

A strange reality: the work of William Hudders

BY ALEX GENDLER

Landscapes and still lifes may seem like a thing of the past when compared with the clashing images, bold statements, and abstract content of modern art. But this is not the case with the works of William Hudders, currently being exhibited at the Portlock Black Cultural Center.

Strikingly different from traditional paintings of the sort, Hudders' works utilize high-contrast light and the interaction of objects with perspective to give seemingly normal scenes

an alien feel. Taking subjects as mundane as a city billboard or a man walking his dog, Hudders is able to transform them into juxtapositions of apparent normalcy and disturbing, barely identifiable unfamiliarity. His work has sometimes been described as surrealist, though Hudders is ambivalent about the label. While surrealism is concerned primarily with dreams and the imaginary, Hudders claims that his work is about finding "the unreality within reality."

Hudders, who has taught at Moravian, Seton Hall, and the Studio Arts Center in Florence,

Italy, received his Masters in Fine Arts at the University of Pennsylvania. It was there that he first began experimenting with this style. "Until that point, I was doing a lot of abstract work, a lot of things from my head," he said.

"I found I was repeating myself." Painting directly from life, however, allowed for more possibilities and unpredictability. "There's more visual incidence," he noted. "Things happen that I wasn't prepared for."

Several of the works are perspective paintings. "Blue Morning," for example, represents a cityscape as seen through the leaves of a plant standing on a windowsill. In this way, the shapes of the leaves intersect and contrast with the larger landscape to create a unique view. In another work, entitled "Dogwalker," the small shapes of a man and his dog are reduced to a nearly polygonal state in the geometric grid formed by the lines of the surrounding buildings.

Hudders revealed that his inspiration for beginning the work was the interesting angle that the leash and the extended arm formed against the ground. A few other works focus on odd shapes--such as a wrench--and their contrast with the environment.

Perhaps somewhat unexpected is the group of still lifes depicting the conventional arrangement of fruit on a table, which Hudders described as "me fighting with Cezanne."

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- William Hudders

"These are things I do in the studio when I have no idea of what else to paint," he quipped. Yet even here, Hudders' personal style comes through, making the fruit appear strangely artificial.

A strong sense of serenity and stillness pervades each of the works. "I'm kind of interested

in boredom," Hudders admitted. "In contemporary media, we're surrounded by things that agitate us." Hudders' works, on the other hand, let viewers "sink into the picture," allowing them to fully absorb the uniqueness of his style and the feeling of oddness that accompanies it. The unfamiliarity and contrast within the work are never artificially created by the artist but seem to naturally come about simply as a result of the combinations chosen. "You can just put two colors together and get a profound reaction," he explained.

Hudders is currently a visiting lecturer at Lafayette, teaching Principles of Studio Drawing and II. His exhibit will run until January 20th.

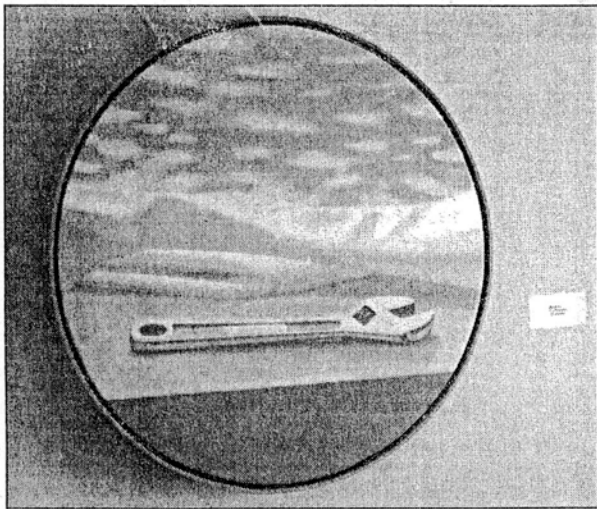


PHOTO BY MAUREEN JACKSON

Hudders' work focuses on the interaction between objects and their environment, using intense light to highlight contrast and form.