

A Conversation with Daniel Stepp

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DANIEL STEPP: PAINTINGS AND DRAWINGS

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Daniel Stepp received his MFA in Painting from the New York Academy of Art where he studied with Eric

Fischl, Vincent Desiderio, and Alfred Leslie. He earned his BFA in Design from the University of Florida. Stepp worked as a newspaper illustrator, designer and art director while doing commissioned portrait, landscape, and mural paintings. Currently, he is Visiting Assistant Professor of Art at the University of Florida in Gainesville. His works have been exhibited in numerous exhibitions in Florida, New York, Alabama, and Canada.

Stepp states the following on his narrative paintings:

"My work could be described as American genre. Subjects that I explore are: tools and technology, sex roles in labor, corporate branding, initiation, ritual, and the transference of myth and archetype onto genre activities. I am intrigued by the paradox and incongruity of a contrived culture imprinted onto evolved, long-standing traditions. What interests me is the horror of the mundane, the disassociation of humans from the biophysical environment, and consequently an effort to replace or transform nature. Through the subversion of seemingly traditional subjects and approach to painting, I invite conflict to the viewer. I strive to create images that are visually provocative and lead to investigation. In the same way you might stare at clouds or plaster on a wall and begin to "see" images, I want people to invent a narrative or story about the picture. I invite a free association that will lead viewers to a unique understanding of the image, fermented by their own identity."



Daniel Stepp

Paul Karabinis: Tell me a little about yourself - your educational background and interest in art.

Daniel Stepp: I studied Graphic Design, worked as a designer, and hated it. I wanted to pursue painting so I moved to New York City and went to the Graduate School of Figurative Art (New York Academy of Art), where I studied with Eric Fischl and Vincent Desiderio. At the time, Alfred Leslie and Jack Beal were also there - artists in the American realist school. In 1996 I left New York and moved back to Gainesville. I am currently a Visiting Assis-

tant Professor at the University of Florida where I teach painting and drawing.

Through Fischl and Desiderio I began thinking about moving figurative imagery into narrative imagery. Not everything I do is narrative; I do a lot of straight-ahead painting - portraits, still lifes. I do the smaller stuff to get a sense of completion as the bigger, narrative pieces take several months. I'd describe them as open narratives that invite some viewer participation. I'm putting certain things there, but I want the paintings to become interactive - where the viewer will establish roles and motives for the characters. Hopefully the viewer can create a connection between their own life and the painting. Maybe it can cause introspection because of the familiarity of the subject.

PK: Many of your works seem to be domestic dramas. I can identify with these scenes, yet as narratives they are a bit ambiguous. How do you come up with these scenarios; and what fascinates you about such essentially mundane subject matter?

DS: What seems mundane in life is the surface of things but underneath is a lot activity, abnormality, history,

myth, and secondary action. That's what fascinates me. It has a lot to do with expectation and result. Anytime a work of art delivers a different possibility than what is anticipated, it jars the viewer in some way. A good example of this is the *Hermaphrodite* sculpture in the Louvre (Roman copy after a Hellenistic original from the 2nd century BCE). When you walk in, you think you're seeing the backside of a beautiful woman; but when you get around to the front you get something a bit different. So I try to present seemingly ordinary events that hopefully deliver something outside of the original expectation.



Lawn, 2002, oil on canvas, 32" x 55.1/2"

One strategy is to project myth and archetype onto genre activities. A lot of times it may be a biblical event or an event from art history or both. The painting, *Lawn*, for example, is based on Masaccio's *Expulsion from Paradise* [1426-27]. The painting started with this kind of religious - art historical image base in my mind. Once the image starts developing, it moves away from that - but it's the impetus of the picture. I've flipped Masaccio's figure [Adam] and put his hands on the lawn mower. I see the figures as Adam and Eve - archetypally - after the Fall. Off to the right would be the metaphorical Garden [of Eden]; but this is suburbia with cookie-cutter houses - mankind's attempt to tame or reshape nature. I was after the conflict between the natural world and the created world - civilization. The lawn mower represents technology - this mythology that all you have to do is get the right new machine and your life's going to be great. In most of my paintings there is some sort of technology that becomes an artifact [of this notion]. A vacuum cleaner, an exercise bike, a cell phone, etc...

