Michael Mazur

ENTRANCES AND EXITS AND THE PATHWAYS THROUGH

MICHAEL AND GAIL MAZUR FIRST APPEARED IN OUR PAGES IN 1990, when *Provincetown Arts* published "Common Ground: A Collaboration," featuring four poems by Gail and two spreads of Michael's intertwining monotypes, connecting paired poems with surrounding foliage, as if the poems appeared in successive windows looking out upon a garden. The Mazurs, who had recently purchased a house in Provincetown, had been, for many years, spending summers in Mashpee, overlooking Wakeby Pond, the largest body of fresh water on Cape Cod. Gail's poems spoke of the pain of departure from a beloved place, which yet retained the radiant and soothing memory of "two lives, lived side by side, sharing a sense of place, inhabiting common ground." Michael made the Wakeby series as a commission from MIT in 1983. Because experience always "takes place" in a location, events are etched into settings, and here Michael and I spoke at a table in my office with two windows offering a view of the same bay we shared.

CHRISTOPHER BUSA: You and Gail bought a house in Provincetown in 1989, after giving considerable thought to this relocation.

MICHAEL MAZUR: It was happenstance that we spent time in Mashpee, because Gail's parents owned a house there. We would visit when we were just courting, and I fell in love with the place. Then the house burned down in a terrible fire, and her parents sold the place to us for a dollar. We built a new house and spent about ten years on our own there. We hardly knew anyone. We were always alone. We knew no other artists or writers in the town. On occasion, we imported people to stay with us. One warm spring weekend in 1984, we were both invited to lecture and read and visit the Fellows at the Fine Arts Work Center. We strolled around town and knew that we had to be here. Later that summer we decided to go to a party at Long Point Gallery to celebrate Stanley Kunitz's eightieth birthday, and heard him read that great poem about raccoons. One drowns this dog that chases it into the water. Gail introduces herself to Stanley and he says, "Ohhh, Gail. Michael Ryan speaks so highly of you!" There was an exhibit in the gallery showing personal items that surround an artist in her or his studio, "From the Studio Wall."

ABOVE: *WAKEBY NIGHT* (TRIPTYCH), 1983, MONOTYPE AND PASTEL, 6 BY 12 INCHES
FACING PAGE: MIKE WORKING ON "L.A. WALL PAINTINGS," JANUARY–MARCH 2003, SANTA MONICA, CA PHOTO: JERRY SARAPOCHIELLO

You do a good imitation of that emotional quaver in Stanley's voice.

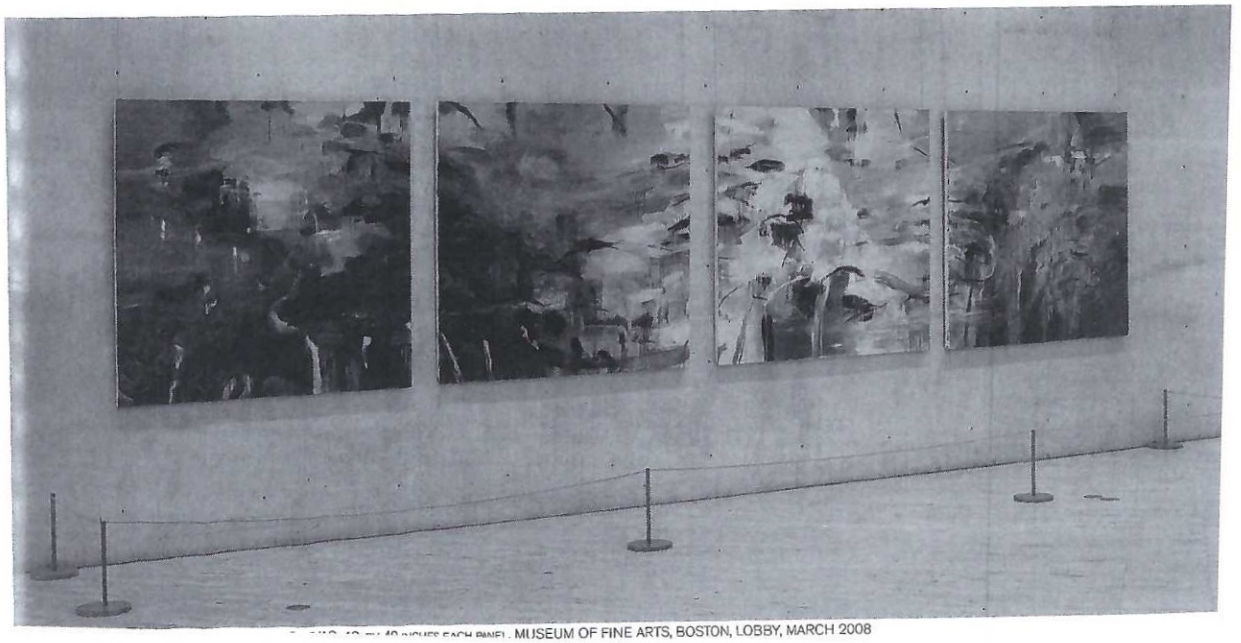
Gail was hooked.

You both became very involved with the Work Center.

