The Oregonian

Gifted artist/teacher spent his life exploring ideas, not fame

ROBERT HANSON, who died last month at 75, was a thorough observer with a calm, generous approach to teaching art

By D.K. ROW | THE OREGONIAN

Plenty of local artists were better known than Robert Hanson. But few were as respected for having so much talent yet hewing to such a focused and serious path with little concern for fame or wealth.

"Bob Hanson worked for love," said Bonnie Laing-Malcolmson, curator of Northwest art at the Portland Art Museum and a former student of Hanson's when he taught at the Pacific Northwest College of Art. "He loved what he did. He never tried to be a world-famous artist. He just wanted to do something really well, the best he could, and then allow the work to speak for itself."

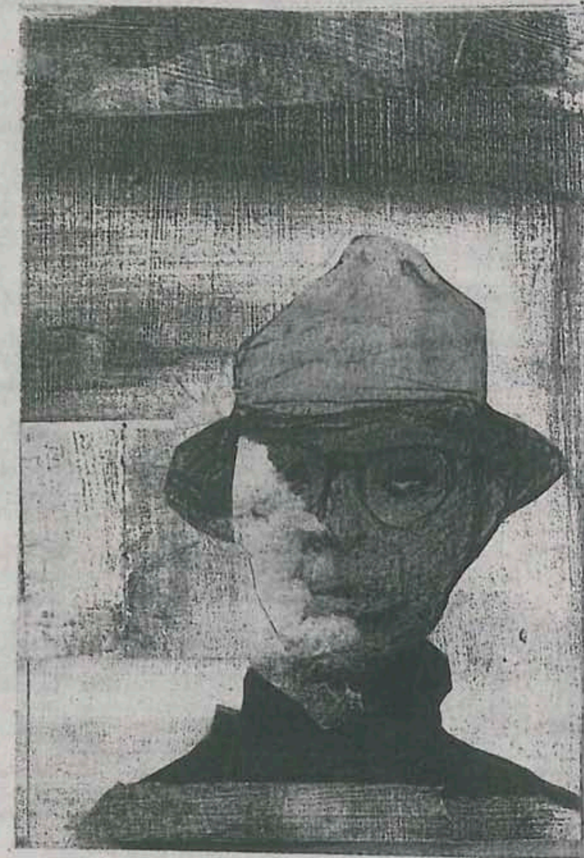
Hanson died of cancer on Dec. 16. He was 75, and is survived by his wife, Judy Cooke, also an artist, and a son, Joshua. He left behind a body of impressive work — decades of paintings, prints and drawings — and legions of students who revered his calm, probing and generous approach to teaching art. Hanson taught students at PNCA for 34 years, many of whom went on to become respected artists, including Jack Portland, Sherrie Wolf, Lennie Pitkin and Esther Podemski.

Like many artists who helped define Portland's modern and contemporary art scene, Hanson arrived from elsewhere.

He was born in Washington, D.C., in 1936. His father was a landscape architect, his mom a social worker. After they divorced, Hanson moved with his mother to Virginia, where he attended a private Episcopal school, Christchurch, for several years.

The school's rigorous curriculum would prove to be a crucial foundation for Hanson as an artist and man. Hanson was known for his thorough, observant mind, and

Please see HANSON, Page L4



A self-portrait drawing titled "I'm Not Sickert."
ROBERT HANSON

"Bob would do some quirky things. He'd draw a self-portrait of himself slouching off with a note telling me he was going for a walk to shop for groceries at Food Front." **Judy Cooke**

Hanson

Continued from Page L1

those attributes were advanced through the liberal arts fundamentals taught at Christchurch, which was founded in 1921.

After graduation, Hanson attended the University of Virginia for two years but then transferred to the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston in 1959. Hanson believed his growing passion for art and graphic design would develop more fully at an art school, which at the time were considered trade rather than professional schools. He graduated from the Museum of Fine Arts with a printmaking degree.

The school's printmaking department was a tightly knit group, some of it out of circumstance. The department was in the basement. Quarters were cramped; printing presses had to be shared.

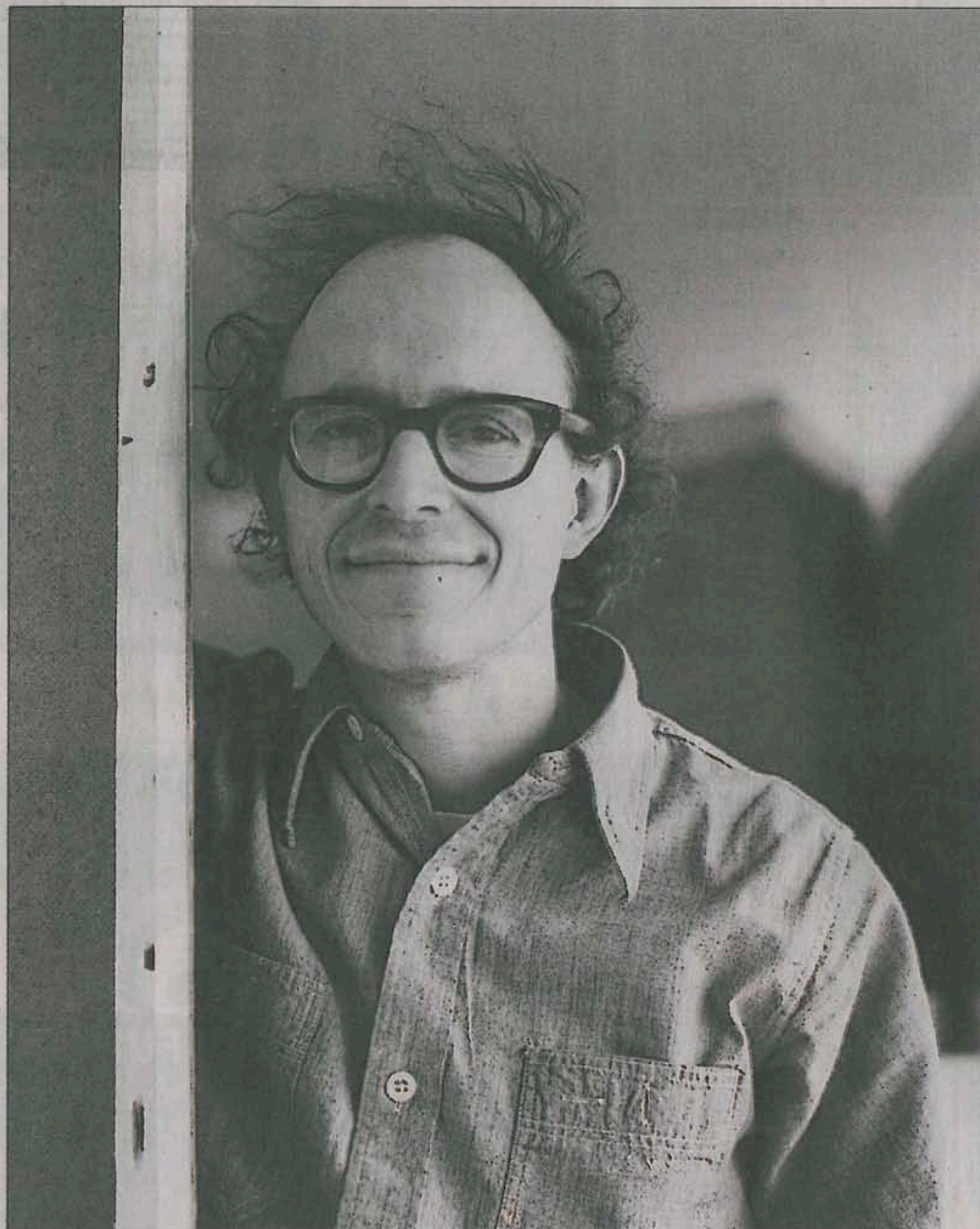
It was in this boisterous environment of overlapping needs that Hanson met another printmaker, Judy Cooke.

Cooke remembers Hanson from the first had a style that marked him as unique.

"When I first met Bob, he came to school wearing a jacket and tie," Cooke says. "He looked essentially like a businessman — remember, this is an art school. And he always carried with him The New York Times and The New Yorker under his arm." (His impeccable style in later years morphed into an ever-present black beret and peacoat.)

Sometime in 1962 Cooke and Hanson began dating — Cooke can't recall exactly when that year or what happened their first time out. They married a year later.

After college, Hanson worked full-time as a graphic designer. But in 1968, he and



Robert Hanson, shown in an undated photo from the 1970s, later adopted an ever-present black beret and peacoat.

Cooke uprooted to Portland so he could teach at PNCA, then known as the Museum Art School because of its affiliation with the Portland Art Museum. At the time, Hanson, like Cooke, was pursuing an art career. But he needed a full-time job to pay the bills and he no longer wanted to work in an office.

Teaching, say those who knew Hanson, suited his intellectual temperament and cultural sensibility.

Hanson was a voracious and constant reader, for instance, who consumed literature. His taste in that regard included Proust, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Julian Barnes. He was fervent about jazz and film, too.

But teaching did more than just suit Hanson — he was really, really good at it. Hanson was searching, unselfish and focused exclusively on an individual student's work and how it was progressing artistically. He chose not to

An untitled portrait from May 24, 2011, is one of Hanson's works now on display at the Portland Art Museum exhibit.

ROBERT HANSON

Robert Hanson exhibit

What: Exhibit of Hanson's sparsely rendered drawings – most less than 12 inches tall – of seated female models

Where: Portland Art Museum (part of the museum's APEX series showcasing contemporary regional artists)

When: Through April 29

Tickets: Included in museum admission ($12-$15)

Details: 1219 S.W. Park Ave., portlandartmuseum.org

address their career issues, such as finding the right dealer or how to become famous.

"If he came to your studio, he'd look at your work from a middle distance, then walk up to it, lean forward, take off his glasses, and then ask a question," says Podemski, now an artist in New York. "Embedded in that question was some sense of what you had done before and what was new in the new work. It was never about your career or his. It was a pure experience, which is unusual in the art world, because the art world is always about careers."

About the work

What of Hanson's career? Hanson was deeply skilled. Printmaking taught him how to draw well, and that technique liberated him to try many things.

For a time, he detoured from his roots to paint big abstract works. Then, in the 1990s, he detoured again, this time to drawing.

At first, those drawings were self-portraits. They were a little abstract, too. Then, over time, the subjects began to include other people — women, men, young and old, people with tattoos, people who simply interested Hanson. All of them were well done, and though they "looked" like their subjects, they were notable because they captured a condition, a state of mind.

These artistic moves and shifts said many things about Hanson.

One was that though he had exhibited regularly and with one of the best dealers in town — Elizabeth Leach — Hanson did not think about his career in commercial terms or about branding a style that was easily recognizable so he could sell work or attract attention.

"Bob had the discipline to explore an idea, create a generous body of work, and then move on," says Anne Johnson, a close friend and PNCA professor. "He was not held back by his successes. He was unconcerned with fulfilling an audience's idea of what his 'signature' style ought to be."

Another quality was that Hanson personally felt most comfortable as an observer who used his intellectual curiosity to scrutinize, whether the world or a subject. While personable, Hanson was not chummy or a joiner. Friends say he was a deeply private man who avoided frivolousness.

