustic bombardment by the radio and the TV, big headlines changing three times a day, and leaving no choice to decide what is important, to eliminate the individual and act like a powerful though smooth machine, and many

other details are expressions of consternation in which the individual is confronted by uncontrollable dimensions in comparison with which he is a small particle. He can act; but the sense of independence, and significance has gone.

" The individual has become estranged from himself. He does not experience himself as the center of his world, as the creator of his own acts - but his acts and their consequences have become his masters, whom he obeys, or whom he may even worship. The alienated person is out of touch with himself as he is out of touch with any other person. He like the others, is experienced as things are experienced; with the senses and with the common sense, but at the same time without being related to oneself and to the world outside productively. "[2]

Alienation is called that condition of man where his own acts become to him an alien power, standing over and against him, instead of being ruled by him. So people do worry, feel inferior, inadequate, guilty. They sense that they live without living, that life runs through their hands. How do they deal with their troubles? By another form of passivity, a constant spilling out as it were: by talking. In today's world, for an individual being acceptable really means not being different from anybody else; because we live in a circle. Feeling inferior stems from feeling different, and no question is asked whether the difference is for the better or the worse. The individual finds it impossible to remain by himself, because he is seized by the panic of experienced nothingness out of this circle.

"In recent years there is an increasing emphasis on the concept of security as the paramount hymn of life, and as the essence of mental health. One reason for this

attitude lies, perhaps, in the fact that the threat of war hanging over the world for many years has increased the longing for security. Another, more important reason, lies in the fact that people feel increasingly more insecure as the result of an increasing automatization and over conformity."[3]

Instead of machine being the substitute for human energy, man has become a substitute not only for the machine, but also for the decisions which have been made by him.

"Human nature is neither a biologically fixed and innate sum total of drives nor is it a lifeless shadow of cultural patterns to which it adapts itself smoothly, it is the product of human evolution, but it also has certain inherent mechanisms and laws. There are certain factors in man's nature which are fixed and unchangeable; the necessity to satisfy the physiologically conditioned drives and necessity to avoid isolation and moral aloneness." [4]

THE INSIGHT INTO THE WORK

To me, symbols are particular forms given to content . I used the characteristics of animals to represent aspects of the human condition, as, for example, alienation and isolation. The bugs are in the form of an animal and not an animal that has been humanized, but, in a metaphorical way, a human that has been animalized, alienated from his environment, from himself. According to Carl Jung, these creatures, figuratively coming from the depths of the ancient Earth Mother, are symbolic denizens of the collective unconsciousness; but for me, they are also from my own dreams. My intuition consisted of the sudden and most unexpected insight into the fact that my dreams meant myself, my whole reality. In a period of time, especially the bug dreams contained an indefinite number of unknown factors; they were unconscious aspects of my perception of reality at that time, and then they became an integral, important, and personal expression of my work. After reading Kafka, Edgar Allen Poe, and Carl Jung, I translated my dream symbols to my work. Actually, my unconscious dream symbols became useful for the idea of alienation and isolation.

One could say that a dream is symbolic, for it does not state the situation directly, but expresses the point indirectly by means of a metaphor. For in our daily experience, we need to state things as accurately as possible, and we have learned to discard the trimmings of fantasy both in our language and in our thoughts.

" A dream is supposed to correct the imbalances in one's life. Dreaming has been likened to a safety value by which the accumulated tensions of the day are discharged so that we awaken refreshed in mind as well as in the body. Dreams, according to the modern dream theories, are discontinuous with waking life. They tell us, in effect, that

we are in our dreams what we are not when awaken."[5]

We can become dissociated and lose our identity. We can be possessed by moods, or become unreasonable and unable to recall important facts about ourselves, but beyond that doubt, even in what we call a high level of civilization, human unconsciousness has not yet achieved a reasonable degree of being controlled. Using the dream symbols is also important to me to show that something is still out of reach of being ruled by anyone, any power in human nature, even by ourselves.