Art history provides us with a visual vocabulary that is part of the whole language of painting; I find it interesting to use a "syntax," if you will, that people are familiar with. Even if it isn't directly apparent, people will make a connection. I often borrow poses, gestures, or themes that are in our memory.

PK: I think many who look at these works will have some familiarity with the settings and little domestic moments you present. The settings seem perfectly frozen and there is a tension in them that is subtle and ambiguous. This tension seems to be the result of a disassociation between the figures. They're in close proximity to one-another, but there's a psychological gap between them...

DS: It's something that I took from [Edward] Hopper. I just look at domestic environments and think about dysfunction and how to make it fit into a single image....The detachment and isolation you are talking about is from the relationship to the *machine*. Technology creates an intimacy barrier between the figures [in the paintings].... Gloves,

safety goggles, sunglasses, dust masks - they all exhibit caution of the world or perhaps even caution of our "messiah" (technology) and act to inhibit an interaction with the natural world or interpersonal relationships...What congealed that idea for me was reading the work of Erich Fromm. He talks a lot about

loss of freedom through several forces in society, particularly automation, conformity, and authoritarianism. He had this idea that people working in an industrialized work force are always in a hierarchy of power. In other words, everyone has a boss above them and there are levels of dominance and submission that occur in that work environment where you spend most

of your waking life. This [hierarchy of power] is carried into your personal life - whether with friends and family-where you act out what Fromm called this sadomasochistic relationship: you mimic your work relationship and assume submissiveness in your personal relationship, or you act out against it by trying to gain power. A lot of my paintings are based on that idea - where one figure is acting out, in one form or another, power or dominance over the other in some slight way. This ties back into technology, which is a metaphor for power...

There is an irony here because in some instances, like the phone in *Lawn*, technology is supposed to be a vehicle to communication, but its acts as a barrier of communication between the man and woman...In *Face Cream*, the only intimacy is through the product. The girl with the headphone is achieving a personal contact, but through the vehicle of technology. There's always a surrogate intimacy through technology, through [consumer] prod-

ucts. Even in *Cigarette*, the cigarette and lighter become the point of contact between the two people. Technology, on some level, has been fetishized or eroticized. This can also be seen in the woman ironing in *Laundry* or in the man in *Lawn*.

PK: Explain...

DS: I don't know if you noticed it, but the man mowing in *Lawn* is aroused. It's the technology engaging his sexuality as the iron is in *Laundry* for the woman. Another thing that I do in *Lawn* is to make a shadow on the wall of the house that echoes that shape apparent in his pants. It's subtle, but I make other abstract shapes similar in form to those things I want to draw attention to. It's a compositional idea to make themes and variations. It's not obvious but the shapes create familiarity to one another and then you make connections. On the surface everything looks normal, but I'm hoping to invite investigation.

PK: I'm interested in this *barrier to communication*. Let's follow this idea in relation to some other paintings. What about *Breast Pump*?

DS: This is based on the Madonna and Child archetype; but rather than the woman feeding the baby, she's feeding the *machine*. In the foreground, a cat is sniffing the [baby] bottle. The child is forming a surrogate relationship with the pet instead of a human. There is also the interaction of the child with the toys. The *intimacy* is with the machines and the animal- not the two people.

PK: Let's talk about *Rifle*. I keep focusing upon the oven mitt over the stove. It seems like the focal point of the painting. The woman's hand is going in the microwave and the man's hand is working his gun. Again, there is a tension - a sexual

tension in this work.

