
Origins Of An Artist: Roger Preston's "Holocaust Series"

by Todd Niemi

I was born on February 28, 1939, in Saint Joseph, Missouri. Soon after, we moved to Bartesville, Oklahoma, where my father got a job with Phillips Petroleum Company. We lived there for about a year and then moved to Phillips, Texas, where I spent the rest of my childhood.

One thing that encouraged me to be creative

at a very early age was my bedtime. I had to go to bed at a certain time at which I usually didn't feel sleepy, and I would get into trouble if I didn't fall asleep soon. So I would make up stories and visualize them in my head. Finally, I'd fall asleep. Each night when I'd go to bed, I'd pick up the story where I left off the night before. So it was like a serial.

My father—an electrical engineer—and I had a difficult time understanding each other because I was very intuitive and he was very

logical. We were always confronting each other because of this. My father didn't really encourage or discourage me. As long as I did well in school

at school. I wanted to create a world in which I wasn't being controlled by somebody else.

My grandparents were more



At the Fence

Roger Preston is a professor of art at Atlantic Union College. The computer-aided art and excerpted remarks are from an interview, conducted by student Todd Niemi, that appeared in the AUC student paper, the *Lancastrian*.

he was happy.

My mother, who was an "artsy-craftsy" type of person, one year entered all of my ceramics in the town fair without my knowing it, and they won quite a few ribbons.

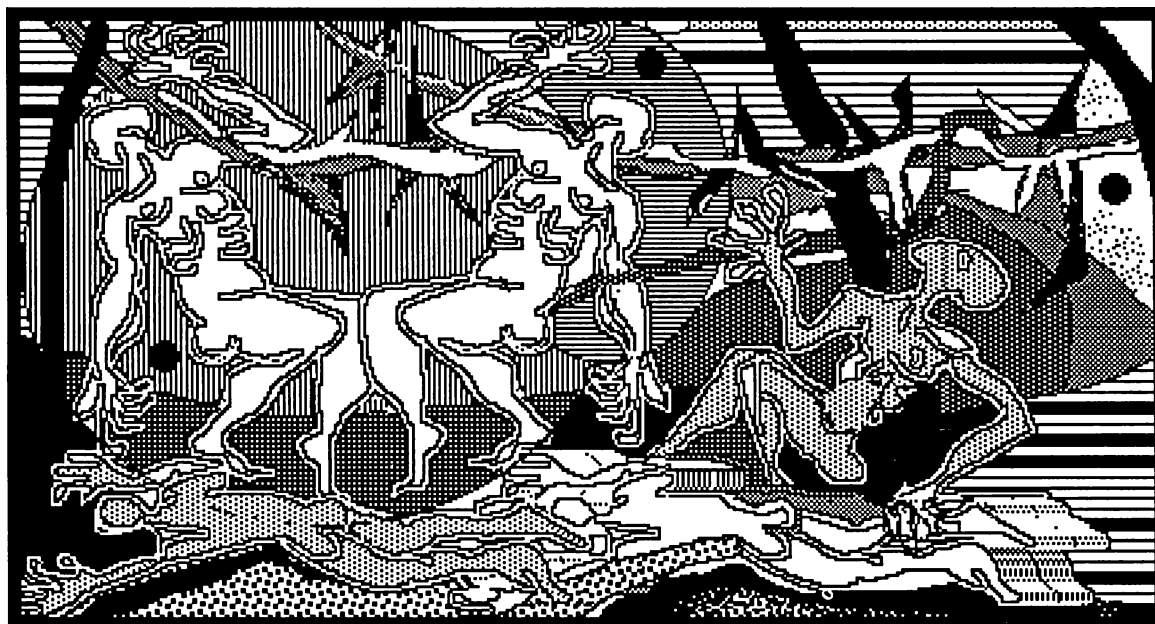
My childhood wasn't an unhappy one, and I wasn't particularly shy. But I was basically a loner. I liked to be alone because I could create my own world. I would come home from school, go to my room, start working on my artwork, and create my own world. Or I would go hiking in the canyons by myself. These were the two options I had.

I wasn't necessarily unsatisfied with the real world, I just wanted to control my own world. As a child, your parents have control over you at home and your teachers control you

encouraging to me than my parents were. They allowed me to work and were critical of my work in a positive way. I did a lot of animal sculptures for them, like horses, cows, and so forth. They took a great deal of interest in my art. My grandfather was a horseman and a rancher, so he knew the anatomy of these animals and would point out any inaccuracies. Because their ranch was way out in the country, there was no one else around. So I learned how to entertain myself, to make believe.