Finally, the drawings show Hanson was a lover of beauty, an aesthete, says artist and former student Sherrie Wolfe, but not in a shallow way. Hanson drew appreciatively but critically. He wanted to understand people and the world better.

Power to surprise

Hanson's intellectual devotions and private mannerisms, however, did not translate to a dour, quiet man.

He was a lover of parties and he liked to dance. And he had a sly, witty humor that popped up in surprising ways.

Cooke was once waiting at the dentist's office. There, she noticed the office's file on her and her husband, just an arm's length from the patient's chair. Cooke peeked and caught a glimpse of an envelope from a bill that Hanson had sent before. It was decorated with big teeth.

"Bob would do some quirky things," said Cooke. "He'd draw a self-portrait of himself slouching off with a note telling me he was going for a walk to shop for groceries at Food Front."

In 1980, Hanson was diagnosed with thyroid cancer. He was treated and the cancer went into remission. In 2000, Cooke said, the cancer re-appeared. Hanson underwent further treatment but the cancer eventually reached his vocal cords. His once authoritative voice became a husky whisper.

The loss of his voice affected Hanson tremendously, people say, because he loved to talk and debate about art, literature, politics, the events of the day.

"To be frank — though Judy would know best — the illness took some spark out of Bob," says Elizabeth Leach, who represented Hanson for 23 years. "He was more quiet. He had to conserve his energy. And it was hard for him to talk."

Last year, the Portland Art Museum began assembling a show of Hanson's drawings. Hanson had been working on the project with curator Laing-Malcolmson. It opened Saturday.

In November, Hanson's health began to deteriorate rapidly. But it didn't deter him.

"He never said anything like, 'Dammit, why is this happening,' " says Cooke. "He was not that kind of guy. There was no big end-of-life discussion."

Cooke said Hanson continued drawing. It's what kept him going. He completed his last one on his birthday, Dec. 3.

Hanson died at home. Cooke was right beside him.

"He couldn't speak," she says. "Mostly, I was just talking in his ear."

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D.K. Row: 503-294-7654; drow@oregonian.com; oregonlive.com/art

The Oregonian
THURSDAY, JANUARY 8, 2009
EDITOR: JOAN CARLIN • 503-294-7612
HowWeLive@NEWS.OREGONIAN.COM

This drawing by Bob Hanson, "Acorn," will be on display along with more of his work at the Feldman Gallery at Pacific Northwest College of Art.

Amid the dark clouds, art

As the economy and weather wreak havoc with our lives, galleries around Portland offer works worth purchasing

By D.K. ROW | THE OREGONIAN

FIRST THURSDAY

Who knows what the weather will bring during tonight's First Thursday? But if recent weeks are any indication, it might be an opportunity to ski the Pearl District and downtown areas while trolling the galleries.

What's certain is that there are some extremely strong exhibits opening. And while galleries might be struggling financially — who isn't? — they're at least putting up work worth purchasing.

Here's a tipsheet of several shows that should be on your First Thursday map. Most galleries are open from 6-9 p.m.

Feldman Gallery at Pacific Northwest College of Art: Bob Hanson is a masterful formalist — few can draw as well as this longtime Portlander. But Hanson is not merely a crafty draftsman. His beautiful drawings testify to the timeless power of technique. They also show us there are endless ways of seeing the same thing. Hanson unveils his latest work in a show called "Beauties." New York artist Molly Dilworth, an artist-in-residence at PNCA, also exhibits work in the gallery's project space. (1241 N.W. Johnson St.)

Elizabeth Leach Gallery: In 2005, Seattle artist Drake Deknatel died while sitting at a cafe. His was a talent that should have had more years to make itself known. Now, Deknatel's Portland dealer, Elizabeth Leach, has gathered his paintings, many of them inspired by Europe, in particular Berlin, which Deknatel visited often. In his recent review of the show in The Oregonian, Brian Libby wrote: "One feels pulled by these paintings into a grimy but vivid world just below the surface of human consciousness." (417 N.W. Ninth Ave.)

The Drawn Line

May 5 – August 12, 2007

THE VIVIAN AND GORDON GILKEY CENTER FOR GRAPHIC ARTS

45 Benjamin West

55 Amanda Snyder

72 Max Pechstein

The Drawn Line

This exhibition reveals shifting conceptions of the role of drawing in Europe and America from the sixteenth century to the present day. Selected from the Museum's permanent collection, the works are organized to reflect three main themes that have long marked the artist's repertoire: the figure, the portrait, and the landscape. From quick sketches to highly finished sheets, these works enable the viewer to study the myriad ways that drawing media – graphite, gouache, wash, crayon, chalk, charcoal, pastel, and watercolor – have been handled over the centuries.

Before the eighteenth century, drawing served mainly as a preparatory stage for creating works in other media. From the eighteenth century onward, drawings were prized for the qualities of spontaneity and intimacy the drawn line revealed, and so they became works of art in their own right, to be viewed and marketed as a reflection of an artist's skill and temperament.

Historically, the study of the human figure has been an essential part of artistic training, whether drawn from the classical cast, a posed model, or rendered in the rush of the transitory aspects of life. The drawings here embrace both religious and secular contexts. They reveal approaches to figuration that range from the romanticized to the realistic, from the idealized to the raw.

In portraiture, the observation and recording of the individual likeness entails numerous decisions, including the form of presentation: profile, full-face, or three-quarter view; head only, head and shoulders; bust-length, half-length, or full figure. The portrait may be formal, official, or commemorative, or more informal and intimate in nature, which will affect the artist's treatment of the sitter. Portraits vary in their degree of naturalism, realism, exaggeration, and idealization, and in the degree to which they suggest the subject's inner life. Artists' self-portraits represent a special case in portraiture: free to confront his or her own image – with all that may imply – the artist is unconstrained by convention or a patron's wishes.

The landscape has offered rich possibilities for representation through the centuries. Details of nature can be scrutinized up close; nature can be confronted as powerful and all-encompassing in long views and panoramas. The pastoral view offers a peaceful or bucolic backdrop for human activity, often in the guise of mythological, literary, or genre scenes. The urban setting presents the built environment as a location for human interaction and drama from the domestic to the public stage.

Figure

1 **Jean Audran** *(French, 1667-1756)*
Untitled, n.d.
Crayon on paper
Image: 6 ½ x 5 inches; sheet: 9 ¼ x 7 ⅞ inches
Gift of Walter P. Chrysler
52.2

2 **Jay Backstrand** *(American, b. 1934)*
The Companion V, 1971
Graphite and Prismacolor on paper
28 ½ x 22 ½ inches
Gift of Ed Cauduro
85.1.1

3 **Isabel Bishop** *(American, 1902-1988)*
Untitled (Figure studies), n.d.
Ink and ink wash with graphite border on paper
Image: 4 ¹⁵⁄₁₆ x 6 ⁵⁄₁₆ inches
Gift of Robertson Collins
2001.47.3

4 **Isabel Bishop** *(American, 1902-1988)*
Untitled, c. 1940
Ink on paper
Image: 4 ½ x 3 ¼ inches; sheet: 4 ¹⁵⁄₁₆ x 3 ¾ inches
Gift of Anne and Ernest Munch
2005.76

5 **Paul Cadmus** *(American, 1904-1999)*
Two Nude Studies, 1937
Ink on paper
Image: 9 ½ x 11 ¾ inches; sheet: 10 ⅜ x 14 inches
Bequest of Charles Henry Leavitt
59.26.18

6 **Marc Chagall**
(Belarussian, active France, 1887-1985)
Profiles, 1941
Ink on paper
Sheet: 9 ½ x 4 ½ inches
Bequest of Isabel Rotkin
92.152.2

7 **Jacques Callot** *(French, 1592-1635)*
Old Prophet in a Commanding Attitude,
c. 1621 – 1635
Ink on paper
Image: 4 ⅛ x 2 ½ inches
Gift of Richard Louis Brown
93.65.7

8 **Robert Colescott** *(American, b. 1925)*
Three Nudes, n.d.
Ink wash, graphite, and gouache on paper
Image: 22 x 17 ¾ inches
Gift of Max W. Buhmann
69.5

9 **Léon François Comerre** *(French, 1850-1916)*
Untitled (Group of figures), c. 1890 – 1910
Conté crayon on paper
Sheet: 9 ⅞ x 11 ⅛ inches
Gift of Kenneth and Joyce Treiman
88.11.2

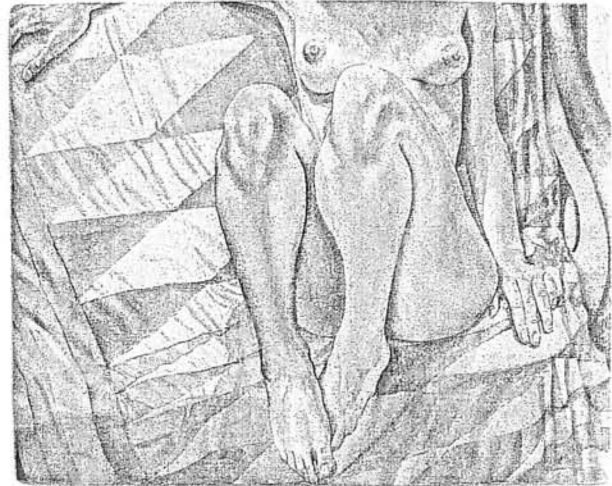
10 **Pietro da Cortona (Pietro Berrettini)**
(Italian, 1596-1669)
Untitled (Frieze with figures), c. 1630
Pen and ink wash over graphite on paper
Image: 5 x 8 ¹¹⁄₁₆ inches; sheet: 5 ⅞ x 9 inches
Gift of Linda and Paul Clinton
79.50.129

11 **Paul Dahlquist** *(American, b. 1929)*
Wall, Figure, Lattice, 1978
Charcoal on paper
Image: 18 ⅞ x 12 ⅛ inches; sheet: 19 ⅞ x 12 ½ inches
Gift of the artist
89.8.1

12 **Arthur B. Davies** *(American, 1862-1928)*
Nude, n.d.
Chalk and charcoal on paper
Image: 17 ⅞ x 13 inches
Gift of Thomas C. Colt, Jr.
50.170

13 **Dosso Dossi (Giovanni de Lutero)**
(Italian, c. 1486-1542)
Untitled (Army crossing a river), c. 1505-1542
Pen, ink, ink wash, and charcoal, heightened with gouache on paper
9 ¼ x 12 ½ inches
Gift of Mrs. Mary Riley
93.39.1

14 **Ubaldo Gandolfi** *(Italian, 1728-1781)*
Untitled, c. 1740-1770
Oiled charcoal and chalk on paper
16 ¾ x 12 inches
The Vivian and Gordon Gilkey Graphic Arts Collection
86.13.477


40 Philip Pearlstein

15 **Paul Gavarni (Hippolyte-Guillaume-Sulpice-Chevalier)** *(French, 1804-1866)*
Young Woman in a Loosely Fitting Costume, c. 1840
Ink and ink wash on paper
Image: 5 ½ x 4 inches; sheet: 7 ¾ x 5 ¾ inches
Gift of Mr. Bernard Carr
86.73.1

