*mysterious*
*pleasures*
THE ART OF H. CLARK STEWART

# *mysterious pleasures*

THE ART OF F. CLARK STEWART

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# *acknowledgements*

The opportunity to organize and host *Mysterious Pleasures: The Art of F. Clark Stewart* is, in many ways, owed to the success of the University of Tennessee Downtown Gallery, now in its second season of exhibitions. The Downtown Gallery provides an auxiliary exhibition space to the Ewing Gallery of Art and Architecture, effectively increasing the availability and scope of the exhibition programming at the University of Tennessee. Sincere gratitude is extended not only to the university administration but also to the members of the greater-Knoxville community who continue to support this invaluable cultural resource.

The tireless efforts of many talented individuals have been equally important to the success of *Mysterious Pleasures*. Dr. Frederick C. Moffatt, Historian of American Art and acclaimed author of both *Errant Bronzes: George Grey Barnard's Statues of Abraham Lincoln* and *Arthur Wesley Dow*, is duly acknowledged for contributing an insightful text on the life and work of F. Clark Stewart, reproduced herein. The exemplary and sensitive design of this exhibition catalogue is credited to Martha C. Shepp-James, an award-winning and nationally recognized graphic designer, who—like Clark—is inspired by and responsive to narrative forms of art and design. Also, Cindy Spangler, Collections Manager, who coordinated the publicity and loans for this exhibition; Adam H. Alfrey, Exhibitions Specialist, who served as copy editor and photographer; and Mike C. Berry, Downtown Gallery Manager, who supervised the exhibition's installation, are individually commended for their efforts in organizing this sizeable exhibition/catalogue project. *Mysterious Pleasures* would not have reached its final scope and breadth were it not for the collectors who willingly loaned their art to the exhibition and for the individuals who generously provided monetary support for the catalogue. In conclusion, I thank Clark and Judy Stewart for their cooperation and assistance in the development of this retrospective exhibition—*Mysterious Pleasures*.

Sam Yates

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# *the arrival of*
# F. Clark Stewart

It was in the summer of 1966 that F. Clark Stewart and his wife Judy loaded their 1953 Mercedes-Benz 220 with their belongings and set out on a cross-country adventure from Southern California to East Tennessee. Knoxville—the Stewarts' final destination—was, in many ways, a totally unfamiliar and unseen landscape. Clark was successful in his application for a faculty position within the University of Tennessee Department of Art. As he lived on the West Coast, Clark was not brought to campus for an introductory visit and, therefore, was not afforded the opportunity to meet his future colleagues during face-to-face interviews. Since the hiring decision was solely based upon telephone conversations and correspondence, one suspects the unusually abrupt procedures aroused in Clark, as well as in his future colleagues, a considerable degree of suspense and excitement.

Luckily, Clark's adventurous spirit did not dissipate during his summer trip through America's deserts and farmlands, for he would need to retain such enthusiasm while adjusting to the eccentricities of a new hometown and to the demands placed on a new faculty member. Clark had applied to teach Drawing and Design in a department that, only one year earlier, was administratively part of the Fine Arts Department (inclusive of Music and Art). The newly designated and independent Department of Art would now be allowed to offer a Master of Fine Arts Program, along with its undergraduate curricula leading to the Bachelor of Art degree or the Bachelor of Fine Arts degree. With these new changes and under the leadership of a charismatic department head, C. Kermit "Buck" Ewing, the department underwent rapid student growth and faculty expansion. Throughout his tenure at the University of Tennessee, Clark remained an important member of the faculty and a witness to the evolution of a once small Department of Art into a nationally recognized and accredited School of Art.

Over the past four decades, the educator F. Clark Stewart has impacted the lives and maturation of countless aspiring young artists; many former students directly credit him for their own success as professional artists and teachers. His contributions as both a dedicated teacher and a cognizant, active member of the university community are immeasurable.

The goal of *Mysterious Pleasures: The Art of F. Clark Stewart* is, however, to celebrate the achievements and work of the artist F. Clark Stewart. The works on exhibition, as with his tenure at the university, span forty years. As the viewer will soon recognize, Clark never strays far from his primary subject—the human figure—or his primary interest—the human narrative. Art movements, like fashion, have developed and faded with time, but Clark has remained steadfast in his commitment to figurative art and its ability to create mystery and a range of emotional responses.

Sam Yates



*Let a Man who has made a Drawing go on & on & he will produce a Picture or Painting but if he chooses to leave off before he has spoild it he will Do a Better Thing*

WILLIAM BLAKE

F. CLARK STEWART was a painter in his undergraduate and graduate school years but became increasingly enamored of drawing. By 1966, when he joined the University of Tennessee Department of Art as instructor of Drawing and Design, he was more interested in crafting intricate assemblages from found material and displaying them inside Plexiglas containers or glass boxes. With their serendipitous contents—some attachments lit up or independently moved—the boxes, by example, contested a unified and rational point of view. In part, he was following the example of the German Surrealist Max Ernst but, even more, that of Joseph Cornell. Concerned