"People who rely totally on their rational thinking and dismiss or repress every manifestation of their psychic life often have an almost inexplicable inclination to superstition. Dreams compensate one's outer life, the emphasis such people put in their intellect is offset by dream in which they meet the irrational and cannot escape it."[6]

> "There is a time when the operation of the machine become so odious... that you cannot even tacitly take part; you've got to put your bodies upon the gears, the levers, and all the apparatus, and you've got to indicate to the people who run it and own it that unless you're free, the machine will be prevented from working at all." [7]

Man does something, voting, and under the illusion that he is the creator of decisions which he accepts as if they were his own, while in reality they are largely determined by forces beyond his control and knowledge. No wonder this situation gives the average citizen a deep sense of powerlessness in political matters as well, and therefore, that his political intelligence is reduced more and more. "There is an absence of understanding of the meaning of political events which is truly frightening, because our intelligence helps us to produce weapons which our reason is not capable of controlling. Indeed, we have the know-how, but we do not have the know-why nor the know-what-for." [8]

Democracy cannot work in an alienated society, and that the way our democracy is organized contributes to the general process of alienation. The facts, however, are that the modern, alienated individual has opinions and prejudices but no convictions, has likes and dislikes, but no will.

There is no active productive participation, no common unifying experience, no meaningful acting out of significant answers to life. In some way, for most people,

there is nothing to do but to escape into movie -dreaming, crime, neurosis and insanity, if we have no collective expression of our total personalities.

In this etching, the circle - MANDALA - according to Carl Jung, is a symbol for four functions of consciousness - thought, feeling, intuition, and sensation - equip the individual to deal with the impressions of the world he receives from within and without.

Hanging figures symbolize death, helplessness of the regulations, unchangeable laws, decisions of the - a sharp razor-blade - modern industrial societies.

METAMORPHOSIS

In the big lithograph - METAMORPHOSIS- the progress of transformation between human and animal symbolizes how human nature has become estranged from himself. An almost robot-like man with wires in his head is surrounded by bugs - locust and beetle - and his eye is being pulled out by these creatures. The scale of the bugs is as big as the man. And it makes the atmosphere dream-like, but at the same time much more horrifying and dangerous. In real life, these creatures are far from being dangerous, but in the dream they are unavoidable and terrifying.

On the upper right corner, the circle symbolizes both the origin of industrial modernization - alienation - and the restoration of a lost inner balance for human nature.

With industrial revolution, not only human physical energy - man's heads and arms as it were, but also his brain and his nervous reactions are being replaced by machines. The individual feels smaller with an almost self-regulating world of machines which think faster, work faster, and often more , than he does.

" ... red and enormous, rising in haze, its beams cutting obliquely through the gates, the whole building - site and the fence. Symbols of the two worlds : the sunken lighthouse, the sun caught in the barbed wire. Can this sun be trusted ? Is it still part of autonomous nature or is it already ruled by a dictatorial bureaucracy ? " [9]

People have been crushed under the wheels of technical civilization ; they have lost their legs in a motor accident. Indifference and dehumanization have taken over in this iron age, that at the back of convention and hypocrisy, there is a very different kind of reality crouching before a leap into nothingness. It is not natural to liquidate innocent people or to put hundreds of thousands of them behind barbed wire.

Not only industry, man too is being automated. The sense of loneliness, abandonment, loss of contact makes many people ready to surrender to the inhuman mechanism, in order, by adapting themselves quietly, inconspicuously to secure a crumb of individual freedom, to cease to be human beings outside the universal automatism.

" The stone prison in the midst of wooden huts, the labour camp, the arrogance of officials, the dust on the red flags, the grayness of negativity. The worst thing is that one becomes used to it, becomes reconciled, adapts oneself, accepts the inhuman as normal. " 10

In modern industrial societies, the individual has become so accustomed to the vacuum that it neither bores nor alarms him. He is what he has and what others think of him; and what they think of depends on what he has.

