

Self-Portraits Since 1971



(note I corrected this—and added a few things, changed some pictures--edited it some—in April 2021, /I made the bulk of it in 2016, about 5 years ago)

It is 50 years of self portraits I have done. Hard to believe that since I remember being in the bathroom in the first one above, with a pencil, doing that drawing in the bathroom mirror. It is 49 or 50 years ago. In fact.



Samuel Clemens, aka Mark Twain, writes in his autobiography that no autobiography is entirely honest. No one can write all the dark and hidden things in a human life. A few have tried, perhaps, from Kafka to Plath, but I am not trying to do that in any case. Twain did not have to deal with the fact that now big business is trying to make the personal the exploitable. They want to turn private moments into profit for them. They want you to pour out your heart texting and on Facebook and want you pay them big bucks to do it. Corporations are monetizing everything, even people's best, most intimate or most profound experiences. I think the opposite is more important, to deny corporations and seek to express what is not about money in ways that bring us together against the corporate takeover of our lives and bodies and subjectivity.

I think Mark Twain would agree with this if he were alive now. Expressing every sordid detail of everyone's private lives is not very interesting, particularly when it is in big business interests to do so. It is just as absurd as expressing the ultimate idealizations, which are also fictions. Life is mostly in between the sordid and the ideal, and that is what I paint, draw and write about. So here I am writing an alternative view of self portraits both in history and in my own life. What matters is what they cannot own and cannot expropriate. The artwork here is not about random, instantaneous "selfies", but long thought out pictures often done with decades of deliberation behind them. These are stages in a philosophical and intellectual and emotional development, done in relationship to nature and not an excuse to farm or plow up subjectivity as a means of making corporate profits. On the contrary, these offer resistance to that.

There is a very old, even ancient prejudice against self-portraits on the grounds that there is something about a portrait that says "look at me". In the mythic mentality of make-believe religion, one is only supposed to consider god or gods, not oneself, since the ego is supposed to be vain and evil or the vessel of sin. In the biblical "first commandment", it says "thou shalt not have any gods before me" or any "graven image".

Obviously, there is no god and images are not bad things, as Islam and Puritan religion thought, so there is no harm in trying to tell the truth through images. Good images come from good people, who mean well by them. Bad images or characters can mean well too, as in the writings of Joseph Conrad. Puritanism had a value in self-abnegation in view of an idea of god that had no reality. It makes no sense to deny yourself for a god who is not there. The Protestants did not allow paintings in churches, dressed plain and were down on most self-expression as “vanity”. The old objection to the “Vanity”, of art has no grounds for existing. There is vain art, or fashion and corporate art certainly, but it is not something that can be taken very seriously. But my art is not that. The art that was about “great powers”, images of Jesus, Buddha, or God, Caesar or the King is gone now. I reject that these imperious Icons alone had the right to picture themselves. It was a kind of colonialism of the image that was the root of iconoclastic controversies.

The realists were rejecting elite art in favor of an art of ordinary people back in 1850 and I understand what they did and why, and I agree. Self-portraits are a measure of how far we have come from being virtually forbidden from caring about ourselves in the Dark Ages. It is a good thing to monitor oneself in these works and to paint oneself as clearly as one can. The self is a biological thing, and not a metaphysical idea. There is no reason to glorify the self as aristocratic art did, or to denigrate the self, as Islamic and modernist art tend to do. Once one understands this, a portrait of a human or an animal are more or less the same thing. The dislike of self that was promoted by powers is no longer necessary. I stress women particularly in the self-portrait essays because they have been so abused by the obsession with altering the self to fit corporate fashion. All the females I stress were people first. I am not trying to say “Look at me”, but rather, I agree with Thoreau who quoted Socrates and said, that the “unexamined life is not worth living”. I am a person quite equal to a Giraffe or an Otter, and not at all a little god or a human being as seen as superior to all other species. I imagine, and make an art that is beyond Speciesism.

I think that painting and drawing are much more accurate about dealing with realities than writing is. Painting is close to expressing the facts and appearances of human existence, both in its positive and negative aspects. It records precise indications of time, places and intentions of the heart and mind. Painting is real and existential and goes beyond mere written symbols or the “Word” or other Platonic or religious constructions and fictions. Writing is too abstract and hindered by symbols, whereas painting is much more direct and complex, showing things more as they are, at least when the will of the artist is to do that and to the degree he or she is faithful to reality. This is partly why it is much more intimate and personal to make a good self portrait than it is to write a memoir. Not only is a picture worth a thousand words, a good picture is worth even more than that.

My own self portraits begin when I was very young. I think I did the first one at age 14 or 15. I started doing them at a time when adolescent confusion about who I was was acute. I knew no one but my mother cared about me much. So they were not done to show off and say “look at me”, “look at me”. On the contrary, no one was looking. My early self portraits are intensely personal documents about my hard and alienated adolescence. Later ones are also very personal, though less concerned with my existential dilemmas.



This is one of the first drawing, done at 14 or 15. There is an earlier self-portrait and I did a drawing of an African American boy at this time too, now lost, as well as others. The drawing of the boy was kept by the school. I started drawing partly as a way out of my loneliness, as we had just moved to Ohio and I desperately missed my friends near Pittsburgh. It was a solitary pursuit, trying to understand the world that my father's constant corporate moving had thrown us into. My early drawings have verve and style in them already, even if they are sad and even desperate on occasion. There was life and exuberance in the freedom and emotional abandon of the lines. I was drawing for myself, and rarely showed these to anyone. They were born of a need for expression, as an awareness of the fact that I existed and was worth something, even if the world told me I was not.



I remember being very pleased with this drawing after I did it because I thought it captured the feeling of that time. I felt it showed me more as I actually was than I would have been able to express to anyone at the time, if I tried to speak to them in person about myself, which I would not have done. Words could not say. It shows me on the verge of desperation asking where I am, and who am I and who are we, we who look at each other so painfully and with little understanding? What kind of world am I in and do I belong anywhere at all? The drawing expresses an emotion like dread, fear or apprehension. The style of the drawing is one that I continued to use throughout my teens. It is loose and confident, with a tendency to undulating patterns and abstract design. I let the lines speak for me, not just the facial expression, and they speak of confidence and growing skill.

Let the expression will out, both confidence and fear, at the same time. I had been drawing and painting only a year and a half and there is a sense of certainty that has appeared in the work. I love drawing. My main concern was to tell a truth I was seeing about reality. I was not trying to make images for their own sake, for sale or for any reward at all. Art was about telling the truth as best I could, of making mistakes if I

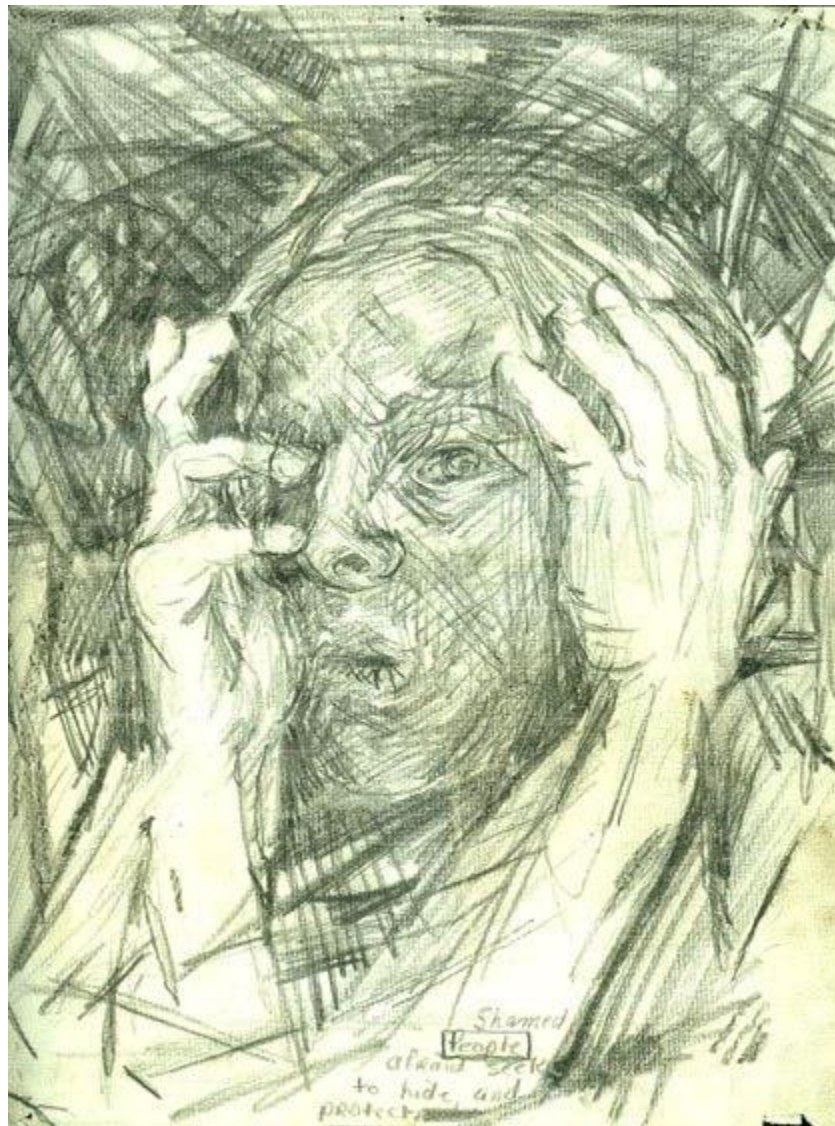
needed too, even, but of trying to live and draw honestly and without the guile and phoniness of what they call the “art world”. I knew nothing of the art world. I was talking to myself about art in history and about reality and I was doing this at 15 and 16. These early drawings are above all about self awareness and that was new to me, and it had a strength in it, it kept me going and made me proud.

Those who did not like it, well, they miss the point entirely.



This is a self portrait adapted from the great Goya drawing. He was one of my early heroes, this artist who took so many risks and tried to tell the truth. I loved the freedom and expressiveness of his work, and studied the Caprichos and Disasters of War at an early age. I was right away interested in social realism, and wanted my work to express my times and the sorrows and joys of it. This shows a man who exhibits “sad

presentiments” of what will come. I show a version of Goya’s face in the upper right and then my own face on the man. I think I gave it the title, ‘who am I, where have I been and where am I going’. It shows very well the great fear I felt in adolescence and my feeling of being lost, exasperated and crying. It was very hard to be this age, and it is too bad that few in our society seem to grasp this and help kids who need help. I tried my best to get help. I had a few good teachers. But I found very little to help me. I was on my own. for the most part. This is a drawing about that. I was using Goya to elaborate my own feelings, I was talking to Goya, as I learned to talk with other artists. He helped me learn from him and I made it richer by adding my own feelings to it. It was like learning to play and compose from Mozart.