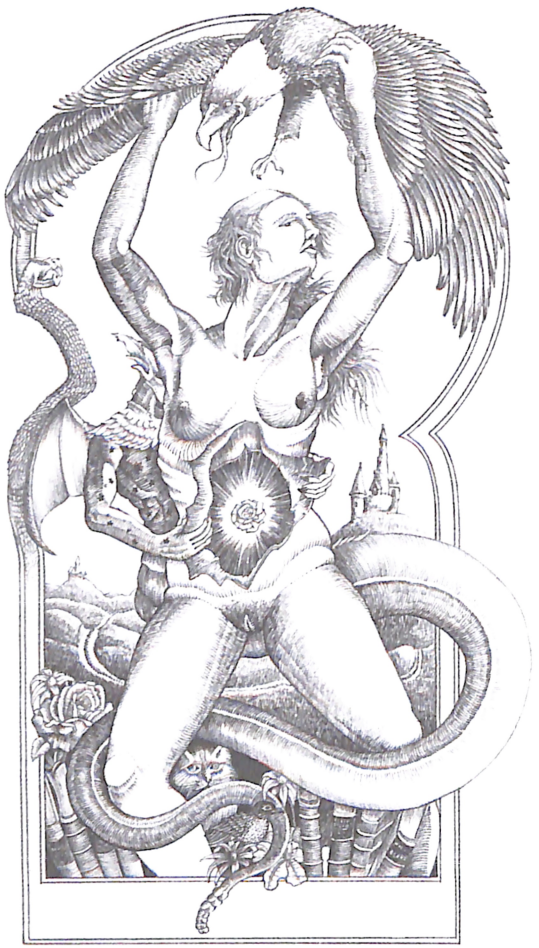
*Nulla dies sine linea ~ no day without a line*

APELLES (VIA PLINY THE ELDER)

SOLICITUDE

Graphite • 30 x 40 inches • 1986

*Collection of Judy & Dennis McCarthy*



from THE MARRIAGE OF HEAVEN AND HELL

Graphite • 8 3/4 x 4 1/2 inches • 1969

*Collection of the artist*

he had become too dependent on Cornell, America's leading fabricator of enigmatic micro-installations, Stewart, in 1969, quickly found his way back to "pure" drawing through a series of small graphite pencil drawings on paper. The leitmotif of these pictures is a sultry nude female, whose indolence and waist-length hair resembles the beatific Pre-Raphaelite woman, but whose athletic body is more redolent of the heroic Renaissance male, that of the Christ, for example, in Albrecht Durer's print albums. Besides its sexual ambiguity and mystery, this commanding figure demonstrates considerable physical capability and thus, in Stewart's functionalist lexicon, perfect beauty. While remaining under the spell of the basic urge to draw, he produced a pictorial portfolio based on William Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell.* Privately printed in 1972, the portfolio features multiple views of a perverse female avenger who inventively wreaks havoc on man's world. There are also related pictures of imprisoned females.

ONCE MORE TIRING of flat work, Stewart was back with collage and with constructed pyramids, *a la surrealisme*, which contained secret doors with arcane, half-hidden messages attached. In the period between the late 1970s and early 1990s, he occupied a plateau that accommodated a painting-drawing synthesis: the remarkably adaptive covering qualities of

acrylic paint (Liquitex), on one hand; the sprightly mark-making capacity of the colored pencil (Prismacolor), on the other. The combination ideally suited the artist's determination to illustrate, via a stringent symbolic shorthand, the unfolding drama of his domestic life. Like the scandalous innuendos that sometimes haunted the allegories painted by the English Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, some of Stewart's home pictures read as painful confessionals, others as self-parodies that served a therapeutic, as much as an expository, function. Of the happy blend of materials that sustained the legibility of these works, Stewart savored the efficiency, cleanliness, and durability of acrylic paint—a water-soluble, plastic-based synthetic that could be brushed on to the impervious surfaces of panels, natural wood, and slate. An electric engraving pencil was also usefully employed for making lines on the flat and shiny surfaces of the slate pictures. In the last few years, Stewart has become a walking commercial for the manufacturers of Liquitex acrylic, after having discovered and fully responded to the incomparable luminosity and depth of the brand's line of colors, particularly the greens.[1] Acrylic was also surprisingly malleable. The pictorial surfaces began bristling with what he termed "acrylic fossils," the crusty after-images left by objects that had been dipped into rapidly drying puddles of paint. When mixed into acrylic, he discovered, industrially produced glass beads brought forward a pleasingly thick impasto of glistening washes. In comparison to acrylic, oil paint—the old




SELF-PORTRAITS AFTER GERARD'S CUPID AND PSYCHE

Graphite • 8 1/4 x 6 1/4 inches • 1972

*Collection of the artist*



SCORPION

Graphite • 30 x 40 inches • 1986

*Collection of the artist*

standby—was messy, unclean, and hopelessly opaque. On the basis of several oils-on-canvas exhibited in his 1988 retrospective exhibition at the Cheekwood Fine Arts Center in Nashville, Tennessee, commentators predicted Stewart would reclaim oil as a favored medium.[2] This did not happen. Similarly, in 1994, he seemed headed for a second career as an installation artist. One piece, *Bloodline*, the result of extensive genealogical research, dramatized the life of his great-grandfather who was in the Confederate Army. This project and another, *Untitled Metaphor*, which utilized a tank of water, a submerged manikin, and directed lights, effectively extended into living space the Horatian doctrine of *ut pictura poesis* (whatever poetry is, painting is the same), an aesthetic which Stewart respects. But what most counted against installation was its overwhelming popularity, and having grown to mistrust his own motivations for engaging in it, he put it aside. A residue of his involvement in installation yet lingered for several years in the painted twig frames Stewart favored for his paintings. Another media option, printmaking, was rejected out of hand because of its indirectness and its dependency upon a cadre of technical specialists. "You don't know what you've got until several steps later."[3] Neither was monotype, a one-of-a-kind print, acceptable.