We saw it as the essential core of a serious place. Without the fellowships, artists would go elsewhere because they could not afford the high rents. One of the original missions of the Work Center was to keep people in Provincetown following their fellowships, which may be irrelevant at this point. The founders saw after the tremendous activity of the fifties and early sixties that many artists left for the Hamptons. Gail and I felt, if we were to buy a house and live here, we better work damn hard to keep the place as attractive to us as what drew us here. We couldn't just sit back. What you get you have to give back.

That's exactly what Alan Dugan told me about his commitment to helping writers at the Work Center. He said people helped him, and so he passes it on. He was almost blind in his generosity, hardly caring for the person, but loving the potential in the person's poem.

I know the feeling. It has happened to me many times. I tend to have a high threshold of acceptance of other people's work, and I learned this can be isolating. Early on, I wanted very much to be an artist, and that cut me off from a lot of people. I have one friend from high school, the cartoonist Ed Koren. I tended to work alone most of my career. When I came here, I discovered it was no longer important for me to judge people on the basis of their work alone. There was another standard. If you compare the history of Provincetown to the larger history of art, we are worker drones, small creatures working the same fields. Because of your nearness to this community, you learn to judge people on the merits of their own behavior, their personality, their character, and not necessarily on what they do.



[illegible] MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON, LOBBY, MARCH 2008

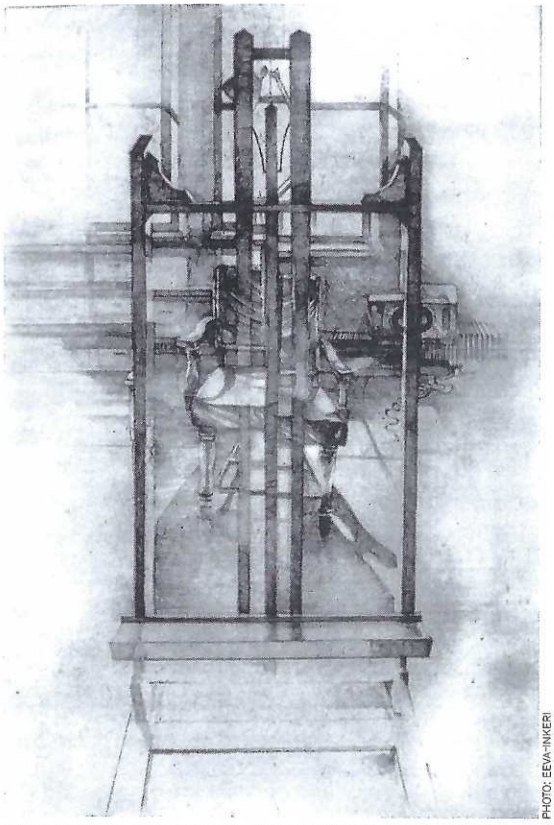


PHOTO: EEVA-INKERI

EASEL AND CHAIR, 1972, ETCHING AND ENGRAVING, 40.375 BY 27.75 INCHES
COLLECTION JANE VOORHEES ZIMMERLI ART MUSEUM

This summer you have curated the "Provincetown Studio Show" to raise consciousness about the living legacy of the town. Is that because you felt this kinship with the artists who worked here?

Yes, I think so. Initially it was a reaction to the destruction of Blanche Lazzell's house, mostly because the powers in the town had forgotten about her—an artist who arguably could be among the most important figures in the history of the colony. But later it has seemed to be homage to that sense of fellowship I feel with all of them. You can be isolated in a small place and feel important, but Provincetown is humbling in that way. I feel like just one in a long and never-ending line, part of a club that encompasses not just the town but the whole history of our art. Art is not a competitive sport, and those who treat it that way are bound to disappointment and what is worse, bitterness.

Stanley always resented the ranking of poets in the way tennis players are ranked in terms of competition results. He felt, once you were any kind of poet, you were admitted to Parnassus. The haiku was equal to the epic. Perhaps the important thing is to be honestly expressive. I learned that from my father, who once told a blocked student, "Try to do something lousy."

We all fight our battles with the "talent we come with, not the talent we might want." That revelation made Provincetown work for me.

Aloneness, solitariness begins to ease into a community that functioned actively in your imagination and your social life. You had taught at Yale and the Rhode Island School of Design. You taught for ten years at Brandeis, and at Harvard for even longer—all these places have communities.

The irony is that they didn't. Harvard certainly didn't have a community of artists. In the seventeen years I taught at Harvard, and I taught part-time, I was only in the house of one person who was teaching there. At Brandeis, people had chips on their shoulders about being passed over at the time. I never saw them. At RISD, my first job, the only colleague who befriended me there was Gil Franklin, who became a lifelong friend. He took me in. On occasion, we socialized. I think my personality wasn't easy. I was driven. Work is still the most important thing to me, but here it's a completely different story, involuntary to some extent, because of the street action, just greeting people on the way to an event. Whether or not you go to their house for dinner, you feel you know them as much as you can know anyone. You meet on committees and work together for short periods of time on a common cause. Perhaps it's like the experience of people who work on election campaigns, heavy with communal activity that's very project oriented. I wouldn't do these projects without the goal, which creates the system of solving the problem of how to get it done.