My art at 16 drew increasingly into a very personal and left leaning social realism, though I do not think I called it that. It was a concern with those who suffer and are underdogs, since I knew I was such a one myself. This above drawing has a title,

“Shamed People, Afraid, Seek to Hide and Protect”. It has always struck me as very curious. I do not know exactly why I felt so much “shame” in my teens, as I think I wrongly called it. I am the shamed person cowering behind the welter of lines, trying to protect myself. But “shame” is not the right word. I was not a bad kid. I made my share of youthful mistakes. But what I felt was not a shame such as one feels for doing wrong. It was more a feeling of having been abandoned without knowing why. It was a feeling of not being loved, of no one caring, and thus a kind of generalized feeling of exclusion, that there must be something wrong with me that my father in particular did not seem to love me. We had moved too many times, and my father did not seem to care how I felt. I felt lost and victimized, and could not express it except in drawings. His alcoholism was no doubt related to this. The need of being loved is a powerful thing in adolescence, which was magnified by the feeling of so much loss. The feeling of this need and its frustration, plunged me into loneliness and I mistakenly called this ‘shame’. My mother seemed to notice at least, and she worried that I had some strange “guilt complex” as she once called it, but it was not that either. I’d recognized the same feelings when I read Van Gogh’s amazing letter 155. Vincent really defines the difficulty of growing up exceptionally well. He was already in his 20’s but it described how I felt at 16. With him too he had an overbearing father who was too hard on him. He writes:

“What moulting is to birds, the time when they change their feathers, that’s adversity or misfortune, hard times, for us human beings. One may remain in this period of moulting, one may also come out of it renewed, but it’s not to be done in public, however; it’s scarcely entertaining, it’s not cheerful, so it’s a matter of making oneself scarce. Well, so be it. Now, although it may be a thing of rather demoralizing difficulty to regain the trust of an entire family perhaps not entirely devoid of prejudices and other similarly honourable and fashionable qualities, nevertheless, I’m not utterly without hope”.

<http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let155/letter.html>

I shared this feeling of having to hide while one altered oneself, while yet one so wished to find reasons to hope and change, when there seemed so little chance of making a good start of it. This was how I felt too. But I was not nearly as desperate as Vincent. I had already begun with art, and was already fairly good at it at 16. I knew I could do it. Coming across Vincent at this point was very encouraging and helped me. I had built myself a room in the dark basement of the house and sought protection and study there. The tiny room, with my books and drawing table, I fought through my depression and learned to draw and paint. Most of what I did then is lost, but I did a close up of the face of Saul by Rembrandt, who was trying to show Saul’s madness while David played the harp. I did a study of hands in Rembrandt’s great picture of the Prodigal Son. I did the face in Kokoshka’s 1913 self portrait. I did studies of Gerome and Delacroix, Ingres and read Baudelaire on art and a biography of Renoir and especially Leonardo, who was always my favorite. The had a huge oversized Leonardo book at the library in the high school, which I read when I wasn’t reading William James. If only I could attain Vincent’s clearness of mind--his ability to study.



I kept on drawing. I did a study of myself in an act of self overcoming, as Nietzsche called it. I had not read Nietzsche yet, but his phrase is apt for what I was trying to do. It is a pleasant change from the depressed previous images. I did this for someone in an effort to cheer her up. I also did this drawing about her. Here she is being hugged by her dead father, who died when she was 3 years old. I picture him as an old man.



She and I had a dysfunctional relationship and she was even more emotionally disturbed that I was, so I tried to show her my approval and happiness, hoping it would rub off. I don't think it helped her much at all, as was often the case with these attempts. Our society is not one where art can function well in helping communication in our relationships. Art might not be dead for me, but it is dead for most. The relationship never amounted to anything real, but it was an attempt, and that was not nothing. My drawn lines could express elation and happiness and fly like birds on the page. I could be happy after all, dance with my pencils, I could express love. It was not enough of course, but it was a start, and an effort and even if I could not help the young woman it was meant for, I could at least try to.



But it was some years before my molting period was really over, even if I did manage to achieve some liberating understanding before then. This drawing shows me seeking the door out of my depression and into life, though I am not yet out of it in the drawing. This was an attempt to express something similar to what I had done in my first oil painting. I no longer have my first painting of myself. It was my first painted self portrait and it might do to digress over its content. The painting was of a man in a sort of clown suit made of white and red stripes. The stripes horizontally encircled each limb and the torso. The man stood with his arms folded and legs crossed, in a rather circus-like pose, recalling an 'outsider artist' image, like a John Kane, whose clown or mime wrestlers were somewhat like what I did. Kane was a Pittsburgh and Ohio artist who I admired. I had lived in these places and knew the world he painted, not far from where I live now.

The man in my painting looked very sad, even lost, like a sad mime, arms and feet crossed, looking back at the viewer, trying to decide something.. He stands before a long black wall and on the other side of the wall is a landscape full of trees, nature and a beautiful blue sky. The man has come to an opening in the black wall, and can now walk

into nature, but for a long time has been prevented from doing so by the long black wall. This figure was me and my depression. The man is standing near the opening in the wall glancing back at his jailer, or others who are on this side of the wall, the sad life my father had created for me. It is a painting of transition for the mime character: he is trying to decide how to move beyond himself, and is caught in indecision. He has a willingness to go but has not gone yet. He glances back recalling his suffering or loss of liberty, and he glances forward to nature and freedom. This is how I felt in those days, let out of a sort of sort of social enclosure, but at the same time not yet having reached the truth and freedom I felt I would find in nature, rightly as it turned out. It was probably my first independent work conceived entirely on my own and so was something of a declaration of my having become a man, or grown up.-finally: I showed the painting to my parents and my father thought it strange and made it clear he saw nothing in it. My mother was kind about it. I was hurt by my father's comments and destroyed it in front of him in a bout of self pity and rebellious, childish defiance.

In many ways the wall was my father, that prevented me from being my full self. I showed it to him thinking that he would see that I was the man in the picture and that I was trying to get over the wall and to meet nature without shame or fear. Would he ever treat me with the respect I felt I deserved? The painting was about the longing for nature and the removal from it due to despair and the long black wall of separation and ignorance. I destroyed it in front of him in a fit of anger because my father did not understand it, or understand me. It was childish to do that of course, but my plea for adulthood had been mocked. I wish I hadn't destroyed it. If I had had more confidence in myself I would not have cared so much what my father thought, or minded his mockery of me. But that is how my early start as an artist was. I needed positive reinforcement, not indifference or suppressed opposition. I got little support, except perhaps from my mother. But I was not yet willing to give art up. Indeed, I have never given it up. My whole life was going to be dedicated to it and I already knew that at 14 or 15.



Four or five years later I revisited the wall image in this work called the Wall of Being. It is a transcendentalist image, of course, but the boy in front, on the “rock of conscience” resembles some portraits a young man from Rocky River made of me in some black and white photos, in which I was sitting on the floor in a corner of a room, looking terribly sad and lost.

This lost painting of the mime in nature was an important painting for me. It had a long life even if it was destroyed. I would later do other works about walls and barriers, such as the one shown above. It was partly about my desire to return to nature, which I had been closer to earlier in my childhood. But it was also about feeling lost. I wished to have the understanding of those the man in painting is looking at— the viewers, the audience. My destroying the paintings was a measure of how despairing I was that anyone would understand me. I was a person withdrawn into the corner of life, behind a curtain, in the basement where no one would see me. Nature became my refuge from utter rejection by people. I started taking walks into the woods nearby. I found little pockets of woods

spread here and there. I laid in the grass and listened to water falling in a hidden little water fall I found. I did this so often I began to trace the movement of erosion that the waterfall carved as the lip of the water fall cut the earth inches and then feet over a period of a year or so. I investigated a little stream that went though the forest. I watched birds.

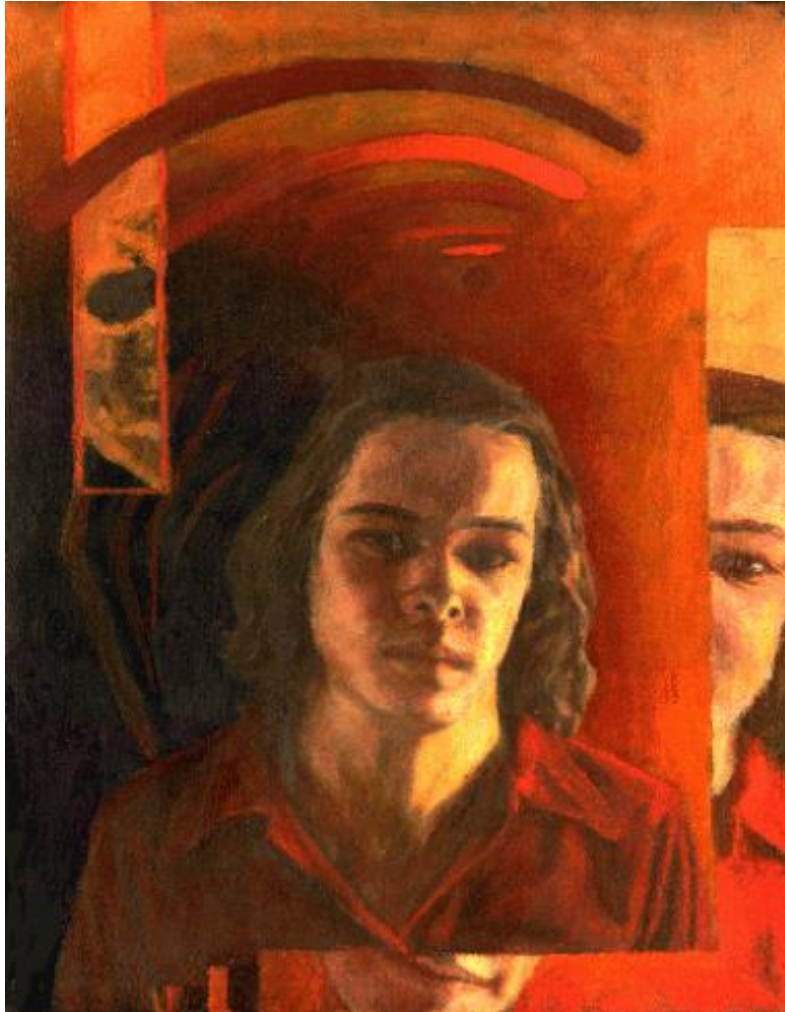
So the drawing above has a similar meaning. Outside is the future, scary and welcoming at the same time. Nature is there. My childhood, paradoxically, is there too. Inside is confusion, rendered into a certain order in the progression of my lines: musical almost, dense and full of expression, even if it is not quite coherent. Yet the lines still dance and play and the door is open.



I was almost out of it in junior year of high school. I was painting and drawing, reading philosophers like John Dewey as well as Thoreau and Faulkner and writing long essays for a flexible studies program at school. I headed up a class on Thoreau and we all read Walden. Life was starting to go well. Junior year in high school was amazing and my best year. But senior year my dad died, suddenly, of a heart attack. My older brothers and sisters abandoned my mother and I was set to care for her. In this drawing, done the summer after the disaster of my senior year, you can see me as an adolescent, far away in the background now, helpless and unaware of what was about to happen. My present face, much older, is up close and crying. I am growing hair on my face, and that was

new. A death's head is in my pupil. I am a man, too soon a man, and I can scarcely manage it. I could not actually cry for my father's death, in fact, because I was the one that had to care for Mom. I did my best with that. So in my drawing I am crying for his loss. The adolescent I was is gone. Now there is only the young adult, trying to cope and not doing very well.