The individuals were not thrown into a state of barbarism, but were condemned to something incomparable worse- to an unnatural condition maintained by the achievements of technical civilization: barbed wire, watch-towers, searchlights, automatic pistols and statistical accuracy. To reduce everything to quantity, to what is measurable, countable, exchangeable, is the tendency of technical civilization. The individual, however, is the quintessence of the qualitative, the unaccountable, the immeasurable potential.

In itself, an animal is neither good nor evil, it is a piece of nature. But in man, the animal being - which lives in him as his instinctual psyche - may become dangerous if it is not recognized and integrated in life. Man is the only creature with the power to control instinct by his own will, but he is also able to suppress, distort, and wound it - and an animal, to speak metaphorically, is never so wild and dangerous as when it is wounded. Suppressed instincts can gain control of a man; they can even destroy him. Suppressed and wounded instincts are the dangers threatening civilized man.

The animal demon is a highly expressive symbol for such an impulse. The vividness and concreteness of the image enables man to establish a relationship with it as a representative of the overwhelming power in himself.

The individual has to solve a problem, he can never rest in the given situation of a passive adaptation to nature. Even the most complete satisfaction with all his instinctive needs does not solve his human problem; his most intensive passions and needs are not those rooted in his body, but are those rooted in the very peculiarity of his existence.

" Man is torn away from the primary union with nature, which characterizes animal existence. Having at the same time reason and imagination, he is aware of his aloneness and separateness;of his powerlessness and ignorance; of the accidentalness of his birth and his death. He could not face this state of being for a second if he could not find new ties with his fellow man which replace the old ones, regulated by instincts. " 11

UNDERWORLD FIGURES I, II, III, IV

In these small etchings, small colourful images are the translation figures of power and nothingness; instinct and aristocracy; animal and barbarian; nature and civilization; animal taming and violence.

" His gaze, from seeing bars forever passing,
Is now so tired that nothing is retained.
It seem as if a thousand bars were massing,
And then beyond the bars no wild remained.

The soft paws, in their strong and supple padding,
Move in a circle, small and smaller still:
A dance of forces round a center circling
Within which dazed, there stands a mighty will.

Just now and then, to let an image enter,
The pupil's curtain soundlessly will part,
The image passes through the limb's quiet tension-
And ends its being in the heart. "[12]

PERNICIOUS DREAM and ORACLE GAME

In both paintings, PERNICIOUS DREAM and ORACLE GAME, the figures are in an unmovable position - almost cocoon shape- and facing to the bugs - grasshoppers and mosquito - with fearful faces. The figures are helpless, feeling victims; they cannot move, they wait.

The lines around the figures isolate them from their environment, and at the same time protect them from the danger of bugs - alienation. I frame the images with lines almost in boxes so that they occupy a separate space in the paintings. The space indicates both interior and exterior space, and as the rendering of atmospheric effects or a carrier of mood - isolated and alienating space. The figures also evoke the classic childhood night mare of running away, but not being able to move. In the paintings, the important things are the images, yet the indefinite spaces are as important as the images.

Neither grasshoppers nor mosquitoes are dangerous for human beings directly, but they are harmful insects. They damage human nature indirectly as " this society of 'active and passive barbarians' is the result of technical, industrial, and political revolutions in which the bourgeoisie have been the determining force. It has reached its extreme towards depersonalization, irresponsibility, and loss of identity. The decay of the " I " is manifest in all countries with a highly developed modern civilization. " [13]

UNTITLED (HANDMADE BOOK)

This book includes some small sized of etchings in colour on different materials. It is a translation of some important memories from the past to today. It is an admission of myself in this world of personal thoughts and feelings from unconscious to conscious. It is a kind of diary which is a bridge between two cultures, between logic and sense, between right and wrong, between loss and gain, between past and present, between present and future.