DS: As I said before, I'm doing a lot of stuff with *protection barriers*. Formally, I wanted red [for the mitt] so I put it there for that; also, the red knife at the far right. I'm triangulating the red color across the picture. The sexual tension is created by the partial nudity (the guy has his shirt off) and the relationship to the machines-the gun and



Face Cream, 2003, oil on canvas, 34" x 48"

the microwave. The gun carries a phallic representation and also one of violence and reference to sport. The tattoo [on the man] is of the bull from the Lascaux caves in France - again an attempt to regain some sort of primitive state - the hunter-gatherer possibly. So the idea in this was this primitive state of gathering food being replaced the commercial state of consumption... Microwaves, Coca Cola - all these things that have completely removed us from the process of [food] gathering. This has always been interesting to me because it is an element of civilization in opposition to the natural world. I think that in our culture we sometimes don't have any sense of the labor it takes to get food to us - it just magically appears at the grocery store.

PK: Consumer products appear in many of your paintings. They are products we are all familiar and they

seem to be carefully placed for a specific purpose...

DS: *Cigarette*, which is essentially an Adam and Eve after the Fall, has corporate products instead of fig leaves blocking their genitals. In this painting, the name of the product connotes an emotional state of the figures: "Glad" and "Pledge." They are almost like the thought balloons in a comic book. Corporate products have

such names because they create a relationship between the product and that word or that emotional state. Someone said the goal of advertising was to make you feel bad about yourself. That way, you'll buy something to make yourself feel better.

PK: Yes, the consumer product replaces the emotional state. You many not reach that emotional state in life, but you can at

least buy the product that serves as the substitute. I also have to say there is a bit of humor in all this - even if it is a bit offbeat. The products in front of their genitals seem to suggest some stereotypical notions about how men and women understand intimacy: He is *Glad* - he got what he wanted. *Pledge* is a much more complex term. The woman has "pledged" herself to the male. These words reinforce an attitude about sex between male and female that is less than ideal.

DS: That's a pretty accurate observation.

PK: Your way of painting, along with the frozen gestures and poses of your figures seems to reference a photographic vision. Do you use photographs as reference?

DS: A lot of them are started from photographs. It's something I derived from artists like [Edward] Hopper, [Edgar] Degas, and count-

less others who used photography in their work. I'll shoot a bunch of photos and then thread a composition out of them. But once I get going, I work from life with the figures. The information - the color - is formed from life, but I use photography as a drawing tool - to create possibilities for poses. I find this takes the stiffness out of the model. When you have someone pose [for a painting], they can get into more contrived poses than if you're just snapping photos of them.

PK: I realize this reference to photography is sometimes a touchy subject for painting. I never have seen this as an issue, just another way of reference for the painter...

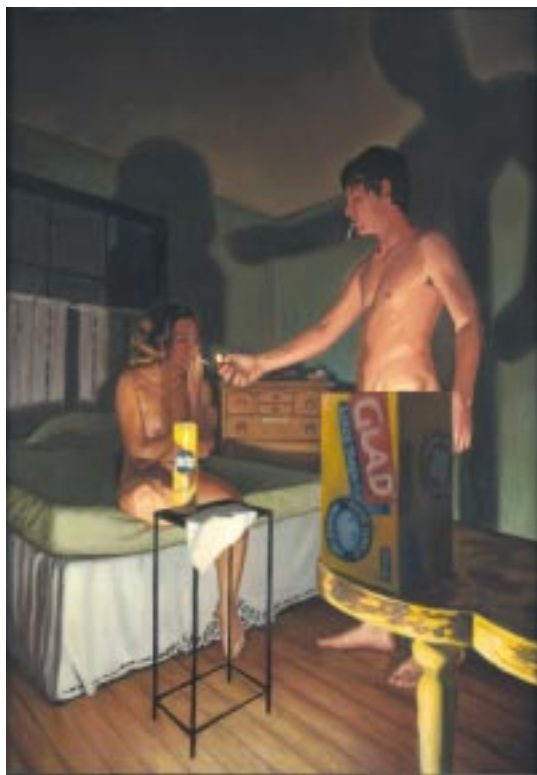
DS: Yes. It's a way of seeing that is informed by the lens that differs from working from life. When you work from life there is a different possibility for color and for drawing than you get from a photograph. The photographic lens creates a different form of perception - certainly in the way shadows are grouped into flat areas is a by-product of lenses. The human eye actually adjusts continually when you look from light to shadow areas of the set-up, so a lot of painters squint to keep the aperture constant....

