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Senior Integrative Project Thesis

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A Moon with a View: A Collection of Intaglio Prints and Drawings

Pierre Bonnard's mastery of color and of the effects of light makes his scenes of daily life some of the best examples of the richness and meaning there is in the everyday. The everyday is what we know best, and, the way I see it, this doesn't make it inconsequential. In fact, it is these unremarkable moments of life that add up and play a huge role in shaping us. At the very least, this imagery is so ingrained that it is especially resonant when we confront it in works of art. Bonnard's works portray mainly domestic interiors, portraits of friends and family, and accessible daily life activities like eating breakfast. It is Bonnard's departure from realism and focus on color and rearrangement of space that makes his works more emotionally realistic. His compositions have little logical sense of space, but this actually allows Bonnard to capture their essential qualities. Bonnard's quick, loose brushwork and layered strokes of color create scenes that come alive, not with dynamism, but with a richness of spirit.

Even a Bonnard without any depicted figures has a strong animate presence. The object is not to depict the superficial qualities of the figures and the place, but the mood and spirit of those players. Bonnard proves that a serious sense of preciousness and spirituality can be achieved from accessible subject matter. I am drawn to Bonnard primarily for his success in creating pictures inspired by his personal life and for his exceptional translation of the intangible concept of spirituality especially in what could be perceived as ordinary subjects.



Pierre Bonnard. *Dining Room Overlooking the Garden (The Breakfast Room)*, 1930-31. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

I am trying to capture a similar sense of spirituality in my Integrative Project. My two sources of inspiration are the moon and the power of memories. The moon is part of our everyday landscape yet it transcends the everyday with its terrific presence, much like the memories we carry: powerful and present, yet untouchable and distant. Bonnard supremely captured this strange simultaneous stillness and animation. I find this quality to be particularly applicable to the way our memories behave and, even more strangely, to the ever-present moon. The moon and the power of memory have always inspired me, but only after creating images in both veins did I see their connection and continue to reflect on it.

Indirectly, most of my subjects are members of my family. I chose the photographs that I was drawn to and really wanted to work from. It is no coincidence that my instincts were to choose images of my mother and father, and brother and sister, whose faces obviously stir a lot

of feelings and associations. While this same personal chord will not be struck in the viewer, I hope that the emotion it took to create the works will resonate.

For example, one piece depicts my mother and father with a profile-view of my mother repeated three times below. This piece kind of turned into a tribute to my mother. She is only half engaged in their conversation, and, from being close to their story, I see a lot of energy between them, but she is still light, both in color and in spirit; she looks beyond with positivity. Below, her profile is repeated, this time in the opposite direction. She is a huge role model to me, and in these portraits I wanted to capture her beauty, in which I also see strength, patience, and humility.



This piece is a good example of translating personal attachment to something that will hopefully be evocative to a wider audience. Etching is a useful tool in trying to represent the quality of memory imagery because it allows for repetition, which is just one of the ways our brain distorts memories. The arrangement of smaller images on the larger sheet of white paper

also resembles the way our mind brackets certain moments of a memory into a charged moment of time. The graphic quality of the geometric shapes against the white paper allows for a contrast against the gestural, fuzzy marks of the etching.

The rest of the images have a much more dream-like quality that I wanted to achieve, not only for the association of the floating feeling both the moon and our memories have, but mostly because I think it is the only way I could have captured the beauty of the moon: to flatten it and exaggerate its scale and surface. Medieval Italian panel painting flattens representational imagery to achieve extraordinarily emotional works. The religious subject matter is, to me, only a consequence of what inspires me about work from this period. More broadly, these paintings depict universally relevant stories of human emotion and behavior. Somehow the simplified aesthetic that flattens figures almost to cartoonish proportions and uses bright color and decorative pattern achieves a heightened emotion and importance.