SEVERELY LIMITING himself to the reductive practice of drawing as "drawing," Stewart, in the 1990s, concentrated on a sequence of large graphite drawings on paper—they ironically resemble the popular mid-century woodcut illustrations made by Rockwell Kent—in which line results from a vigorous and momentary swing of the arm, rather than from the constrained action of wrist and fingers. These energetic compositions are unabashedly theatrical. In them, the usual lineup of symbols vanishes. Alluding to universal human experiences—the rites of passage and the tempest—and borrowing heavily from canonical old master works, the Romantics particularly, many examples in the series represent feminine or "feminized" protagonists who ride out storms in small sailboats. Having been troubled by the artist's earlier female motifs, feminist critic Susan Knowles observed with satisfaction that "these pieces are clearly autobiographical. [Stewart] is present in them in female form... a far cry from the imprisoned females in his earlier work."[4] Stewart himself preferred a more far-reaching humanistic interpretation of the graphite series:



SHIPMATES

Graphite • 30 x 40 inches • 1988

*Collection of the artist*





LITTLE CAT

Dry pigments • 30 x 22 inches • 2004

*Collection of Betsy & Stuart Worden*

> *Many of these narratives* are about lessons to be learned, encounter situations where life impacts on you; you get overwhelmed by life, by experience, by situations you're involved with. The drawings are formal guides to the events. Of course there are pretensions here. Pretensions are what make us human, after all; they call attention to our common humanity. I think what most of us call honesty and sincerity is probably an exaggeration. Completely sincere people don't interest me. I'm really more concerned with pretensions which are authentic.[5]

LIKE HIS PRE-RAPHAELITE mentors, Stewart savors art history. But the official advent of Post-modernism, which, by way of contesting the supposed virtues of authorship and "originality," sanctioned every kind of artistic "appropriation," accelerated this basic inclination in Stewart's work. And just to keep Rembrandt and Bernini in their proper places, he began seasoning his historical quotations and images with ones he scrounged from cheap advertising throwaways. Leading up to the present moment, the artist has been exploring the technical possibilities of dry pigment on raw paper, surely the most stringent and irreducible possibility open to the drawing medium. Reversing the conventional mark-making, figure-on-ground approach, he relies almost entirely upon the erased, absent line to convey the limits of form and transmit tonal variation. Broken into

manageable pieces, the Staedtler Mars plastic eraser, used in conjunction with a rag, has replaced the stump or colored pencil as primary mark-maker. As previously occurred in Stewart's *oeuvre*, a major change in material and technique has signaled a sea change in subject matter. The stories remain as figurative as ever, but the human element has been replaced by the antics of household pets: a regal Staffordshire Terrier scampers across a carpeted space, or a pussy cat curls up for the long sleep. The artist recollected:

> *In the animals, I just wanted to draw,* and divorce myself from narrative, to make drawings that just didn't have any meaning but what the drawings conveyed—and, at the same time, to try to draw directly, forcefully, energetically, technically, masterfully—not in the sense of I think I'm a master—but masterfully in drawing the way I've learned from looking at master drawings—very direct. Every mark has to have a sense of literal momentum to it...'velocity' is a word I like to use a lot.

He also values the way words like "economy" and "decisiveness" describe superlative drawing achievements, for example the shadow that is formed from a single well-judged line, rather than a muddled convolution of markings.



CLEO AND THE WOLF

Graphite • 23 1/2 x 17 1/2 inches • 2002

*Collection of Fletcher C. Stewart III*



FIGURE STUDIES

Nupastel charcoal (L) and charcoal (R) on newsprint • 36 x 24 inches • n.d.

*Collection of the artist*

WHILE LOOKING BACK at his frequent changes of pace, Stewart considers that he has finally become a "draftsman." But this tidy summary misleads us. What of life drawing, that ongoing and unchanging practice, and resulting body of work he has never exhibited or sold? Just as the accomplished musician returns to basic exercises to keep in top form, so Stewart, whose teaching responsibilities required it, had special incentive for revisiting the life class on a regular basis. As an instructor of life drawing, he has been a demonstrator as well as a discoverer of incontestable truths. His charcoal sketches of nude models on yellowing newsprint contribute to an international visual language that has been in use for six hundred years. They follow no stylistic or chronological systems; they are not recognizably "Stewarts"; one might conceivably have been made by a Baroque artist, another by an Impressionist. But Stewart notes that good life drawing is on the endangered list, since academia no longer stresses its importance to a young artist's development. In his case, the good drawings came easily, when everything clicked; the less successful ones endured the fate of being overworked or ill-conceived. Informed by experience and a perceptual alertness, and also advantaged with a small bit of luck, the successful life drawing for Stewart is an exhilarating performance-in-process, not a mathematical resolve of an aesthetic problem.