It was shortly after this, when I was still just 18, that I sailed out on the Great Lakes as a Merchant seaman. This earned me enough to put myself through college for a few years. There is a self portrait of me on a ship in this blog down below. As it was done recently, I do not include it here.



I did this painting when I was 18. It is my first accomplished oil painting. Explaining this work is not easy as it is was of the more personal things I have done. I did the painting in February and March of 1975. It is called "Looking at Jenny." I have left out her actual name. Who she was does not really matter at this point. Let us just say Jenny

was a woman I fell in love with, in some ways my first adult love. We were good friends for some months and I even met her folks, who lived in a small town on the Ohio River. I loved the river towns. I really admired her and her love of science.

It is a solid piece of work and I still like it. It is objective. The space it describes is rather cavernous. I was emerging from the suffering and darkness of my father's death. I had gone to Marietta college to study with a painting professor there. He knew techniques about oil painting gathered from the past, which is what really interested me.

Abandoning all that has been learned over centuries seems very ill advised to me. I only spent a semester there as he was let go, to my disappointment. I also had an english teacher who took me under his wing, and taught me a great deal, Stephen Schwartz. He art teacher knew allot and ended up working for Windsor Newton, the paint manufacturer, so I learned a good deal from him. As I would later find out a large art school was not a very good place to learn to paint. I pretty much had him all to myself and this was very valuable.

There was so much to tell Jenny. I wanted show her myself as clearly as I could in a work of art. The side panels in the work are attempts to show my love for her, hence the smile and the warm looks. I show myself looking rather fragile and pale in the major middle image, but very accurate to how I looked and my mental state at the time. I am sandwiched between my love of her, shown in the side panels and the bottom and death—shown in the panel hanging on the upper left side of the picture, seen form the onlookers point of view. The skull represents my father— who had died a year before. I wanted to share myself with her and let her see what I had suffered through my father's death and depression in my past. I was still grieving and recovering from these things. There are multiple panels implied but not shown, which suggests many aspects to myself. The painting shows me in conflict with myself about love of her and the shadow of my father's death, which I was still suffering from deeply, as was everyone in my family. This is complicated but really, not hard to understand. I will explain some more.

It is a painting about that most ubiquitous of early troubles, the early love story that fails. It is an unusual portrait for an 18 year old. She was 18 too. I did not think so at the time, but I can imagine it was intimidating for her to see this, if she saw what it was about at all. She knew nothing of the suffering I had already seen at 18, and perhaps it frightened her. It did not occur to me, then, that it should bother her at all. I thought it was very flattering to her that I would put this much effort into trying to explain myself to her and do this painting for her to see. But I don't think she understood it, or me, or even noticed what it was about.

I was very idealistic in those days, as is quite normal for that age, I suppose. Since I had never quite "been with woman" before, in the whole sense of that phrase, though I had girl friends and had experimented up to a limit. But I did not want it to be trivial or inadvertent. I thought everything should grow from our friendship and not be forced. Her need of alcohol made this impossible. One night she came over and insisted on getting us drunk. My father had alot of good things about him, but in he was an alcoholic and eventually that would kill him. I did not want my love life to begin with alcohol. I was not a drinker then or now. But she was so pushy I let her do it to me, and I regretted it right away. I did not like the dizzy and nauseous feeling it produced. I had

merely resisted what she tried to force. We argued and she left and that was the end of it. I did not want it to happen that way, rather sordidly. The evening and the relationship were ruined by what she did.

Yes, this is hardly unusual with college freshmen. I could have gone along with her I suppose. She just wanted a good time with some guy. Anyone else probably could have given her what she wanted. But my rejection of the alcohol brought about her rejection of me and she never came back. It was not a fair trade. It was safe to conclude perhaps, that she did not care much about me anyway. She never apologized for doing what she did. Looked at from another point of view, there was an excessive amount of drugs and alcohol in colleges then. What she did was a standard thing. I was the unusual one in that I refused it. So the relationship failed a month or so after I had done this picture. The picture is thus rather an orphan, and a failure in that it never really served the purpose it was meant to; I knew she did not understand what I had done in the self portrait, or what was going on with me then. Art can be a lonely thing and this picture still tells its truth even though the reason for its creation was never realized. It was deeply flattering to her that I picture a love of her leading me out of the darkness of my father's death. Yet she never really knew that, nor cared to know it, I guess.

Perhaps I expected too much of her? The painting did not reach her and I never knew why. Perhaps someone who could not see what a huge effort this painting was was not someone I wanted to be with anyway? It certainly was not due to my lack of trying. How could she not see that as something in praise of her, leading me out of the cave of my depression after my father's death, like Orpheus leading Eurydice? But she did not seem to see me very well and did not know how to read the painting or me. But she was 18 and had another agenda in mind. Does any 18 year old want to think of death? I was too complex, too serious, too needy, too much. I have journals and poems from those days, and the summer that followed, I mourned her loss rather acutely. I doubt she mourned me much at all, or thought much of me. I even made a sculpture of a woman that had a similar meaning to the painting. If I had been ruled only by reason I should not have taken it so hard. But like it or not, I was in love with her, and had lost her. My favorite music that year was Bob Dylan's album Blood on the Tracks. I projected her onto most of the songs about lost love.

“We had a falling-out, like lovers often will
And to think of how she left that night, it still brings me a chill
And though our separation, it pierced me to the heart
She still lives inside of me, we've never been apart.....
... People tell me it's a sin
To know and feel too much within
I still believe she was my twin, but I lost the ring
She was born in spring, but I was born too late
“Every day's been darkness since you been gone.”
Now there's a wall between us, somethin' there's been lost
I took too much for granted, got my signals crossed.
Just to think that it all began on a long-forgotten morn.
Come in, she said, I'll give you shelter from the storm.

Bob Dylan aside, was it silly to project myself on music like this?. Or is that what popular music is. We feel into it and put ourselves in the melodies and words. But this is a kind of dreaming. It fades eventually, as do all strong emotions. She gave me no shelter, or any indulgence really. I was left out in the cold again, which is where I was to begin with. I went on studying my painting and Kafka and Klee. My struggles were just beginning.

But the truth is I realized that I loved her and that she did not love me and that had to be accepted. It had been a very good friendship and I was devastated by what she did. I loved her, and was still thinking about her 6 months later, and wrote a lot of poems about her too. I missed her badly. I slowly worked out that my idealistic notions of romance were partly at fault for my being so hurt by her. It was nothing for her, just a sexual thing gone awry. It was not her first time, as it was for me. For me it was a search for a heart of gold, an image of a relationship where we shared each other's hearts for years.

I did finally find this. I saw eventually that she and I would have been incompatible in any case, but I did not see that then. Decades later I learned what kind of work is often done in Southern Ohio. Suffice it to say that life does not go well for many in outlying places in West Virginia and Southern Ohio. There are few jobs and people there are easily exploited, because of their poverty. Energy companies are common there and they rip mountain tops off to get coal and dig mines that leak toxic chemicals into streams. Many work for these energy resource companies and those who enable them such as the Ohio Division of Natural Resources, who make money killing animals and give the green light to many geologically harmful projects. The agencies and companies do much to help create global warming. Coal and Oil companies are not just destroying land and streams in West Virginia and Southern Ohio, they threaten the destruction of our planet. I recently read Naomi Klein's [This Changes Everything](#) that makes it clear that coal and oil must go as energy sources: they harm the planet, and they harm the future for all our children. A few billionaires harm the lives of millions people and animals all to get more of the money they do not need.

So this is a painting about my own delusions and my waking up to them. The painting looks out to someone who was never quite there for me, indeed, I really did not know her well or she me. We were thrown together accidentally in college and it would not have worked between us anyway. But I learned some things from her ignoring of me, my art and its meaning. I put large amounts of energy into art. But our culture makes most people oblivious to deeply meant art and the images it creates. Our society is not about reality, but rather conditions people to get used to images that lie to them or try to sell them things they do not need. My art is not that. I have always created in this vacuum. It goes along with what I have been doing all these years. I am not responsible for the fact that others do not care for or ignore what I do. From my early days I was interested in making images that are the opposite of advertising. I wanted to talk about reality, not dreams and to express hard truths, not false allurements for ulterior motives.

So, objectively, this portrait celebrates my side of a love that died before it developed. It is a picture of a sad young man in love shortly before he gets rejected. Everyone goes

though this, or nearly everyone. I was full of hope and yet unaware that his love will soon be unrequited. Of course, it is a hopeful work, because I did not know the end when I did it. I only learned the end after it was done. But I painted it quite truly, sitting in my dorm room on the bed staring in a mirror, day after day, thinking of her. How many young men of women fail at love? It shows a young man about to fail and lose the person he loves. In the painting, if not in my real life now, I am looking out at her still, hoping she will see me and love me, even though she never will. That gives the work a certain lovelorn wistfulness. It captures the thoughtful earnestness of a young man in love, trying to impress a young woman with the truth and honesty of who he is. A hopeful young 18 year old is waiting for a young woman to love him. But she is not there and will never arrive for him. Indeed, she walked out on me rather cruelly, and hence, perhaps, that is the sadness in the eyes of the lost young man. But is it her that I am dreaming of here? O maybe he will have to wait for another, maybe the painting is about my future more than my past? Yes, I can see that now.

The sadness is overcome somewhat by the amber glow of the painting as a whole, an amber glow that was so much like the orange and ochre grasses (little blue stem) that grow along the Ohio river in southern Ohio in March, which I loved. For me, then, her beauty and the lovely orange and gold grasses of Southern Ohio and the Ohio River itself, were the same thing. Later I realized there is a great deal in Southern Ohio that is not her.

But in my condition of dreamy love sickness, all that mattered was her. I saw her as a metaphor for the Ohio River and the golden grasses of winter in that part of the world. Love has an amazing way of opening nature to us, bringing us inside the outer world. She was the never ending and huge Ohio River, and the great Sycamores Trees with stars above them, under which we walked together. I made a whole world around her that ended in having little to do with her. So my painting looks out towards an imaginary woman waiting for my love in return, but it was a love that would never come from her, but from something inside me would experiment for years to find its realization.

The heartbreak implicit to this work is common for most of us when we are young, no doubt, but no less painful on account of that. I share it because I am sure this such sentimental loss is very common, as Blues and sad songs of lost love are common. Love does lead us to nature eventually, and children, if we follow it. We are animals, and poetic ones. this was an image full of poetry and longing for a woman that was more a part of me than a woman who I had not met yet. This roving idealism was really not yet tempered by the reality of real women. Given the portraits that come before this one, I can see I was trying very hard to escape the depression of my teen years, but had yet to entirely succeed. The beauty and sadness of a work like this is shows how art can keep present what was so far past. This work goes back to Jesus or before, even though he never existed. I didn't know this then.

As Darwin said, art is about sexual selection, even if one does not know why, to whom or where it will arise or fall or alight upon. This painting is about that arising, that

awareness, the opening of the heart that seeks love in the real world. That is why the woman's name really does not matter, she opened my heart then and it never really closed even as she faded into mist. Other women came, and eventually the one with whom I now have children arrived, and this painting looks forward to that, even though it was 20 years in coming. My art would never leave nature to which, from then till now, it has always been open. Maybe this is the meaning of this painting. Something opened then in me, and eventually it issued as children to carry on the opening. It took 40 years to have this complete cycle. The world will hopefully open for one day for them as it did for me, and a life of creating will blossom from them as it did for me. I hope so. Though I hope they will not have to suffer in the ways I did. The whole world and all the species seem to be about this. We try to love and to make the world better for our children. Or at least most of us do....