UNTITLED (INSTALLATION)

" ... there he sits, Niel's, who had set forth to become a great artist, who had exposed his soul to the violent sensations of modern culture and science, there he sits and feels with pleasure the tiredness in his joints and muscles that comes from physical labour, and stares as if with extinguished brain functions at the rhythmically waving cornfields. It is like a circle that closes: the results of millions of years of development, the brain - animal, the cerebral creature, now it is drawn back to the vegetative, the plant, into everything that is delivered up to day and night and heat and frost; now it sits there as if it had never been stirred out of the bliss of its brainless forebears, as if returned home, tired of the long road, at rest in the sun - an object filling space. "

Thomas Mann

CONCLUSION

The modern individual is in fact a curious mixture of characteristics acquired over the long ages of his mental development. This mixed - up being is the man and his acts that we have to deal with. Skepticism and science as convictions exist in him side by side with old - fashioned prejudices, outdated habits of thought and feeling, obstinate misinterpretations, and being ignorant.

As scientific understanding has grown, so our world has become dehumanized. The individual feels himself isolated in the cosmos, because he is no longer involved in nature and has lost his emotional unconscious identity with natural phenomena.

The people in the industrial world sense and recognize the increasing alienation. The sight of their deformed fellow - men makes them suffer; they long to see man whole. But many of them despair of the possibility of changing the situation, the more so as great masses of people have accustomed to the condition of total alienation; they stifle their occasional disquiet by increased consumption, and see no reason to break out of the `comfortable, convenient houses of bondage'.

The images on my work are pieces of life itself - images that are integrally connected to the living individual (myself) by the bridge of the emotions. I am aware that it is difficult to grasp the concept, because I am trying to use images to describe something whose very nature, makes it incapable of precise definition.

In my work, the self is often symbolized as an animal, representing our instinctive nature and its connectedness with one's surrounding nature and cosmos comes from the fact that the origin of our psyche is somehow woven into the whole world, both outer and inner.

> "I am your child and your mother. They call me the 'connecting animal' because I connect people, animals, and even stones with one another if I enter them . I am your fate or the 'objective I'. When I appear, I redeem you from the meaningless hazards of life. The fire burning inside me burns in the whole of nature. If a man loses it, he becomes egocentric, lonely, disoriented, and weak."
>
> Carl G. Jung



MANDALA (MAGIC CIRCLE) 23.5 x 32.5 " (ETCHING)



METAMORPHOSIS 26 x 32.5 " (LITHOGRAPH)



