



Other side of Pluvius [slide]
by Walter Frederick Christen

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
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APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

Walter Frederick Christen

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.

Date

4/3/96

Chairperson, Graduate Committee

Approved for the Major Department

Date

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Head, Major Department

Approved for the College of Graduate Studies

Date

5/4/96

Graduate Dean

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ARTIST'S STATEMENT

Oh! Could I stand in the valley, that's "trembling" with summery heat,
Where the logs lay "bucked" on the side-hill, in lengths to a hundred odd feet;
There's Cedar and Fir, and there's Hemlock, that's eight or nine feet on the stump,
That will thunder and crash over windfalls, and land at the "tree" with a thump,
And I'm longing again for the bunkhouse, with my packsack over my bunk,
I could dream of a trip to the city, and maybe enjoy a good drunk.
This job in a shipyard is lousy - a paradise fit for a tramp.
So to Hell with a life in the city; I'm off - to a logging camp!

-Robert E. Swanson

Watching the news and reading the paper provides the public with an image of logging that is seldom a positive reflection of the industry. Environmental groups protesting, unconcerned loggers "raping" the forest and long-winded politicians are the images facing the general public. Having been surrounded by the lumber industry from a young age I find many of these images to be untrue or at least misleading. The existence of the logger is continuously being threatened. Using charcoal and paper in my drawings, I hope to show the reality of the timber industry and the influences of people, machinery and ideas within that industry. With the current debate about environmentalism and the "new social conscience," this way of life is facing difficult times. In a few years this environment may be lost, if not by the closing of the forests, then through introduction of new, high-tech machinery. "The logger needs a spokesman, something or someone to represent the thousands of smaller loggers and the cork shoe wearing men that work in the brush" (Finley Hayes). I hope that my work can provide a pictorial record of this lifestyle, the way Darius Kinsey's photographs document early logging in the Northwest of huge virgin timber, using oxen, axes and cross-cut saws. I would also hope that people unfamiliar with this way of life would come away

with a new perspective, and a positive one.

Several artists have influenced my work. I appreciate the work of Thomas Hart Benton for his realistic views of man and machinery and the lives of ordinary people. He is a member of a group of "Regionalists" whose work focused on rural subject matter. Diego Rivera's works are extremely detailed and, like the work of Benton, show the worker and industry. I follow the example of these two artists in that my work depicts the logging industry and the men involved.

My drawings mirror the logger's point of view in the forest. The view limited by the forest floor and the canopy of the trees is mimicked by the dimensions of the paper. The panorama, a narrative in which I can present a larger picture of the action, can be "read" in book-like fashion, all the while revealing a tale or concept.

I employ charcoal in my drawings lending a more historical context to the works. Similar to the photos of Darius Kinsey, I want my work to reflect the life and times of the logger and life in the woods. Pattern and texture also play a large role in the development of my drawings; these elements engage the viewer to explore the entire drawing. The patterns also create a sense of the surreal. For example, in my drawings the bark on a tree several miles away can still be seen in detail, whereas in real life that would not be possible.

My early work was based on personal experience in the woods, things I had seen and the people with whom I had worked. I then moved into experimenting with elements of time and the process of narrative. I worked to incorporate different time periods into one drawing without interrupting the flow of the drawing. "Donkey Ridge" provides an example of this concept. This drawing shows a modern day logging operation in the same picture as a relic of an earlier day, the old steam Donkey. I have also explored the concept of time in one of my newest pieces, "A Good Days Work." This work shows the forest in the way a logger

would see it before the logs are cut and bucked to length. The trees do not appear as they are in true life, but how they will appear once they are cut. My recent work also uses the trees themselves to show a change of time. Adding immature seedlings to a forest of second growth trees emerging from an old growth show a time span of more than three hundred years.

