



Nine Heads with Squares, Oil on canvas, 72" x 72" One of several mask type paintings. Painted in the Arnold Blanch studio in 1981.

Faces and Nudes

by Tim Slowinski

I left the tent room with artist Jane Millet and we moved into a small summer cottage on the other side of town. Berrien tried to hang on for a while, sleeping on the cottage floor, but then he met a woman who claimed to be the ex wife of Woody Allen and moved into her apartment. Jane and I moved several times, searching for better and less expensive live/work space. We shared a house that was the former home of Woodstock artist Arnold Blanch, then moved to a caretaker cabin behind a house that was once the home of Ralph Whitehead, the founder of the art colony called Byrdcliffe. The cabin was tiny, I think it was once a chicken coop. We paid seventy five dollars along with an agreement to mow the lawn of the main house. It was owned by Whitehead descendents who showed up one or two weekends a year to reminisce.

There were two rooms one over the other, the lower room was so narrow I could stand with arms outstretched and touch both walls, one of them concrete that dripped water on humid days. Behind the building was the woods. Once raccoons broke in and tore the kitchen up, dumping flour, pasta and anything they could get their paws on all over the place. For a studio I worked a deal with the local crafts guild to renovate an abandoned building nearby, it was about the size of a two car garage, a part of the former Byrdcliffe colony they now managed. The deal went sour when they reneged on our agreement, tripling my rent after the job was done by adding "administrative fees." By today's standards it was a pittance, but on principle I refused to pay them.

Another group in town, the Woodstock Artists Association, (aka WAA) owned a large farm house and

barn that had been donated to the organization. It was formerly owned by a member of the Guggenheim family who wrote popular novels under the name Jane Burr. The WAA used it for a time as an art school and then abandoned it. I proposed that a group of artists move into the house and restore it in lieu of rent. They accepted the offer and we moved from the chicken coop to the Burr house.

I lived and painted at the house rent free for four years. The low cost of living opened up large swaths of time, time to work, to think and to dream. More than anything else, time is what I needed to develop as an artist and the house provided that—but as a project the house was doomed from the start. I was seen as the person in charge and responsible for the success or failure of the project, but the WAA refused to give me any authority to actually manage the occupants. There was no system to filter out the slackers. Early on work done communally on the property ended up with one or two people doing all the work, so things were divided up. Each artist had a section of the house assigned to them to repair. Even the front lawn was carved into pieces like a pie, with each person responsible to mow one section. This quickly degenerated. The lawn became a mohawk haircut, some sections two feet long, others mowed down. Some walls of the house were scraped and painted clean,



Primal Conflict, Pencil and acrylic on board, 40" x 30" From the series of painted drawings using primal face painting. Painted in 1982 at the Byrdcliffe garage studio.



Nude in FourParts, 36" x 45"
Pencil and acrylic on museum board and plywood

These are two of a number of nudes created at the Burr House during 1982-83. These were part of a series of fairly large scale works in this style. The entire series was dispersed. Some pieces were sold, some deconstructed and one piece ended up as a roof on my tractor shed.

Fragmented Nude, 96" x 48"
Pencil and acrylic on museum board and plywood

others crumbling and peeled. Even the refrigerator became deranged with milk and juice cartons, bread and bags of produce taped and stapled shut with names written on them. Phone calls went unclaimed and unpaid, antiques began to disappear. Some artists immersed themselves in alcohol leading to fits of incongruous piano banging and destruction of property. The artists were incapable of functioning communally. Gradually the place transformed into some sort of halfway house for socially dysfunctional artists.

The house was good for making art and during this period my artwork went through a series of changes. The photo based, fractured realism developed into a series of mask like faces floating on color fields. The mask faces developed as mixed media drawings with acrylic washes on paper and board, utilizing a blend of personal, portrait imagery mixed with primal face painting and abstract forms. The drawings then developed into a series of large scale nudes. Using the artist Jane Millet as my model, I worked up large pencil drawings in precise detail. When finished I would cut the drawings into pieces and glue them to plywood blocks, reassembling the drawings on larger wooden boards creating a multitiered surface that would then be painted with acrylics. In the middle of the series our relationship ended and Jane left the Burr house to pursue a design career in Manhattan. Despondent, I sold several of the pieces at a local gallery for flea market prices and vowed never to use a physical object again as the subject for my art. I had no idea what I would do and for quite some time, I did nothing at all. A blank canvas sat on the easel. I spent a lot of time looking at it, reading and lying in bed.

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