16 **Hubert-François Bourguignon Gravelot**
(French, 1699-1773)
Untitled, c. 1720 – 1770
Graphite, pen, and ink on paper
5 x 3 ³⁄₁₆ inches
Gift of Mr. Eric N. Shrubsole
80.115.3

17 **Hubert-François Bourguignon Gravelot**
(French, 1699-1773)
Untitled, c. 1720 – 1770
Graphite, pen, and ink on paper
5 ⁵⁄₁₆ x 3 ⅝ inches
Gift of Mr. Eric N. Shrubsole
80.115.8

18 **Hans Grohs** *(German, 1892-1981)*
Cherokee Indian, 1959
Sepia ink and graphite on paper
9 ½ x 12 ½ inches
Gift of Frauken Grohs Collinson
91.3.9

19 **George Grosz** *(German, 1893-1959)*
Untitled, n.d.
Pen and ink on paper
Image: 18 x 13 ½ inches; sheet: 19 ¼ x 14 ¼ inches
Gift of Karolyn and Robert Eiseman
91.1

20 **Guercino (Giovanni Francesco Barbieri)**
(Italian, 1591-1666)
Elijah in the Desert Fed by Ravens, c. 1619-1620
Pen, ink, and ink wash on paper
Image: 8 ¼ x 11 ¾ inches
Gift of Sally Lewis
2005.75.2

21 **Thomas Handforth** *(American, 1897-1948)*
Woman in Chair, c. 1930
Graphite and ink on paper
Sheet: 15 ⅜ x 13 inches
Gift of Mrs. Merle Shera
87.43.243

22 **Robert Hanson** *(American, b. 1936)*
Marsha, 1970-1973
Charcoal on paper
23 ⅞ x 18 inches
Gift of the artist
1995.46
© Robert Hanson

23 **Tom Hardy** *(American, b. 1921)*
Peggy, n.d.
Crayon on paper
Image: 15 x 28 inches; sheet: 22 ½ x 30 ⅛ inches
The Vivian and Gordon Gilkey Graphic Arts Collection
1997.228.446

24 **Karl Hofer** *(German, 1878-1955)*
Dancing Figure, 1946
Ink on paper
Image: 15 x 10 ½ inches; sheet: 19 x 13 ½ inches
The Vivian and Gordon Gilkey Graphic Arts Collection
84.25.127

25 **Jean-Baptiste Huet I** *(French, 1745-1811)*
Untitled (Young couple fishing), 1774
Pen, ink, ink wash, and graphite on paper
Image: 15 x 10 ½ inches
Bequest of Edwin Binney, 3rd
94.30.2

77 Giuseppe Valeriani

THE SUNDAY OREGONIAN ◆ NOVEMBER 10, 2002

ArtsWeek's

ELIZABETH LEACH GALLERY

FRAME GAME

Robert Hanson at Elizabeth Leach Gallery

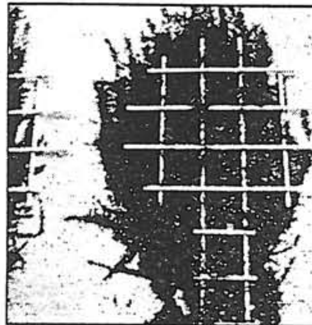
Many fellow artists regard Hanson and his wife, Judy Cooke, as two of the smartest artists in town. And Hanson's latest show offers verifiable evidence of someone whose intellectual and artistic reach extends well beyond the visual. Inspired by the Brothers Grimm and early Northern European art, Hanson presents a unique fictional world of drawings, short stories and photographs. 207 S.W. Pine St.; 503-224-0521. Closes Nov. 30.

Elizabeth Leach
GALLERY

visual ARTS

tip sheet

THE OREGONIAN, FRIDAY, JANUARY 9, 1998



A detail from Robert Hanson's "Self-portrait After Magritte."

Figure-ground relations

Of the many artists who paint landscapes or portraits, **Robert Hanson** and **Stephen Hayes** are unusual for how well each has made both. Far more than simply rendering their subjects or interpreting them emotionally, both artists (and in particular Hanson) have pursued the genres with an intellectual rigor rare in the touchy-feely Northwest.

In the kind of focused pairing of artists Portland could benefit from having more of, curator Terri Hopkins will examine the relation between landscape and portraiture in the two artists' work.

Opens 3-5 p.m. Sunday, Art Gym, Marylhurst College, one mile south of Lake Oswego on Highway 43. Regular hours: noon-4 p.m., Tuesdays-Saturdays; through Feb. 12. Admission: free.

207 SW Pine Street
Portland, OR 97204
503-224-0521
FAX 503-224-0844

Ground strokes

Marylhurst's "Figure/Ground" show aims to create a dialogue between two local artists' work

art review

Figure/Ground

WHAT: Paintings by Robert Hanson and Stephen Hayes
WHERE: Art Gym, Marylhurst College, 1 mile south of Lake Oswego on Oregon 43
HOURS: Noon-4 p.m. Tuesdays-Sundays
CLOSING: Feb. 12
RECEPTION: 3-5 p.m. Sunday
ADMISSION: Free

By JON RAYMOND
Special writer, The Oregonian

A dialogue between artists can open up whole new ideas in the distance between their work. A sharply drawn comparison can brighten the corners of an artist's oeuvre otherwise left in shadow.

In this spirit, "Figure/Ground," showing at the Art Gym at Marylhurst, compares a select sampling of work by two Portland-area painters, Robert Hanson and Stephen Hayes. Hanson, after decades of abstract landscape and still-life painting, has recently made a turn toward text-based work. Hayes, during the past 10 years, has pursued large and small paintings of rural landscapes, empty domestic interiors, human figures and portraits.

But while the show labors to draw a connection between the artists' respective interest in figurative painting, landscape and their own identity, the overarching idea never quite comes into focus.

Like the language-based art of the late 1960s and early '70s, Robert Hanson replaces the optical experience one expects from a gallery visit with a more readerly enterprise. But where linguistically minded artists such as Ed Ruscha and Bruce Nauman turned words into pictures, often inducing a brain-teasing, three-dimensional dyslexia, Hanson does something much different. His work recalls Carrie Mae Weems or Lorna Simpson, both of whom juxtapose images and text to illuminate the construction of race and gender. Hanson lets photos, drawing and writing absorb one another, cross one another out and index one another in curious ways.

Images swaddled in words

Sidestepping the sparse, fragmentary conventions of much text-based art, Hanson swaddles his images in words. Where others proffer a single adverb or clause, Hanson gives whole paragraphs. In doing so, he moves the art world's normally poetic interest in language into something more expansively literary.

For instance, "Openings/Tea Noir" lines up six sepia photos of a porcelain teapot, each accompanied by the opening paragraph of a different detective drama. Hanson concocted the drama, his doubly fictional writing technique falling between two poles: Polish novelist Stanislaw Lem, who has written entire books of fake reviews, fake introductions and fake prefaces, and Snoopy, the cartoon dog, whose own mystery novel remains ever unfinished.

In Hanson's hands, the beginning of a mystery is enough to invoke the play of genre and gender, recited in the high-pitched voice of the teapot.

In another piece, "Self Portrait With Self Criticism," Hanson embeds a small, graphite self-portrait in a fabricated clipping from the New York Times. In it, he "objectively" narrates his own career path from the view of an attentive art critic. By riding the language of journalistic art criticism into the realm of autobiography, Hanson undermines both his own authority and that of art reviews in general. Like facing mirrors, the brief memoir offers a peek into Hanson's sticky effort to extract himself the artist from himself the writer. It also reveals how words can change images and imbue them with heavier meanings.

"My Trip Abroad" mounts coolly composed Polaroids of street details, trees and industrial architecture above diary entries from a two-month sojourn in Europe. Breezy and episodic, the written travelogue complements the rows of photos above, each part an oblique documentary of the other. A set of related pieces couples similar photos with penciled self-portraits. Their combination of drawing and photography is the nearest the show gets to its stated triangulation of portraiture, landscape and identity.

For the most part, writing seems to be the real crucible of Hanson's recent work. Like the theoretical sources informing it, much of Hanson's material celebrates the parasitic relationship of writing to whatever it interprets.

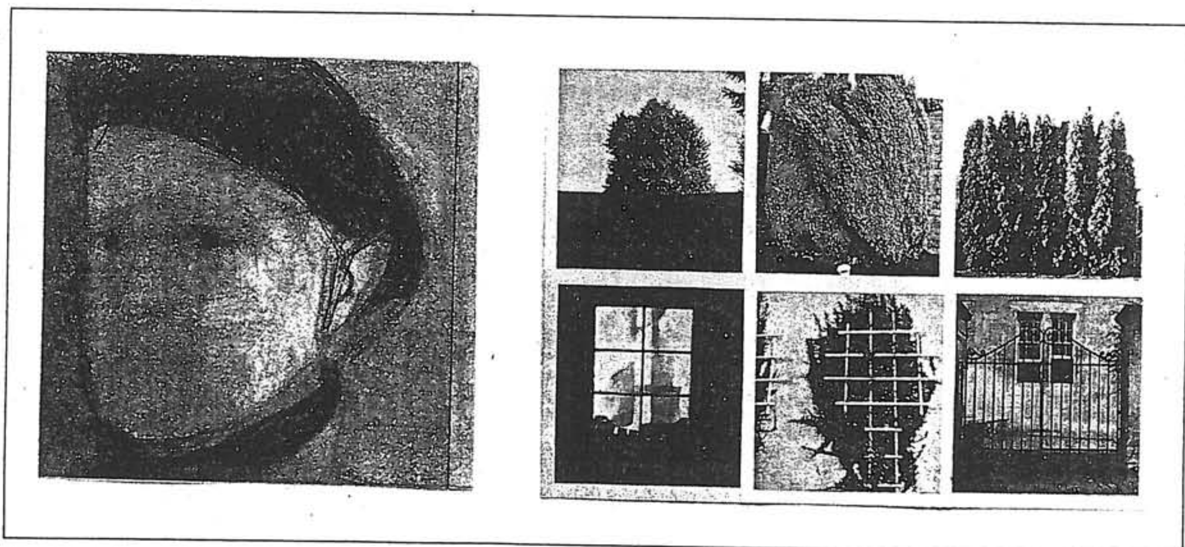
□

As hard as one tries, it's difficult to superimpose Hanson's intellectual concerns onto Stephen Hayes' much more conventional work. Where Hanson's portion of the show takes on an armload of brainy, nonformal issues, Hayes delivers a more gestural performance. "MAN," a series of black-and-white monotypes, recalls Edgar Degas' raunchy brothel sketches, by way of Eadweard Muybridge's studies in motion.

Indeed, Hayes' gestures seem strongest when grounded in the moving human body and unencumbered by color. "Drama," a large canvas featuring a stand of trees limned in yellow against a murky purple sky, is marred by lazy brushstrokes and a palette sliding toward mushy, overworked brown. A series of small, square portraits are more accomplished but still feel like exercises.

