8-1-1980

An Investigative Approach to the Collagraph

Melissa B. Walker

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

Follow this and additional works at: https://commons.und.edu/theses

Recommended Citation

AN INVESTIGATIVE APPROACH TO THE COLLAGRAPH

by

Melissa B. Walker

Bachelor of Science, East Carolina University, 1975

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

Grand Forks, North Dakota

August
1980

This Thesis submitted by Melissa B. Walker in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts from the University of North Dakota is hereby approved by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done.

Jacquelyn McEleny
(Chairman)

Paul Finnishland

Brian O. Paulson

This Thesis meets the standards of appearance and conforms to the style and format requirements of the Graduate School of the University of North Dakota, and is hereby approved.

William Johnson
Dean of the Graduate School

Permission

Title   An Investigative Approach to the Collagraph

Department   Visual Arts

Degree   Master of Arts

    In presenting this thesis, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a graduate degree from the University of North Dakota, I agree that the Library of this University shall make it freely available for inspection. I further agree that permission for extensive copying for scholarly purposes may be granted by the professor who supervised my thesis work or, in his absence, by the Chairman of the Department or the Dean of the Graduate School. It is understood that any copying or publication or other use of this thesis, or part thereof for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission. It is also understood that due recognition shall be given to me and to the University of North Dakota in any scholarly use which may be made of any material in my thesis.

Signature   *Melissa Walker*

Date   5/16/80

iii

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

ABSTRACT .

This thesis investigates the development of my imagery through the media of the collagraph.

An Investigative Approach to the Collagraph

In the history of printmaking, the collagraph is a fairly recent development. The origins of the process can be found in the combination of collage and intaglio. No one artist is credited with the invention of the process, although it is generally agreed that a United States printmaker, Glen Alps, coined the word "collagraph" in 1956 as noted in Ross/Romano, The Complete Printmaker. It comes from the Greek word, colla, meaning glue, and graphos, meaning to write. Basically it is an additive process in which various materials are glued to the surface of a plate, which is then inked and printed in the traditional manner.

Until I started working with the collagraph, I had received very little formal training in any printmaking medium. Consequently I spent a great deal of my time learning about the technical aspects of the collagraph. The problems I encountered are faced by any printmaker and most are not special to any one print media. With this in mind I will confine myself to a discussion of my imagery, its evolution and meaning and the influence of other artists and ideas that have had an effect on my art.

I first heard about this form of printmaking during undergraduate school, while working with fabrics. It occurred to me that the colla-graph would be an ideal way to blend the variety of textures and fibers that I found interesting with printmaking. During this period I became aware of the work of Alberto Burri (see fig. #1), an artist who used fabrics in many of his collages. The fascination I had at that time with fibers and textures combined with the art of Burri had an important influence on my later work with the collagraph.

1

This influence was not readily noticeable in my first prints. The shapes I used were hard edged and linear with few spots of texture. The imagery was very similar to paintings I was doing at the time. I soon decided to incorporate cloth, torn paper and other soft, natural materials. I felt that the soft, free, more flexible qualities found in these materials would project into the imagery I was developing and at the same time offer a wider range of shapes and textures.

The variety of images made possible by the use of these materials was at first confusing. I decided to limit myself to horizontal shapes, a decision influenced by the flat environment of North Dakota. A loose translation of the shapes I found gradually formed the basis of my imagery (see fig. #2 and #3).

Even though elements of landscape are found in my prints, I try to keep them unobtrusive. I don't want the reference to be an obvious one. Part of the reasoning behind this is that I want people to look beyond their recognition of my prints as landscapes. I hope that they can find other meanings in my images, perhaps enjoying them solely as non-objective forms. Together with the visual part of my imagery, there is an emotional side. The feelings I get when I am out in nature, away from the structures that man has built, are feelings of tranquility, stability and strength. I try to project these emotions through my use of shapes and colors, but, without referring directly to the environment.

Other artists in whose work I sense a similar objective have influenced my work. Mark Rothko, Mark Tobey and Burri are examples (see fig. #4 and #5). Their work is dissimilar at first glance, especially in their differing scale. They do have in common simplicity, a subtle stability is

present. With this stability comes a feeling of tranquility. This is one of the most important feelings that I am trying to evoke. I want to express these qualities, stability and tranquility, with the fewest number of elements possible. My most successful attempts in this area are "Double-focus" and "Airscape", (see fig. #6 and #7).

With technical problems decreasing and seeing an end to my exploration of horizontal forms, I introduced bolder and more irregular shapes into my compositions. My work became less a horizontal and more an aerial landscape. I began using shapes I had seen from the window of an airplane (see fig. #8 and #6). My forms stayed simple, but because of their increasing irregularity, they became more interesting.

Color has played a major role in my efforts to project a subtle landscape image and the emotions that I feel. Although black is a standard printmaking ink, I quickly found that it and the white paper I was using presented too harsh a contrast. I changed to dark brown earth tones on a cream-colored paper to enhance the natural effects I was looking for. Small areas or spots of stronger color such as a deep red or green were used to brighten some of the prints. This also added more depth to the images. I continued to use dark earth tones for several months. These dark tones reflected the reference to landscape I was looking for but the emotions I wanted people to feel were not coming through. I began using lighter, more varied colors. Shades of light blue, ochres, pale green and peach began appearing with and dominating the dark browns I had been using (see fig. #9 and #10). These soft, rich colors added to the feeling of tranquility I was looking for and emphasized some of the more subtle colors I had seen in nature. I spent a great deal of my time experimenting with these

colors. Often I would use an old plate that had previously been printed in dark browns, and reprint it using the lighter colors in different combinations. I found that the same plate could look completely different depending on the colors used and that color could be used to improve the original composition. One example of this is "Grasslands II" (fig. #11 and #12). It was first printed in black on white paper. The emotional effect was one of abruptness and harshness. It lacked the warmth I felt needed to attract the viewer to it. Later, when the same plate was printed in an earthy green on a buff paper, it lost all of the harshness it had had before. By adding a solid green rolled-up area at the bottom of the print, I got rid of the floating weightlessness of the shapes in black. I used this technique more and more to improve each plate to its best potential and I plan to continue this habit in the future.

A print can have interesting textures as well as interesting shapes and colors. Texture has not been a major concern of mine, but I have used it to add a certain amount of visual interest to each print. I have chosen fabrics, paper and string to work with because the textures are subtle and varied. Cloth and paper are inherently soft to the touch and if they evoke any concepts in the viewer it is one of softness. This is one of the feelings I want to project in my prints. Other man-made materials such as wire, coins and fancy lace are too structured, too hard for the type of imagery that I want to develop.

People often ask me what my imagery means. I have no quick answer for them. There is no social message hidden in the colors and shapes, no puns or witticism to be found. The reference to landscape is there but is subtle and sometimes difficult to spot. What I do have is a

visual image for people to react to emotionally. I hope their
reaction is a pleasant one. The colors, shapes and materials I use
are all meant to direct and reinforce their reaction.

The collagraph has been a positive learning experience for me,
both technically and aesthetically. I have found a process that
offers me the quality of detail that I have been looking for, freedom
to experiment with color and a variety of possible shapes. I am
planning to continue working with this form of printmaking. I feel
that there are still many possibilities that this process can offer
and I plan to take the time to explore them in the future.

1

2

3

4

5

TOBEY, Mark (Amer., 18
CALLIGRAPHIC III. monoprint;
H.17 3/4" x W.11 3/4"; G.57.

34.5

9

6

7

8

9

10

11

12