Master of Fine Arts
In
Drawing and Painting

ASSEMBLAGE: BRIDGING
SCULPTURE WITH DRAWING AND PAINTING

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Assemblage: Bridging Sculpture With Drawing and Painting

My art process combines non-objective, representational and abstract approaches. The non-objective aspects of my assemblages involve the creation of shapes made of paper mache', combined with other materials. (Figure 1) The representational part of my work happens when I use the assemblages as references for creating my paintings and drawings. Finally, the representational forms are abstracted in the final stages of the painting or drawing.

Figure 1. Paper mache creations for use in my assemblages.
Like Wassily Kandinsky came to abstraction through representational painting so have I. I am in agreement with his discovery that "...the path to the heart and soul lay not in painting pictures of things, but in isolating the purer expressions embodied in color and line."¹

Bridging the disciplines of sculpture with painting, and drawing allows me to use several different methods to create paintings, drawings and prints. The assemblages consist of white, organic shapes made of a paper mache' material with smooth curves, twisting and turning in all directions, interrupting the space around them. These biomorphic shapes reflect the subtle hues and elements of the environment. I first create the shapes, then I paint them white. Spaces are cut into these white shapes, creating additional negative and positive areas. Found materials, such as fabrics of various colors and textures, are cut into different sizes and placed in the arrangement to interact with the white shapes, creating an engaging composition. The reverberating colors and reflections enchant the environment in and out of the assemblage. Projecting strong lights from the side creates mysterious shadows. I weave copper wire or other elements in and out of the jagged openings of the white shapes. Soft fabrics are mingled in play. These fabrics touch and intersect with each other creating additional negative and positive spaces. These assemblages become my inspiration, providing opportunities for researching new ideas for paintings, drawings and prints.

Creating assemblages began in my undergraduate experience in an abstract painting class. Integrating my representational background with abstraction opened new
opportunities for me. The process of making assemblages as references helped me to see abstraction in forms. The use of the assemblages as models made certain characteristics more prevalent in my artwork. The brushstrokes became more defined, the variety in texture was further developed and my subjects became more enticing for further investigation by viewers.

![Figure 2. Dark Shapes, Oil on Canvas, 2004](image)

_Dark Shapes_ (Figure 2) was the first painting in my Shape Series, which was based on an assemblage I created and studied. This painting started the infrastructure of my future works. The division of negative and positive spaces became an integral element in my work. Negative spaces are sometimes divided again and are repeated as positive shapes. My varied applications of paint create thick, textured surfaces as well as thinner areas that look as if the surfaces are vanishing into the background. The assemblages I create help me to visualize my paintings, drawings and prints.
The Assemblage is my “sketchbook” in the early conception of a painting, drawing or print. Intuition and aesthetic decision making guide me as I emphasize and/or eliminate whatever I decide the composition needs to complete the artwork.

![Shapes and Paths](image.png)

**Figure 3. Shapes and Paths, Oil on Canvas, 2005**

*Shapes and Paths* (Figure 3) was the second of the Shape Series. I introduced the use of stronger shadows, which became a repeated component in my art. I move everything around until I have achieved the composition I want. I light the composition using side lighting to create shadows and lights that make more positive and negative spaces. The light not only accentuates the form but also creates reflective hues that wrap around the white areas with subtle color changes. Shadows and illumination create the gradual shifts of value from dark to light. All of these elements are used in most of my paintings and drawings.
After I create assemblages, I paint on canvas or wood panel, or I draw with pastels on paper using the enhanced assemblages as my subject and form of reference. When I make my canvases or panels, I use rabbit skin glue as a sizing, then several coats of gesso to create a smooth and sealed painting surface. I also sand the surface between each coat, which adds to their smoothness. I build cradles on the back of my hardwood panels to prevent warping. My painting process involves several materials and techniques such as different mediums, brushstrokes, painting knives and occasionally scratching into the paint. Images in my paintings or drawings appear and disappear into the composition. Copper wire, fabric or other objects are used as lines or paths in the paintings to lead the eye on a journey throughout the work of art. Most of my paintings and drawings go in and out of the frame of the picture to establish freedom of movement beyond its borders. The Shape Series began with the use of a limited palette, and then I slowly incorporated more intense and varied colors. The shapes also changed; they started small with little openings and gradually grew larger with more negative spaces cut into their surfaces.
Shapes and Colors (Figure 4) demonstrates the various elements I use in my work. I have applied the paint in a variety of techniques in this painting from impasto to thin and transparent application. The repetition of shapes, the division of spaces, shadows projecting from the created shapes and negative spaces becoming positive shapes. The colors and their intensities create a push and pull movement for the viewer to experience.
Abstracting the shapes and composition is vital. Holes become positive elements in my paintings, as can be seen in Embracing Shapes (Figure 6) which evolved from the assemblage shown in (Figure 5). This painting incorporates the strong diagonal shadows seen also in the assemblage.