*Surrealism is not a direction or a movement; it is a permanent state of the soul*

WILHELM FREDDIE

IN EARLY RETIREMENT, F. Clark Stewart is trim, has thinning hair, and stands six feet high. His manner is gentle, ingratiating, and thoughtful. He has considerable aplomb and a deliberateness of speech that make him seem a bit formal and aloof. There is, as well, a faintly meditative air about him. When conversing or lecturing, his large dark eyes seem to search out, then lock onto, a distant horizon. He was born in July 1942 in Evansville, Indiana, the only child of Dr. Fletcher Clark Stewart, Sr. and Grace McCrory. Originally from Kansas, the father was a physician and medical director with the United States Public Health Service, an assignment that came with the uniform of a naval captain. Reared in northern Alabama, Mrs. Stewart studied English at the University of Southwestern Louisiana, Lafayette, before teaching high school in a rural area of the state. The parents met and married in

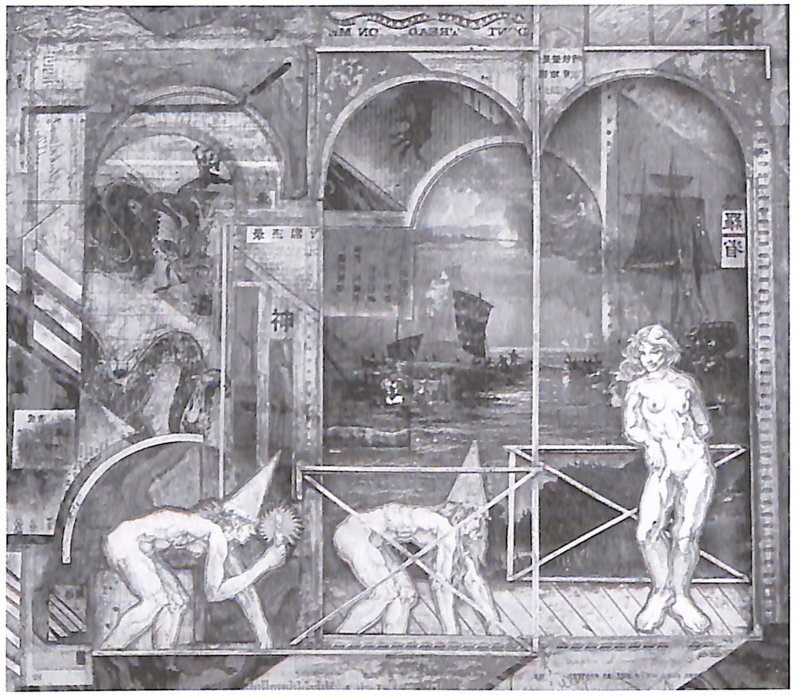
*If it were left to artists to choose their own labels, most would choose none*

BEN SHAHN

QUEST

Acrylic and colored pencil • 18 x 23 3/4 inches • 1999

*Collection of the artist*



WHY THE EAST IS RED

Drawing/collage • 15 x 16 1/2 inches • 1976

*Collection of Kathleen & David Joyner*

New Orleans shortly before Dr. Stewart was ordered to the American Consulate in Hong Kong, China. During the Depression, foreign service offered its employees distinct advantages, not the least being a steady income and unique cultural enrichment. Residing in state rooms in the Hong Kong Peninsula Hotel, the Stewarts thrived on the city's internationalism. But the hotel's upscale soirees and odd, if quaint, entertainments—a detachment of Sikhs awakened the guests each morning with bagpipe music—convinced them that British colonial governance and its rules of social etiquette were a cut above those of other embassies. They attended services at the Anglican Church and dusted off the old Stewart coat-of-arms that bore an image of the sacrificial pelican. They became social magnates, collecting period furnishings and hosting and attending teas, formal dinners, and musicals, which drew a crosscurrent of notable personalities and diplomats, Hong Kong's Governor General among them. Unlike many mainlander Americans, they came to regard the British Empire, even in its decline, as one of history's noble experiments. Clark recently expressed their view in this way:

> *The Empire interests me because*, by the turn of the century, it had become the first viable and nearly total World Order, and its intentions, though not always realized, were largely benevolent, bringing order and good government and an end to barbarism and slavery.[6]

THE SECOND WORLD WAR brought the Stewarts home side to the Midwest and to military bases and naval stations on the east and west coasts. "Home" was in reality a sequence of rentals, some quite comfortable ones, with an old Ford parked out front. The parents retained their Asian colonial furnishings and, with the birth of a son, were as determined as ever to maintain a structured and disciplined domestic sanctuary. Thus, young Stewart was reared in a punctilious and somewhat overprotected family enclave that, while it successfully neutralized any feelings of rootlessness the boy may have experienced, tended to isolate him from other children. In a household dominated by women, he missed the company of female peers. Watching over him were a nanny and his Aunt Julia Key McCrory (having earned a master's degree at the University of Wisconsin, McCrory taught Speech, Drama, and the Oral Interpretation of Literature at Lindenwood



The Stewart family, circa 1949



WINDOW DANCER IV

Drawing/collage • 24½ x 16½ inches • 1976

*Collection of Dr. Jack M. Barlow*

College, near St. Louis, and at Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green). A maid cooked and served a formal dinner each evening. The meal followed a scripted ritual that stressed obedience, timeliness, and proper attire. A gentility governed table manners and conversation. Along with a beloved antique piano, properly displayed utensils, candelabra, drinking vessels, and cloth napkins, all gave visual assurances of family stability and perpetuity. Young Stewart's first memories of the world outside the home's hermetic environment were of military establishments and officers' clubs in New York and California. Excursions aboard Coast Guard cutters were not infrequent.