Next to Hanson's deliberated work, Hayes' thought progression appears almost arbitrary. Although his progress from rural landscapes to interiors to human figures supposedly contains an inner narrative, it's hard to see it.

Eventually, it seems that Hanson and Hayes are taking part in different conversations, with Hanson's the sharper and more expansive and Hayes' the more sentimental. While each has its own tenor, they rarely overlap.



Robert Hanson explores the vagaries of identity in "Self-Portrait After Magritte," on view at the Art Gym.

or morality tales. Today they serve viewer as elicitors for reconstructions—relevant, though not necessarily the original, narratives. Both examples literally serve or served as containers within the culture of their production while simultaneously acting as broadsides for some story. Studio pottery, recently produced, limited in edition, made precious by collectors and exhibited under Plexiglas shields, is other than a functional vessel in this conventional sense. These works serve, not as beasts of burden animated by a narrative, but rather as mediums—shuttles between what seems to be perceived as an uncomfortable present and an idealized past.

The works presented in this exhibition by artists producing today illustrate this point as succinctly as works produced by ceramists earlier in the century. The division between the downstairs and the upstairs galleries is only chronological. Rodney Tsukashima produces vessel-like forms. *Untitled (Vessel #6)* is meant to act as a meditative object and steer meditation in the direction of contemplation of historic traditions. Cindy Kolodziejski's *Macrocystis Pyrifera* is a polyglot of established historic forms and techniques. The result is a quirky character vessel wagging a photo-realist tale with baroque significance. Rosaline Delisle is consumed by purity of form meshed with rigid, delineated surfaces. These, in combination, refer to recent histories—beginning with the Bauhaus aesthetic and extending to op art and geometric abstraction. Ralph Bacerra combines a number of historical references to arrive at *Untitled Cloud Vessel* and like the other works within this series, this lidded jar is a carefully crafted and visually adept lament for a pristine/a previous era.

These works, like most work by contemporary ceramic artists included in this exhibition (the notable exceptions being work by some members of the Otis School), are facile, clean and coherent. They are craft conscious and focused on classic models produced during other eras. In general, the works in *Function and Narrative* are crafty reproductions foregrounding historical aesthetics which can be pleasing, but do not necessarily function (as I have defined function) or spin open narratives. The viewer is inundated with issues of practice and left to consider how and why a material was put to use rather than feeling the need to use these objects as stepping stones along some cognitive trail. It is a wistful experience.

—Charlene Roth

Function and Narrative: Fifty Years of Southern California Ceramics through October 19 at the Long Beach Museum of Art, 2300 E. Ocean Blvd., Long Beach.

Charlene Roth is an artist and writer based in Los Angeles.

Oregon

'Notes from All Over: Messages from the Interior' at the Oregon College of Art and Craft

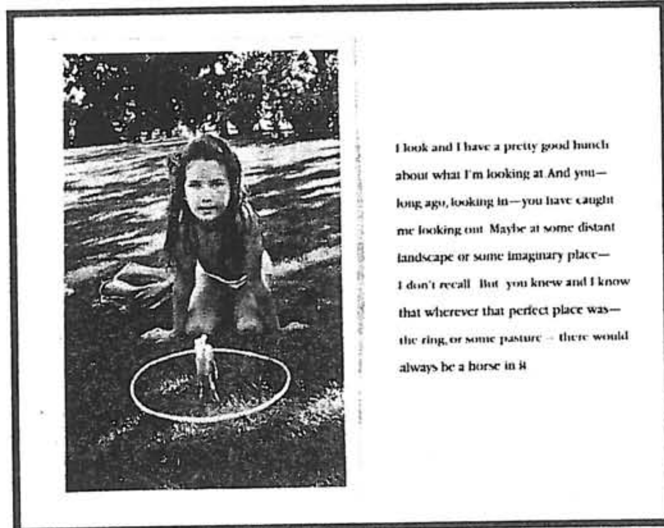
Opening eyes, then, yes—but only in order to cancel them, and to recall that the draughtsman's contract always concerns a pleasure and a condition that are not only out of sight, but out of this world.

—Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, 1993

Seeing is believing, right? Not anymore. In fact, it's the other way around, according to more than a few physiologists, psychologists and theorists. Though they approach the issue from their own disciplines, they agree that what we believe, arising from our experience, our fears and desires, has as much to do with "seeing" as optical nerves. In looking at nature or just about anything else, what we don't see—our "blind eye"—shapes perception, and perception, as even non-experts recognize, has layered and nuanced meanings. The several definitions of sight and insight, vision and visionary semantically exemplify the blurry line between literal observation and its mental alterations. For several years, Robert Hanson, an artist of literary leanings, has been exploring this amorphous area where the physical eye, the blind eye, and the mind's eye meet and mix. His most recent spin-off, *Notes from All Over: Messages from the Interior*, was a curatorial project in which he collaborated with thirty-six invited artists. The exhibition consisted of "notes"—images created by the artists—and "messages"—his written response to each of the images.

Hanson's first foray into visionary explorations began in 1995 with a gallery show of self-portrait drawings inspired by his reading of Jacques Derrida's *Memoirs of the Blind, The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*. Like Derrida's text, the drawings were enigmatic and playful, metaphoric and introspective; they concerned himself as an artist as well as art itself. The next year, he became more outwardly directed, sending descriptions of a person (taken from portrait drawings by Ingres) to artist friends and inviting them to create a portrait based solely on the description he had provided. For both these exhibitions, as for this most recent one, Hanson provided text as illusory as the pictures.

In that there was a disconnect between image and text, the structure of *Notes from All Over* was somewhat reminiscent of "exquisite corpse" games. Hanson asked the artists to create and send him a "picture postcard," i.e., a small (approximately 4-by-6-inch) painting, drawing, print or photograph of an imagined place, after which he would produce the text it inspired. Mounted on identically sized paper (17 by 11 inches) with typography supplied by artist Manda Beckett, the pictures and their texts have the intimacy of a deluxe travel book. The travel destinations, however, are unlike any to be found in agents' brochures, and the texts are light-years away from "having wonderful time, wish you were here."



Dianne Kornberg, photograph and text from *Notes from All Over: Messages from the Interior*, at the Hoffman Gallery, Oregon College of Art and Craft, Portland.

With so many interpretations of the theme, each requiring a close reading, it's impossible to do anything more than to select certain works to indicate the imaginative range. Arvie Smith, known for colorful paintings of Africans and African-Americans, was the only artist to create his image on an actual postcard, which he mailed from Ghana. Some of the pieces were abstract, or near abstract, like Brian Shannon's lithograph of repeated cone or horn-like images, which elicited a word picture. Hanson's writings took the forms of poems, party invitations, anecdotal fragments, even advertising. Three brief ads were connected with a picture of a straight-back chair in an empty room (a collage and relief print by Jeannie Moreno). They concerned the death of two old women; the obituary on January 12, the estate sale on February 2, and a real estate ad for a "charming Victorian home" on April 2.

A photograph (by Dianne Kornberg) of a little girl kneeling before a ring—possibly a hula hoop—with a plastic toy horse at its center evoked both an imaginary place and the fascination with horses that seems to be a part of female childhood. In his brief accompanying essay, Hanson touched on that association, as he also played with shades of meaning in "looking." The child is looking out, the photographer and the viewer are looking in, and all are indulging in—or "seeing"—different visions.

In spite of the show's descriptive title, gallery visitors who had no appreciation of Derrida's playful demonstration of semantic "spillage" and Hanson's applications of its relationship to images looked for—there's that word again—explanations or narratives in the texts. Sometimes they weren't disappointed, but Hanson was at his best when his flights of fancy "were not only out of sight, but out of this world."

—Lois Allan

Notes from All Over: Messages from the Interior closed in August at the Hoffman Gallery, Oregon College of Art and Craft, Portland.

Lois Allan is a contributing editor to *Artweek*.

Washington

'Southern Stories' at G. Gibson Gallery, and Arthur S. Aubry at the Seattle Art Museum

Photography often appears to offer us a direct line to the artist's view. Since we are not distracted by tactile qualities or real objects jutting through our space, a simple photograph seems to expose the immediate preferences and peccadilloes

Elizabeth Leach
GALLERY

visual arts

The Oregonian
a&e
ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT GUIDE
FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 1996

The verbal becomes the visual in Robert Hanson's experiment

Artist Robert Hanson continues to explore the prismatic dimensions of describing visual art with words — but this time as a curator. Taking a pair of drawings by Ingres, an early 19th-century French romantic, Hanson wrote a paragraph on each, handed them out to 14 of his artist friends and asked them to make a drawing in response.

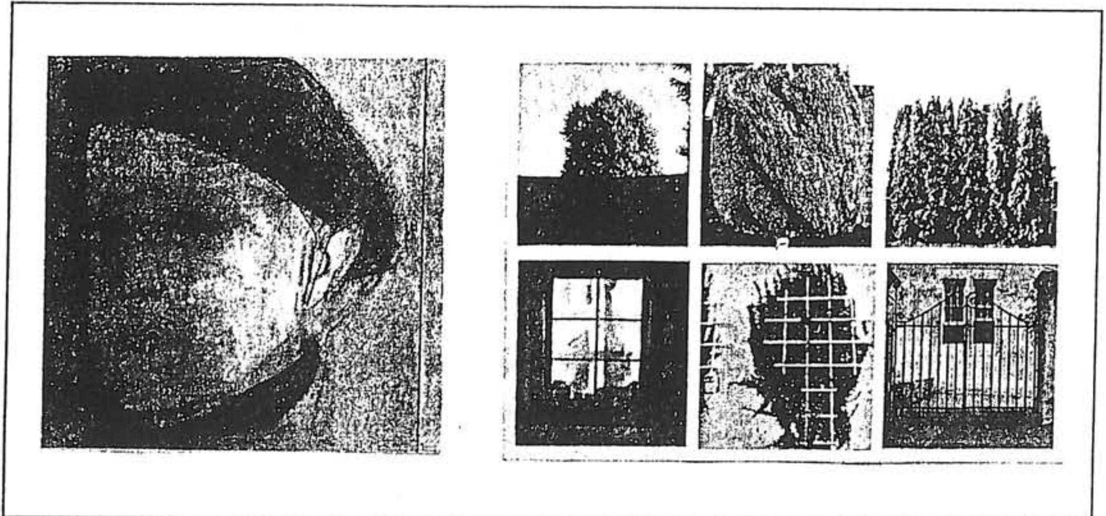
The result, "Imaginary Portrait Drawings," is a show about translation and imagination, featuring some of the city's better draftsmen: Henk Pander, Rachel Hibbard, Paul Missal and Anne Connell, among others. It's the kind of potentially fun experiment that recalls surrealist parlor games. And, indeed, one artist, Anne Johnson, seemed to catch on, cutting and pasting Hanson's descriptions *a la* William Burroughs and coming up with an Ingres that Man Ray could be proud of.

Elizabeth Leach Gallery, 207 S.W. Pine St. Hours: 10:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Mondays through Saturdays, through March 2.