You have worked for years as an activist in various areas–political, civil, and arts related. Did this result from a reaction against the isolation you spoke of?

Perhaps. I really like being alone. Gail calls me the "boy in the bubble." I was an only child and grew up in Manhattan, in a comfortable but small apartment where I retired to my room a great deal. I had a lot of homework and enjoyed having projects to do there. We didn't get television until I was in my teens, and that was mostly test patterns and wrestling and the Roller Derby! My earliest training was with an artist in his loft near Astor Place, and I transferred my sense of perfect solitude to a studio setting. I think it was in 1968 that my sense of participation in the world began, as an activist against the Vietnam War. My first project was to be a founder with Gail of a group called "Artists against Racism and the War." I designed something called the "American Way Room," an installation in a storefront in Central Square, Cambridge. I collaborated with about half a dozen others and found that I enjoyed the companionship and the solving of these kinds of problems. Doing things that seem beyond my grasp when I start. I have served on several boards, but one of my favorite actions was securing, with a neighbor, the banning of Jet Skis from the inner harbor here. And, of course, working for the Work Center.

PHOTO: GREG HEINS

MAZUR USING HIS HAND WHILE WORKING ON *THE WAKEBY MONOTYPES*, 1983

Does some analogue of this social activism take place when you are alone in your studio?

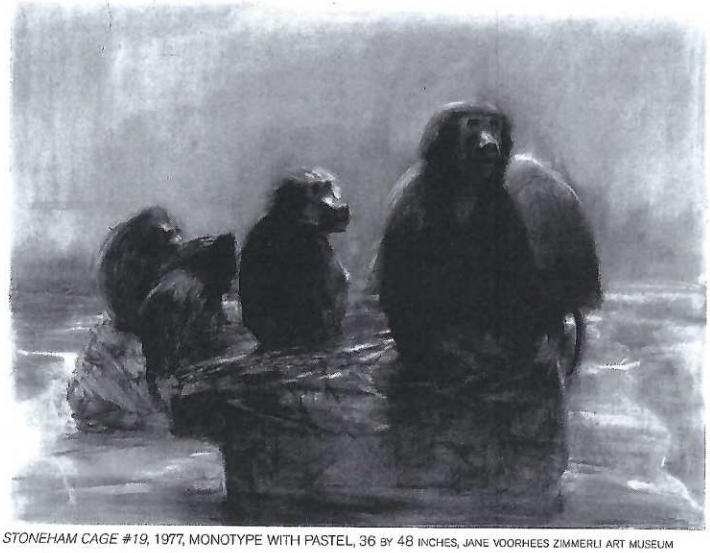
It is the same thing in the studio. That's the reason I'm so restless. If I know how to do something, it's not as attractive to me as when I don't know how to do it. Besides imagination, an artist really needs problem-solving skills.

The problem offers the surprise of the solution.

The sacred word is *surprise*. That's a sacred word for both the artist and the viewer.

Well, the surprise is the result. I've been reading in the journals of Jack Tworkov's. How simply he describes his technique of using the grid to organize chaotic fluidity. He said, "The grid is like the sea. You can fish in it."

The way he paints, it also looks like a net. Surprise is a consequence of structure. Whatever your system or structure, you cannot know exactly what's at the end of it. Moving along, you cannot pursue perfection, because it will elude you. I have seen good artists never finishing promising works because they were blocked by their own judgment—the work was not good enough. You have to be flexible to welcome tangential surprise, where, if it doesn't go this way, perhaps it will go that way. The joy for me of being an artist is not the perfect thing, which we all know is impossible. It's the revelation that comes from the unexpected expression of a deeper idea. It always comes in disguise.



STONEHAM CAGE #19, 1977, MONOTYPE WITH PASTEL, 36 BY 48 INCHES, JANE VOORHEES ZIMMERLI ART MUSEUM

I recall a Work Center workshop you gave in using stencils, where students were obliged to be expressive with a limited vocabulary. Have you ever given a workshop in the creative process itself?

That would be presumptuous, I think. A few years ago I taught a weekend workshop in understanding how Cézanne made a drawing. I had never done this before. I showed them that it was not a stylistic issue, but a way of seeing and understanding what those negative and positive chips are doing. It's at the heart of Cubism. I set them with a problem to solve, but it was very hard for them.

To build the facets meaningfully?

Well, to understand what happens at the edges—the most important thing there is in drawing—is everything. And it is why drawing is so important to developing a sense of strong form. When space is divided, the action is at the edge. I would talk and diagram and a few began to get it, but if I asked them to just go and draw, they dropped the idea entirely. Perhaps I was right to try the exercise; certainly it was doomed to failure. Most artists cannot embody the basic principles of another set of eyes. As a teacher, my process is very biographical. The monotype thing is a technical excuse for dealing with individuals.

An excuse?

It's a sort of disguise. It's a system I can teach and they can learn methods. But, basically, I talk to them about what they are doing. There is always this point, when I teach a monotype class, when I want to see what their paintings are like, so I can understand where they are coming from. When you look at hundreds of drawings by Hofmann students, you can't tell the difference.

They all look alike. You can't tell Selina Trieff from Bob Henry.