After Marietta, I went to art school for some years . These two self-portraits are from art school, probably done when I was 19 and living on Hessler Street, near Cleveland. One is blue ball point pen and the other back conte crayon. Like my best work form art school, it was done outside of school, for myself. They are well done, accurate and realistic. They are not as open as the one I did one nearly a year or so earlier. They are strictly observed and objective, and that is good. I still like it , as this is how I needed to be then. This was a time of study and intense efforts to grasp what my world was about and who I was.

There is a new objectivity in it, as well as a strength that is growing. It is not sentimental at all, and not even vulnerable either.

What happens to me and my self portraits during and after art school is quite complex and I am not going to try to tell these complex stories here. I made a film that is essentially a self portrait and I did performances. Theater caught my attention for while. There were many experiments. I did a series of abstract things, made books, carvings, sculptures and drawings. Some of these involved self portraiture of various kinds. I was writing a lot and lived in various places. I have decided not to talk about any of this here, I am not writing an autobiography, but just an overview of various self portraits, so I will keep to a selection from visual arts.

So I will simplify these years. I did get out my depression to a large degree. In between '76 and '79, I began doing an elaborate series of pen drawings in '78-79. These drawings were done mostly between 79 and 84, though the series limps along after that, as there are some from 87 and a few paintings in a similar style from 1990 and 91. But around 1983, I started doing realism and Plein Air work and that was my primary interest that is still on going. One should not confuse the realistic nature work and the Philosophical Drawings. I called this series began in 1978, the Philosophical Drawings and there is more than a thousand of them. Again, the realistic nature work and the Philosophical Drawings are very separate things. I have written about the Philosophical Drawings extensively, though I do not think I have quite fathomed them yet, and these writings are not finished. There is a lot in them, not all of it obvious, so it really needs to be written about.

Art school was a very confusing place, that did not teach me what I needed to know. Certainly I learned many things, but the ruling art of the 1970's and 80's was corporate minimalism and Duchampian or Warholian nonsense. I explored it but there was little there. So after art school I went back to my own roots in doodling, and from there I started increasing my capacity to draw out of my head. My work has always been self directed and I did not need schools or teachers, even if I sought them. I learned more about drawing from Jack Hirshman than I did in art school, for instance So these drawings grow out of attempts to turn art into poetry on the one hand, but also attempts to tell stories and make characters, and talk about my personal subjectivity in ways that go beyond narrative and join up with the so called history painting of the 19th century. But adapted through Jungian ideas and later the animal style of the earliest art. They situate me in a sort of mythic drama and are interesting as attempts to describe myself, my life and the world I lived in then. They are also as mistaken as my mind was then, but as artifacts of the time they are invaluable. They are very specific and largely autobiographical. In total, they are a sort of self portrait of that time, but individual works are self portraits too, and I will show a few of these.

Since 1976 I had been trying art in many venues and styles and lived in many places. I began doing the Philosophical Drawing in 1978. I had chosen the poet Jack Hirschman as a teacher in 1979 and studied with him in North Beach, San Francisco. In 1979, I was

doing three or four of these drawings every day, sometimes more. They get more open and creative under the influence of Jack Hirschman and the poetry scene of North Beach.



This one was done after Jack had gone off to Romania, if I remember correctly. The “still unsaid eye” is about nature as self-creating, joyous place, a swirl of cells and flowers seeking to create a world of more flowers and cells, more males and females, interacting in a cycle of turning spheres of sex, love and nature creating itself in a wonder of defeated death and nourishing life, going on from generation to generation. It reverses the human centered vision of Michelangelo in the last judgment, which is speciesist and objectionable. It creates instead a view or nature that includes people. The man is in the midst of it with a woman inside him. It could have been a woman with a man inside of her. The woman inside the man is interesting. I did a number of drawings about man inside women or women inside men. He had a notion of “seeing the other inside of oneself”. I took Jack’s idea and went beyond it as show the woman and man as creating a vision of nature together. It is a metaphor for a good relationship and it is true, a couple is a strength in nature and they recreate the world every generation, not just in humans but in every species. It is an image of the love relationship, or the way in which, when I love, it seems as if my loved one is physically inside me, present in my being.

This is a poetic image of course, but it has a psychological reality that is accurate. Indeed, the physical presence of the other in the act of love eventually does become the physical fact of a child made of both parents. So my putting a woman inside this man is not entirely fanciful.

The concept of the “unsaid eye” is also interesting. The ‘unsaid eye’ refers to something seen that is not yet understood, or if understood, not yet capable of being explained to others. At the time I did the drawing I think it was the latter. I could not explain the intuition this drawing is based on and which it tries to elicit in the viewer. The intuition, I now think, has to do with the relation of nature to seeing and the self and its apprehension of the “sense of existence”. What the still unsaid eye could see was the importance of nature and in one sense I was predicting my own future, since nature was already important to me then but become even more so. The best of the Philosophical Drawings have this suggestiveness and I like many of them still.



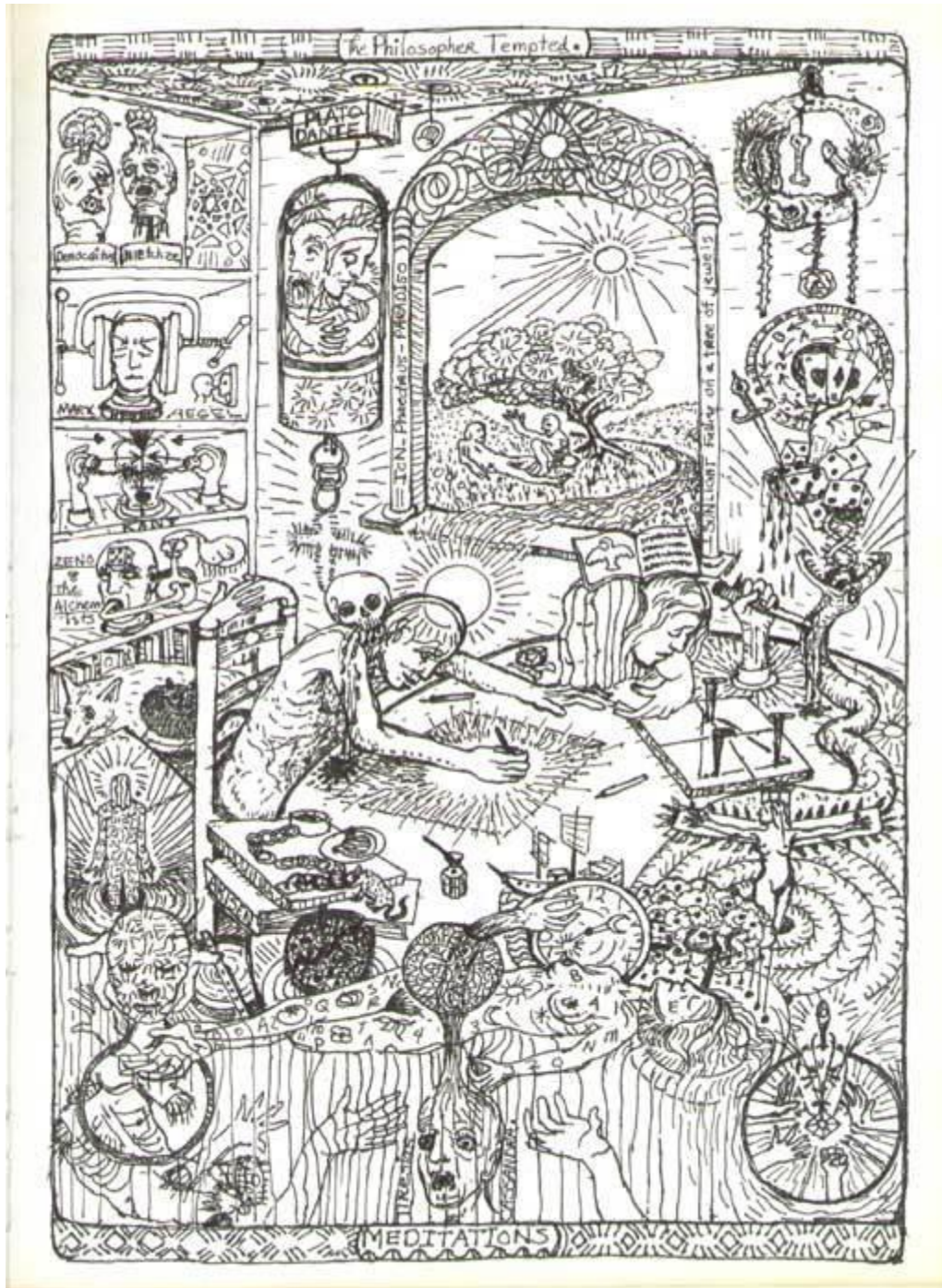
“An Actor Recalls Himself” is the title of this one. Imagine an actor who plays Hamlet or a character in Beckett’s plays. The actor gets caught in the amazing world of that

character and begins to think that he is Hamlet or Krapp, Lear or Estragon, and suddenly, leaving that stage at the end of his performance, he recalls that he is not Hamlet, or Estragon, but himself. This happens after getting immersed in a movie in a movie theatre too. that shock of the real when you come out of a fiction. That sense of reality, of estranged self- recognition, is what this drawing tries to be about. One recalls oneself after an absence, after a period where one forgot who one was. The sense of being is a very fragile and important thing. I had this feeling in a big way after waking up after a severe heart attack that nearly killed me. Illusions fall away and one is faced with reality in a direct and powerful way.

One does eventually lose oneself. People who have Alzheimer's begin to lose themselves consciously. They know they are losing themselves. When my mother first started showing serious signs of this illness, she would say over and over, " I am lost, I am lost". She began to lose her memories and her abilities to use language, and soon, she stopped recognizing most people. I wrote this after she had the disease 5 years.

" After 4 or 5 years of the disease she still knows me, but not by name, as she still knows herself, but not as the person she was. She tells me over and over that "I love you" and I tell her the same. It calms her to hear that. The self she has now is fragmented, and though it is certainly a self of value and importance, I am one of the only people she used to know who still treats her as a person. I recite the names of places lived and people she has known. I tell her the names of meals she cooked. Her eyes glisten. Everyone else assumes she is gone or sees her as only a body to be maintained. My mother has a self in the same sense that a baby has a self, or a person who is seriously disabled. She can still smile and laugh and say occasional phrases or words that makes sense. She still walks and feeds herself, but eventually she will lose these capacities too. But because she does not have a 'self' in the conventional of legal sense, she is vulnerable to exploitation and harm and I have spent some years trying to protect her from those who would harm her. I haven't been entirely successful at this, and both the exploitative nursing care industry and a few individuals, have been able to harm her. But I have fought for Mom's rights as best I could and stopped at least some of this exploitation."