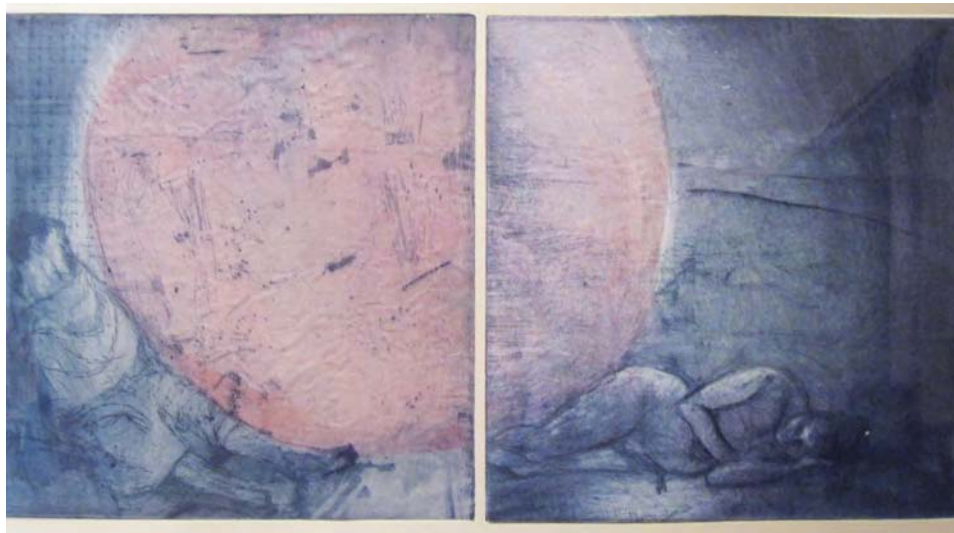


Fra Angelico, *Annunciation of the Virgin*, 1436, San Marco, Florence.



Simone Martini, *St. Martin Sharing his Mantle with a Poor*, 1322-26, Church of San Francesco, Assisi.

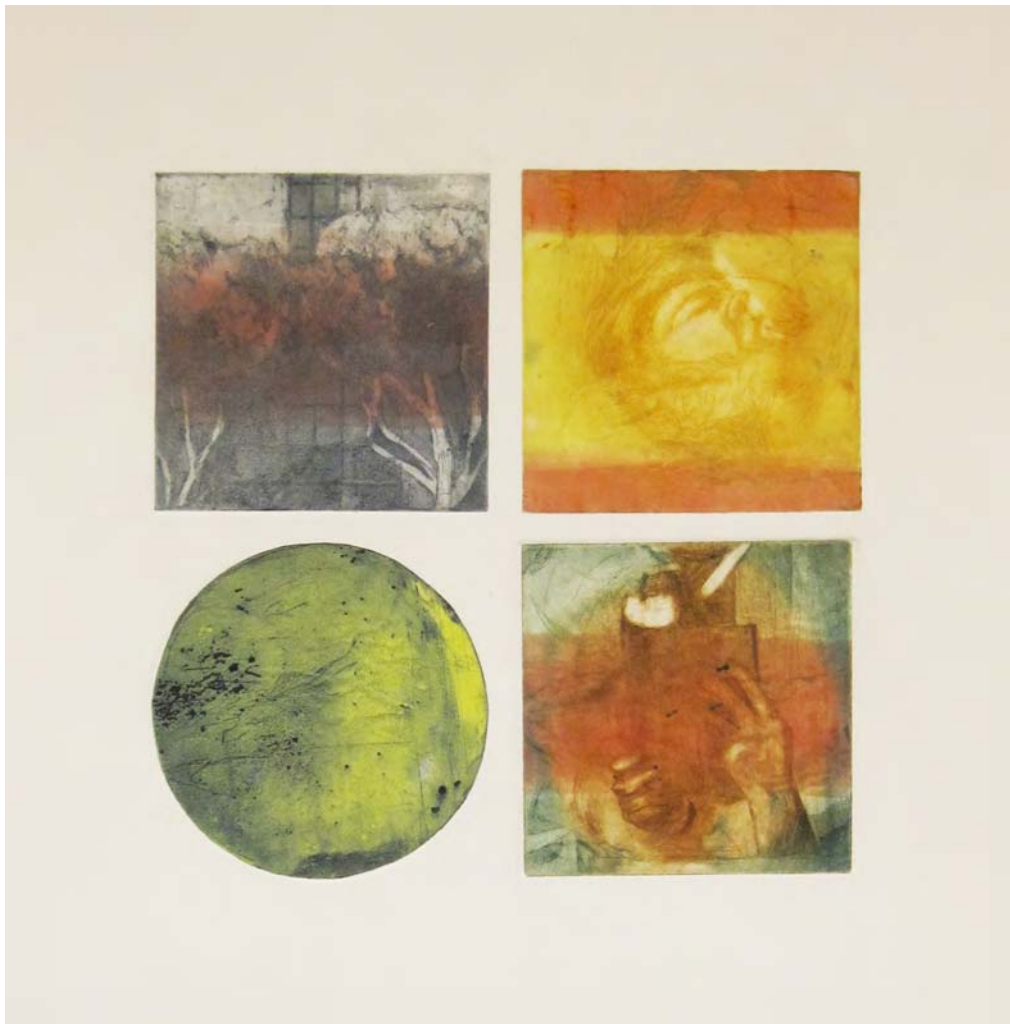
I see some of these characteristics especially in my pieces that depict the moon. My drawing is much less detailed and refined than the medieval examples, but I see similarities my use of color and the flattening and bracketing of space. There is a reverence in these works (only in part due to its religious content) that I wanted to come through in my own.



