San Fernando Valley State College

THE METAMORPHOSIS OF CONTENT THROUGH FORM

An abstract submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Art

by

Annette Rose Bird

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The abstract of Annette Rose Bird is approved:

Committee Chairman

San Fernando Valley State College

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"..."'What is my duty?' I asked myself. To understand the great game. To take apart the doll of Earth, to discover in its belly the straw and the sawdust and the tiny ingenious mechanism that makes it germinate, bloom, fructify, die, and be reborn; to wind it up again without anger and without disgust, to watch it exhibit its marvels. And not to be fooled by it!"

Nikos Kazantzakis

- The Rock Garden
ABSTRACT

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I

Theme

Nothing in this life we live nor of the earth on which we live it, is static or unchanging, and often, it is not what it seems. The flood engulfs, destroys and ebbs; concern becomes indifference. The hillside corrodes but the valley flourishes. Love deepens or, finding no nourishment in the dry atmosphere of discontent, dies. In some, fear may swell until reason staggers. In others growth brings a calm perception and unhurried knowledge.

But in all of us, as human as we are, the invis-
ible and denied is ever-present and ever-rocking-the-boat; and hate may masquerade as love, habit and need imprison two strangers in a turned-off marriage, and a mother can tell her child to fly but never open the door to his cage.

But it works the other way also and most of us are more involved and more dependent than we realize (or are willing to admit).

This involvement and alienation, push and pull, ambivalence of feeling and relationship, is the theme, or content, of my work and I attempt to achieve it through a metamorphosis of form. It is the form that carries the message. I communicate through shape and texture, with lines of stress and tension; not by means of symbols. The symbols are there, of course, because I choose form elements from the environment in which I live and, admittedly, my choice is "loaded". But although certain objects have strong literary associations, these same objects (machine parts, dolls, toy soldiers, kitchen tools, discarded or broken pieces, enfolding or cornucopia-like shapes, etc.) also have form meanings that are complimentary, and even contradictory, to the more obvious associations. It is with these perpendicular, diagonal or opposing tensions that I am concerned; particularly with the total,
unified form. (Illustration 3)

In this emphasis on form and the subordination of the parts to the whole, I believe I move away from the mainstream of assemblage as a style. Assemblage, during its relatively short existence as a media or technique, lying somewhere between collage and sculpture, has already acquired certain historical techniques and traditional forms (or absence of sculptural form), and usually emphasizes the literary or subjective, symbolic meaning of the individual elements that are utilized. I have been drawn to the method of assemblage in sculpture and the use of collage in printmaking through my awareness of and fascination for the many, varying forms in the world around me. However, as I indicated before, I prefer to exploit the objects I choose as meaningful shapes and transform and reinterpret them as they relate to the other elements of the sculpture or print.
II
Development

Originally, I tried to use forms that expressed the affirmation and denial of the symbiotic dependency between mother and child. This relationship, I felt, patterns and influences all later associations and therefore is reflected constantly in the culture forms of the surrounding environment. My first sculptures used many dolls and toys and were concerned with expressing the mother-child oneness, both positive and negative aspects, through superimposition and ambiguity of forms and meanings. However, I used very few elements and each one retained, for the most part, its original form and character regardless of the role it played in the total form. (Illustration 1) I then began to use more complex arrangements of "found" parts and invented, sculptural shapes in an attempt to create a unified expression that was much more than the mere sum of its parts. In order to further relate the individual elements and enhance the feeling of a single sculpture I cast these assemblages in bronze. This process has also invested some of the ordinary "seen-but-not-seen" objects with a time-capsule magic, transforming them into artifacts from another age. (Illustration 2)
ration 2)

At the same time I was printing collagraphs and etchings that used the same forms and style of my sculptures except that they were, of course, two-dimensional. Space, in such a media, can use internal, negative shapes in a more complex relationship than in the usual three-dimensional sculpture, with the exception of relief sculpture. My final project was a closer welding of feeling and technique between the two media of sculpture and printmaking. I did a series of relief sculptures, to be mounted on the wall, (Illustrations 5-8) and a number of prints with plastic overlays, an attempt to add an aspect of three-dimensionality. (Illustration 12)

There has always been a strong iconographical theme running through and relating to the various symbols and forms in my work. This was not at first intentional but after I recognized this recurring image of "icon" I did, at times, consciously exploit certain basic, universal forms that have immediate emotional and spiritual significance - the cross, the halo or aureole, frontality of position, etc. (Illustration 4) As far as I can understand my usage of feelings and relationships with which I am concerned would be either impossibly saccharine or unbearably threatening in any
other context than the controlled, primitive, stylized language of the icon.

I have recently, however, in the relief series, tried to move away from traditional iconographical symbols and towards the invention of a more personal form language. (Illustrations 5-8)
III
Technique and Methodology

A. Sculpture

My first bronzes were made in the following way. Working from either a sketch or a general idea I would choose various found objects - dolls, shoe last, motor parts, utensils, toys, pieces of wood, metal and so forth. These items would primarily be picked for size, shape and texture, with the exception of the doll’s heads and parts which usually were so unavoidably subjective in their connotation that they had to be utilized consciously. Other objects, of course, had associative meanings, but not always the same as the form meanings, creating an ambivalence of content.

Using wax both to invent forms and to combine them with the found objects, I carefully assembled a model that would look exactly like the finished sculpture, except for the change of material. I then made a mold of latex that could be removed from the model and resealed, with a plaster shell to hold it in the correct position. Wax was then melted and poured into this mold until a wax sculpture, at least one-quarter inch thick, was formed. This wax was carefully reworked where necessary and then taken to the foundry
to be cast in bronze through the lost wax method. I did all of my own grinding, filing, polishing, etc., on the bronzes after they were cast.

After infinite hours of mold making in this manner, another, but logical extension of this approach, occurred to me. I made many small molds, by an easier process, of shapes that interested me and into these molds and my earlier ones I poured wax. The wax forms were then reworked by adding, cutting away, retooling and torching and combined with invented forms into new, more directly experienced wax sculptures. This method was a far more flexible and satisfying means of expression.

B. Printmaking

I have done etchings and collographs and prints utilizing both of these methods. The etchings were done on zinc plates by line etching through hard ground and aquatint. The collographs were printed from plates made of mat board, some cut into shapes onto which color was rolled and others coated with liquitex and incised with lines or built up with textures from various papers. Sometimes an etching would print the line and collograph plates would create the color shapes.
IV

Conclusion

As the style and images of my sculpture and prints moved closer together I became more and more interested in the possibilities of metamorphosis of three to two-dimensional form and vice-versa, a possible further exploration of some of the themes with which I have been involved through form transformation. This is the direction to which I look now and hopefully I will eventually be able to create small editions of sculptured prints or printed sculptures.
1. NUTCRACKER SUITE. Porcelain, wood and metal
2. ICON FOR A TOY SOLDIER. Bronze.
3. JUST WHISTLE. Bronze.
4. ICON FOR A NAMELESS CEREMONY. Bronze.
5. 10:00 O'CLOCK NEWS. Bronze.
6. ONE FOR THE MONEY. Bronze and wood.
7. LIMIT: ONE HOUR. Bronze and wood.
8. FOUR TO GO. Bronze and wood.
9. MONDAY'S CHILD. Collagraph.
10. PRIVATE CONVERSATION. Collagraph.
11. ICON FOR A WASHING MACHINE. Etching.
12. MOM AND POP. Etching and acetate.