

Travels of a Salesman
by John E Pokoski

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts
Montana State University
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Abstract:
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

Master of Fine Arts

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
Bozeman, Montana

December 1998

N378
P75

APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

John E. Pokoski

This thesis has been read by each member of the thesis committee and has been found to be satisfactory regarding content, English usage, format, citations, bibliographic style, and consistency, and is ready for submission to the College of Graduate Studies.

12/9/98
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Approved for the Major Department

12/9/98
Date

Head, Major Department

Approved for the College of Graduate Studies

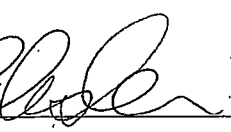
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ARTIST'S STATEMENT

"The guy's name was Snodgrass and I could see him getting ready to do something crazy. His eyes had gotten bigger, showing a lot of the whites, like a dog getting ready to fight. The two kids who had come skidding into the parking lot in the old Fury were trying to talk to him, but his head was cocked as though he was hearing other voices. He had a tight little potbelly encased in a good suit that was getting a little shiny in the seat. He was a salesman and he kept his display bag close to him, like a pet dog that had gone to sleep..." Stephen King, "Trucks."[1]

"A woman was harassed by a traveling salesman in the 8200 block of Haggerty Lane after refusing to listen to his sales pitch." Bozeman Daily Chronicle[2]

The traveling salesman is a leftover icon of the American scene of yesterday. He was a common part of American life that is rarely seen today. Now there is home shopping on cable t.v., but at one time, there was not a home in the United States that hadn't been visited by one at one time or another. These men traveled across the country

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[1] King, Stephen. Night Shift, p.127, "Trucks", The New American Library, N.Y., N.Y., 1979.

[2] *Police reports*, Bozeman Daily Chronicle, Tuesday, March 10, 1998.

knocking on doors, toting their cases, dressed in drab older suits, ringing doorbells for all to let them in. And people did let them in, not knowing who they were or where they came from. The salesman's display case was his key to the world. With it, he could get through many locked doors which would otherwise never open to him. As a child, seeing these mysterious men at their work, reading about them in stories, and seeing them portrayed in movies, I wondered about the salesmen and their lives. What did these men see on their journeys and what did they do? Looking at my drawings and paintings, you will find several possibilities.

The salesman takes you on a journey through my work, showing you the sometimes bizarre, often seamy side of life that is his world. In earlier works, the salesman was the perpetrator of disaster and harm to others, but in my more recent works he becomes often more of a guide and a chronicler of events. This is not to say that he doesn't have his dark side. The places he visits and the deals that he makes are for the most part shady, but you would be hard pressed to prove that he committed a crime in a court of law. The salesman himself remains anonymous, his face partially or fully obscured to the viewer, his suit worn and drab, his visage nondescript. The suitcase is also nothing that would stand out in your memory unless you had seen it opened, where a strange light comes forth. The ever present suitcase contains only mystery for the viewer. We are left to wonder what is contained within. What is the salesman selling? What does he accept as payment?

The dreamlike space and dark mood of the works suggest that whatever the

salesman is selling, you wouldn't want to pay his price. The skewed perspective in the works is reminiscent of the rolling perspective used by Thomas Hart Benton. Another painter who influenced my work is the contemporary English painter Carel Weight, who did many paintings in the sixties and seventies utilizing this type of skewed perspective and dreamlike spaces. My own earlier drawings and paintings depicted an imminent danger, not unlike those found in votive paintings depicting the near calamities that the survivors paint as an offering of thanks to God for having survived. These votive paintings, found in Catholic churches worldwide, always contained an angel or saint as the savior or guardian of the survivors. The salesman has taken the place of the saint in those works, but he hardly seems a savior, but more a threat to others as the instigator of danger. My recent works deal with a more insidious type of danger, which is implied more than depicted, and requires more thought on the part of the viewer to understand what is truly happening. In these new drawings and paintings, the salesman becomes more of a tempter or puppeteer, standing behind the scenes and manipulating events. The danger changes from an outside danger to one that comes from within. It is the deals that he makes with people and the temptation of what is contained in his ever present case that the salesman uses to corrupt people into becoming the danger to themselves or to others.