The work I am completing now has become much more political and narrative than my earlier drawings. I am now exploring elements of the society. The drawing "Shake Rats" shows men from the shake and shingle industry who sometimes bend the law in order to make a living. In this new age of politics and the environment the shake rat and the logger are more endangered than the animals. These new concepts and ideas have come about with my research into the industry.

In my recent work, people have reappeared and become an integral part of the image and the meaning. Instead of being a prop to the drawing, the people have become the main image. After all, what is logging without the people involved in the industry?

Come with me unto this woodland - watch the fawn creep low to cover;
Watch the dawn upon the hilltop greet the sun as a bride her love.
Fare thee well, O great metropolis, cruel and artificial city,
Here's one lumberjack who's leaving your maddened mobs, devoid of pity,
Take me back, O fragrant forest,
'Neath your pine trees let me dream;
Let me join the woodland chorus
Out where Nature reigns supreme.

-Robert E. Swanson

LIST OF SLIDES

1. "Old Growth Fallers," 12" x 124.5", charcoal on paper, 1996
2. "Long Island," 12" x 41.5", charcoal on paper, 1996
3. "On the Neamah," 12" x 41.5", charcoal on paper, 1996
4. "Morning in the Cascades," 12" x 14.5", charcoal on paper, 1996
5. "Fourth Generation," 12" x 41.5", charcoal on paper, 1996
6. "Set Asides," 12" x 41.5", charcoal on paper, 1996
7. "Boneyard," 12" x 41.5", charcoal on paper, 1996
8. "Highball Riggin' Crew," 12" x 41.5", charcoal on paper, 1996
9. "Changes," 12" x 41.5", charcoal on paper, 1996
10. "Donkey Ridge," 12" x 41.5", charcoal on paper, 1996
11. "Shake Rats," 12" x 41.5", charcoal on paper, 1996
12. "To Save the Ancient Second Growth," 12" x 41.5", charcoal on paper, 1996
13. "Buffer Zone," 12" x 41.5", charcoal on paper, 1996
14. "A Good Days Work," 12" x 41.5", charcoal on paper, 1996
15. "Stihl Life," 12" x 41.5", charcoal on paper, 1996
16. "Steel Life," 12" x 41.5", charcoal on paper, 1996
17. Installation view: exhibition
18. Installation view: exhibition
19. Installation view: exhibition

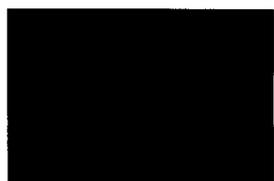
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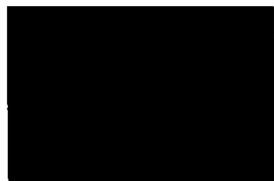
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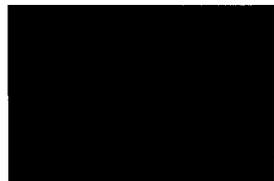
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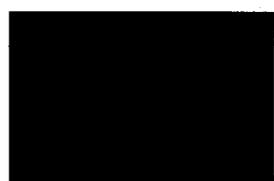
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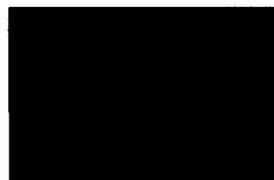
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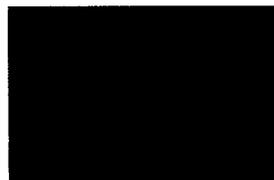
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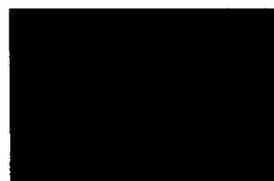
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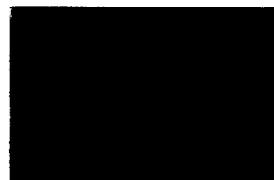
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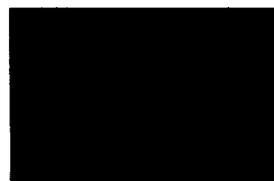
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