I bring up this story about my mother's Alzheimer's to show how fragile the self is, and how social systems can be harmful to individuals. My drawing tries to point to the fragility of the self, and how easy it is to lose it. The beauty of a really good actor is that she or he can enter into and out of various selves and still be who they are when they go home. Their acting helps us learn what it is to be human and animals on a fragile planet. My notion of the self was expanding and growing and art was leading me further into the adventure of life on earth.



The Philosophical Drawings got more complex as time went on. Many of the larger ones get so complex that deciphering what they are about is quite difficult. This is one of those. I won't explain all of it here, but this one is about me trying to find my way through the thicket of philosophy. I was working at a bookstore and reading everything I could get my hands on. It pushes Durer's "Melancholia" into entirely new directions. Dante hangs by the window and Plato and Socrates are outside. Sculpture on the shelves show Democritus, Nietzsche, Kant and others. A black cat sleeps with a white dog, a sexual talisman hangs in the air, a woman covered with letters lays on the table. It shows

a confused young man trying to draw himself out of the confusion, focusing on the sun itself, on light. That is what the Philosophical Drawings are, in fact. I furiously try to draw a picture of the sun on a large drawing surface. I did do a picture of the sun a few years ago and it is interesting as an actual object that sustains all life and not at all interesting as a symbol of anything.

So this is me still trying to grasp the meaning of things but not there yet. I was trying to understand the world I then could grasp, which, for all the complexity, was not yet deep or simple enough. Now living on earth all seems quite simple compared to then. I have rejected Plato and Socrates seems mistaken about many things. Democritus is somewhat interesting, but Nietzsche is not. The interesting thing in these drawings is the endlessly creative line, which is not afraid to go anywhere. This picture goes back to Durer's great print "Melancholia", and shares its delusions. In Durer, the longing angel longs to return to something that does not exist. He is burdened by his own wings that will never fly. The difference is that I am trying to draw myself out of the delusions and doing so with passionate intensity. Durer never got out of them. It would still take me some years yet, at least 10 more years to be exact.

The Philosophical Drawings often explore deformations and conflicts and used the human body as a means of expression that often betrays its integrity. I was pushing on the limits of what I could express, and often used the human body as a means to do that. Some of these drawings bother me now, as they go too far, expressing human violence, often in protest, or too willing to deform bodies. They are often misunderstood, by people who do not know them or why I did them. I understand why I did them, but they reflect my limitations due to my age and the depth or of thinking I had yet to undertake. Suffice it to say that I no longer agree with many of the philosophical questions the drawings raise and try to answer, or fail to answer. But at least they ask the questions and that would lead me to answers. They raise questions of power and sex, relationships and ultimate questions. They often get it wrong and make mistakes, as I did throughout my youth.



This one explores the Orpheus myth. He, of course, is a conservative image, rather Platonic, of man as the carrier of civilization, which is how Delacroix saw him. I later rejected such images and meanings. But it is an accurate picture of spiritual or transcendental cruelty. I then thought that Spirit was everything, matter nothing or nearly nothing, the body is destroyed for the spiritual, and the senses, as well as sexuality are to be denied. I would reject this way of thinking eventually, if not yet.



This is one of my favorite drawings in a group of drawings about books. I remember doing this drawing. It was done in a time of loneliness and struggle. I was often going to New York City to be with a woman that I loved. She insisted on living there. I disliked New York and its drive towards self destruction, its coldness and self importance; its lack of caring and the absence of nature. I visited there often and perhaps lived there 3 years all together in the 1980's. But I did not like living there for long. I kept leaving it and one day left it for good. This drawing was done when I was in Cleveland. It is not a literal self-portrait, though it is me and based on imagining what I looked like when I was sitting at my desk and embracing my beloved book in just this way. The book I was embracing was probably my journal, in which I was writing notes and doing drawings like this one. I am expressing a deep love for my work, a love I still feel for it. I have put most of my life in it. I have always loved art and the search for meaning in a world gone

awry. Van Gogh says that “love of art makes one lose real love”. I don’t know that that is true. In some cases, yes, in other cases, no. It depends on what other qualities the person in question might have. Vincent was a particularly hard person to get along with for long.

I love the way the hands gently touch the pages, almost like a lovers hands. What I appreciate about this drawing is that it expresses very clearly the emotion of love and peace that my work has given me over the years. Indeed, besides my wife and children, and living close to animals and nature, the only real peace I have found in my life is in my writing and art. My beloved books have been dear sources of solace and comfort to me on many days when people were not there for me. Books have often helped me return to the hidden sources of my own life. My own books have contained my losses and sufferings. My books have attempted to hold on to all the life which has been lost despite my efforts. People I have loved who I lost without intending to; people who died. People that I loved but who left me, or who I left. In the final end, all those I have loved are still with me in these works. Even if they are buried in a book somewhere, or lost in my fading memory.



I did very few drawings of my own real face in the period of the Philosophical Drawings . There are a few, but they are not the norm. This is mostly deliberate as I wanted to restrict what I could do to primarily what came out of my own head through my hand. I wanted to restrict myself to non- objective studies involving my own brain and head, not my eyes, not cameras, not objective study of any kind. Many of the figures are me, but do not objectively look like me. This period was the period of my exploration of our world and of religion. I lived in many places, met many people, and tried many things out, playing with the abstract and symbolic, mythic stories, automatic associations, dreams and surreal and poetic ambiguities were part of my research.

When I did combine the real and metaphorical in one image the results disturbed me and others. The literal and actual combined with the symbolic or associative do not work well together. There are several examples of this and this is one. It shows a self portrait from my middle twenties combined with an abstract fantasy in the background which is almost musical. If I see it as a caricature, it looks like a young poet in front of a circus. I did visual doodles like this going back to my childhood. I wanted to redo the Book of

Kells as a portrait of my own thinking and living, capturing nature itself in my lines. Such things always seemed to express something of the very force of life itself, or some aspect of the creativity of nature. I liked that in my complex constructions. But the attempts are always falling too short. but it tends to understate the facts of what I am referring to. This style tends to be over stylized and verges on, without quite reaching, the cartoonish.

Below is a late drawing that combines the two styles. The linear or subjective and the tonal, shaded and objective. The two styles are not combined. But they are there and they are disparate. I can imagine some examples were this works well together, but this is not one of them. This works well as an example of what happens when the two styles are put side by side—how both styles are exaggerated by it...



Part of the reason I stopped working out of my head was because I did not like the combination of the decoratively abstract and the literally real. The above drawing was done by accident and shows this. It verges on surrealism and creates an unreal and hallucinatory art. This is due to the loosely metaphysical perspective I then adopted. I had things backwards then. The shock of the real was not the problem, it is the solution. I put my real head into a drawing that has a lot of fantasy elements in it.

Going deeper into what is real to try to find solutions to the problems we face in our actual world, that is what matters. What does not matter is fiction and subjective delusion. Do not get me wrong here. I am glad I did a thousand drawings like this. It was

a learning process. I learned so much about myself and the world. One important thing I learned was that the seeming reality of the unreal is the problem. This is the problem in our lives, in books, language, movies, advertising, dreams, fictions, lies and falsehoods that cannot be verified. Human life is rife with such things, making our world a place of real nightmares, religious and political wars, the rich exploiting nature and the poor.

The Philosophical Drawings taught me that reality is what matters, not symbols, myths or dreams, imagination or poetic metaphors. But I learned this by deeply exploring these myths, religions, falsehoods and dreams. This is not to say that there is no reality in these drawings. there is. they are intensely personal and that has value all by itself. But they do fail in the end and I gave up that style irrevocably. They undermined themselves, in the end. I drew myself out of them. There was a plowing up, a catharsis, a going through the fire, burning up my own delusions, that needed to be done.



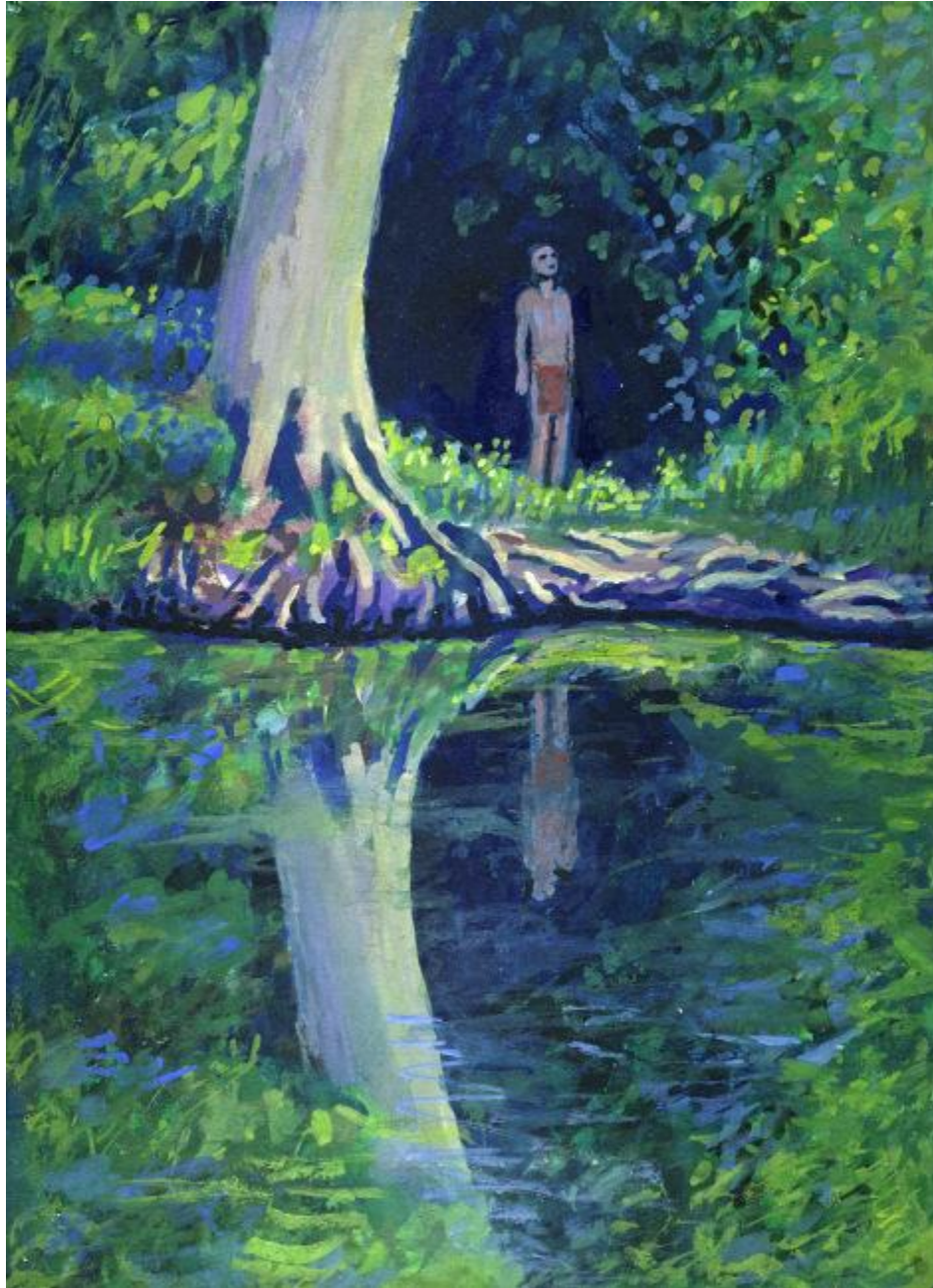
This drawing is a composite of various Philosophical Drawings. It was done later and meant to sum them up in a way. It shows a sad and thoughtful young man sitting in a field, considering his own existence, surrounded by flowers and stars. One of the characters I made up in these drawings, a proxy for myself, was the blindman, and this might be a picture of the blind man seeing nature for the first time. It has a certain dream like quality I do not admire any more, but the reality it describes still matters and it is in this direction that my art had started to go in the 1980s. The ideal was collapsing and reality was finally taking over. I am far from the sadness of my youth now, and soon to be far from the illusions and dreams of the period when I did the Philosophical Drawings.



