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Many years ago, I was struck by a quote by the English Romantic poet, William Wordsworth. He said of poetry - that it is "emotion recollected in tranquility."

What Wordsworth said of poetry may also be applied to visual art. I find for example that over the days, the weeks, often times the months taken to complete a single composition, the process of rendering a drawing from photographs I have taken on site becomes a sort of extended moment of memory where, to borrow his words, in the "tranquility" of my studio, "emotion(s) recollected" from time spent on that location inform development of the piece from start to finish. The finished work, itself, regardless of composition, thus seeks to communicate an emotion once felt, as so recollected in tranquility.

The absence of the human presence in a great majority of my charcoals is significant to achieving my aim of creating an atmosphere of contemplative quiet, of stillness via settings where the viewer may experience, in a personal way, a quiet moment to reflect on life; by implying but not closing any specific narrative in a composition, the viewer is invited to "enter into" the space to create their own. The sense of quiet suggested by an empty lot somewhere in Manhattan's lower east side, as portrayed in the drawing *Space in the Lower East Side, Manhattan*, or the silence "felt" within a dark tunnel devoid of the thunder of rush-hour traffic, as in *Final Approach, Manhattan*: each of these may for example, to some, evoke stillness of an unsettling quality. Now contrast these with, for example, the peaceful quiet of a landscape such as depicted in the charcoal *Ohio Oil, March*, where the viewer may perhaps experience stillness of a pleasant nature. Each of these examples in its own way directs the viewer, if they are so inclined, to experience different aspects of the sometimes hidden stillness of life.

The first of the two meanings of "still life," which I see signified by the charcoal drawing titled, *Still Life, Lower Manhattan* (2019), is that "still life" is traditionally thought of as the rendering of an inanimate, commonplace object: in this example, a building.

The second meaning which may be implied by the expression "still life" is, in my mind, much more specific to this exhibition, *Stillness of Life*. In this case, the building becomes a metaphor for life itself. On the very spot on the map where – in one's recent memory – there was complete destruction of life, there is today a new tower proclaiming to the world not with words, but by its quiet, monumental presence: "I am here; there is still life in this space."

It was in these two thoughts of "still life" that I arrived at the title of this drawing.

My recent drawing, titled *Feed Mill, Swine Creek Basin* (2021), follows a gradually changing style in my work that began around the time that *Still Life, Lower Manhattan* was executed. Over the last few years, regarding this stylistic change, while still adhering (to a significant degree) to what is commonly thought of as realism in art, I find myself – for lack of a better way of expressing it – feeling more freedom in, "bending," or distorting somewhat the traditional meaning of realism in art. I am feeling the freedom to create somewhat abstract, unexpected juxtapositions and/or orientations of elements in a composition; that is, not to work in strictly realistic or non-representational styles, but somewhere in between.

So, for example, in *Still Life, Lower Manhattan*, this building has been set against a dark gray, almost black sky, and yet the central tower – as well as buildings tilted off-vertical on either side of it – are lit, as if artificially, in an artist's studio for execution of a piece in still life. In the same way, the mill structures in *Feed Mill, Swine Creek Basin* have been front lit, as if "spot lighted," center-scene, on a stage of snow tracked asphalt. This lighting quickly fades into darkness around the left and right sides of the structures, only to intensify anew at the distant horizon. Contrast what I'm referring to here as a gradually changing, more abstract stylistic tendency in the work, with my earlier drawings of cityscapes and landscapes. Those earlier works are rendered in a more strictly realistic style that one would expect to see in a natural setting, under natural lighting.

It's not easy for me to put a finger on exactly what this gradual shift in style signifies for me, where it comes from, why it occurs now in my life. It seems it must have at least something to do with the passing of time, and the on-going, dynamic intercourse between the universe inside and outside of ourselves as we grow older. An artist will (may?) eventually become so used to seeing, and drawing, the familiar orientation of something vertical – say a skyscraper – that their imagination may eventually begin to feel a sense of curiosity, and the freedom to risk an urge to distort what's familiar: i.e., "the vertical."

– Anthony Mitri
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