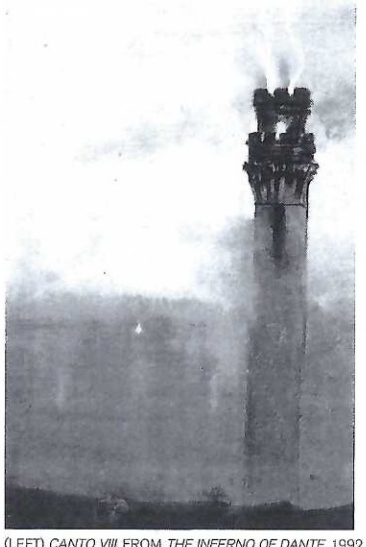
Or from Blanche Lazzell, who also studied with Hofmann. He was teaching a system. Hofmann knew this was only a way into something, rather than the work itself. I want to see where A is in order to know the direction to B. I don't want to set point A from my point of view. I want to see where they go from where they start. They may have several modes, but I will like one thing, and I'll say that is where you should begin. I'll do that. I watched Alex Katz do a one-day workshop at Harvard. All these undergraduates had their paintings up. He sat there for what seemed like hours, though it was only maybe twenty minutes. He never said a word. Everybody was getting very nervous when he stared at one painting, then whispered, "I like the shoes." That was it. I looked at the painting and Katz was right, the shoes had all the stuff that wasn't in the rest of the painting.

Isn't the idea to expand the little that is good? When you alluded to your "biographical" method of teaching, I wondered if you sought out the passages of paint where the artist was struggling with psychological issues. Clement Greenberg had a Geiger counter for locating the source of trouble in an artist's work in progress.

I could probably do that too, but I don't want to.

Because that would be too directive?

Too directive. By saying where the painting is, he's saying you should take the rest of the painting out. He's not saying you've got to figure out what makes that work. And then it's got to come out of you. Greenberg wanted to tell the artist how to paint the work. He famously said to David Smith's



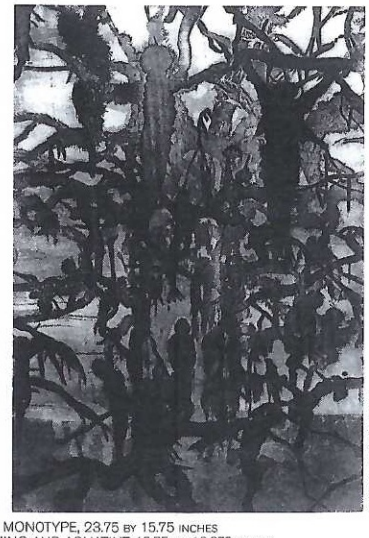


PHOTO: JACK ABRAHAM

(LEFT) *CANTO VIII*, FROM *THE INFERNO OF DANTE*, 1992, MONOTYPE, 23.75 BY 15.75 INCHES
(RIGHT) *CANTO XIII (WOOD OF THE SUICIDE)*, 1996, ETCHING AND AQUATINT, 15.75 BY 10.875 INCHES

CLOSED WARD (FIGURE FIXED ON FIGURE FALLING), 1965, ETCHING AND AQUATINT, 35.5 BY 26.25 INCHES

widow, that Smith should never have painted his sculptures, asserting that it destroyed the form. Yet what Smith did was wonderful. Greenberg could destroy artists on the basis of his pronouncements. That's exactly the opposite of the way I operate. What Hofmann did was very different, more like my Cézanne project. He wanted people to understand the value of the whole surface, and how the surface could be broken up, and still work. The push-pull of movement was important. He was essentially a movement teacher. He was saying, if you want to be one of us, make something happen—not unlike Albers, who was at Yale when I was there, but with, I suppose, less abuse in the process. Students of Hofmann's—George McNeil, Blanche Lazzell, Mary Frank, Bob Thompson, any number of people—took little things here and there, went into the system, and it came out looking completely different. That's how it should be. With my Cézanne exercise, I suppose I was being Hofmannesque, but I realized, emotionally, I wasn't up to it. As soon as I saw the wonderment and craziness in people's eyes, I began to fret; I'm not interested in proselytizing. Everybody brings their own character to their teaching.

Everybody I know recognizes that you are a genius as a teacher. They marvel at your demonstrations, and the basic image is of you, wearing work clothes, bending over the table with a loaded brush in your hand. Trancelike, your hand and arms and body lean into an evolving motif spreading across the surface. You spoke about lack of mentation in some performance activities, a bypassing of the thinking process in the spontaneous decisions that seem made as if the artist was actually a mere medium. The doing and the decision that inspired the doing are discovered in the result, mysterious, I think, even to the artist. Since you mentioned the role of the artist's biography in forming the artist, I wanted to ask if you think that the artist's work reveals her or his essential biography.

Sometimes it does. Sometimes it does not. I think it's somewhat of a dangerous notion. One of the problems of trying to understand the artist through the art is the resulting psychobabble. I think all artists, and this may be true of other professions, are split: when you are doing the thing you love doing and know how to do it, you arrive at a part of yourself that is maybe deeper and more at the core of your being than you can express directly in person. Goya! He starts out as an ass-kisser, and then becomes this incredible artist. If you met him when he was in court, being very nice, you would see one Goya, but if you met him during the time he was doing the late "black paintings," he would not seem so nice. You don't learn a lot about a person through their art, but you learn something from the art that is extra-personal.