...I'm not a purist about working from live observation nor am I adherent to photographic effects. My attitude is that I am trying to create narratives and whatever tools I need to get me there is what drives me. My interest is more in storytelling and compositional image making. In fact a lot of things are completely made up in my paintings. One thing that is pretty consistent is an attempt to work from life towards the middle to end [of the painting] just because the color is different and the mark of the paint is different when it's a direct response. It's hard to explain why but it's true. It's like the difference between watching an accident on TV and seeing it in person. The live response carries more impact, significance, and ultimately truth.

PK: I'd like to talk a little about

your education. You studied with Eric Fischl. It's obvious that there are some influences, but your work has a different demeanor. While there is a kind of vague dread in your work, Fischl appears to see the world as grotesque. Talk a little about your relationship with him.

DS: The class I took with Fischl was a seminar on content development and narrative



Cigarette, 2003, oil on canvas, 48" x 34"

strategies. One of the things he does a lot of is reference art history. So certainly I became interested in referencing other paintings and connecting my paintings to the history of art. His images are coming more, as you said, from a grotesque exploration of suburbia and sexual adolescence - which I'm not necessarily as interested in. Most of my paintings are about domestication. There certainly is sexuality underlying [my work] but it's not as blatant....

...I'm interested in creating technically engaging paintings and this comes through Vincent Desiderio whom I also studied with. The way he paints is more connected to the

way I paint. He taught me a lot about painting - direct and indirect painting, glazing, light, shadow, drama, color and form. I'm still learning a lot about painting. That being said, I have always been into traditional painters: Rembrandt, Velasquez, Vermeer, Caravaggio. I know that Manet felt that he paled in comparison to the masters so that's comforting as well. If you have something to say though, the technique will come as you progress, so I don't dwell on it. As I said earlier, I like to consider painting as a dialogue with art. I suppose I study other painters' formal approaches in the hope it will come through. I also just look at life and try to make things look as I see them. In that sense, painters are just filters...

PK: You studied graphic design and it seems to me that your interest in structure and communicating an idea is something that is related to this background.

DS: Probably. Also, I got into art through comic books. I didn't grow up in a house where conversation centered around Michelangelo (laughing). As a kid I read and drew comics. I think that has always been in my work - the idea of a single image conveying some kind of story. I don't use text like you find in comic books, but I use symbols that might work like text. In the piece *Vacuum* [see exhibition], the paintings on the wall [within the painting] are poster reproductions acting as visual thought balloons. Above the man is Ruben's *Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus* [1615-1618]. Above the woman is Artemisia Gentileschi's *Judith and Maidservant with the Head of Holofernes*, [1625]. So here's this domestic scene: He's gazing off somewhere watching television, which has this third presence. She's vacuuming the house. He's dreaming about sex, she's dreaming about violence. Underneath all of this normality is this potential for explosion. Their passiveness is contrasted by these baroque images of violence.

PK: What is primary for you when you paint? Is it process, content, structuring the painting, making that connection to the history of art?

DS: In terms of what drives me to actually make paintings I guess it's a desire to communicate something to an audience. I think of myself in some ways as a storyteller who enjoys questioning the truth. I want to challenge the audience to reflect upon their own experiences. In terms of actually making the work, it's a little of all the things you mentioned. Anytime you make a painting you've got to come up with what I call "a strategy of interest."