Figure 5. Assemblage for the painting called *Embracing Shapes*

Figure 6. *Embracing Shapes*, Oil on Canvas, 2010
*Embracing Shapes* shows the organic vulnerability of shapes in my work. It is as if the shapes become alive and interact with the surrounding space and each other. The shapes sometimes appear to have a personality with feelings that are accentuated by their movements.

![Image](image-url)

*Figure 7. Changing Shapes, Oil on Wood Panel, 2011*

Changing Shapes is painted on a wooden panel. I achieved the changes in value and movement through the composition and a glazing technique of oil paint combined with a medium. This translucent oil painting glaze is applied over a dried under-painting that exaggerates lights and shadows. The under-painting is opaque. The painting is viewed through layers. Vermeer used this painting technique.²
Shapes with Red, (Figure 8) has an active composition, as the shapes and colors move in and out of the background. This spatial fluctuation is created by painting soft and hard edges, color variation, values and a composition with movement. This painting has dark areas of pattern tying the composition together and leading the viewer visually around the composition. Some of the paint is applied in an impasto manner with a painting knife and with enhanced brushstrokes. Allowing the viewer to participate in the interpretation of my work is engaging.
Modulating Shapes (Figure 9) shows my emphasis on negative and positive spaces. The shapes, objects and colors fuse in and out of the background allowing the drawings to become more fluid. Layering lines and marks to achieve depth, interesting texture, and variation are accomplished when I am using the medium of pastel. The viewer is further engaged through the balance of form within the negative and positive spaces and the intensity of color.
The application of pastel also allows for further opportunities to abstract the shapes, as in Melting Shapes, Figure 10 melting into the background and reappearing in another location.

The formal elements of the shapes I create in assemblages are used in other forms of art such as printmaking, as seen in Figures 11 and 12. Although I did not use a formal assemblage, the elements and shapes were drawn from my memory of previous compositions.
I created the etching, *Shapes and Ovals* (Figure 11) through scratching into the ground covered, zinc plate. I placed the matrix in an acid bath for a limited time. The acid etched the scratched areas of the matrix. After I washed the ground coating and the acid off the plate I covered it with black intaglio ink and the matrix was placed on printing paper and finally, put through the press. The etched areas became the ink lines in the print.

Figure 12. *Shapes with Orange and Green*, Intaglio Process, 2010
Shapes with Orange and Green (Figure 12) was created by printing one image on top of another. After my designs were scratched into two Plexiglas ground covered plates they were put into the acid bath. Then the plates were washed and prepared for printing. One matrix was covered with orange, yellow and green ink, the other was covered with a whitish gray ink. The orange, yellow and green inked matrix was put through the press first, then after a short time of drying the whitish, gray plate was pressed on top. I use some of the same compositional elements in my prints as I do with the paintings and drawings I create.

My art process has been influenced in many ways. It is like living in a culture or a family and picking up traits unconsciously. Reading sources, exposures to other art and artists, professors and critiques all have influenced my creative process. A particular artist whose art I identify with is Georgia O'Keeffe, especially her combination of representational art with abstraction (Figure 13).

Figure 13. The Black Iris, Georgia O'Keeffe, Oil on Canvas, 1926. http://www.okeeffemuseum.org/natural-and-still-life-forms.html
Her color palette in The Black Iris is limited. The shapes are modeled to create depth, line and form. Like myself, O'Keeffe uses representational objects as a reference and then takes artistic liberties to create an abstracted interpretation of the object.

Figure 14. Pelvis with Shadows and the Moon Oil on Canvas, 1943

I use similar compositional elements in my works, such as the use of spatial ambiguity. Her compositions move freely in and out of their borders, as do my compositions. Repetition of shapes using lights and shadows, subtle values, modulated colors, and organic subject matter are central elements in her work and my own.
Shapes With White (Figure 16) is a good example of the direction of my future work.

For this installation, I created a mobile in place of an assemblage. The mobile is constructed from canvas, rabbit skin glue, and is painted with gesso. The painting is intended to mimic the movement in the mobile. The mobile hangs in front, with its shadows falling over the painting, integrating shadow and movement. Creating mobiles, assemblages and or freestanding sculptures will be part of my future installations. I also hope to incorporate new materials to replace paper mache. Paper mache is very temporal and I have found a better material called Paper Clay. I recently met the originator of this material, Rosette Gault, at a conference, and I saw other works of art created with this material.  

Figure 16, Shapes With White Painting Exhibited with White Shapes Mobile
In conclusion, through assemblage my art creations have moved in a direction that
bridges my love and experience in sculpture with painting, drawing and
printmaking. The path through representational art has led me to rely more on
shapes, line and color.

1 Kissick, John. *Art: Context and Criticism*. Penn State University: Wm.C.Brown, Inc.,

2 http://www.essentialvermeer.com/technique/technique_glazing.html

Reference List


http://www.essentialvermeer.com/technique/technique_glazing.html