

Dare to be different

MIXTURE MAGAZINE

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Mitch Glassman



Written by mixture
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Mixture Magazine interview with Mitch Glassman



Photography by Jaymes Leavitt

Mitch Glassman

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Art With A purpose

Written By Gohar Khalyatan Photographs by Jaymes Leavitt



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Boston MA:

MM: Beginning on the clearest note, can you give us an overview of your work? What influences do you incorporate into your artistic mix?

MG: The most often articulated aspect of my work is the evolved mark-making. The relationship of opposites as best explored in the relationship of the measured line to the organic line (the rational and that which is beyond rational) has given birth to a script which reflects both text and rhythm. I've coined this script marcography.

Initially, the marcography emerged from a process of extensive drawing; an internalized process of dialoguing within a universe of "absolute opposite", as I understood it. This process at first gave way to images dominated by color, random forms and line. However, as the process and dialogue continued the line (marks) became dominant. I recognized that for me the resolution to the 'problem' of opposites was discovered in a purely abstracted script. A preconstructed language which reconciled the relationship of that which is understood in algorithms and that which is not; quantum mechanics and consciousness.



The (notion of) understanding poetry and music has been a springboard to advance my problem solving. During my time studying and traveling in China, I began reading 11th century Tzu poetry. The notion that metaphor and rhythm informed in the abstract impacted the nature of my work. When I returned from China (1998) and as a part of my resolve to face the challenge of the reconciliation of the perceived opposition of East/West culture, I also began to read Ancient Hebrew poetry and the Bible.

More recently (2005-07), I've drawn heavily from the work of Samuel Beckett (pun intended); and the music of Steven Reich, Phillip Glass and John Adams. Their aesthetic moves beyond the restrictions of minimalism, as I see it, to evoke a humanist dialogue, not unlike my evolving marcography.

MM: So this piece, which you say tells the story of your style, what is it called?

MG: I've given this piece that I completed in 1999-00 the title 'Repetition and Difference, the montage'. This term is borrowed from the title of works by French philosopher Gilles Deleuze. The title could be reduced to meaning that 'everything is always changing, but some thing stays the same.' My work has taken me to deconstructionist philosophy, ancient texts, minimalist and classic compositions and the theories of mind and consciousness...It seems doors keep opening and I keep walking thru them.

MM: Do you look at other artwork in the mix of influence?

MG: I look at classical art. My favorite place in Boston is The Isabella Gardner where I'm very happy to be in the company of Rembrandt. In New York it's the Metropolitan and in Venice it the Scuola Grande di San Rocco, the Tintoretto's and The Church of San Sebastian, the Veronese... In a visit to Haifa, I was moved by some wonderful works by some young contemporary Palestinian artists. The artwork I experienced in Tibet and China has been a powerful influence. Having said all this, I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the authentic richness of children's art. That is an important part of the mix.

MM: Do you have any interesting life anecdotes?

MG: I'm often asked when or how my interest in 'opposites' began. I remember as if it were yesterday, when I was eight or nine years old sitting on the shore near my house, watching the tide rise and the water splashing against this very large rock.. boulder. The brutal concrete nature of the rock and the fluid rhythm of the water...I just needed to understand their intrinsic difference. The perfect metaphor? I guess it's all about process and dialogue, uh? Then the tide goes out and the rock remains...



MM: What, in the most personal sense, is the highlight of your career?

MG: Probably my experience in Israel and the Palestinian territories in 2001. During the rise of the Intifada in Israel, I was compelled to see if there was anything I could do with my work to reconcile the differences, not that I was expecting to save the world. I used the internet to contact Palestinians and Israelis who were organizing for similar efforts. My intent was to lead workshops with mixed groups of Israeli and Palestinians in experiencing collaborative drawings. Each group was to consist of about eight people working around a table on a single large surface. The collaborative process requires each participant to engage in a dialogue by taking timed turns around the group making marks; each mark making process was in response to the previous participant's marks. Out of this process a unified field of marks evolves almost in the image of an abstract oriental carpet. Each participant loses their individual identity in producing an extraordinary image of a unified field. I've participated in similar workshop in diversified groups in the U.S. with amazing eye opening results for the participants.

This was just the idea I had presented to the people I contacted. Soon, I got an invitation to the Center of Reconciliation and Mediation in Ramalla and a similar group in Haifa. But the week I was to go, suicide bombings became daily devastations. I got emails from both parties saying that running this workshop would be impossible and that no one would show up, but I went anyway. This is the very approach I take in my art process, going one step at a time without knowing what the outcome will be, yet being sure that it is the correct thing I am doing at that moment.

After arriving in Israel and in a coffee shop in Jerusalem, a young woman came in and we somehow started to chat. She was an Israeli of European descent who had migrated there from Germany. She was interested as to what I was doing there, since I was the only American there in this time of conflict. I began explaining to her the same things which I just explained to you and she insisted that she introduce me to some of her artist and poet friends who would be inspired by what I'm doing. She was the first cellist in the Jerusalem Symphony. This was the beginning of an incredible journey for me. I met these people after the symphony, and through them I was meeting other artists, poets, and writers. I got in touch with this one man named Ali Qlibo. Initially he said that he did not have time for me but he could see me if I met him in a coffee shop in the west bank. So I found my way to the coffee shop and sat there, reading my book on Deleuze. When it was about nine-o'clock at night (an hour after our arranged meeting) Ali Qlibo walked in. When he saw what I was reading he said "You're reading Deleuze! That's my man!!". What was supposed to be a 10 minute conversation turned into a three hour meeting. This fellow was no light weight. He had a PhD in Anthropology and was teaching at Al Qud University in East Jerusalem. He was also a painter and filmmaker. As a matter of fact, he had just completed a film with a grant by the French Government that was premiering that week. We became good friends. He introduced me to a group of Palestinian musicians who welcomed me into their homes.. At this meeting as in all my others I spoke about my plan for collaborative drawing and the nature of process and dialogue and the resolution of opposites in mark making. At the end of a month long journey in the territories it became clear that my meetings had become the dialogue and the process. In a fashion, I was the blank sheet of paper. This reinforced my concept of Marcography and a notion of universalism. I carried with me examples of my work and each and every conversant felt they understood it and 'read' in it something personal..

MM: Do you think that you might be creating your own language through art?

MG: The marcography is textual and gestural. In as much as language conveys ideas, it is not language.

However, it does evoke poetic meaning. One might say that it is driven by emotion and charged with reason or driven by reason and charged with emotion...

Poetic and musical.

MM: What do you find to be the most gratifying about your work?

MG: When people view the work and engage in their own dialogue. And because the dialogue consistently changes, the work never dies...

MM: To end on a good note, do you have any plans for a new exhibition?

MG: I do. It revolves around these six pieces (eventually 12) I've been working on. Just as I mentioned that I refer to ancient texts in my work, these pieces are influenced by the Journal of Solomon, which by tradition is the foundation of ecclesiastics. This is said to be the earliest written document on the relationship of science and belief, so it again ties in with working with opposites and things which are beyond our understanding.



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