Let us consider a quick survey of fifty years of your work. Your career began with your first mature body of work, the portfolio of etchings called *Images from a Locked Ward*, which depicted psychotic patients in a mental hospital. The turbulence of their inner world was made real by your distortions of physical space. One image, *Figure Fixed on Figure Falling*, conveys the out-of-body delusion of a naked figure dreaming on the floor, his body pinched between two converging institutional wood benches, on which two more sleeping bodies are splayed. The foot of one obscures the line of sight of the fellow sleeping on the floor, and this seems to blur the form of the falling figure. Your next body of work dealt with woefully depressed apes kept captive in cages at a regional zoo. If we fast-forward to the monoprints you produced to accompany Robert Pinsky's historical translation of Dante's *Inferno*, we can see your fascination with these dark themes.

People come up to me at a show and say you must be in hell, drawing the deranged or Dante. And I would say, no, I'm having fun. They're shocked, maybe disappointed. These important subjects are deep inside me, but the thing that makes me able to do it is the challenge of expressing this material without being hindered by my own emotional compensation or overreaction to the subject itself. If I have to illustrate any horror I felt

THE FALLING, 2007, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 84 BY 96 INCHES

AFTER A CHINESE SCROLL, 1997, ETCHING, WOODCUT, CINE COLLÉ, 15.25 BY 17.75 INCHES

reading passages in the *Inferno*, I have to think about how I'm going to go about it, and that gets you back into process. I'm sure Goya did the *Disasters of War* with great zest. Look at all those crucifixions! The history of art is the history of artists dealing with difficult subjects.

It must be some way to master melancholy, and translate misery into some kind of symbolic joy.

Exactly! It is in the making of the object. It is why tragic circumstances are more endurable when one is working in any field. Van Gogh, I'm sure, was at his sanest when he was painting, for his were supremely well organized and authentically intelligent works of art.

Motherwell said the most important thing for an artist is to arrive at a result you can accept as your own. Here is where the personal comes in. Maybe the colors are too unnatural.

Self-criticism, after awhile, becomes unconscious. That unconscious self-criticism is what basic literary or artistic intelligence is. You stop making "mistakes." You stop judging yourself. You do it with an instinct that where you're going is right. I have read that Thomas Aquinas is supposed to have said we must "trust the authority of our senses." Overly judgmental people often can't flow. I listened to an interview with Motherwell, and he said he didn't want to let anything out of his studio until it had been there for at least a year. He had to know it was right—that it was his. I think there is another reason I would agree with that, and this gets us back to the studio show this summer. The very existence of a thing in a studio is a model for action. Once it leaves the studio, it no longer is a resource to the artist. If you can see you are beginning to get habits of self-parody, you want the oddball painting staying in your studio for years, loveable and open-ended. It's not necessarily what the dealer wants, but it has a tremendous importance to the artist. These comparisons that occur in the process of working in the studio are far more important than stacking the painting away in storage. When you go into a studio, you are surrounded by little bits and pieces of things that take the place of the muse. They are the muse. Keeping a work is not necessarily to know that it's right, but to live with its implications.

Can any artist continue a series over a lifetime, or must his career be a succession of series, say with every seven years organized around one body of work?

What is inspired and resolved cannot be repeated too often without becoming inauthentic and devolving into self-parody. One hears a lot about "branding" but it weakens the work. This is why I go from thing to thing. Not to find out if I can make another one for my dealer, but to see if I can take it a little further, if there are still useful juices. But that rarely works. The satisfaction of edition prints is that there are numbers of them to satisfy need. It happens sometimes that I get that call, "Do you have any more?" It's tough to say, "No, I don't." I did five paintings over the last year and a half that were, for me, big statements. They related to 9/11 and the war. They may not be successful, but I needed to do them. They have nothing visually to do with either, but they were metaphoric.

Have they been exhibited?

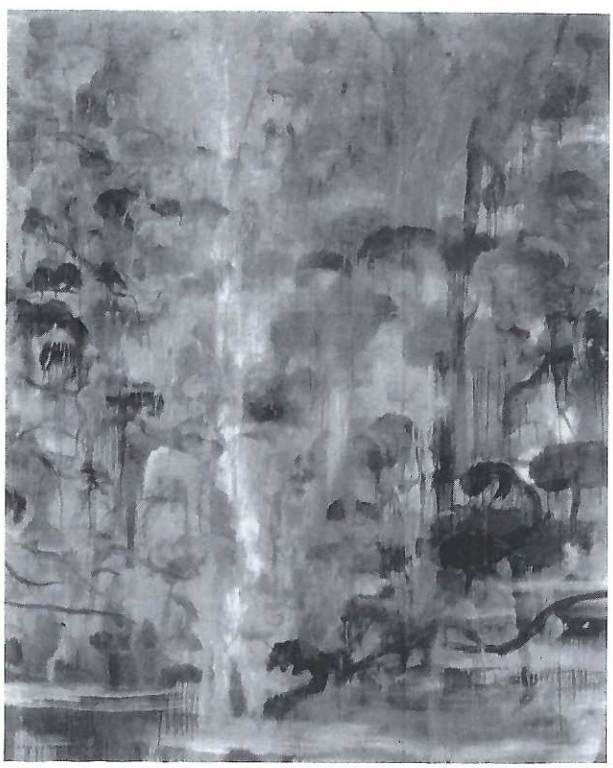
Not yet, but, perhaps, next year. I showed them to my dealer in Boston, Barbara Krakow. They are big and black and white, and I don't think they are commercially viable. I felt I said what I had to say, and it was hard to stay in that same state. I knew I had to go back and become more joyous and playful. That group won't be repeated. I have seen cautionary tales in artists who have gone on too long, feeling they have left something unsaid. And here is the key point: It can be left unsaid; everything is left unsaid. An older artist friend of mine, the late Walter Murch, used to say the first time you feel a work is finished, stop! After that it is often just fill. Closure may be the hardest thing.