IN THE LATE 1940s, a ritualistic visit with his parents to "Old Ironsides," the restored USS *Constitution* in Boston Harbor, precipitated young Stewart's first "art experience"; a family-assisted project that provided materials to construct wooden models and to paint and draw pictures of the ship. Beyond the satisfaction derived from making and possessing the objects, the boy's ultimate concern was "to capture and retain and experience and live vicariously what I imagined to be the life of the people who sailed the ship." From this encounter, Stewart also gained an early appreciation of what empire-building meant in cultural terms: the fact that America's most admirable epoch, one in which heroic action, patriotism, education, and civilizing influences were honored above mere creature comforts and material gain, was framed in time by the exploits of mighty war ships. The ignominious sinking of the battleship USS *Maine* in Havana Harbor at

century's end—this particular metaphor of sexual impotency figured in two works—marked the precipitous down side of America's golden age. After 1949, when the family was living in Long Beach, California, Stewart supplemented the military indoctrination he gleaned secondhand from his father's example by enlisting in the Boy Scouts of America. His troop was commanded by an energetic Korean War veteran who put him and his colleagues through a virtual boot camp. Dressed in pressed olive drab, the troop often visited military bases or embarked on overly ambitious hikes. One aborted exercise projected a nonstop march from Death Valley to Mount Whitney. Another, to Donor Pass, where the Scouts occupied a tepee village, ended with a mass helicopter rescue when a snowstorm struck. But without such overreaching, Stewart determined, the troop might not have otherwise distinguished itself, which it succeeded in doing most impressively when it broke a fifty-mile-hike record previously established by a detachment of the United States Marines.

DURING SUCH TESTS of physical endurance, Stewart perhaps imagined himself to be a foot soldier patrolling a frontier in one of Her Majesty's colonial armies. By contrast, the technological gadgetry the American military industrial complex currently envisioned for future wars held no interest. Military history properly belonged to human history, while the war of the future, as it was projected in Pop artist James Rosenquist's giant mural *F-111* (Museum of Modern Art, 1964), belonged to a purgatory of glitzy American engineering and manufacture that discounted the human



F. Clark Stewart, BRITISH SOLDIERS

Painted tin • standing height 2 1/2 inches • circa 1990



presence and the gratuitous act of heroism. As with the "Old Ironsides" project, Stewart needed to invest his imagination in some sort of tangible object, preferably one of his own making, if he were to relive history in an effectively "vicarious" manner. During one term, the Long Beach elementary school he attended sponsored a sociology project aimed at reconstructing and picturing every aspect of life in a typical Chinese village; Stewart's prized contributions of watercolor illustrations were henceforth preserved in the school library. His high school years in Santa Ana launched him into a fury of model-building, picture-making, collecting, and the rebuilding of classic vehicles, all passions that to varying degrees have stayed with him. His educational experience was also enhanced by his mother's ongoing scholarship. Having enrolled in the University of Southern California, Mrs. Stewart studied mythology and symbolism and impressed upon Clark the idea that these disciplines could serve him as portals to universal truths.[7]

THE ARTIST RECENTLY OBSERVED that model-building provided a focus for understanding the past that a hopelessly inexact verbal history could not.[8] With this in mind, he turned to antique editions of illustrated British military magazines and catalogues and commenced making painted tin soldiers. A kind of miniaturized version of the terra cotta army discovered at the Chinese tomb of Qin Shi Huang Di, Stewart's warriors now total some eight hundred in number. These represent foot soldiers and officers of as many specific British colonial units as he had time to research. Consisting of six men and an equestrian officer, each unit commemorates participants in various turn-of-the-century English military engagements:

WINDOW DANCER II

Drawing/construction • 29 x 13 inches • 1975

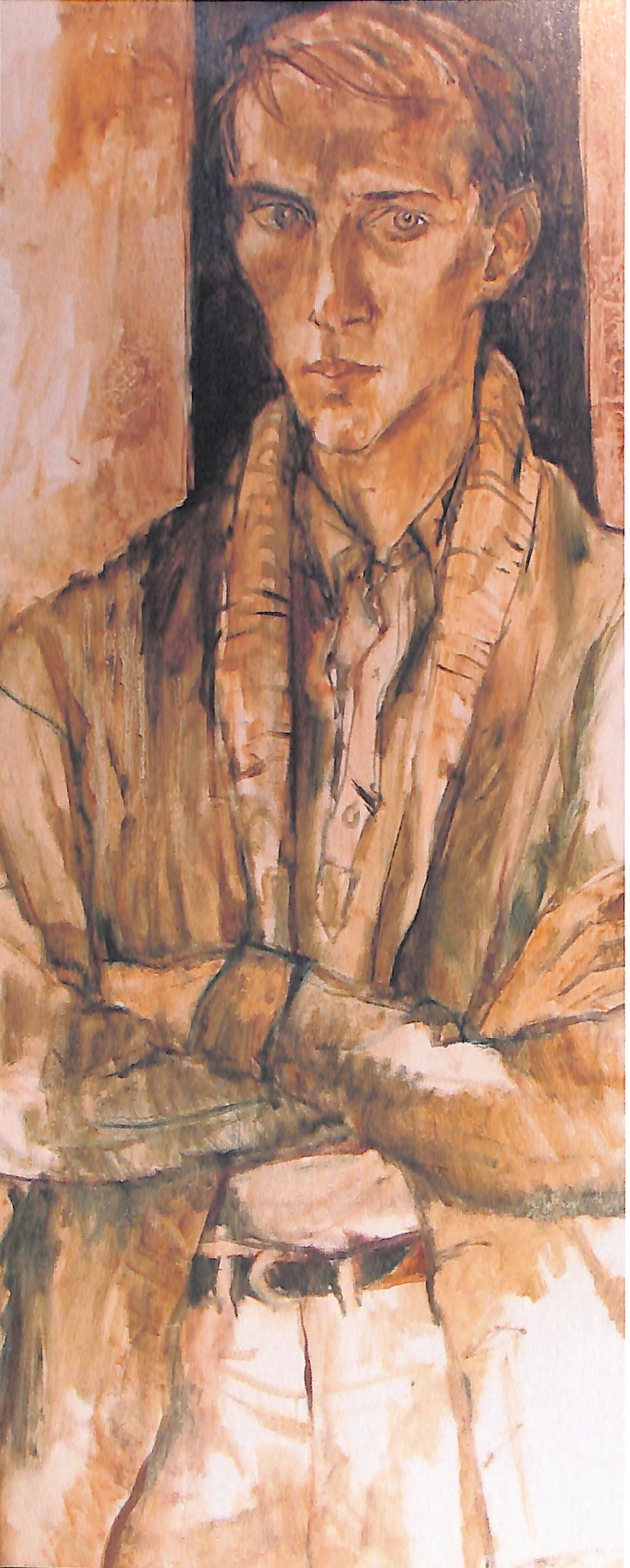
*Collection of Beverly & Harold Duckett*

Obderman in the Sudan, the Zulu Wars in South Africa, including the battles at Isandlewana and Rorkes Drift, and the continuous pop-up "guerrilla" skirmishes on India's northwest frontier. The artist is quite mindful that from a present-day American perspective, the Sudan and Indian situations continue to resonate. Stewart's "empire complex" extended to the building and collecting of model trains, a man's-only pastime some psychologists attribute to an individual's subconscious desire to "control and master territory."[9] With the help of a British model kit, he simulated a mountainous stretch of Scotland's Caledonian Railway as it looked around 1900. His first rebuilt automobile engine belonged to a 1949 MGTC. Moving to motorcycles, Stewart restored two Spanish Bultaco Metrallas, a Royal Enfield, several English Nortons, and, at present, is returning a 1966 Benelli to service. New car and bike designs repel him. When apprising the efficiency and good looks of the vintage machines he has tended, Stewart sounds more like the folksy wood craftsman than a hard-boiled machinist.

IN 1964, STEWART GRADUATED from the University of Redlands with a Bachelor of Arts degree. The previous year he had married Judith Ann Newton, who was double-majoring at Redlands in Art and English, and minoring in Theater. Having earned her in-state secondary teaching credentials, Judy taught several years of high school English before she and Clark left California. Stewart's painting courses were taught by second- and third-generation Abstract Expressionists, a fact that did not win them his respect. What was perhaps most useful to him at the university was a