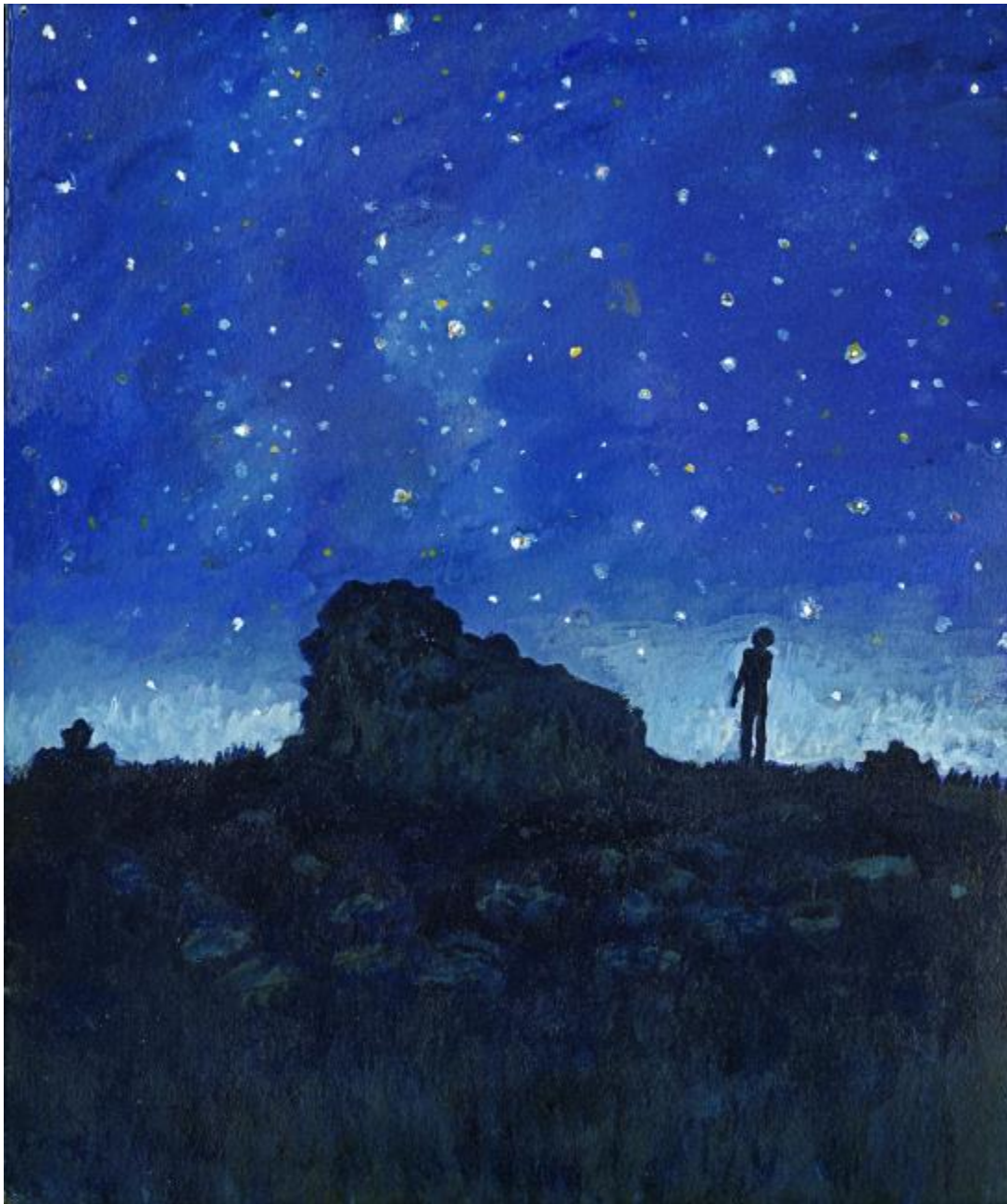
I had the same problem trying to translate the Philosophical Drawings into oil paint and color. How do I overcome my own subjectivity? This was an early attempt at this, probably done in 1984. I was 27 or 28 then I did not like the result that much. I was working in two series then. I had started doing Plein Air gouaches near Lake Erie. But at home I was doing another series of the Philosophical Drawings. My art had split into two directions. This painting combines the two tendencies. It shows me swimming toward a pine covered shore in Maine. I actually lived in Acadia Park, in Maine, for a month in 1980. I imagine a great white bird there like and Great White Egret or Crane, but here almost a mythical species. I imagine that if I reached the shore the bird of my dreams would be gone and there I would be in real woods on a real shore, rocky and hard on my feet, as I came to know in Maine. The Plein Air studies I was doing were based in reality, which I liked better than poetic fantasy. For some years the two styles, one subjective and the other objective, conflict and interpenetrate. It would take me

more than another decade to find myself entirely. I remember in my early 40's finally feeling that I had become mature and myself and I could do what I had always wanted to. But it took me twenty years to learn this. Art comes from a deeper place than writing and it took me years to change my art.

By 1986 or 87, I had largely given up fantasy and 'make believe' in my painting, which, unbeknownst to me at the time, was moving far ahead of my drawing, which was still languishing in personal and poetic mythology. I adopted a literal and objective manner that I had used first in painting Lake Erie beginning in 1983 and then used in Ireland in 1984. In 1987 I started doing painting like this one in Point Reyes. This small one was done in 1987, mostly from life on a moonlit night shows me just after twilight looking at a real egret in the salt marsh of Tomales Bay. The striving for personal myth is gone. This is the delta where Lagunitas Creek pours into Tomales bay, on the Inverness Ridge side of the Bay. Salt Marshes are very interesting places, and full of life too. I had largely found myself, and my painted art is now far ahead of my studies in drawing and writing. I still like many of these works. They begin to show an individual in nature and are resolutely non-symbolic and do not rely on metaphors. What is a person in space, how is being alive to be expressed in such a way that our lives on earth are shown as they are. These questions point toward the idea of Nature's Rights which is a theme that comes to dominate my art. How are we to recognize our relation to evolution and nature and our place in it, in a non-hierarchical way, with ourselves no longer being the "measure of all things", but rather one of many beings on a rare planet in a still not understood universe without gods or fictional concepts?



This one from 87 or 88, evokes a similar theme. It shows a real spot up Lagunitas Creek, not far from Point Reyes station, near Elephant Mountain and I imagine myself as a young Native American, singing a song over the waters, as if I were a young Miwok Native, perhaps singing an imaginary love song to the woman he hopes to marry. Certainly there is fantasy here, but reality is taking over. At least now I am in the realm of the historically possible. My sensibility is deepening and basing itself more in reality.



This one is probably from 1988-89. I was 32 and had been making art since I was 14. This is my first work that I really feel proud of and have few doubts about. It took me 18 years. It shows me, looking up at the Milky Way sky near Point Reyes, where I lived for 3 years. The Milky Way could be seen in resplendence there sometimes. I went out to study these rocks alone. I went out other nights in different places to study the sky. I only wanted to do where the Milky Way begins near the horizon. His is a real person in a real place. My first painting, discussed above, was done when I was 14, of the boy longing to go beyond the wall that separated him from nature. The painting done when I was 14 or maybe 15, was only a hope, a hope to embrace myself as a natural being in the

natural world. By now I had really done this --- I was over 30---and I was daily immersed in this landscape which I allowed to take over my life.

This was done from reality near Olema and Nicasio Reservoir. Only the figure of myself, here reduced to a silhouette, is imagined, except in this case, I am painting what was actually there and there is no metaphorical overlay at all. I did many paintings in Point Reyes from life. I was not so interested in my own image as the space in which my image occurs. I wanted to integrate myself into nature as part of it. In some cases I was using myself as a conduit of the viewer into the painting, after the Chinese, who tended to do this also. In 1986 I was influenced by spiritual idea of landscape, such as one sees in Pre-Raphaelite work or Turner, Palmer or Van Gogh. But I eventually got over that too. At the same time I was also in rebellion against those same ideas, so in works done in Point Reyes, I was very much violating the spiritual ideology I was then studying and knew I was. This tendency would eventually take over my art. I was already largely an atheist and ecological painter. But was not quite willing to admit it yet. I was a very poor candidate for Schuon's cult, or any cult for that matter. I was too independent for them, too confident. They wanted someone much more dependent, weak, even servile. I lasted not much more than a year, the second year I was already out of it, I stayed to see if I could get Maude out. I couldn't. I tried but she was strangely of two minds, one was very needy and one was too independent too. This tendency in here would get he thrown out of the cult, but the th other tendency in her would keep her trying to get back in, which would never be accomplished.



MARK KOBLOW 12/17

This painting was done in 1997, with the painting above used as a reference. The Philosophical Drawings had failed between 1987 and 1991. I was thrown into a real philosophical conundrum by the issues that arose. By 1991 I had given up on religion and went back to college in 1992 to try to understand what had happened. I did a lot of Plein Air landscape work up until 1989. I only did a few works between 92 and 97. After getting my Master's degree in 1997, I started painting again seriously. This one was done in 97 in Ohio, though it pictures me in Point Reyes. Notice the point of view is no longer about me, but me seen from the point of view of the Barn Owls. I had gotten quite close to these birds as they lived outside my window. The point of view is quite high, but I needed to do that because I wanted to picture Tomales Bay in the far background and Inverness Ridge running alongside it with the mist over the hills. The old barns are gone now, made into shops. The owls were scared away by the money makers. My favorite part of this work is the misty hills and the Bay under the stars. But there I am, finally part of the actual world. It is a world few look at.



I did most of this in 1997 too, and did nothing with it for many years, but lately I got it out again and changed the foreground, based on photos I took in Point Reyes. I wanted to make the field a more wild field, such as I have grown to love. Fields get very fecund and full of life when they are let go and not altered at all by humans. Grasses and bushes are healthy in this environment and not at all like grazed places, where sheep and cattle, used for meat, do great harm. Grazed fields look spent and weak. I spent time

wandering and canoeing around the Marshall and Walker Creek area, where this is, and came across owls there too. I even slept out there one night, hearing owls as where I slept on the beach next to Tomales Bay. This shows me looking up at a Barn Owl flying away. I found a dead Barn Owl in the area too, which was sad, probably killed by a Great Horned Owl. The fog is creeping in, sliding silent over the hills like 'cats paws', echoing Carl Sandburg's metaphor. I stand down below, looking up at the bird flying away. This reality now, I am living a life among live things and joyous in it.