— *Randy Gragg*

207 SW Pine Street
Portland, OR 97204
503-224-0521
FAX 503-224-0844

The Oregonian



JIM LOMMASSON

In "Self Portrait After Magritte," Robert Hanson looks inward and outward, pairing a pencil drawing with snapshots taken on his walks.

visual arts

Deeper explorations of self

Robert Hanson turns his probing insight to himself-as-artist

Hanson explores the blindness of artistic vision in a detail from "Four Gloomy Ruminations."

By RANDY GRAGG
of The Oregonian staff

Artists are different, so it has been said over and over again. Yet, precious few who see artists as foreign bodies can put their finger on exactly why.

The trick is to study the artwork closely and, most importantly, over time. Marching to their proverbial different drummers, most artists sooner or later change step, creating a rhythmic tension that makes the viewer appreciate the deeper, more complex patterns of the original beat.

Robert Hanson's exhibition at Elizabeth Leach, "Variations on the Self," is an excellent case in point. Hanson is one of Portland's quieter artists. Never flashy but always intelligent, Hanson over the years has steadily tackled the most elegantly simple question of Modernist painting: how to create a picture that will communicate without relying on Renaissance perspective and representational form.

His past work is similar to Bach variations: simple themes executed with a virtuoso's energy and grace, evoking in just a few notes an entire corpus of artistic knowledge. In the small worlds of Hanson's painting, depth is rarely more than a tension between colors. Skittish brushstrokes flirt with parallels in the real world. Emotions are triggered by forces no more predictable than a gust of cool wind.

For Hanson, art is clearly a choice. Not driven by grand romantic passions or therapeutic need, he has always seemed a combination of monk and hedonist, working in a world of intellectual richness and pure visual pleasure.

Creative introspection

Hanson's current show, however, could easily suggest some kind of personal crisis: It seems like a reconsideration of his entire viewpoint. Gone are the buoyantly enigmatic abstractions. Instead, the walls are covered with moody self-portraits lightly rendered in pencil, photographs that look like location studies for horror films, writings that reveal more than a modicum of existential angst.

review

Robert Hanson
"Variations on the Self"

WHERE: Elizabeth Leach Gallery, 207 S.W. Pine St.
HOURS: 10:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Mondays-Saturdays
CLOSING: Sept. 30
ADMISSION: Free

As if to explain, Hanson has even crafted a review of his own work. In a flawlessly faked clipping from the New York Times, dated Dec. 3, 1996, a critical alter ego named Webb Garr takes a retrospective view of the artist's work. Arguing against his "modernist infatuation," Garr makes an eloquent case that Hanson's rare portraits have always been his "most promising moments."

Indeed, taken at — excuse the term — face value, Hanson has portrayed himself with the deep introspection we see in the self-portraits of Rembrandt or Goya. Exquisitely drawn, nearly all grouped in series and many dated only days apart, the pictures have the hallucinogenic quality of shifting moods and intense observations of his own aging.

The images grew, Hanson said in a recent conversation, out of a creative block where his paintings "kept coming up white." Pointing to one series of images by a younger Hanson, he spoke of "the whiff of mortality" he felt on finding a 1966 student card photo in a drawer. The overall goal of the self-portraits, he said, was simple: a return to the basics of "observational drawing" from a mirror.

Penetrating paradoxes

It would seem, then, that Hanson has joined a legion of contemporary artists returning to the age-old values of humanism. Rejecting both modernism's purity and postmodernism's irony, their hope is to find, as critic Garr so eloquently titles his review, the "Exit Signs in a Cold Cathedral."

Well, maybe.

Look a bit more closely and you'll find a fascinating paradox in Hanson's new work: In many of the self-portraits

Please turn to
HANSON, Page 21

THE OREGONIAN, FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 1995

Hanson: Introspection, riddles imbue art

■ Continued from Page 19

the eyes are obscured.

In "Four Gloomy Ruminations," for instance, his face is subsumed in varying cascades of thick, picture-flattening pencil strokes. The final image is cut by a plane that sits like an upturned blade, a cutting conclusion to the sinking feeling the previous pictures evoke.

In others, Hanson has paired his self-portraits with Polaroid images taken on his "usual routes" through the city. Presented again in series, they become akin to stills from a film shot through Hanson's eyes. Where most pedestrians might notice only overgrown trees and concrete urban structures, Hanson finds the glaringly lit spaces of Giorgio de Chirico and the mental puzzles of René Magritte.

This is a man whose real world is packed with quotations from the history of art.

Intellectual subcontext

Lurking within these artworks is Hanson's recent reading: Jacques Derrida's "Memoirs of the Blind." Best-known as a key figure of the "deconstruction" literary criticism, which exposes the power structures inherent in language, Derrida turns his sights in "Memoirs" on visual arts. In an essay in which he cites numerous historical artist self-portraits, the famed French theorist argues the impossibility of the artist ever truly being able to see himself.

Sound complex and heavy? In Hanson's hands it's not. He has turned Derrida's cul-de-sac maze of rhetorical self-reference into a series of poetic conceptual riddles. Equally importantly, Hanson offers a teasing embrace and deft critique to a vast range of historical and contemporary ideas. He even sent Derrida several of his eyeless self-portraits with no message or return address — in other words, blind.

In the end, the show is as wry as the grin that comes to the artist's face when asked if he is confronting some sort of personal cartharsis. For Hanson, a creative block has led to a small vacation from his usual work and a series of post cards describing a different view of home.

Reflex

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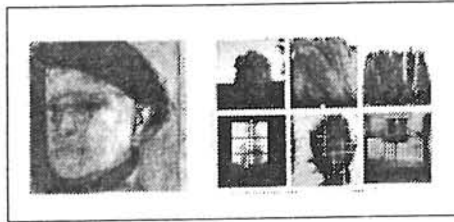

Robert Hanson, *Self Portrait After Magritte*, mixed media, 1995, 7.5" x 18.5"

ROBERT HANSON AT ELIZABETH LEACH GALLERY (Portland). Robert Hanson, long-time professor of painting and drawing at Pacific Northwest College of Art, shows "Variations on the Self, Drawings & Mixed Media on Paper," at Elizabeth Leach Gallery, September 6-30. Viewers should not expect to see simply a drawing show. *Three Images Sent Blind to Derrida (I & II)* and *Postcards Sent Blind to Derrida* suggest the conceptual complexity of Hanson's presentation. All the images in the above drawings are self-portraits, sans his spectacles, with eyes closed. The drawing in *Three Images* and *Self-Portrait with Eyes Closed* is stunning, uncanny (in the latter) in its evocation of Redon, among other charms, but the presentation raises questions beyond the contemplation of sophisticated drawings, questions of text and context and the nature of the activity we term art. The scope of this exhibition is hinted at by the labels of the sections into which it is divided: "Fiction/Non-Fiction," "Sensibilities," Associations & Sight."

Hanson's writing, which accompanies "Variations on My Passport Photo," can be as absorbing as the visual images he creates, fluent, evocative, pregnant and even explosive in juxtaposition with the drawing. Fire, experience, creation, meaning, incompleteness.... "Slowly, the words come again and the sounds follow and the sounds mesh smoothly with the words, and he relaxes." Music is also quite present in the aura of this show as suggested by the term *Variations*.

In these Hanson Variations, crossing-over becomes a major sport in the pair of fraternally twin pieces *Two Dissimilar Artists* and *Self-Portrait with Self-Criticism*. The former piece presents a December 5, 1994 review from the Living Arts section of the New York Times of a Ferdinand Hodler (1853 - 1918) show. The review contains details from Hodler's painful existence and includes a stark drawing, *Self-Portrait with Wide-Open Eyes*. The twin of this piece is a "Living Arts" review attributed to Webb Garr, dated December 3, 1996, of an exhibition by Robert Hanson which includes the drawing *Self-Portrait with Self-Criticism*, again picturing the artist without his glasses, looking like an unhappy German symphony conductor. Viewers might find study and contemplation of the interaction between these pieces edifying, entertaining, and, at times, hilarious.

"Variations on the Self" is a show that goes beyond—considerably—what one might expect of a show advertised as Drawings & Mixed Media on Paper. **— H.J.**

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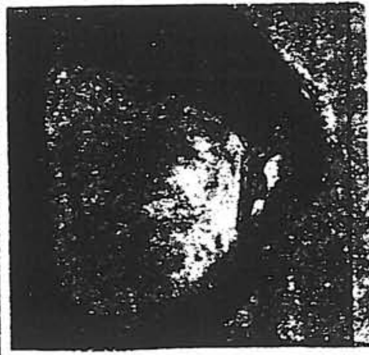
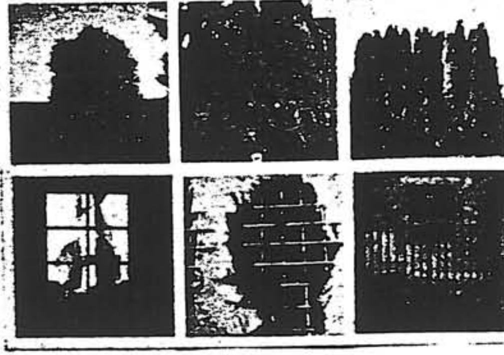



Robert Hanson, *Self Portrait After Magritte*, 1995, mixed media, 7-1/2" x 18-1/2", at Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland. (Photo: Jim Lommasson.)

Oregon

Robert Hanson at Elizabeth Leach Gallery

A portrait, as they say, represents the desires of three people: the sitter's, the artist's, and the viewer's. When the sitter and the artist are the same person, however, the psychological implications intensify, and as a result, self-portraits are among the most tantalizing yet problematic representations of the human face. They may be produced for a variety of reasons, but invariably they remain to some degree self-revelatory, not the least as manifestations of the artistic ambitions of their creators. The ostensible purpose of Robert Hanson's recent foray into self-portraiture, exhibited as *Variations on the Self*, was to investigate the relationship of the artist, as an artist, to perceptual processes (visual and mental), extrapolating from philosophical and art-historical sources. On another level, these small, beautifully executed graphic works suggest that Hanson, a respected painter of uncompromising abstractions, is engaged in serious introspection with regard to his own art.

As a case in point, *Self-Portrait with Self-Criticism* is a witty simulation of an old clipping from *The New York Times*. Hanson duplicated the *Times* typeface as well as the color of old newsprint, and in the guise of critic "Webb Garr" wrote a review to accompany a two-column image of his own face. The review, under the title "Exit Signs in a Cold Cathedral," rejects both modernist formalism and ironic postmodernism, lauding instead a return to humanism.

Any artist interested in self-portraiture must look to Rembrandt, and Hanson is no exception. Unsparing observation and strong oppositions of light and dark are as pronounced in Hanson's drawings as they are in the earlier artist's. The difference is intent. Rembrandt's use of chiaroscuro contributes to a mood of emotional intensity; in Hanson's *Four Gloomy Ruminations*, it serves a philosophical inquiry. The four graphite drawings are quite dark, with piercing light touching a different area in each—forehead, nose, chin, shirt collar. The black backgrounds seem to be enveloping the face, but the eyes, already totally obscured, see nothing and reveal nothing.