Stewart with his 1949 MGTC, circa 1957

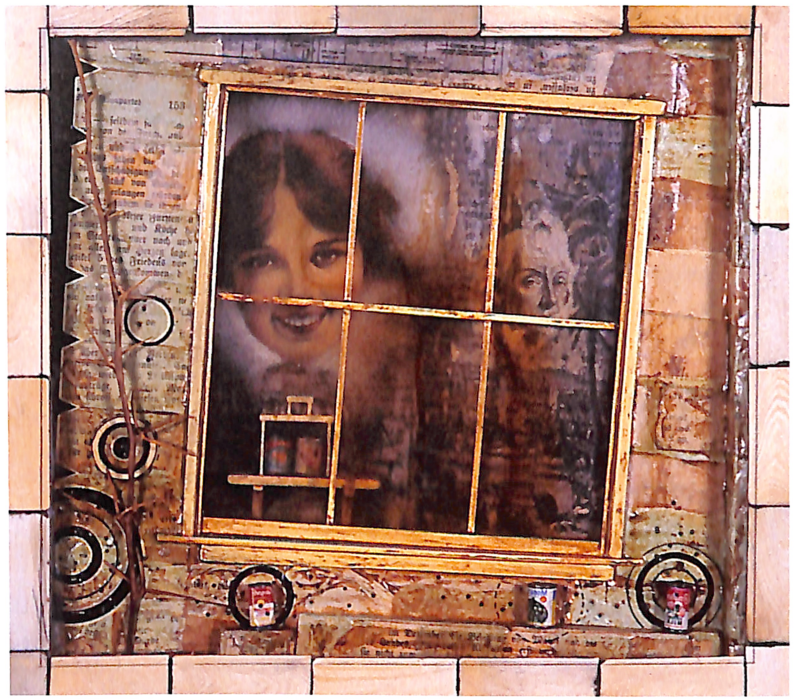


course that combined art techniques with an introductory offering in Art History. One learned the history of art by doing it. The drawing segment interested him most, and he fell into the habit of packing a pocket book of old master works to serve as a ready reference. Striving to imitate an admired example as accurately as possible, he began with charcoal before branching out. Following a round-about trail that could cover five hundred years of art history in one or two days, he might copy a *quattrocento* silverpoint, an eighteenth-century, three-conte crayon drawing by Antoine Watteau, and an early twentieth-century, pen-and-ink by Amedeo Modigliani. The objective was not just to learn technique, which the practice accomplished admirably well, but in a sense to also "possess" the beautiful drawing as one would own a piece of furniture or a motorcycle. No university faculty was available to assist Stewart in this extracurricular exercise (he later built it into his introductory drawing course). But in 1963, he found a mentor only a short distance away from Redlands at San Bernadino Junior College, one Louis Fox, an eccentric but impassioned master of life drawing. Over the period of a year, Stewart took but one class from Fox, yet it was more than sufficient to convert him. This instructor, he remembers, issued a single order to his classes: "Draw what you see." A critique was equally to the point: moving from station to station without comment or explanation, Fox either crumpled up student drawings or pinned them to the wall. Beyond the practice of drawing, Fox also encouraged Stewart to make the collecting of art—not just drawings, but all manner of sculpture, painting, and *objets d'art*—an extension of what it meant to be a studio artist in their time. Thus, seeking out the lower end of the contemporary Los Angeles art market, Clark and Judy began prospecting along La Cienega Boulevard; in its

Louis Fox, F. CLARK STEWART

Oil on canvas • 48 x 24 inches • 1965

print shops, bookstores, and art galleries they acquired an eclectic assembly of nineteenth-century Mexican religious paintings, Chinese drawings and paintings, and several Durer woodcuts from the "Small Passion" series: *Christ Appearing to His Disciples* (*Doubting Thomas*), in which the semi-nude Crucified strikes a pose of Herculean invincibility, and the densely packed *Betrayal of Christ* (*Arrest of Christ*), both impressions dating from around 1510.[10] Accommodating proprietors brought forward Rembrandt prints, Persian miniatures, colonial English portraits, and Italian engravings that, even if they could ill-afford them, provided the couple with the best of all learning experiences. This was especially valuable at a time when the supply of good commercial reproductions of historical art works remained extremely limited. With additions (Judy began collecting African tribal art a decade ago), the original art collection, dispersed among family antique furnishings, most appropriately complements the Stewarts' Tudor Gothic revival home in Knoxville.



PLINKIN' AND DREAMIN'

Collage/construction • 11 x 12 inches • 1977

*Collection of Ericka Stewart & Jim Tosney*

STEWART PURSUED a Master of Fine Arts degree in Painting at Claremont University Graduate School between 1964 and 1966. In those years, Southern California's art industry was headlining Pop Art, Minimalism, Color Field Painting, and large-scale assemblage projects like those of Edward Kienholz, who especially impressed Stewart. However, drawing continued to divert him from his major subject and so did a scholarly research project that sent him to southern Mexico. In the latter instance, Stewart's quest, which was no doubt inspired by the research of Yale University art



LOVE THY NEIGHBOR

Collage/construction • 12 1/4 x 9 1/4 inches • 1970s

*Collection of Christine & Robert Aiken*

historian George Kubler, was to sort out the interwoven cultural strands of pre- and post-conquest Mexican religious art and architecture.[11] Destined for a class paper, the project constituted for Stewart another foray into the ambiguous duality of empire and culture. With his own Mexican icons in mind, he questioned how the liturgic use of blood in Christian Europe related to its pagan use in Aztec ceremonies. In regard to European influences on Mexican architecture and sculpture, he wanted to probe the extent to which "Renaissance" or "early-Baroque" Mexican buildings and statues might better be understood as "Gothic."

BESIDE SUCH ACADEMIC inquiries, Stewart was also distracted from his graduate painting by the storytelling art of the Pre-Raphaelites and the "surreal" constructions of Ernst and Cornell.[12] The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (PRB) was a confraternity of mid-Victorian English painters who emulated the lives and naive approaches of early-Italian Renaissance artists, those pious seekers who lived before the advent of Raphael Sanzio, the chief formulator of the High Renaissance style. The PRB maintained that it had been the so-called "glorious" Raphael who had first industrialized the picture-making process, thereby stripping it of its former spiritual essence. In the mid-1960s, no art movement was more antithetic to the reigning principles of avant-garde modernism than the tedious descriptive analyses and overblown moralizing found in the canvases, drawings, and book illustrations of the PRB. Early on, Stewart found a cache of reproductions at home

in a coffee-table book, but became better acquainted with John Everett Millais and Sir Edward Burne-Jones, when their paintings and drawings were unveiled at George Huntington Hartford II's controversial New York Gallery of Modern Art (opened in 1964).[13] Guided by the PRB's example, Stewart drew upon a maxim he often repeated to his drawing students: "Every picture tells a story; every element in the picture should have some kind of signifying function." For example, while surveying Millais' *Mariana* (Tate Gallery, London, 1851), a view of a full-skirted woman who has risen from her embroidery to stretch and gaze through a window, one discovered a catalogue of binaries—the contrast of light and dark; of exterior and interior; of eroticism and religious restraint (a private chapel appears beside her work place); and of labor and reflection.[14] These conjured what Stewart termed a revelatory "collision between the spiritual and the temporal." The window motif would remain a consequential addition to his work, particularly in the early "Window Dancer" series.