In order to move on, you try a different tack.

You have to go off on slants—could I do it with stripes or squares? My studio life is filled with themes and variations, off periods, digressions, and transitions. My career may suffer from it, but it is who I am.

One key career concern of yours is the implications of particular mediums—printing and painting particularly. You began as a realist and evolved into a late-life abstractionist. Your early training was highly concentrated on printmaking, and painting only became accessible to you via your discovery of monotype, where the direct working on a smooth surface is the one printing process most like painting. And you entered a concept of abstraction through an understanding of Chinese aesthetics, expressed in your atmospheric evocations of falling water and rising mist, of sun and wind and rain, and other natural forces. Your image of abstraction seems to evolve upon meditating on natural forms, personally experienced. Do you feel this aesthetic is a lifelong interest, or is it only apparent in this series?

Both. My uncle, Harold Isaacs, was a Trotskyite in the thirties who went to China out of college and became a journalist. He was the first person to publish in English the work of several significant contemporary writers: Ting Ling, Mao Tun, Lu Xun. He took enormous risks. For a while he was



MIND LANDSCAPE AFTER CHAO MENG-FU, 1994, OIL ON CANVAS, 84 BY 72 INCHES

POND EDGE II, 1997–1998, ETCHING AND AQUATINT, 32 BY 39.75 INCHES

pro-Communist, and then in China, as a result of his researches, became an anti-Communist. He tried to see Mao, but could not, and had to escape through an international enclave in Shanghai. He became *Newsweek*'s correspondent in Burma during the war. Later, he taught at MIT. He was a model of the maverick for me, the individual who goes off and does the thing not expected. The family tended to dislike him. He wrote several books on China, and I've always loved Chinese painting. I had no way into it, but there are times in my landscapes where you can see the influence.

You took a trip to China just before you settled in Provincetown.

Yes, just before I settled here I came across a book by Maggie Keswick on the Chinese garden. She was the wife of the architectural writer Charles Jencks, and the two designed a highly inventive garden at Portrack, Scotland. I was in a time of transition in my work, a dismal period. I wasn't showing much. But I read her book and it blew my mind. It was very much about a specific situation. Chinese gardens are unlike any gardens in the world. They are very different from Japanese gardens. For centuries they fostered smaller scholar/artist/family gardens. These were private gardens separated from the vaster imperial gardens. The scholars would surround themselves with visual metaphors, physical mementos evoking China. In its parts, it was a little like miniature golf. There was the garden, the pool, rushing water, mountains and rocks, and pavilions, patios, and architectural enclosures. The construct became the country. Visually and psychologically, poets, artists, and calligraphers—every part of the garden became a poem.

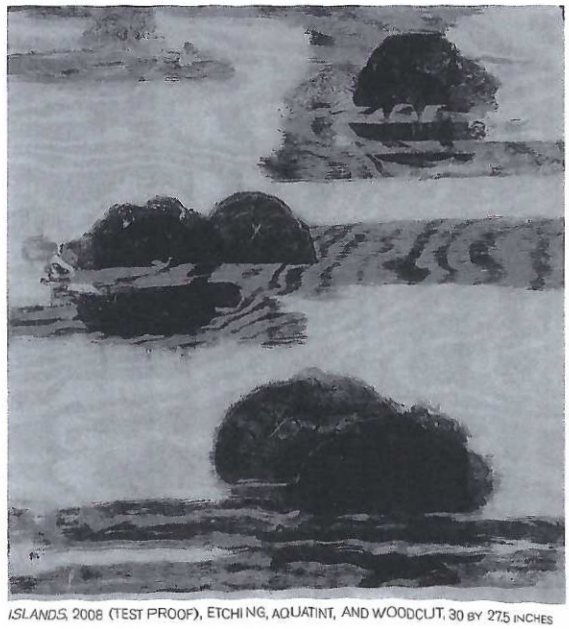
Or a stanza in a poem.

Or the whole poem, which would often be incised on a flat rock and placed where it was conceived in the garden. In many cases, the garden was essentially a maze. On a three-quarter-acre lot, to get to one side or the other, you could have many experiences by different paths, up into pavilions giving a vista looking through the back of a window. You could have a lifetime of poetic experiences and visual experiences in that three-quarters of an acre. The Astor Court in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York is based on a Chinese garden in Suzhou. More elaborate were gardens built in such a way that one concubine could never see another during the day's work. The man in his house could go from his house to the concubine house without being seen by anybody else, so jealousies wouldn't occur. There were many strategies for those gardens, and what struck me, visually, was that they were like a Cubist experience. You could see the world from so many different facets, so many alternative points of view.