The figures in this piece of the giant pink moon (taken from photographs of my brother and sister) are not central to the image and mostly serve to accent and highlight the moon as the

subject. Their peaceful, heavy, thoughtful live bodies embody the fulfillment I get from the moon. Again, etching, and, in this case, collage serve to create the layered rice paper that makes the pink moon. The extra fuzzy marks that result from the biting of the plate, adds to the mystical atmosphere of the moon.

The attention to design and geometry in medieval painting became really important in my own work. Repetition worked in the following piece not only in the square shape of the three plates, but in the horizontal pink that runs through each, which is then offset and highlighted by the standalone glowing moon.



The rigidity of the circle, squares and rectangles on the clean white paper, helped achieve a frozen narrative quality that recalls an action of the past. This characteristic is a big part of

medieval works; the way an altarpiece is broken up into windows, each depicting a different story. This piece brings together the concept of the moon and of memory. Both are depicted and color, composition, and treatment of the marks recalls their relationship of shared radiance and quiet authority. Here the moon stands for itself, but it is also a metaphorical moon, out of context (unlike the pink moon in the piece with the two sleeping figures). It stands for a uniting powerful circle that connects everyone. It is as present and distant as the square snapshots of memory, but stands out by breaking the pattern with its circular shape.

This piece was important in distancing the concept of the moon from the moon itself. I didn't want all of the pieces to include the moon, and I didn't want all the representations of the moon to be literal and in context. This idea comes up again in my final print piece, which depicts a repeated square portrait of a young boy. This boy is the only figure who is a stranger to me. I spotted him among a crowd in front of a church on a Sunday morning in Volterra on a trip to Italy. Ever since taking the photo, his face has always stood out. The standout coincidence here is the lasting impression that this photo had on me and my love for the medieval Italian aesthetic previously mentioned that was founded on this first trip.

The fact that his portrait is repeated shows that it is the representation of him, not actually the boy himself. It is in this same way that the moon is not the moon, but the feeling and meaning of the moon.



Over the course of this project, his face has come to represent a parallel to the moon and, in turn, a kind of representation of myself. I see his intense stare not as a negatively serious thing, but a reverently serious thing acknowledging how big things are. The moon watches over everything and is a kind of past, present, and future. In our own lives, our memories form our present identities and inform the way we see the future. This is how I can best explain the moon as a metaphor for a view into the past.

I hope that my prints are literally as vivid as memories and the moon. This yearlong project brought together my love for the human figure and the moon through the direct quality of drawing and limitless richness of color. And while these images are fueled from my own everyday, the moon links us all and is a window through which I see myself.