

Dear Pat,

You came upon me carving some kind of little figure out of wood and you said, "Why don't you make something for me?"

I asked you what you wanted, and you said, "A box."

"What for?"

"To put things in."

"What things?"

"Whatever you have," you said.

Well, here's your box. Nearly everything I have is in it, and it is not full. Pain and excitement are in it, and feeling good ^{or} ~~of~~ bad and evil thoughts and good thoughts—the pleasure of design and some despair and the indescribable joy of creation.

And on top of these are all the gratitude and love I have for you.

And still the box is not full.

JOHN

John Steinbeck from East of Eden, the introduction

When John Steinbeck wrote the letter that serves as an introduction to his book, East of Eden, I believe that he was talking about his book as a container for all of the things that he knew and felt until that time. After reading the journal that he kept as he wrote the book, I am convinced that these were the things that he felt he had included.

But, almost as a postscript, Steinbeck adds that his box is still not full. He leaves himself room to grow and learn more and to write more about the human emotion as he discovered it. He included what he did know and understand of the world, but he knew that he did not understand everything and that all of his decisions had not been made.

This paper is concerned with my work, what I know about it, the problems I had and the decisions I made in making the work. Steinbeck, using his narrative, drew pictures with his words. I believe that I, using pictures, have made narratives with my marks. It was important for Steinbeck to choose the right words, characters and setting to make his story work. I believe that many of his choices were very logical; some were not. Some were made because he intuitively knew people, places and the world in which he lived. I intend to explore some of the choices I made in making my pictures. There are decisions I have made about which I am aware and about which I feel strongly; there are some about which I know little.

I choose to use small objects - picture hangers, pull-tabs, garter snaps, clothes pins, etc. - as reference for my pictures because of their functional and unified structure. I choose these particular objects over many others because of their combination of unified and intriguing shapes. Those shapes and the objects they make invite me personally to look at them, touch them, manipulate them physically and finally to draw pictures of them. These objects can also perform some kind of action when their function is performed. Those actions provide material for a pictorial narrative and if expanded, material for a fanciful narrative.

I do choose these objects because they are small and intimate, but just why I enjoy these shapes and combinations of shapes, I am not sure. I can handle the objects, understand their structure and function, and claim them as physically mine without disturbing any one else's values or ideas. They are inherently simple, and I do not have to get involved with complexities that overwhelm me. Working with the human figure, making hard-edge compositions, drawing still-lives, depending on the energy of abstract-expressionism, the magnitude of the landscape, and social commentary; all of these things in a way become too complex for me. I did not understand these things; I could not handle them any better than they had been done; and I could not find enough or enjoy them enough to make them valuable for me. Thus, I applied what I did know and understand of these things to the objects that I could handle and could enjoy and started to use that as a basis for my pictures. Only if I know and understand what I am doing or at least feel that it is something that I can handle, can I find value in the pictures I produce. I feel that I know enough to be able to talk about these small objects in the visual language of my work.

The ideas that are the narrative for my pictures deal with actions or series of actions of the objects. The individual actions of the objects are real; the combinations of actions and the narrative that results is a fantasy. All of the actions are possible but not probable in their combination and specific relationships. I choose to make a narrative

about the objects. Only by doing so am I able to realize part of the life that exists in these objects and recognize it as an element that drew me to them in the first place. The actions that they perform is another thing, real or fanciful, that I enjoy, understand and can control as a valid statement in my work.

By choosing to make a narrative about the actions of the objects, I provide the viewer with information that he can recognize and understand. My choice of specific actions or a specific narrative is not a completely conscious one. I do not carefully consider actions and purposes in terms of what they will do to the viewer. The whole process of choice is almost purely spontaneous, relying mainly on actions and ideas that I find inviting and enjoyable. From the point at which the picture is completed, it is the viewer's choice as to what he sees or wants to see. I will not state that a pull-tab is alive or that it dies; nor can I say that the objects have human aspects or any other specific values. The objects are what they are, and their actions are evident; if I said that they or my pictures were any more than that, I would be initiating dishonest speculation. These objects are presented in an environment of my choosing, in an attitude of my choosing and by a method of my choosing. The choice of ideas are impulsive visual choices and only become describable after the pictures are finished.

Within the context of each work, I explore and develop attitudes about the objects and their relationship to the picture as a whole. This produces ideas that will be used and explored in later pictures. These ideas form a line that runs through all of my pictures, unites them and causes each to be a foundation for the ones that follow it. This group of works began with the rendering of an object; now, the pictures are a narrative using objects engaged in actions with other objects and those actions and objects working in and related to an environment that I constructed for them.

I do choose to elaborate and develop forms within the objects I use. As I pointed out above, the fact that I do this has no specific editorial purpose. I do it intuitively; I do it because the forms suggest it, and the new forms that I can create from the old ones appeal to me. Steinbeck's indescribable joy of creation applies here.