And how, for you, did you find permission to enter the world of abstraction?

You could understand how in a painting, when I was starting to deal with abstraction, that the painting was made of many pathways. That was how I began to read the abstract paintings that interested me: entrances and

ISLANDS 9, 2008, ETCHING, AQUATINT, AND WOODCUT, 28.5 BY 24.5 INCHES



ISLANDS, 2008 (TEST PROOF), ETCHING, AQUATINT, AND WOODCUT, 30 BY 27.5 INCHES

exits, and the pathways through, with events occurring here and there. That is like these Chinese gardens.

The Chinese scroll was a way to tell the sequential history of groups of people, a kind of pre-cinematic unfolding of a series of stories.

When I looked at Chinese scrolls, I saw they are built in "cells," where each section of the scroll is to some extent a repetition in the next location. Looking at a scroll, you are not just going up and down a landscape. You are going from one way of making something to the next way of making something—through a series of changes that are essentially morphs of the same thing, like a hologram or a piece of the brain. When I saw that, I could paint. That kept me going for six more years.

The idea of never being able to see the whole at once?

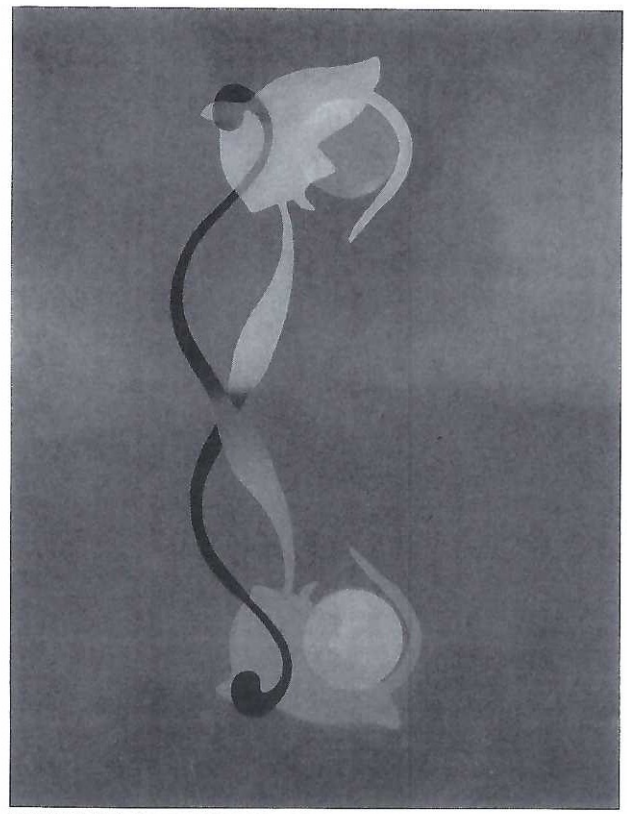
That doesn't happen in Chinese gardens. You can't see the whole garden. Japanese gardens have sites where you can see the whole garden. They are Minimalist experiences, not meant to be confusing but stabilizing, quieting: spare rocks and raked sand. They built stands, like baseball stands, for people to sit and view them.

These garden concepts remind me of the difference between a maze and a labyrinth. In a maze, you can reach dead ends. In a labyrinth, there is only one path to follow. One confuses and challenges, the other offers a kind of meditative sanctuary, like the one marked with colored stones in the cobbled floor of Chartres Cathedral near Paris. In any case, because the garden is three-dimensional, one's personal experience can take the form of passing through, a sequencing of discrete events. Here is a good place to bring up the role of the serial in your work. You are an artist devoted to developing your work in serial forms.

I think it comes out of printmaking. Painting largely buries its own history. But when you erase a section of a painting, you tend to erase what's underneath it if it's wet; if it's dry, you gets what's underneath, but you have to modify it. So you never can see the development. A photographic record and computerization changes this, but it is useless to try to go backwards without changing the surface, for the surface is the essential carrier of aesthetic information.

Yet I have seen photographs of paintings at various stages of completion.