Hanson's less gloomy ruminations appear in works in which he places himself in relation to certain modern artists—Magritte, De Chirico, Ernst—who transformed the ordinary world of appearance into visual enigmas. Pairing a graphite self-portrait with Polaroid snapshots taken during his walks around town, Hanson calls attention to the singularity of the vision that distinguishes his work and sets him apart from the "unseeing" majority of his fellow citizens.

Paul de Man's statement in *Blindness and Insight*, that "... the power of memory does not reside in its capacity to resurrect a situation or a feeling that actually existed, but is a constitutive act of the mind bound to its own present and oriented toward the future of its own elaboration," is remarkably relevant to Hanson's series *Fiction/Non-Fiction: Variations on My Passport Photo 1966*. Identical drawings of the young artist, each the size of a passport photo, accompany replications of a book page in these three "variations," the variations themselves occurring in snippets of Proustian text.

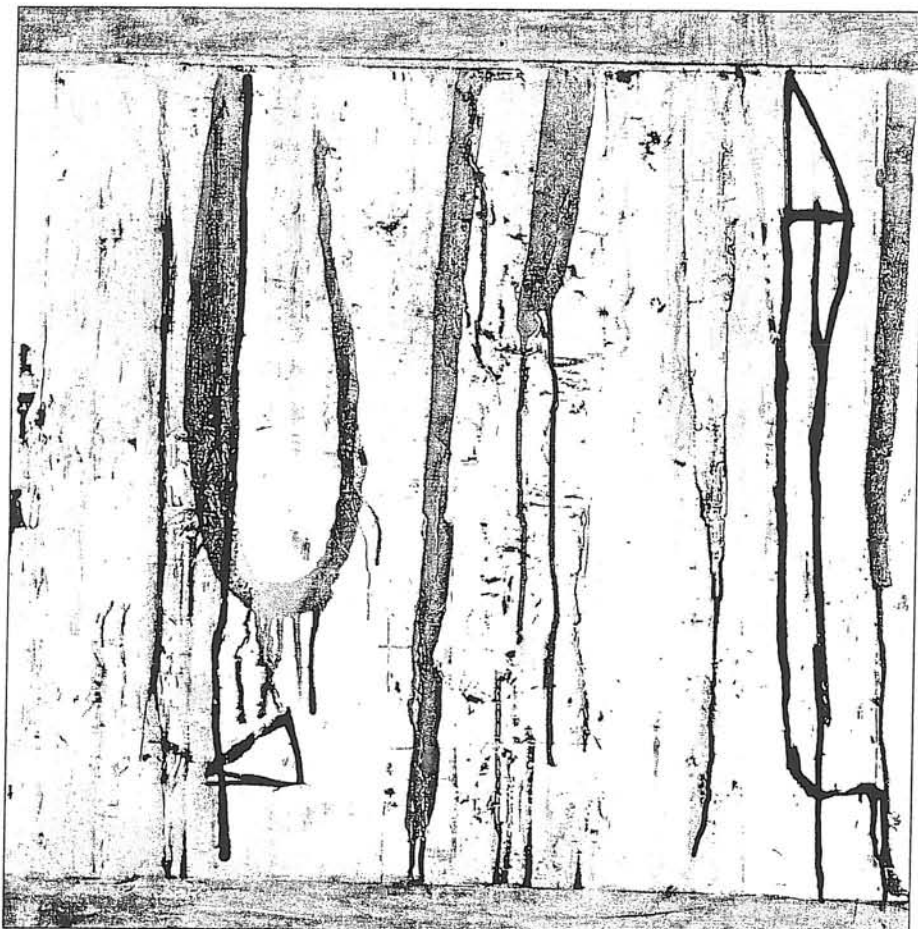
The dilemma of blindness and dubious insight also permeates an extensive set of portraits in charcoal, again with the eyes blacked out, entitled *Images Sent Blind to Derrida*. Postcard-sized photocopies of these drawings were mailed to the French theoretician, while duplicates were mounted as a group with the notation, "with dates: no message, no return." In the essay *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, Derrida argues that the self-portraitist invents himself as much as he invents each drawing: "A drawing of the *blind* is a drawing *of* the blind." At another point he observes that "the blind man can be a seer, and he sometimes has the vocation of a visionary," and there he opens our eyes to Hanson's new body of work.

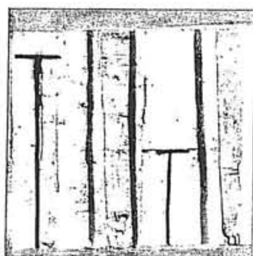
—*Lois Allan*

DIALOGUE

Four Portland Artists
Judy Cooke, Bob Hanson, Lucinda Parker, Cie Goulet

Bob Hanson: Like most of the artists in this area, we four painters are somewhat isolated from major collections, from major exhibitions of painting and other art forms. What do we do when we want to see firsthand major works of art, major collections and so-called major exhibitions? What do artists our here do? What do you all do?
Cie Goulet: We travel.
BH: But why?
Lucinda Parker: You have to.
Judy Cooke: You have to. How as an artist can you feed your own work?
CG: It is a shot in the arm to see a show and get turned on by, like, early-15th-century Flemish painters. Those altarpieces of van der Goes and van Eyck, those ridiculous landscapes in the background, and the 16th-century Italian mannerists, DeCosimo and Bellini, they just take off in the wildest ways, they do these gnarly things, these skies out of hell or something – they are incredible, and it's so infectious for me. It pulls me out of the mundane, and that is what I want, what I'm looking for. I want my work to have an edge and have it change, and if the horizon bends it bends, and I want this life and movement and energy. I want to be infected by what I see, so I think you are right: You have to travel, you have to see some of these shows...
BH: Do you do that on a regular basis? Cie, you actually live on and off in New York, so that has been important.
CG: I'm lucky to be there, and to be able to get on the train and go down to Washington, D.C., to catch what's there, at the National Gallery and other museums. Yeah, I take great advantage of that.
JC: What this concern with travel and seeing collections and shows brings up goes back to how you feed yourself intellectually, where you get your ideas from generally, and about a concern with structures we all share in some way. You know, different kinds of structures are one way to "get" a painting, and then the other way is simply to look at a great painting. We are talking basically about observing more than just local activity. I think wherever you live you are aware of the fact that a community of people, of artists, is working around you. To make the best work you can possibly make, though, seems to me to come from artists anywhere that you really acknowledge as having taken a big step. You mentioned Giovanni Bellini; Bob and I were travelling in Italy for quite awhile, and we went back to Venice twice just to see the Bellinis. The important think about Bellini was not the Madonnas, but that he had put this strange device in those paintings, an edge or a molding, and the Christ child often stands on one of these moldings, sometimes at angle to the Madonna, and then behind the two figures is a very odd sky – it is reminiscent of Magritte. I always get this very surreal sense with Bellini, and he became very pivotal for me – not for things I could actually use in my own painting, but just for this strange time journey I get into. I see Bellini painting back then and I think of other people painting now or recently, and yet Bellini is as modern as any of them. There is this strange warp; you move in time in your head as you look at an artwork. That's what is tremendously mysterious to me about painting, that journey you take in your head.
CG: Living part of the year in New York and then part of the year in the Northwest, I still find that I see fewer shows than you might think of my contemporaries. There are certain artists whose shows I will break my neck to go out and see, and go back many times; but by and large I don't venture out. I have my finger on what's out there just enough to be not motivated to go out and see a whole lot of shows. I know that sounds terribly narrow, but seeing a lot of new art doesn't do anything for me. I want to be excited,





TOP: Robert Hanson, *Grove*, 1993, Oil on canvas
24 x 24 inches
Courtesy Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland

BOTTOM: Robert Hanson, *Temple*, 1993
Oil on canvas, 18 x 18 inches
Courtesy Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland

and so much today is highly predictable. In fact, I've gone to see shows where I've known ahead of time what I'm going to see, but I go just to prove to myself I was right. I like to be surprised, I like to see the excitement that can be out there, as when someone has changed styles and the word is out – "boy, have they really turned a corner" – and I go out to see what the corner was they turned, and how successful they turned it.

JC: That is one advantage New York has: if you find a painter you really care about who is exhibiting in New York, you can really track what they are doing, and not see them only every four years. You may be able to see them much more frequently, or at least keep track of them.

CG: And you trust other artists to keep you informed. If there is a good recommendation, you go. You ask, "How is such and such a show?" And they say, "You've seen it," meaning you already saw it a few years ago.

LP: It's basically product – a problem we all as painters have to worry about. Are we just producing stuff, or are we really working? I think there is a big difference between really working and just making more of the same thing.

CG: You know yourself that some of your work is better than some other. But collectors sometimes want a "such and such," or they want "such and such," and if they work hard enough they'll get one, but they don't much care about getting something that is really better, that is you at your best.

LP: But we don't know about collectors out here, because they're aren't any. [Laughter]

CG: No, not really. There are some now. I think there's a real renaissance happening here. I think there now is a real awareness going on. And a lot of it's happening here in Portland, and in Seattle. I think it's because, at least in part, the support systems are starting to emerge, slowly, or to come back, and they have the goods here.

BH: Traditionally, this area has been kind of anemic when it comes to support of the arts.

LP: Not in art-making, though.

BH: No, in the support. So you see that changing? You really think it's changing?

CG: In the east people grow up with paintings, they want their children to be around paintings, they are used to living with paintings. Too often here, however, people don't think anything of spending $3000 on a leather sofa but won't spend the same money on a painting, won't really think about the enrichment they could get from that. I think being with art is contagious, and I do think that when people see people with paintings, when they walk into a house with paintings in it, they think, "Ah, that's not such a bizarre concept after all." Then they do take that step, maybe slowly but surely. I've seen such changes happening.

BH: But isn't it interesting, that you have people out here who just love the landscape, and they go out to see it and would rather do that than go to a museum, than buy a landscape. Although they will go out and photograph it, as a reminder.

LP: They'll photograph it, frame up the photograph and hang it.

BH: It's some sort of substitute for them.

LP: That's right, like a little talisman. It's ironic, when you see a house with a view window out onto Mt. Hood, and then you see a photograph on the wall of Mt. Hood; it's like a talisman of the Mt. Hood experience. But they have the real thing right there. It's very funny.

JC: That brings us back to this business about painting as an invention rather than as a picture of something. That's particularly interesting here and now, because there is certainly some overlap between photography and painting. The photograph gives you the pictorial image. We would all agree that there are some really terrific photographs we have all seen that take precedence over quite a lot of painting we don't like. I am not brushing off photography at all. But this business about what

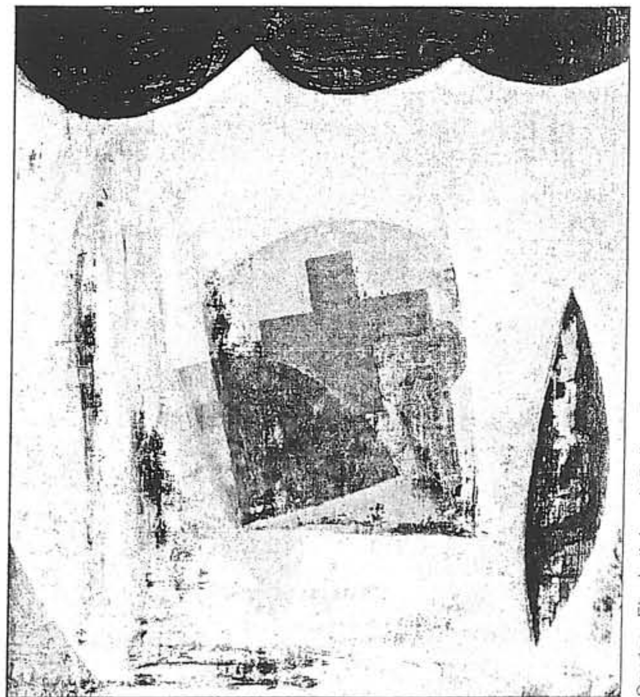
Judy Cooke, *The Dilemma*, 1993, Mixed media, 14 x 96 x 2" Courtesy Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland

you bring to painting as an invention is a pretty serious one, it's very complicated.