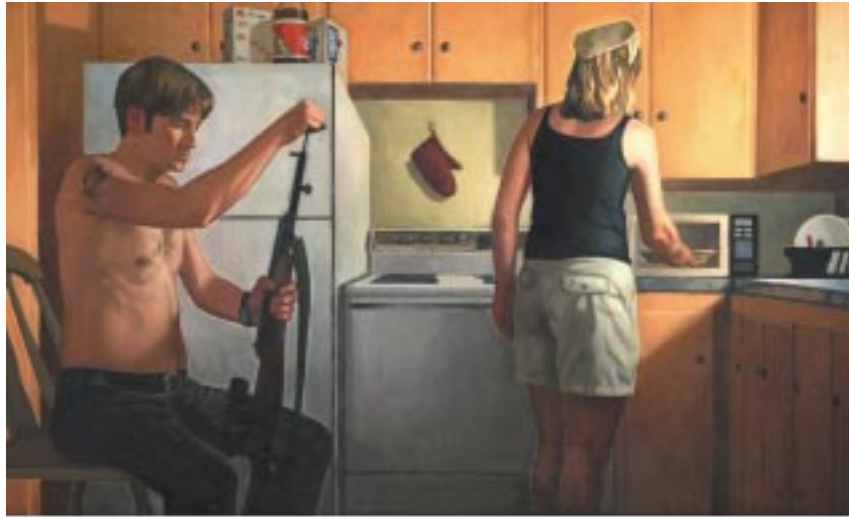
You have to have something that interests you enough to see the painting through to completion. On the conceptual level, it's just the content: How is the scene going to unfold? What are these characters doing? How can I connect to these characters? How can I make them interesting to the audience? These are questions that I ask myself. On a process level it's "How can I paint this for three months without getting bored." You come up with a way to allow invention every step of the way. This starts with composition and moves to issues like surface, color, light - pretty much all formal aspects of paint.

The first level of interest after the idea that engages me is composition and geometry. Without sounding too complicated, I use specific ratios of the sides of the rectangle of the picture. The idea is based on harmonic proportions that allow the rectangle to be subdivided in ways that create squares, right angles, and secondary rectangles within the picture. [see illustration, pg. 8]

PK: Let's talk about this in relation to this large work, *Dog Park*. It was

unfinished when I was last here and appears to be complete now. Elaborate upon the use of geometric shape in this work.

DS: I search out geometric shapes to fit along a grid - like placement of the figures [see *Dog Park* illustration]. The grid alters reality and organizes it into a simpler, and hopefully more harmonious, image. The idea is that if you are using



Rifle, 2002, oil on canvas, 32" x 52 3/4"

these perfect shapes then people sometimes look at your image longer and connect to those shapes...I got interested in this in graduate school - the idea is that the viewer looks at the painting and sees the structure and becomes more engaged with the work, trying to decipher the shapes, but most importantly looking longer.

...Something to consider is that a lot of art operates on an artificial but organized level outside of reality. We accept it and in fact prefer it. People don't speak in iambic pentameter but we like Shakespeare. People don't sing while they talk but we like opera. In fact, most art is really is an artifice on some level; but the artifice allows it to become more real to us, or at least present ideas to us in a way that we can digest them.

PK: I guess there is also a spiritual or philosophical reference - that there is a structure to the world....

DS: Yes. There is structure but we have to identify it. It's an old idea that if you arrange things in the right way you can have mystical, or divine revelation. I think a lot of art is a search for the right combination of "it" whether it is words, colors, or notes of music. For me, I think on some level the geometry and natural order provides an opposition or conflict against the discord

and imbalance of the narrative. It goes back to creating dialogue between form and content...where how something is made will relate to what it is about....I see the geometry working in somewhat of an opposition to the psychology of the painting, which, as you mentioned, is about discord and tension. Composition ultimately can create something for the narrative to act

against or in concert with. On a lot of levels, great painting operates in this way. Either formal elements drive the content or act as a paradox of conflict against the content. It's conflict and opposition.

PK: This painting also reminds me a bit of Seurat's *Sunday Afternoon on the Isle of La Grande Jatte* [1884-1886].

DS: It is an homage to Seurat and also [Hieronymus] Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights* [1510-1515]. Here again is nature that has been resigned to a park in the midst of civilization. Everyone in the park has these pets that are the conduits to people. They have these surrogate relationships with pets.