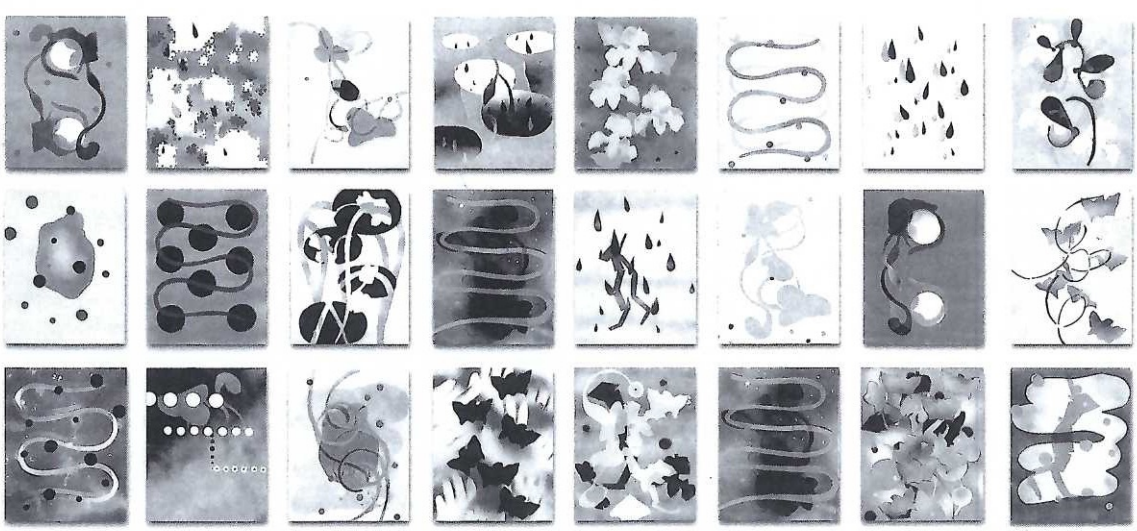
When *Arts* magazine did an article, "De Kooning Paints a Painting," you could see a painting in several states. But even then there was a mystery. You could turn it upside down. When you look at those stages of a de Kooning painting that are captured by the camera, you imagine him being driven forward by something that was satisfactory, yet he wanted to try something else. He didn't have the choice until later in his life to say, OK, I'm going to leave that alone and start painting something else. That would become more like a print. Prints are naturally serial. Prints are built on proofing, in which the history is absolutely clear: state 1, state 2, state 3. If you want to get back to state 2, you can do erasures to approximate the effects. If you have a plate and rework it after you have editioned it, you are still working within that series.



ILLUMINATION I (NOCTURNE), 2005, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 56 BY 48 INCHES

Your *Pond Edge* series have evolved now for eight years, using many of the same plates.

I can use them as material to modify or change. I have this record of where they've been. When I went to monotype, it was even more serial because the



INSTALLATION OF *DIARY PAINTINGS* AT MARY RYAN GALLERY, 2004

MICHAEL MAZUR'S STUDIO IN CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS, 2008

GAIL, (DAUGHTER) KATHE, AND MICHAEL MAZUR AT THE ENTRANCE TO HIS SHOW IN VERONA, ITALY, 2000

ghost of the first print was still printable. You could rework the ghost by adding material to it, and that produced another ghost. In a day, you could produce maybe twenty images that would all be linked as cognates, as kin to each other. In that sense, a series is part of a process. If you do a series of paintings, it's much more self-conscious. It's not really part of the process, because each painting should stand alone. The next painting can refer to it, but it does not come out of the process of doing that first painting. Technically, it may not be a series; it may just be a second or third painting. There are a lot of ways of looking at the relationship of works that follow each other. But a real series, in my mind, is embedded in the process and is much more likely to come out of a reproductive process. Degas, for example, did many bathers. He'd put a drawing through a press and get a second cognate of that drawing, a ghost. Then he would do pastel over it and put it through the press, and he'd get a light version of that pastel. He learned this from printmakers he was friendly with. There would be these multiples. Sometimes he would do what we call counter-proofing—in other words, he would print paper to paper, so two drawings would come out on opposite sides because he wanted to see what the image would look like if it were flopped. When he did the dancer series, he serialized a subject. But the organic kind of series that interests me is the thing that comes out of the thing before. It works for me in different media, but I think it comes out of my experience as a printmaker. I studied it more energetically than painting at the beginning of my career.

In an article published in *Provincetown Arts* in 2006, we discussed your remarkable recent series of *Diary Paintings*, with the shapes derived entirely from stencils you had created–which puzzled me so much because you seemed to be depriving yourself of your own graphic facility. It's as if you've taken a principle of printmaking and made it central to your painting.

It is. At a certain point, all the media become one. The process you use for works on paper, for prints or paintings, becomes so interrelated in the system of studio practice that you just think that way, and it doesn't make any difference whether it's paint or ink.

It becomes the story of the steps it took to make the work.

All art is narrative. Whether it's abstract or realistic, it has a formal story or a literal story—it is narrative. Consequently, if you see only one work of an artist, that may be enough to excite the imagination, but by seeing more of these works, you understand where that narrative is, and how it morphs and changes and develops. We are natural storytellers—everyone. Memory and experience inevitably produce narrative, and that is beautiful. There is a book embodied in the summary of anyone's life.

When I look in the faces of seasoned artists, they exude an attitude of fulfillment, and the absence of frustration. You spoke of perfection as not being achievable, but that doesn't deflate your exuberance. Right now, you are doing a children's book for your grandson, who's a year old.

I wrote a little story called "Jake and the Red Balloon." I photoshopped my daughter's e-mail photos of him and wrote a story about a boy whose red balloon flies out of his hand, and is traced with Google maps in a spaceship. I have another project I've been trying to do for ten years and maybe can't, another children's book called "Dante's Demons" about the way Dante handles demonology. For every demon there is a weakness you can get around. It's a lesson: if you can't go this way, you go that way. Maybe I've lived that one already?

CHRISTOPHER BUSA is editor of Provincetown Arts.