I am the distant figure on the left hilltop, watching the Elk. I was becoming tiny in these self portraits, almost irrelevant, but not quite. I have done art with no humans in it, but I have never been an ahumanist, as Robinson Jeffers was. I am a witness of a world now

made real by its own devices. My art is so close to nature I cannot be taken out of it, even if I do not show myself at all. I wanted to use my figure to show the immensity of space and all the life that goes on it that has nothing directly to do with humans. I made a video image of my spouse walking down the hillside at Tomalas Bay Ecology Preserve.

Most people, the world over, live alienated lives bubbled inside their language enveloped worlds. They have little idea what might be outside of that. Elk live in a very different world. More than once I watched a bull Elk tear up grasses and adorn himself with them for the females, during rutting season. Another male Elk watches from a safe distance. The fog was low and enormous over the hills. I did various studies of the Elk. The original version of this, shows the clouds clearly. One large cloud was in shadow of the moon. The planet Venus was in the sky. These Tule Elk live in few places now, and this is one of the best places to see them. This is not poetry, it is reality.



This one has a somewhat complicated history. It shows a deer who I got to know well, done in July, 1998. She was alter murdered by the Cleveland Metroparks, as was her young. But there is no hint of that here. More recently I added two Pileated Woodpeckers, a Red Headed Woodpecker, a Chipmunk, White-throated Sparrow, some geese and my wife and I. This is one of my first portraits of Heroes Wetland. I did a number of portraits of this place. I don't know off hand how many portraits there are of Heroes in gernal. I think I thought when I did it that it would change the minds of people about deer, if they just looked at them as closely as I had. If one spends enough time with a place and animals, one starts to see one's own identify with them. This is not fiction but fact. My future wife and I spent a great deal of time here at heroes Wetland. We came to understand what was there. That is she and I watching the water and sky, the birds and animals on a daily basis, no longer alienated from the world at all. I had almost died in 1997 and was aware that my life was very fragile indeed. I knew what mattered now.



It was hard for me to leave Point Reyes in 1989, and even harder for me to give up painting paintings of it. There is no place I ever lived I loved so much, though I have

loved many places. In 1997 I wrote my friend in Marshall, John Welch and asked him to take photos for me so I could keep painting it. He wrote back and said it would be too hard to do, as I lived so far away in Ohio. He was sick too and died within the year, poor man. He said that I had to paint the landscape that I lived in and had to stop trying to paint a place so far way. He was right, of course, though other artists have done it. James Joyce wrote for years about Dublin when he lived in Europe. But painting is even more intimate than writing. I kept on painting Point Reyes, even recently. So he was not entirely right. But I took his point and started the series on Heroes Wetland. I kept painting Point Reyes.

So on the surface this is a painting is about the experience and wonder of seeing a Hummingbird. But this painting from 1998 shows me divided between missing home in Point Reyes, California and actually living near Lake Erie in Ohio. The homesickness for California, where I grew up has been with me most of my life. Even if I loved the landscape in Ohio, and I did, I could not stop thinking of my homeland. The Hummer is an Allen's Hummingbird that lives on the west coast. Hence the title: "Remembering Northern California near Lake Erie(Allen's Hummingbird)".

The landscape is both a memory of California and a memory of a little park that was on Lake Erie where I first started painting Plein Air works in 1983. In the 1990's a corrupt government official sold this charming public park to a developer, who made a mansion or two on it. There is something criminal in making public lands private. But It was a great spot and gave me ready access to the Lake's shore, which you can see here. I am above the cliffs in the painting, but I knew a way down the cliffs and I wandered there a great deal, far beyond the spit of land you see behind my head in the painting. This painting thus evokes three times and two places. It shows me at both a place I loved from 1983, which was based on paintings I had done from life then, and then shows how I looked in 1998 when I did the painting. The painting then it evokes California and the sort of light that I had spent so much time studying from 1986-89 in Point Reyes. The longing for home is a universal feeling and one that I have never quite shaken. In the end home can be anywhere, it is just a matter of loving the place as well as you can and learning about its small things as much and you can..I could made Ohio home, but California and Point Reyes were never far from my mind either.

Point Reyes is much like western Ireland in many ways. On the subject of homesickness and lost love these versions of a favorite old Irish song have much to say..... I append them to this painting as a sort of song of longing for what is loved and home....

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Breathing with Deer at Dawn

I did finally slow down but not stop painting pictures of California, though I must say, I did one recently, so I still am doing it, and hope to do more. (see my Oystercatchers, below) But in 1998 we moved next to the Metroparks west of Cleveland and I found Hero's wetland, . I have lived most of my adult life next to public land, and that is one of the best things I have ever done. There are amazing parks in the US. I do not much like the idea of nature as a reservation system, as it implies allowable use for any reason of lands that are not public. All land and nature deserves protection. The notion that humans have a right to treat nature as an expendable resource is absurd. Humans have no moral right to hurt other species and that they do so is already returning to harm them and us, who are innocent.

But at least there are some lands preserved. The ones that circle Cleveland like and Emerald Necklace are among the best in any city area, as many places in them are still wild. The Board of Directors that runs it tends to be corrupt in various ways, but the original park system, created by William Stinchcomb and Harold Groth, set aside 18,000 acres and made it hard to ruin it. The current directors are held back from doing too much damage so far, though they do things that harm the parks. Recently for instance they started a six year plan to spray the Rocky River Metroparks with glyphosate and kill all the plants there, just to get rid of an invasive species they themselves neglected to do anything about when it could have been controlled easily. They have become lords of poison, doing “Shock and Awe” to nature and praising themselves as good “stewards”. They are killing in order to save, just as was done in Vietnam.

So this painting is of the woods at Heroes Wetland which is a place I studied for two years. It is a place poisoned now and nearly everything is dead. But when I did it it was wonderfully alive. There are some great old sycamores there, one of my favorite trees in Ohio. This painting is called “Breathing with Deer at Dawn”. I grew very fond of these deer and knew some of them of them by sight. They lost their fear of me for the most part, since I was there so often. The Rocky River is behind the trees in the distance. I was breathing when they breathe on a cold fall morning. I wanted to express a basic identity with them as beings in a real place, not too different than I and equally deserving of being there. When you stand this close to an animals and see its free thoughts and experience its presence, it is clearly as important in its own world and you are in yours. The notion that deer are a “nuisance” is a fiction created by chauvinistic humans who are far more of a nuisance to all species on earth, than any species could be to humans.





Heroes Wetland is probably an old Oxbow of the Rocky River. Here I show the river which is short distance through the woods to the pond. This is a place we used to call Little Bird Lane, because it was a great place to see migrating birds in the spring and fall. This shows the best time for this migration, in late April and early May when the migrating Warblers, Thrushes, Waterthrush, Sandpipers, Ducks, Swallows, and many other Orders, (Anseriformes, Passeriformes etc.) and Species come through, some to stay and some not. The high hillsides and cliffs in this valley narrow down to from a half mile wide to a few hundred feet wide just after Heroes. That is why there are so many birds there in the spring and fall.

The House Finch has been singing his spring song. He sits in a gorgeous wild cherry tree that blooms above the river in the spring. I worked hard on the tree, trying to get the spring light on the blossoms just right. A young family of geese are in the river, goslings trying to keep up behind their Mom and Dad. A deer pauses in the water to look up river. I am merely a tiny figure across the river, on the river bank, little more than an inch high, watching it all from amidst the sycamore's.. I watched all the life at Heroes nearly everyday for two years.

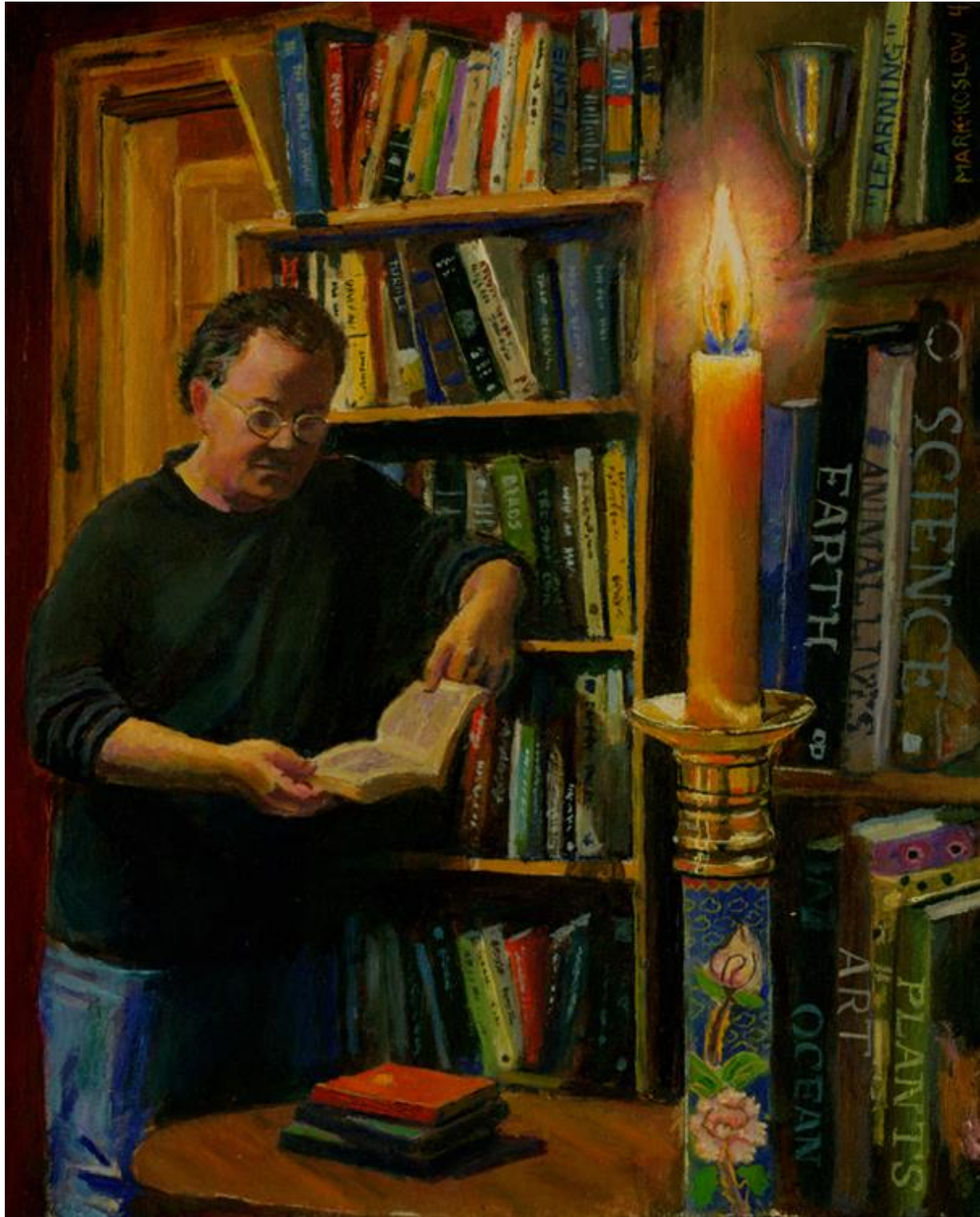


This next one is called "The Marriage Portrait", as well as "Autumn Love Poem". My spouse and I had been together since 1994, but since we were discussing having children, we decided to get married in 2001. This was done in 2001 but not really finished until 2004 or 2005 when my daughter was born. My wife and I had gone camping in Findlay, Ohio that autumn. The light was so lovely at that time and in that place, just as it was on the day of our marriage. I made a lot of photographic and video studies of us and the light. I liked using video as a means of study then as it captures more than only photographs can. It is not always possible to do studies by hand with paint or pencil. Purist oil painters decry this as an adulteration, but that is very snobby. Life is too short to be perfect and sometimes one can make do with what is possible, even if it is not the perfect option. I prefer working from life when I can, but I can't always and in this case, my studies were in depth and over a number of years to do this.

