

Thomas Huber

Opening the Circle

By Carl Van Brunt

“...emptiness (is) the absence of a permanent entity.” -Thich Nhat Hanh

If you are looking for instant gratification, you are pausing in front of the wrong painting. Thomas Huber’s work sagely ignores the marketing strategies of the art fair art world. You can’t just “get it” and walk on. If, however, you have the time and inclination to allow your eyes to wander over the fecund and variegated surfaces of Huber’s work, there is much to uncover.

One thing is for sure, Huber is not telling you what to think. Rather, he’s gently inviting you to use your own eyes, mind, and heart to engage in a silent conversation. You may want to begin this dialogue by considering the many pairs of opposites referenced by the artist through his use of transfer techniques, collage, and recycling of friend’s drawings, diagrams and lists. A scrap of reproduced childlike Klee near a Klee-like child’s drawing; a patch of blue jean affixed to the surface of a painting reading to the eye like a tear in the picture plane; a sensitively drawn image of a pine cone dropped next to an appropriated 19th century scientific botanical; abstract markings made with ink dispersed by a turkey baster jostling with a photo of grapes. The imagery, the variety and texture of which is intriguing in itself, may lead you to consider dualities such as high art and low, representation and abstraction, flatness and the illusion of depth, beauty and ugliness, and many more. Huber’s uber goal is to help you get to a state of mind where it is possible to reconcile these apparent contradictions.

Consider abstraction vs. representation. Battle lines have been drawn across this great divide for over a century now. But Huber asks you nicely to drop this arbitrary division. If the question is “what’s real?” the answer is both/and/neither/nor. He confesses to being a “passive/aggressive trickster” who is pranking you into the realization that a baster splotched ink pattern is perhaps more real than a photo of fruit. After all the splotch is really there, the grapes are not. Beyond this is an intimation of a more profound awakening. Both the splotch and the grapes are defined by interconnectedness, or in

Buddhist terms both are “empty” of permanent separate reality. You want your grapes, you’ve got to deal with the splotch and visa versa.

If this inclusive point of view, this refusal to use conceptualization to slice and dice reality, reminds you of the late, great composer John Cage, you are on the right track.

Cage famously included pots and pans and countless other ordinary objects in his instrumentation for his ground breaking music. His goal was to liberate music from all preconceptions. Recently Huber read a book about Cage by critic Kay Larson and discovered many resonances with things he himself has been doing for several years. This lead to the formation of a performance group called “decomposer” and the creation of a work entitled “Many Centers One Song,” performed outdoors this past summer by a large group of musicians and non-musicians, young and old. Performing on real instruments, toys and such non-traditional instruments as rocks, bongos filled with nuts and bolts, and a vuvuzela, the group, arranged in a circle, started playing one note in imperfect unison and then walked outwards with instructions to keep playing whatever they wished with whomever they wished. The other instruction was that the musicians listen to one another. One observer noted that “Many Centers One Song” was essentially a sculptural version of one of Huber’s wall pieces.

Huber’s paintings and collages are free flowing records of open creative process accumulating imagery over time. He relates this to natural processes such as germination or on the super macro scale, the cosmos bubbling off new universes. The artist’s part of this process ends when a tenuous system of visual weights and balances is achieved across the surface of his work. The observer then continues where the artist left off, putting things and meanings together in new and unexpected ways. The entire process could be called a meeting of the minds, not a Vulcan Mind Meld, but rather a convocation in the realm of openness. Here again Huber departs from the prevailing tendency in art, media and politics to polarize. In the continuum linking apparent polarities, Huber has found a fruitful common ground. He has extended you an open invitation to join him there.