PK: All the relationships are quite interesting. While all the animals are engaged in some contact, the humans don't seem to be. On the right hand side, the woman appears to be holding onto three dogs. Two are engaged with one-another and the third is about bite the leg of a man.

In the center, one man's leash is fully extended and his dog is at the groin of a woman. There's human lip contact with one dog. The only direct contact between two humans is one of dissociation. It's simultaneously humorous and a bit poignant - that we sometimes have better relationships with our pets than with humans. It makes you stop and think about how we relate to other people.

DS: There is that dissociation. I think of my paintings as almost like black comedies...like Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove* where you have this comedic element within tragedy...It's interesting how some people look at these paintings and laugh, others seem horrified. I think in both terms. I try to make them funny and I also try to make them disturbing...or relevant. This may be a bit simplistic, but sometimes I think of these paintings as what I don't want my life to be like. You paint these things out to remind yourself of what you don't want.

PK: Let's talk about the color in these works. There's a muted tonal range that characterizes your work.

DS: That's just where my color goes naturally - to the muted range as you called it. I have just been put off by colors that are too bright. I don't like "candy" paintings where everything becomes sickly diabetic in color. I prefer earth tones, and "dirty" colors. I started looking a lot at painters like Walter Sickert. He liked colors without names - meaning that if you look at color in one of his paintings you might say it's a greenish-blue or purplish-gray - colors you can't actually describe...

...I'm probably what you would call a tonal painter - meaning that I in-

terpret color tonally first and then color becomes secondary to value... I always establish value first. I use what I call a generalized field color in my work. There is one overall consistent color key, usually some muted grayish soup, and then I have accent colors of intense chroma. For instance, in *Breast Pump* there is a gray field with hints of yellow and turquoise, but I don't want to over do it.



Haircut, 2000, oilk on canvas, 32" x 44"

PK: Yes, the "contrast" level seems to be that of an interior that is illuminated by natural window light...

DS: A lot of the paintings are done with natural light. For me, natural light represents the idea of *God/Nature* and of *Hope*. Think of the *Arnolfini Wedding* [Jan van Eyck 1434] - the light coming in from the side window. Even though I see my paintings as slightly disturbed or slightly pathetic images, *Hope* in them is reinforced by natural light. This may be a naive hope but it goes back to [Erich] Fromm. He was a materialist/determinist like Marx in the sense that he believed that the material condition of life determined circumstance. However, according to Fromm, awareness creates the possibility of freedom and allows us the opportunity to transcend the condition we are in.

PK: How do you know when a

work is finished? Do you ever go back and rework a painting?

DS: Sometimes.

PK: Well, let's just take a look at this unfinished work, *Thanksgiving*. We can describe it as a typical kitchen scene where the husband and wife are preparing food. Their backs are to one-another. While they are preparing something they are presumably going to eat together, they seem disassociated from one another.

DS: I started out with only two figures and now I'm going to add two kids running through the foreground. That's an afterthought. I started with something and I thought it just wasn't holding together. Many times, I'll look at a piece and just decide that conceptually it needs something. Sometimes they are formal elements. In this [*Thanksgiving*] I think everything is too gray - and I want to build the color

back into it. So it is these two issues that I always think about as I'm making something.

PK: The perspective in some of your work [see *Breast Pump*, *Cigarette*] is sometimes conflicting.

DS: Probably some strange things occur just because of the way I paint. Because I'm interested in putting things on a geometric grid, it's not totally a fixed monocular perspective. That is not a concern for me, Vermeer's paintings, for example, have different reference points in them...and it does lead to slightly quirky effects. I place composition above perspective so I have to sacrifice certain things. The driving force for me is the *idea*. I want them to look convincing, but I'm not as interested in creating exact replicas of reality and [the] illusion of space as I am in making representations of space that have a nar-

rative possibility.

PK: Talk about this work, *Mall*, that we are going to display in its unfinished form. It's really fascinating to see how your paintings begin with this rough gestured drawing and generalized forms.

DS: I start [a painting] in grisaille - painted in just umber and white. I don't use any sort of projection but just start blocking in light and shadow on top of the grid.