The two types of media that I use influence one another. My paintings have become more stylized, fed by what I have learned in my drawings, using the larger tools such as oil bars (oil paint in a paste form used like a pastel) and oil pastels that limit detail. Both the drawings and paintings are built up over many layers to create an intricate

relationship of color and light, with lower layers breaking through to the surface. The use of multiple panels in the paintings and multiple pieces of paper in the drawings to depict one image is one of the devices that I developed through the experimentation of these media. The processes that I use in my work facilitates my ideas. The suggestive qualities of the paint and pastels help to create mood and mystery in my work. The size of the paintings creates a more overwhelming and encompassing view, while the drawings create a closer more personal space for the viewer. The spaces in both have a very cramped and claustrophobic feel, due to the large foreground objects pressing into the viewers' space, funneled down by the rolling shape of the ground, which seems to ooze out at the bottom of the pictures, a result of the changing perspective. The disorienting effect of the space helps to create an uneasy feeling in the viewer, adding to the dreamlike or nightmarish mood of the work.

The mood of the images aids the salesman in his work, taking the viewer on a journey, where the bizarre seems commonplace, and the dark side of humanity is exposed. The salesman becomes not only an observer, but a puppeteer, working behind the scenes with a nudge here and a bribe there, pushing people over the edge of sanity or civilized behavior. Human frailties such as greed or anger are shown, and the thin veneer of civilization is peeled back in places to show the viewer how fragile a thing civilized behavior is. The potential for violence is always there, waiting to be let out by the salesman, who is then pleased to watch his machinations come to fruition, and share his results with the viewer.

LIST OF SLIDES

1. ***A Dog's Life***, oil bar and oil pastel on paper, 42 x 60", 1998.
2. ***Junior***, oil bar and oil pastel on paper, 42 x 60", 1998.
3. ***Pandora's Box***, oil bar and oil pastel on paper, 42 x 30", 1998.
4. ***Halloween***, oil bar and oil pastel on paper, 42 x 60", 1998.
5. ***Boy's Night Out***, oil bar and oil pastel on paper, 42 x 90", 1998.
6. ***The Deal***, oil bar and oil pastel on paper, 42 x 60", 1998.
7. ***Boys Night Out 2***, oil on hardboard, 8 x 12', 1998.
8. ***Road to Paradise***, oil on hardboard, 8 x 8', 1998.
9. ***Louie***, oil on hardboard, 8 x 8', 1998.
10. ***Land of Milk and Honey/Nuclear Winter***, oil on hardboard, 6 x 8', 1998.
11. ***Diner***, oil on hardboard, 8 x 4', 1998.
12. Installation view.
13. Installation view.
14. Installation view.
15. Installation view.

1 A DOG'S LIFE



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2 JUNIOR



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3 PANDORA'S BOX



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4 HALLOWEEN



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5 BOYS NIGHT OUT



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6 THE DEAL



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7 BOYS NIGHT OUT 2



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8 ROAD TO PARADISE



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9 LOUIE



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10 LAND OF MILK AND HONEY / NUCLEAR WINTER



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11 DINER



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12 INSTALLATION VIEW



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13 INSTALLATION VIEW



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14 INSTALLATION VIEW

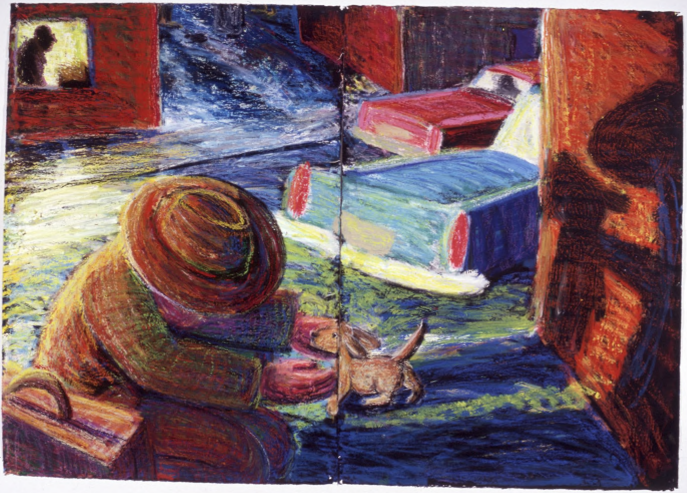


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15 INSTALLATION VIEW



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