This is a painting that took months, years even, and is very carefully constructed. The tree on the right is mostly from a tree at Heroes Wetland. I called it the Multicolored Tree. I had studied trees quite a lot. I had studied light quite a lot. We had seen an Osprey above Findley Lake. The Red Breasted Nuthatch is one of my favorite birds and I had studied them in various places. I had done various paintings as a precursor to this such as 'Chipmunk's World' and one I called "Squirrel Tail in Sunlight". Late autumnal light on leaves had been studied by Thoreau too and I had read him on 'Autumnal Tints', and in his essay Walking he mentions a light which will . I understood very well what he meant by these phrases. Studying how light effects leaves was a major endeavor over some years. Leonardo decries such lighting situation as too complicated, and recommends only painting leaves when the light come from the front of a tree, but I did not agree and tried for some years to paint light coming through trees from the other side. It is not that Leonardo was wrong, it is just that painting trees was very hard in the Renaissance, when all paintings were done in the studio.



This one was started in 2005, and I worked on it a lot, but was not quite happy with it. I only finished it in the last year. The faces and flowers in the foreground needed more work. It shows my wife and I and our new baby walking through the forest. This forest was beside the Chagrin River, where we often went swimming before we had children. It is a picture of real happiness and joy in the new life that is with us.



This last group of paintings are all fairly recent, in the last three years. Since I discuss them at length below there is no need to speak of them much here too. While some are solitary portraits two of them are group portraits. "Emerald Valley", which is the third one here, is my whole family, as is the last one "History", though that one also includes my mother and grandmother.



Making Frames

As years have gone by I have moved from showing myself in the natural world in an effort to describe living on earth in space and among other existing things that also have rights-- what might be called ecological painting--, to more intimate pictures of those who are my immediate family, who are also part of the world of nature. I have gotten more specific about our everyday lives. The vaster scale of some of the Point Reyes works is now narrower and closer, as in Emerald Valley or Making Frames. I have

started showing work and workers, including myself, as part of life, as well as going back into history, my own and others. They are more about home and working, as in "Making Frames" in our garage or making partings in History, or working on the ship or doing intellectual work involving of knowledge and scholarship in "Still Learning", which shows me studying or looking up references in our little library. In the night painting with deer and my family in Emerald Valley I show my whole family integrated into the natural world. I show work integrate into the natural world too. these are not human centered images.

Self-Portraiture, for me at least, has been about trying to understand and explain my life in nature, even when others did not understand me. There are many stories to tell and many ways to look at oneself and the world. I am getting older, heavier, and the young ones are faster than I and more flexible and able. But with age comes insight into what it was all about and why it mattered. Life is its own reward, and living is what life is about. Each species lives the best life it can. And though suffering cannot be avoided, it can be minimized. Each species seeks to avoid sufferings as much as they can to survive. Each species developed in evolution according to its own needs and possibilities and each species deserves praise for these adaptations. Few humans get this and so humans are the most destructive species of other species on earth. Helping species to live their lives in a world that evolves is part of the human responsibility in our time of human caused destruction of nature.

The notion of "externalizing" nature is a very bad idea that is destroying it. My work takes on a certain ecological logic in the 1990's and proceeds into the new century by including my family and work and real life into the mix. Humans must be integrated into nature and not just hated for their abuse of nature. In the end one gives away what one is, to one's kids or to others in the world. In the end even self-portraits are not really about oneself, but about life itself and the living of it for good or ill. There is nothing in the world so gratifying as having kids and I have tried to celebrate that in some of these works too.



Emerald Valley



Self Portrait: Younger and Older

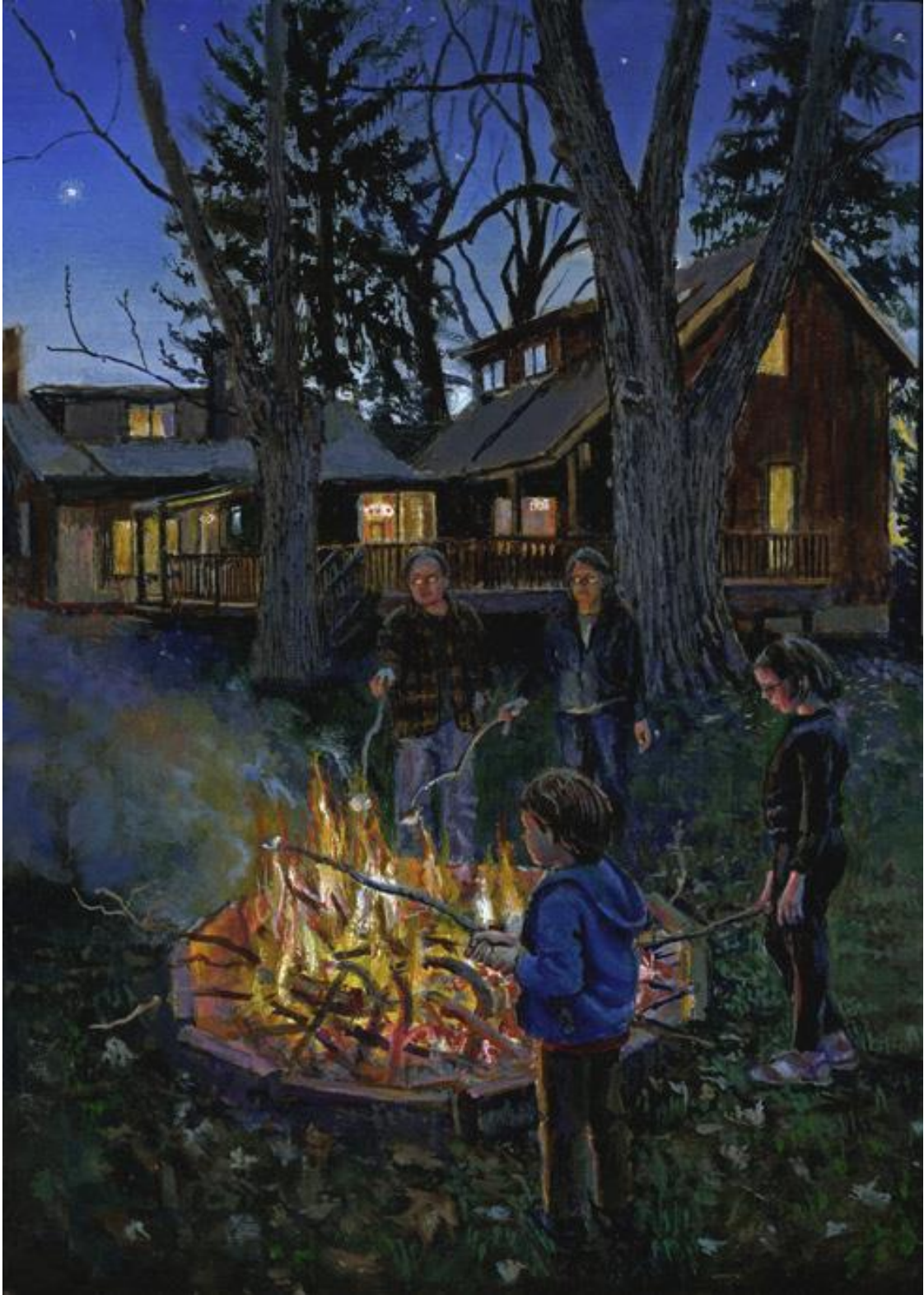


Ore Boats. Me Working on Great Lakes Ship.



This last group of paintings are all fairly recent, in the last three years. Since I discuss them at length in later essays there is no need to speak of them much here too. While

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Firelight. July 2015

whole family, as is the last one “History”, though that one also includes my mother and grandmother.. As years have gone by I have moved from showing myself in the natural world in an effort to describe living on earth in space and among other existing things that also have rights– what might be called ecological painting–, to more intimate pictures of those who are my immediate family, who are also part of the world of nature. I have gotten more specific about our everyday lives. The vaster scale of some of the Point Reyes works is now narrower and closer, as in Emerald Valley or the painting called Making Frames. I have started showing work and workers, including myself, as part of life, as well as going back into history, my own and others. They are more about home and working, as in “Making Frames” in our garage or making partings in History, or working on the ship or doing intellectual work involving of knowledge and scholarship in “Still Learning”, which shows me studying or looking up references in our little library. In the night painting with deer and my family in Emerald valley I show my whole family integrated into the natural world. I show work integrate into the natural world too. these are not human centered images.

The Firelight painting is more recent. It shows my whole family having fun together cooking marshmallows on a fireplace in our back yard. This seemingly simple action is really very beautiful and complex.



This is my dog and me, Hako and I, back when I was 17 or so. I put it at the end because it is the most recent self portrait I have done. It was done in the last couple of years.

Self-Portraiture, for me at least, has been about trying to understand and explain my life in nature, even when others did not understand me. There are many stories to tell and many ways to look at oneself and the world. I am getting older, and the young ones are faster than I and more flexible and able. But despite the falling apart that comes with ageing, insight also comes into what it was all about and why it mattered. This is sometimes called wisdom, though I am unsure that older people are always so wise: often they are not.

Life is its own reward, and living is what life is about. Each species lives the best life it can. And though suffering cannot be avoided, it can be minimized. Each species seeks to avoid sufferings as much as they can to survive. The “falling apart” of old age is clearly a step in the evolutionary process of life. Each species developed in evolution according to its own needs and possibilities and each species deserves praise for these adaptations. Few humans understand this. Instead of nurturing other species, humans are the most destructive species of other species on earth. Humans are the cause of most sufferings on earth. Helping species to live their lives in a world that evolves is part of the human responsibility in our time of human caused destruction of nature. This is a huge problem that my work is partly about trying to solve. Part of the solution is teaching people to listen, they are very bad at doing that, in general. Their “freedom’ matters more than the existence of other species. Yes, this makes ‘freedom’ seem a very bad thing.

Independently of others listening to me or not, my work takes on a certain ecological logic in the 1990’s, and proceeds into the new century by including my family and work and real life into the mix. Humans must be integrated into nature and not just hated for their abuse of nature. Self Portraits are not transcendental. John Ashbury had it exactly wrong. As you see here: they are mostly lovely pictures of the actual and ordinary world. In the end one gives away what one is, to ones kids or to others in the world. In the end, even self portraits are not really about oneself, but about life itself and the living of it for good or ill. There is nothing in the world so gratifying as having kids and I have tried to celebrate that in some of these works too.