It's all worked up as value forms rather than linear drawing. It's tone and form which is something I got from [Georges] Seurat. If you look at Seurat's drawings, they almost look like fuzzy, out-of-focus photographs. Or even late work by Titian when his eyesight was going and he just generalized things. That's how I like to envision the work. I feel it creates a cohesive light entity for the whole painting.

...The scene takes place in a Mall. This is a continuation of these multi-figured groups [that I've been painting]. The couple is having an argument in front of a Gap store. Here, [pointing to a blank area of the canvas] will be two figures - two children on leashes - child harnesses meeting just like pets. At this point, all I've done is work out the grid lines.

PK: One thing we've totally neglected is your drawings, which are going to be a part of the show. In some way it's as if I'm seeing two different artists here. The drawings have a very traditional look about them - as if they are studies. I don't know what the context is when you are drawing them, but they are finished in some areas, unfinished in others. Talk a bit about them...

DS: In many ways they are just exercises to keep my drawing skills up for painting. I've always felt drawing was the root of painting. I

don't really think of them as anything but exercises. That's why most are unfinished...and I would not have considered displaying them until you brought it up...

..Many are demonstrations for my classes [see *Self Portrait* in exhibition]. I did that in about an hour. Sometimes it works out well. Sometimes you're in a class and you just



Breast Pump, 2003, oil on canvas, 47" x 47"

have limited time or you have a model with limited time. In a way it keeps you from overdeveloping things. I know in paintings, I have overdeveloped things and I wished I had stopped sooner. My drawings tend to be kind of underdeveloped.

PK: I ask this of everyone I interview. What advice would you give to anyone studying art - trying to make pictures?

DS: I would say look at as much art as possible - old and new - and try to get a sense of what people have done with painting and what they are doing with it now. And keep making paintings. If you ever get to the point where you are not making art, then you're probably thinking about it in the wrong way. You should be doing something that in-

spires you to make paintings. Be patient. Painting takes years to develop. You have to have experience and something to say in your art through experience. It takes time to develop skills and develop your abilities. I'm still learning a lot. A good example for me is Lucian Freud who is 82. In my view, he's doing his best work right now. It's taken him sixty to seventy years of painting to get there.

I am also sort of a traditionalist. I feel that *skill* leads to *idea*. Let's say you went to music school and did not know how to play piano at all and you took one semester of piano and were told to compose a symphony or write a concerto. Well, you have no skill to build upon so what's going to come out of that? This is just my philosophy. If you build the skills, the ideas come out of that. That being said, there are some really bad skill-based artists that are completely technical and without ideas behind their work. You don't want to get trapped in skill and technique in any art form.

As an artist you have to have humility for the work you are making. You should always submit yourself to the art. That means that the ego should be pulled back. You don't show off. You want to have the skill to do certain things but you don't show off. There are certain times when you feel this tendency to show people how well you can paint, but it's going to clutter the painting. You need to be subservient to the idea.

PK: You're a musician also. How does music figure into your work?