It was a natural and gradual process for me [to decide to be an artist]. I was always the artist. I sold my first piece of artwork when I was in the fourth grade.

Some people feel my work's too



Dance of Death It's not a dream that man is man's most cruel enemy.

morbid. But I want to grab people so that they have to look at it. I want to make people stop and think. Something normal or pretty you often don't have to think about. The beauty of my art is in the composition and media. The subjects I deal with in my work are very chaotic, but the way that I use the media, the composition, and the design brings order to them. And that's the beauty of it. There are different kinds of beauty.

While pretty things may have order, their beauty is often sentimental.

When I was young I really liked Van Gogh because of his colors. Now I consider Picasso to be one of the greatest artists because of

his versatility and the intensity of his work. I don't think everything he's done is a masterpiece, but most of his work I like. Mabel Bartlett, who was the head of the art department while I was here at AUC, also influenced me a lot. She was always very supportive of me and my work. There were two things that she often said that I'll always remember. She said that "art brings order out of chaos," and "art should contain truth,

beauty, and goodness."

I'd say I'm a realist, [although] if you look at my work you might question this.

[In the computer Holocaust series] there's the electrified barbed wire. It's a symbol from my childhood. I use it to represent suffering and death. One of the difficult things about symbolism is that it takes several years to realize all the symbols you use in your



Echo of Death Gas dropping down, screams, tears, vomit, death.



Murdered I have lived, I have suffered, I have seen too much, I lost hope, I was murdered.

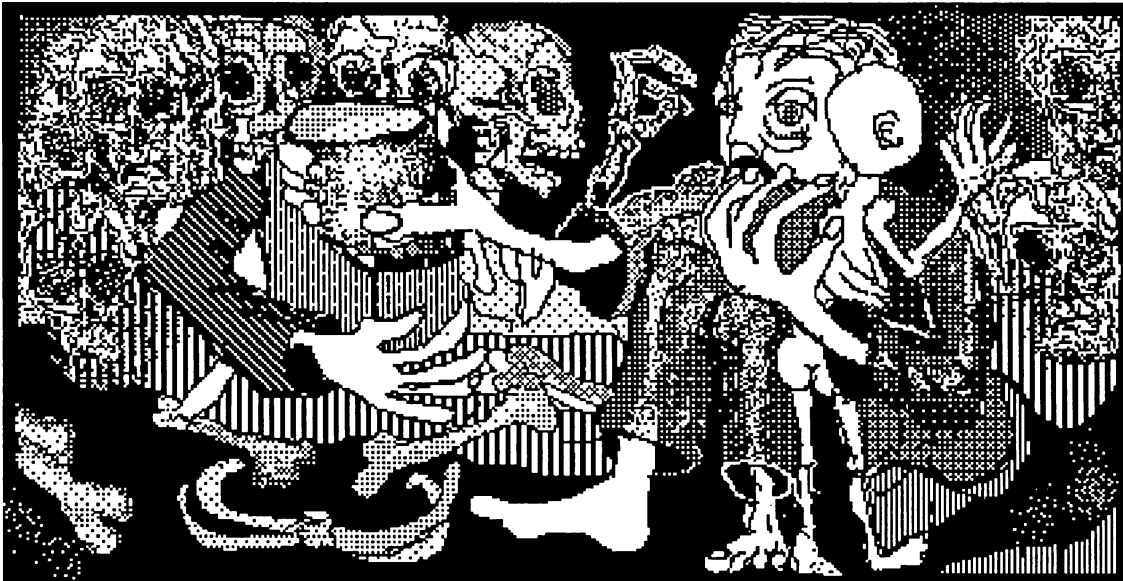
work, and this is a new series for me.

I saw a documentary on the Holocaust called *Shoah* which kindled my interest in the subject. I read between 30 and 40 books on the subject. One of the groups of artists that I like for the project that I'm working with is the German Expressionists. I like the way they exaggerated the human subject to express their ideas and feelings.

Art is a process for me, a way of expressing myself. I feel that I have things to say with my artwork, and I want people to see what I have to say. I find it much easier to express myself visually, and I find this much more satisfying. I'm more comfortable with visual expression. I think my visual work says a lot more than it would if it was expressed verbally. It's a nonverbal language in itself.

I need the reaction of people to my work to be able . . . to understand it more.

The artist looks at the world and makes statements about parts of it. So in a sense, the artist is a social critic. The artist also looks for truth and attempts to reorganize and restate it in a clearer, more understandable manner.



No Cup - No Food A tin cup was a treasure.