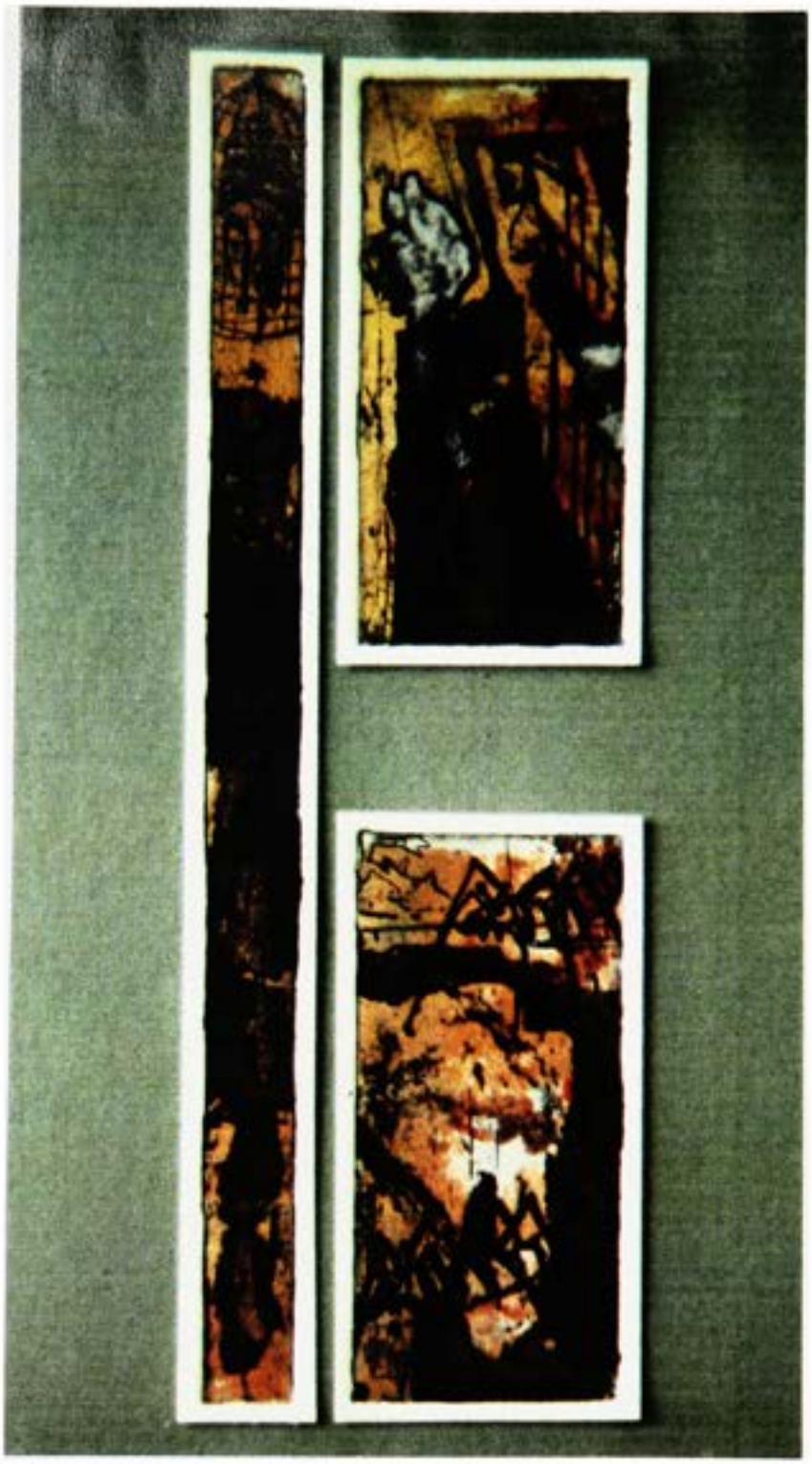
MEANINGFUL COINCIDENCE 16.5 x 20.5 " (LITHOGRAPH)