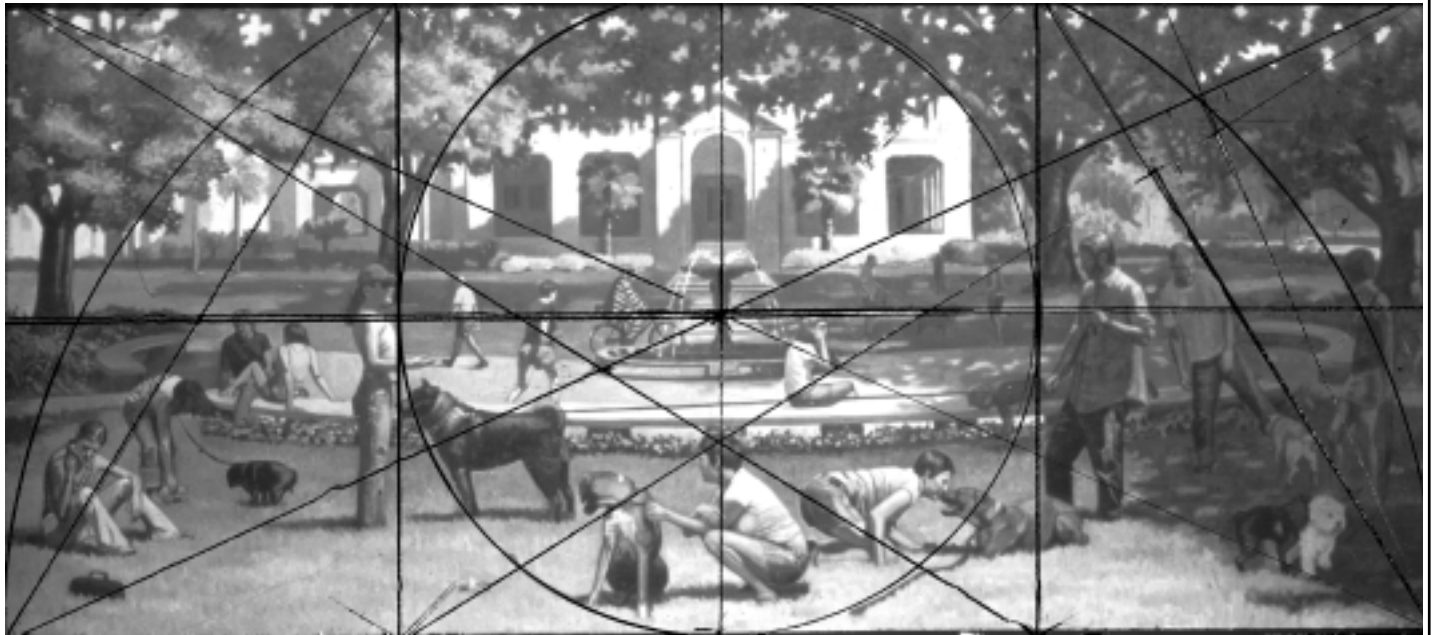
DS: [laughing] I haven't figured that out yet. I'm into jazz and jazz has an improvisational aspect to it. I feel painting is like that in some ways. You have an idea of what the painting is supposed to be, but ev-

ery step of the way you're analyzing and improvising things and going in different directions. In terms of composition, I think of having a structure to the painting like there is a structure to a jazz song. But then on top of that there is a lot of freedom to act and make changes...

...I guess [this is] the main analogy in music that I make: When you

ultimately about sincerity and honesty. I don't say that I can do that with painting, but that's what I think about. It's not what your skills are ultimately, but how deep you are willing to go into yourself and express something to someone. This means getting underneath your own psyche and being vulnerable to an audience and being courageous about imagery. That's what good art

pen with painting as well. It may not be as easily summoned but it can happen....



Dog Park (with grid system)

listen to music you can analyze it in terms of technique and how well someone is playing, etc. But at the end of the night what really matters is how [the music] has moved somebody - what type of emotional context have you created for the audience. That's something I keep in mind [when painting]. I talked about that earlier when I mentioned skill-based art. At the end of the day all of it is just a way of creating an emotional response or connection with an audience. I think of that with painting. What I'm trying to do is move somebody in some way - make someone think about something or react to something. When you think about a singer like Billie Holiday - she didn't have the best range for a singer. Her voice wavered at times, but every time she sang, she sang her heart out. She created an emotional reaction. It's

does in any area. That's what I got from music.

PK: I understand what you are saying about music, but I find music to be so different from the visual arts. I can be moved by music without effort. Music is like an aroma or smell that moves past my perceptual senses or defenses and affects me before I realize it. With visual art, I have to apply some intellectual effort - some kind of thought process - to looking at a work of art. Oftentimes, that gets in the way and I start thinking too much. I don't know what can call forth that state you can get in....that moment of resonance between yourself and the work, but it seems to call for more effort than I need to get involved with music...

DS: I agree with you. There is that experience where everything just fades away but I believe it can hap-