I am very aware of light when I make my pictures. I feel that it is an element that gives the objects much of the animation that made them appealing to me. There are two choices I make regarding light in my pictures. The first is a very mathematical choosing of a light direction and then application of this direction to the objects. This, of course, creates shadows that serve to dramatize and intensify the objects and their relationship to the rest of the composition. My second choice of light is a subconscious one. Some of the objects or part of the ground seems to glow or radiate light sometime during the process of making the picture. The choice I make is simply one of leaving it in. I intuitively let this kind of light happen in the first place and then logically choose to leave all of it or part of it in the picture. An after the fact speculation is that there is an implication that a light source has force or a life of its own.

Drawing is the medium that I depend on; it forms the basis for all of my work, and it is predominant throughout the pictures. However, I have drawn on lithographs and screenprints, utilizing the flat color as ground and as stable shapes to support the drawn images. I have used spray paint for the same reason. Color used by these methods plus the choice of using colored pencils also aids me in attaining the extra

sophistication of an expanded value range. But, I usually choose subtle warm, cool color relationships because of the strength that they will give my pictures without the color overpowering the images. I use what is necessary for me to use to get the pictures I want. The choices are not so premediated as they could be; it just occurs to me that something might work and with control, it usually does.

The biggest and most important choice I have made for all of my work is to draw. Simply, I truly enjoy making marks with a sharp pencil. I like putting a small mark down on a piece of paper and then building it slowly, carefully until it becomes something. The something in this case is one of the objects that I like, containing the shapes I like. I can draw light on these objects, make them three dimensional, make them take a definite place in space and fill that space with an environment for the objects. I can find action in the objects. I can touch all of their surfaces, and I can penetrate those surfaces and polish them to make them do just what I want them to do. I can thus make a little world and people it with things that I enjoy and understand. I can build a picture the way a building is built; this time I can make sure that it is built well. In the end, I have a picture that is mine, and one that I can have faith in because I understand its parts. I like what it contains, and I have made and controlled it completely. Again, the indescribable joy of creation is mine.

If I constructed my pictures any other way than I do, I would not be honest with myself. As I have stated, in the past I have approached picture-making with many different methods, and something was never quite right. Before, I was always acting or making pictures by copying styles. Now, my careful, detailed approach for my pictures is a way that I can understand and a way about which I can feel honest.

I have chosen to make some lithographs for two reasons. The first is that I can invest the same amount of time in the picture drawn for a lithograph, but the result is multiple images. The second reason is that there is an added richness that can only be gotten by the hand printing process of pushing the ink into the paper. Drawing with pencil on paper gives me one kind of mark and one kind of picture. If I were to try to draw the same way with ink on paper, I would never be able to get the same kind of mark or the same kind of feeling. It would be too heavy and too uncontrolled for me. However, when I make a drawing on a lithograph plate and then print it, I attain the best of the two media. I get the rich textures and marks of the pencil on paper plus the inherent richness of the printing ink pushed into the paper.

The lithographs I have printed are black on white or buff-colored paper. I chose to print in black because the entire drawing is done in black crayon on the plate. When making a drawing on paper, I can use different colors of pencil and spray paint, therefore using the subtle and more sophisticated value range that color will give me. But, when I do so, I can see the entire structure at all stages of the development until the picture is finished. When making a lithograph, I am drawing entirely in black crayon, and I adjust everything to its value scale. Even though the plate, when finished, could be printed in any color, I have found that I am most satisfied when it is printed in black. I have not discarded color printing, but at the present it seems that since the drawings are conceived in black marks, they should be printed in black marks. My decision to print some of the lithographs on buff-colored paper is possible proof of my reasons for printing in black. The drawings were done in black crayon on a gray plate; I adjusted all of my value range to those two constants. When printing

began, it sometimes became obvious to me that the print would look much better if printed on a paper that approached the value of the original gray of the lithograph plate.

All of the elements I have talked about are choices that I have made and things I know something about in my work. These decisions served me to solve some of the problems I faced in the process of making my pictures using picture-hangers, pull-tabs, garter snaps, clothes pins, etc. as reference. These are the things I could honestly explore verbally. If I tried to explain them any further, I would be speculating and exploring things I should be exploring in future pictures.

In conclusion, I feel better and more satisfied with the work I am doing than I have ever felt before. I face a multitude of choices regarding picturemaking. My pictures are a product of making specific decisions from that multitude of choices. I work the way I want to work, I draw what I want to draw and I feel there is value in the satisfaction I receive in doing it. I have filtered out all I can understand and handle from all that is available to me. Hopefully, using this work as a foundation, I will be able to add much more to what I can handle. To paraphrase Steinbeck, nearly everything I have as mine is in these pictures, and still they are not full.