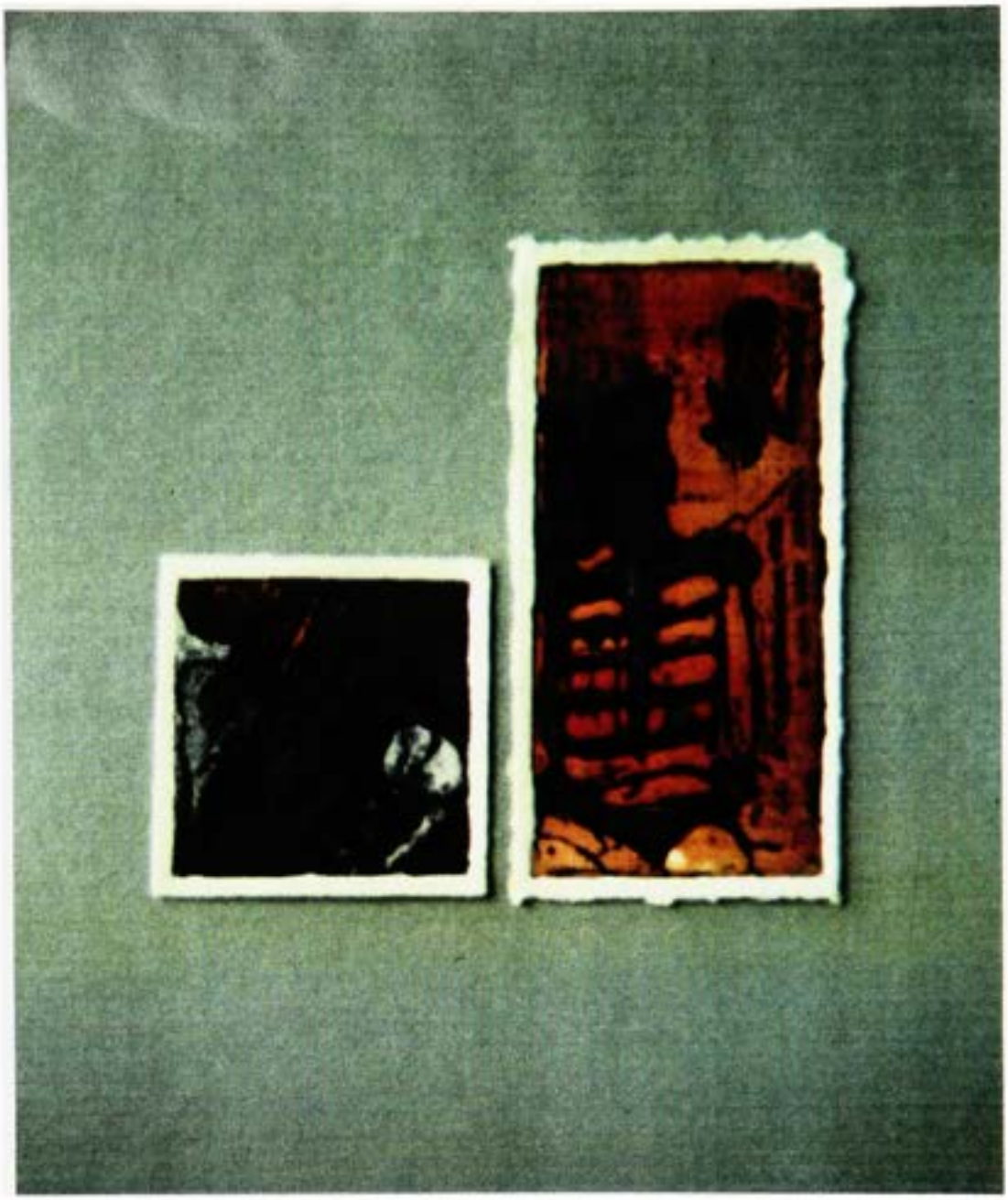
COLLECTIVE INFECTION 17.5 x 21 " (LITHOGRAPH)