CG: Have you ever been driving a car, and been lost in thought, so that you don't even know that you're driving, and then all of a sudden you realize, "My God, I'm driving!" That can happen in painting. I mean, an hour or two will go by and you see this arm reaching over into the paint and it's painting. It's like automatic writing or something. It's like we each have a personal vocabulary and are the product of all these things that have come in on us, some of which have been self-induced and some of which haven't been. There's a gut talent you have, but there is also being bombarded by all these different stimuli: seeing other work, your everyday visual experience, your whole sense of yourself – everything comes in, and it's fascinating how automatic that is. It's always been fascinating to me. We all have that experience of going into the studio, painting all day, looking up at the clock and, bang, it's 3 o'clock already. I think that's wonderful.

JC: Philip Guston talked about that, that whole activity of painting, when you are really involved in the painting and are not just manufacturing a painting. You have all these formal, structural issues that you have down pat – the things you know. Certainly after painting for ten or fifteen years you know something about your own process, and for better or for worse you probably accept, you probably trust your own process in where it takes you. One of the things Guston addresses in his book *Night Studio* is that business about if you're painting what you know, you should be painting what you don't know. He saw painting as a tremendous kind of adventure, where you stuck your neck out, where you took chances. Maybe that's a very romantic idea. But I could see it as a contrast to all the ironic painting going on now.

LP. I don't like irony in art. I am interested sometimes in other people's ironic art, but most of the times I like a painting it's not because of irony, but because of a very strange feeling of beauty. It isn't a cliched beauty that attracts me, it's an invented beauty,



Courtesy Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland

Judy Cooke, *New England*, 1993, Oil and wax on wood, 26 x 24 x 2 inches

and it certainly isn't ironic in the way that appropriated imagery or videos or all these other things are ironic. Politically pre-digested art is ironic in a certain way, and the person who makes it says, "This is what it is supposed to mean, and now I am going to show you how I am going to do it, but you already know what it is suppose to mean, so therefore you know what it means." It's all done already, the message is conveyed before the work is made.

JC: It's like a one-line joke. I could never do ironic painting.

LP: Taking risks in painting is not the same as irony. Any good painter takes risks, they push themselves all the time.

JC: Does one take a risk with an ironic painting?

LP: I don't really know. I just know that when I work I try to set up risky situations and try to do things differently. If I say to myself, "Oh, that's a move I've made many times before," I don't want to make that move anymore.

Lucinda Parker
Chaconne
1992
Acrylic on canvas
96 x 96 inches
Courtesy
Laura Russo Gallery
Portland

CG: You know, I think collectors would be dismayed to hear that it's not a calculated decision to mix blue with alizarin crimson. Sometimes, at least, I am reaching for the brush, and if that color isn't on the palette I'll use the color right next to it, and in the process it'll get mixed. A certain momentum, a certain speed builds up in my working, so I want to make sure I have that full palette and have what I need at hand, but you can't always have that. The choices could almost go many different ways at many different times, and that's part of intuition, of going with what happens. I have stuck my brush in what I thought was green and it turns out to be red and I put it on there and hot dog, it works. I'm really swimming now. I'm not saying it is pure accident, but it all flows together and it's an amazing process to me.

BH: I want to get back to what we were talking before about getting out of Portland and going to look at painting elsewhere. Seeing what's happening elsewhere – whether it's current art in New York or Bellinis in Venice – is important. But one of the real reasons it's important is that there are simply no substitutes for original works of art. A painter friend of ours, Harry Widman, always talks about the tactility or the touch of painting, that the physical presence of a painting is always central to it. You learn an awful lot about painting and how paintings are made from what you as a painter see in a Matisse, for instance, seeing that the paint is as thin as it is and that it's a big painting and, but my God, he used a rather small brush. Or looking at a Guston and seeing that, my gosh, he's used a big brush and it's fairly thick and the painting is also big. It really has something to do with how it looks in real life.

LP: I think that has something to do with why painting is not ironic, because its sense of touch is so physical. It's kind of like love-making. That's corny, but in fact it's hard to be ironic when you are that involved with a surface. If you didn't have that involvement with a surface, you'd be involved only with the image. The image would be the whole meaning, and to me, the image is only part of it. The touch also makes the meaning, and the process of painting as it is recorded in the touch. To me process is sort of close to the heart.

JC: That indirectly refers back to our talking about photography. I think we would agree that, by and large, photography is about an image – a compelling image, and when it's great it's really intriguing. But what Bob is bringing up is the physicality of paint, or of other materials...

BH: And what the physicality tells you about structure, about how a painting is made.

CG: Look at those old Ryder paintings. Look at the crap he used to make them with! He used old coffee grounds and old ground-up cigars and everything. Everyone said, "Albert, those aren't going to last." And he said, "I don't give a damn, it's making the painting the way I want it." I thought of him in relation to photography, and how incredible his skies are. I mean, that really says it as far as "realism," compared with a photograph. A photograph just doesn't give you the excitement and freshness of those Ryder skies. Or, another example, Burchfield would build up his watercolors so they were thick as oil paints, and they'd say, "Charles, you can't do that. You know this is watercolor, there are certain aspects to watercolor, and you are not playing by the rules. Well, look what he did by not playing by the rules."

BH: But, you know, painters, like photographers, really want that compelling image.

CG: We'll do what we have to do to get it.

BH: And when we look around in the Northwest, are we getting it? What are we seeing in terms of the images? If we go to a gallery or to someone's studio, do we see a direction? What are you seeing a lot of? I'll tell you what I'm seeing a lot of. Actually, I see a lot of animals.

LP: Animals!

JC: Many animals

BH: Well, a lot of fish, especially.

CG: There's a lot of warmed-over stuff going on out there, as we all know. Like the t-shirt that people wear with the dog's face with the cross through it.

BH: I have noticed recently that there is an interesting landscape motif that seems to be returning, a long rectangle on which is very dark land, very little color and a lot of sweeping sky, a lot of drama.

JC: Is this the ironic landscape? [Laughter]

BH: It can range widely in quality, but there does seem to be quite a bit of that format in use, and that kind of idea about landscape. A kind of charged romanticism – a lot of atmosphere, but not a bright and sunny one. I have also been aware of a certain kind of abstraction, too, again some of it interesting and some not, which has the color taken out of it, reduced to earth colors – although in this case I have seen a lot of paintings that seem to be bile-like, like bodily fluids across a surface. Another thing I have been noticing is an almost Flemish interest in the figure. These painters are interested in a tighter painting technique, and give their pictures surrealistic overtones.

CG: There is a lot of surrealistic imagery right now.

BH: It often has that Northern influence.

LP: I also see a lot of charming painting, some of it good, but a lot of it just cute, likeable, very saleable. I don't consider most of it serious.

JC: I'd like to talk about that, the business of what is charming and cute and goes over well here. That can happen anywhere, it's not just Portland. But you don't see it to the same extent in the east. I keep wondering if this is due to the huge size and

variety of museum collections back there. I personally see museums as visual libraries. You go to a particular museum because it's known for a certain kind of collection, of a certain period, perhaps, or certain place. To learn about painting, as we were saying, you really need to look at actual work. Of course, the museums of the West coast have a lot of good artwork. Maybe they are just too scattered in terms of distance.

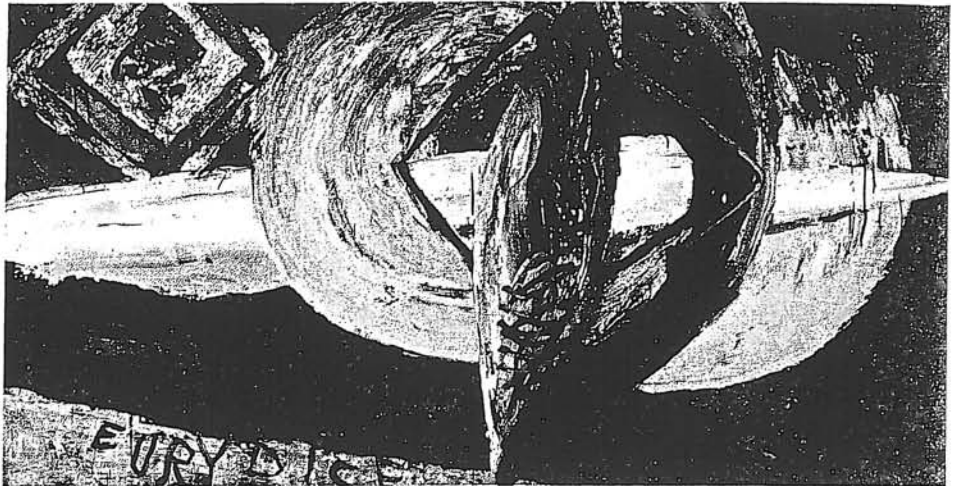
BH: The good ones are mostly far south of us.

JC: There is the new museum in Seattle.

BH. But the Henry Gallery, it seems to me, puts on the most interesting shows. I have heard more than one artist say the Henry is their favorite space to see new art or any art.

JC: Speaking of any art, let's speak of our art, which we actually haven't done.

LP: Okay, this is what I am trying to do. I am trying to make muscular, meaty paintings that are musical, that have something to do with structure and nature, and somehow with folk art. My bright colors and somewhat jazzy shapes relate to folk art in that they are immediately attractive on a certain level. But they are also very fleshy, even bloody. Still, the idea of folk art fascinates me, because it comes from the bedrock of people's interaction. Certain aspects of folk art feed into the way I feel about my own painting, which isn't the same thing but is related to it, full of juice and flesh.



Lucinda Parker, *Eurydice*, 1992, Acrylic on canvas, 48 x 96 inches Courtesy Laura Russo Gallery, Portland

JC: What about your color?

LP: Well, yeah, that flesh, those high-key colors, sometimes set your teeth on end. I like to use lots of yellow.

CG: Those paintings with the knots, what were those about?

LP: Well, I have been interested in a variety of interwoven imagery from different sources, Celtic work, African work, and so forth, and it has to do with protection. Someone would make a knot image and put it on his or her chest or shoe and be protected from the devil. I think that's what all painting is really for. There's a certain talismanic quality to certain images in folk art that are supposed to protect you, and everybody, God knows, needs protection. We need it now, psychologically. That's how I look at my own painting.

CG: I can't really talk about my work without involving process somewhat. I think it has to do with the fact that I paint the landscape. I take zillions of slides of landscapes; when I project or view those slides, they are naturally all green, maybe a little yellow, maybe a little gray, typical Northwest. So I have to reinvent these things. What I am looking for is really just the breakup in space that excites me, that general composition. I divide the space and it has to be what I feel is an exciting division of space, and I'll change anything to get that space. I don't think about what I'm going to do with the slides while I am taking them. It hits me when I walk into the studio. And as soon as I make the decision I never change it. The power and force of the imagery, the oddball space and color, and the edges of the picture, are all things I'm looking for.

BH: So some of that has to do with giving up formal things that reinforce your images.

CG: Exactly.

BH: I notice that, for instance, you use a lot of strong contrast of light and dark, and you like to throw big shadows.

CG: Yes, I like that drama.

BH: That method is partly dramatic but it's also partly just formal configuration, isn't it.

LP: Separating the planes. If you look at a photograph of a landscape the planes aren't separated; you have to do it. And every great landscape painter has figured out ways to do it.

CG: And that's also why I paint on black or dark grays, because I want to get those colors to pop. I find I can get that with that black space and make it work for me.

BH: You paint out of a dark brown.

CG: Dark brown paper or almost black.

BH: I tend to paint out of a transparent atmosphere. I look for a visual vitality hopefully created by the movement or the structure in the work. Although the subject matter may vary, it is usually abstract. So I tend to paint out of white, and although I love the idea of color and have worked with color in the past, I find more and more that I have been restricting color in my drawing. I do also always enjoy the drawing aspect.

CG: One of your strengths is that graphic aspect.

BH: Yeah, I try to stress that, and I also like the idea of inventing a whimsical kind of imagery, like Paul Klee or Saul Steinberg.

JC: I'm actually having trouble right now. I'm jumping into a painting that seems to have two different resolutions. There is quite a lot of use of black, but there is a section of the painting that uses rubber. So that takes me back to oil paint combined with mixed materials. I am going back to a painting that I made when I first got into oil, an 8-foot-long painting that is only 14 inches high. I am still very concerned with this idea of an extended line; I've carried the idea around in my head for a very long time. I deal with this extended horizontal because it reminds you in a sense of your relationship to the horizon. But my approach has nothing to do with depicting nature. My paintings are very concrete, very object-like, very specific and kind of blocky – in some ways quite formal, a little on the rigid side. I use a lot of black in the shape. I spend a lot of time with shape and finding shapes. I have continued with this use of a cross. It's cropped up in a lot of other people's work. It's interesting for me because of it being a kind of intersection; but I'm also concerned with it because of the spirituality connected to it. I don't want anything like a Christian cross. The crosses I make are always about the same size and blocky proportion. Most recently I have used them with numbers. When you grab onto something like this I guess the difficulty with it is whether you can continue making it energetic or whether it becomes dead at some point and you realize that it's only a device for you and you have to put it aside.

LP: As we were discussing before.

JC: But the mixed materials are coming back as a possibility for me. I have also had some curved wood forms built. I made a cardboard maquette after some of the forms that have already appeared in my work, and I had a carpenter make the forms from the maquette.

LP: Are you going to want to paint on them?

JC: Yes, I'll paint or use some sort of mixed materials on them.

At this particular moment I don't know what the image is going to be. I want something that's rather formal and memorable. A lot of the pieces aren't much bigger than 16 inches, and stand out about 2 inches from the wall. Some of them are units that go together. I have one painting I just started that's 4 inches tall and 8 feet long, and 2 inches from the wall. These are all wood.

LP: I always see those crosses in your paintings as being about the "red cross," that is, salvation. Not Christian salvation, but medical salvation. I sometimes think of it as the "green cross" which they have on the pharmacies in Europe.

JC: I love numbers and letters, and I have always picked stuff up off the street and discarded stuff, it always wanders into my studio and I never quite know how I'm going to use it, or how I am going to think about it. Actually, since about 1989, sculpture has affected my work almost more than painting has. While I love painting, I have never felt like a natural painter, in the sense of automatically picking up a brush.

LP: You don't make a lot of brush marks.

JC: I make paintings mostly by scraping and removing.

CG: I feel that about your work, too, Cindy. I mean, you are gouging out.

JC: Yes, but Cindy uses a brush.

LP: I do use a brush, but I also use a big spatula. Apropos of what affects you, you can always see a lot of things, and if you are open-minded you can discover that certain things will affect you more than others, no matter what style or medium you use. For example, travelling in Europe and discovering Romanesque sculpture has affected me much more than any painting. I was so astonished to discover the symmetry and liveliness of 12th-century Romanesque sculpture. Assisi has an old 13th-century church, and seeing it I thought to myself, if those guys can do that in stone, why the heck can't I do that in painting. I mean, it can cross different media and different traditions, and you can pick up on something that may well not be what you're doing. I don't want to carve stone, but I am sure impressed with it when I see it.

JC: I think for me the sculptural relation had a lot to do with the physicality I usually bring into my work. I am painting in a rather different way right now, but I have a feeling it won't stay that way. It will come back to becoming more and more physical. I am trying out a lot of things where I am using brushes, soft brushes; for me that feels very new and completely weird, and it gives me a much flatter, smoother surface. what happens when the illusion is removed, so that you don't have the physicality, was something that interested me. So I have this one painting kicking around the studio – I don't know if it will stay that way at all – that is much more of a flattened Renaissance surface space, you know, layers and layers of gesso and then very, very thin oil.

BH: You know, one thing none one of us does is comment or receive particular influence from the mass media.

LP: None of us has talked about what's in the newspapers or on TV. All of us read the paper, and we read articles in magazines and look at the TV and we're aware of what's going on, but none of us have talked about that.

BH: We've talked about landscape painters such as Burchfield and about Romanesque sculpture and about Giovanni Bellini, but by gum, we haven't talked about television. [Laughter]

LP: And in fact I feel a tremendous urge to protect myself. It's like the building of those dikes in the Midwest, against the flooding. I feel I have to build a dike against the media's intrusion. I just need not to have it be part of what I do in the studio, ever.

BH: I tend not to read newspapers so much either, and I certainly avoid television news. But I have been reading poetry more. As an antidote, perhaps.

LP: I do look at the newspaper. I look at news photographs a lot, actually, and I find them very helpful in teaching. When I teach basic drawing I think of the issues of volume and separation, of form against background, of perspective. There are wonderful things in the newspaper that have to do with those visual issues. You can contrast a photograph used in an ad with one of some refugees in Bosnia, for instance. But, as interesting as I find that, I would use it more for my teaching than in my own work.

BH: We can't quite escape the ironic, though, can we. There was a wonderful picture in the *New York Times*. It looked like it came right out of a George de la Tour painting, but it was of children in Bosnia, living by candlelight.■

TOP: Cie Goulet, *Fallcornfields*, 1993, Monoprint, 30 x 22 inches
Courtesy Davidson Galleries, Seattle
BOTTOM: Cie Goulet, *Wheatfields*, 1993, Monoprint, 50 x 38 1/2 inches
Courtesy Davidson Galleries, Seattle

1989 Masters Fellowships awarded

The Oregon Arts Commission is proud to announce its first Masters Fellowships awarded in the Visual Arts. The Masters Fellowship program was created last year to recognize outstanding artists who have achieved a high level of distinction in their artform, in their professional accomplishments, and in the maturity of their work. Awards alternate between the performing arts, media arts and literature in even-numbered years, and the visual and interdisciplinary arts in odd-numbered years. In 1988, the Commission awarded three Masters Fellowships to actor Wayne Ballantyne, choreographer Toni Pimble, and composer Vincent McDermott.

For a number of years the Oregon Arts Commission has gone outside of the state for its panel members. Each panel is chaired by a Commissioner and most work long days to come up with recommendations which go to the full Commission. The panelists are professionals who are well known in their fields and come to the process with their own brand of intelligence, openness, and sensitivity to the issues at hand. We are indebted to ***William McElroy****, Chair of the Design Department at the Cornish College of Art in Seattle; Montana textile artist* ***Dana Boussard****; ceramist* ***Jenny Lind*** *from New Mexico;* ***Dennis O'Leary****, Director of the Boise Museum of Art in Idaho;* ***Margery Aronson****, specialist in corporate collections in Seattle;* ***John Olbrantz****, Director of the Whatcom Museum of Art & History in Bellingham; interdisciplinary artist* ***Herb Levy*** *with the Seattle Art Museum;* ***Paul Berger****, photographer and professor of photography at the University of Washington; and* ***Miles Barth****, curator of photography at the Center of International Photography in New York City.*

Filmmaker ***Lourdes Portillo*** *of San Francisco reviewed the Film/Video grant applications. The panels were impressed with the hundreds of strong applications submitted this year and the amount of good, serious work being created in Oregon. They are taking with them a deeper understanding of our artists and the richness of their efforts.*

In addition to the $10,000 Masters Fellowships, the Commission awarded eight $3,000 Individual Artist Fellowships to assist with artists' professional growth. Writer Lois Allan has interviewed each of the recipients, and prepared the following profiles for OAC News.

Corinithian Tilt, Robert J. Hanson, Oil/canvas

ROBERT HANSON

Robert Hanson, painter, will make two trips to Italy through his Masters Fellowship, each trip with a specific study goal. In Venice and Milan, he will focus on the paintings of Giovanni Bellini, a 15th century Venetian noted for a quality of unifying light achieved through an almost imperceptible blending of color. Hanson, too, is a colorist of note, using it for dramatic force as well as for pure visual effects. For a number of years his palette was dominated by light colors with close values, resulting in paintings of delicacy and seeming weightlessness. In a 1988 show at the Elizabeth Leach Gallery in Portland, he introduced a new body of work in which bright, high contrast colors were interspliced with black. An abstract painter who loves drawing, he uses brushstrokes and markings to add texture and animation to the areas of color. He abhors a white canvas, he says, and always begins by applying an overall color that acts as an impetus for subsequent choices. Since the shapes that make up the compositions are invented rather than observed, the artist is free to work spontaneously, and the record of his process is carried in layering of colors. Although the content of Bellini's paintings is far different from his own, Hanson shares with him an innate response to color, and looks forward to observing firsthand the Renaissance master's application of it.

Baroque architecture may seem totally unrelated to Hanson's painting, but he thinks otherwise, and intends to visit a select group of 17th century buildings in Rome and Venice which illustrate the Baroque dramatic energy and classical form that he pursues in a contemporary painting idiom. As his work has moved toward a larger scale, he finds a parallel in the rhythm and grandeur of Baroque architectural design which defines its impressive drama. His interest in, as he ways, "the inside and outside," of his paintings also is related to architecture. It all adds up to "a muscularity that I like."

Since receiving an honors diploma from the Boston Museum School in 1963, Robert Hanson has developed a career in teaching as well as in painting. He has won many awards, including an OAC Individual Fellowship in 1986, and has been a member of the faculty at the Pacific Northwest College of Art since 1968. He is represented by the Traver/Sutton Gallery in Seattle and the Elizabeth Leach Gallery in Portland.