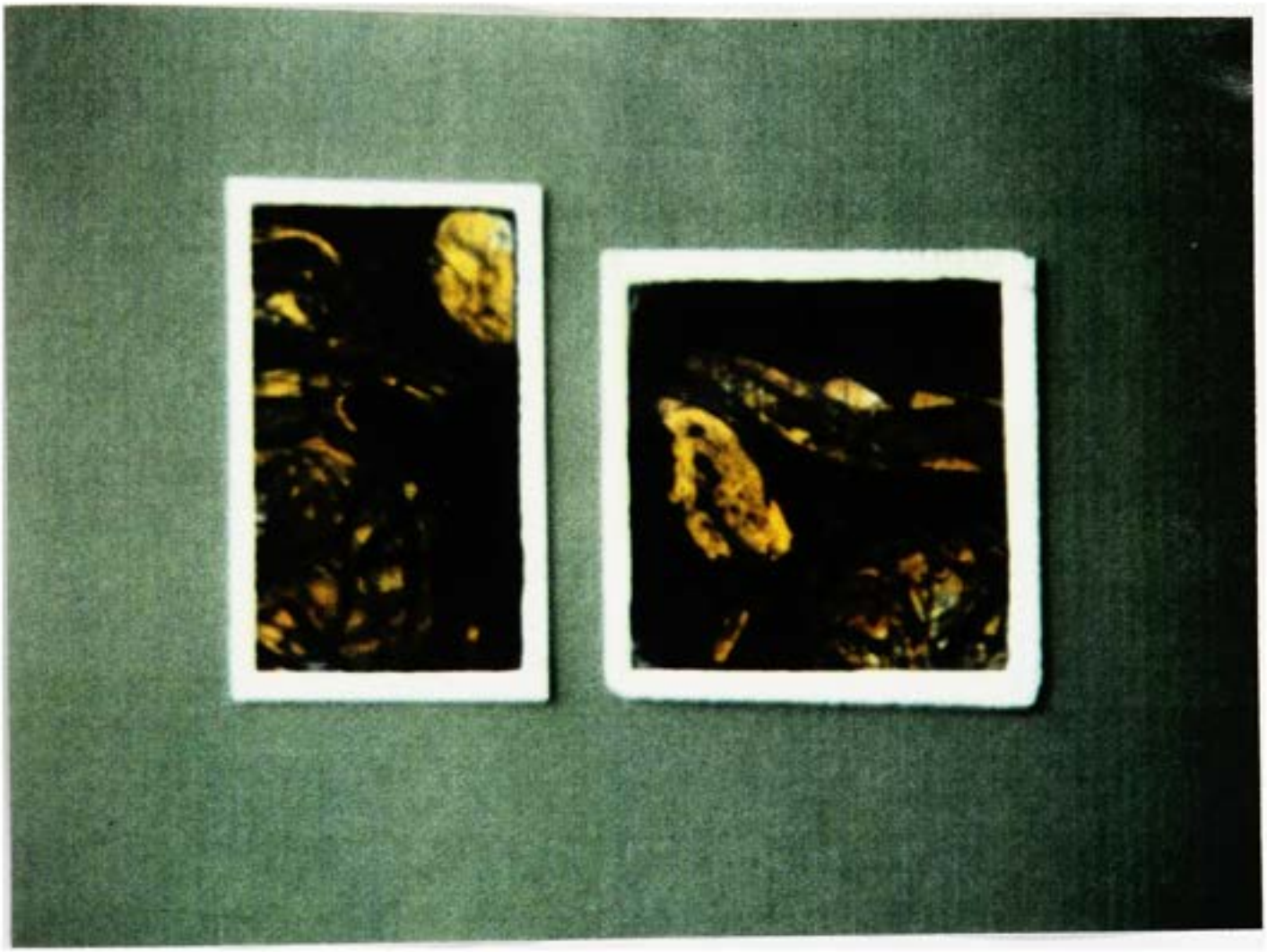
INNER FRIEND 13 x 21 " (LITHOGRAPH)



UNDERWORLD FIGURES I 7.5 x 16.5 " (ETCHING)



UNDERWORLD FIGURES II 8.25 x 10.75 " (ETCHING)



UNDERWORLD FIGURES III 8.25 x 10.75 " (ETCHING)



PERNICIOUS DREAM 33 x 45 " (PAINTING - MIXED MEDIA)



ORACLE GAME 33 x 45 " (PAINTING - MIXED MEDIA)

NOTES

1. Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, (1965, reprinted ed., Canada: Ballantine Books, 1990), 110.

2. Ibid., 111.

3. Ibid., 172.

4. Carl G. Jung, Man and His Symbols, ed. Carl Jung, (New York: Dell Publishing, 1968), 37.

5. Franz Kafka, Description of A Struggle, (New York: Schocken Books, 1958), 83.

6. Carl G. Jung, Man and His Symbols, ed. Carl G. Jung, (New York: Dell Publishing,1968), 84.

7. Alan W. Barnett, The Mural, The People's Art, (New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 1984), 560.

8. Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, (1965, reprinted ed., Canada: Ballantine Books, 1990), 154.

9. Ernst Fisher, Art Against Ideology, trans. Anna Bostock (New York: George Braziller Inc.,1969), 15.

10. Ibid.,33.

11. Friedrich Copleston, Friedrich Nietzsche: Philosopher of Culture, (1942, reprinted ed., London:Search Press Limited, 1975), 192.

12. Nietzsche, Imagery&Thought, ed.,Malcolm Pasley(Berkeley and Los Angeles:University of California Press, 1978), 190.

13. Ernst Fisher, Art Against ideology, trans. Anna Bostock(New York:George Braziller Inc., 1969), 42.

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