CORNELL'S BOXES CAME to Stewart's attention in a much more dramatic way, practically on the eve of the opening of his Master of Fine Arts project in 1966, and made him all the more anxious to jettison painting for object-making. His reaction is understandable. In 1966, Southern California galleries, museums and publishers, in reaction to a belated European revival of Surrealism, launched a supportive advertising campaign. Important shows were convened.[15] The periodical *Artforum*, a paragon of



ARCADIAN ANDROGYNE

Collage/construction • 14 x 8 inches • 1977

*Collection of the artist*



art criticism that was temporarily headquartered in Los Angeles, devoted its entire September issue to Surrealism, carefully detailing its various operational strategies for probing the unconscious world. More important, the revival brought the previously little-known Cornell, who had been loosely associated with New York Surrealism since the early 1930s, into the full light of day. A pioneering exhibition of Cornell's work was hosted by the Pasadena Art Museum in May 1966, and the artist was thoroughly profiled in the April 1966 issue of *Artforum*.[16] In her article, Alexandra Cortesi delineated some of the psychological games Cornell played in his displays. Besides creating something that was inexplicably pleasurable, Stewart appreciated the poetic content of Cornell's work and the fact that with him "the making of art came closer to the making of other things." Cornell's pieces first demonstrated how human perception, as it entered and exited a kind of portal, constantly shifted between differing states of reality. Secondly, they suggested the ways an artist could manipulate this shift of reality through a playful and often haphazard selection of discarded and disjunctive objects—board games, maps, astrology charts, or photographs—and through linguistic play, by utilizing signs that read as puns, or double entendres. Addressing Stewart's adaptive use of Cornell's *modus operandi*, the art historian Dale Cleaver wrote of "strange designs, esoteric geometry, occult astrology, mysterious architecture [being] juxtaposed with old engravings or motorcycle ads. In these Stewart foreshortens time, leads us to hidden correspondences of a cosmic dimension."[17]

ANGELIC PUPPETEER

Drawing/collage • 30 1/2 x 13 1/2 inches • 1974

*Collection of Marianne Custer*

*Rather than confrontations with panoramic vistas, my eye became drawn to small confined areas rich in variety and detail*

F. CLARK STEWART, 1981

DURING HIS FORTY YEARS in Knoxville, Stewart the artist, like Shakespeare's Othello, has worn his heart upon his sleeve. Despite his ongoing operational and theoretical concerns, personal and domestic milestones have continued to form the basis of what has remained a story-telling art. After leaving the shotgun bungalow they occupied on Claremont's scruffy Arrow Highway, the Stewarts sought the reasonable comfort of older period-style Knoxville homes, Tudor-style houses built in the 1920s—the first in the Forest Hills suburb, where they remained until

*A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds*

RALPH WALDO EMERSON



THE GOOD LESSON

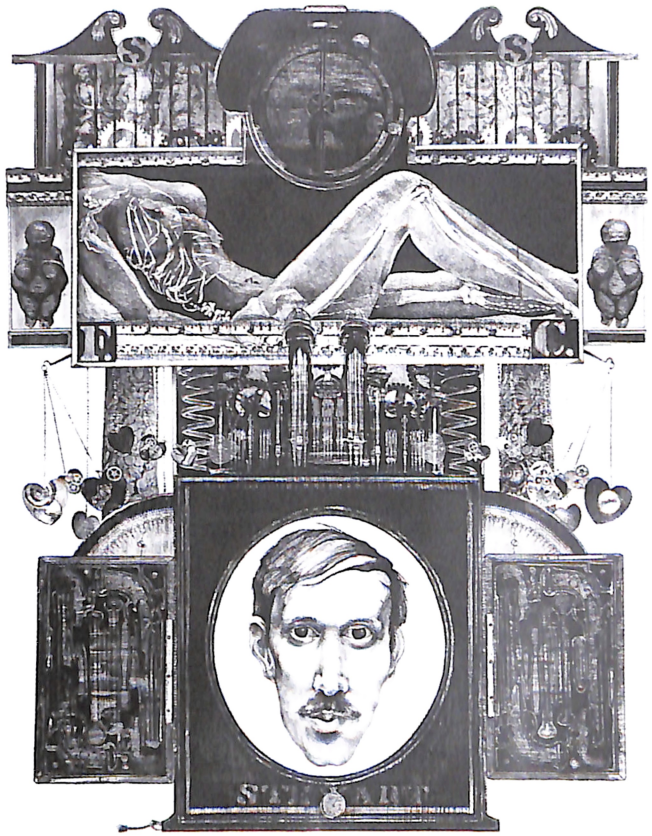
Acrylic and colored pencils, wood frame • 16 x 14 inches • 2001

*Collection of the Liquitex Corporation*

1979, and its successor, in Sequoyah Hills. Three children were born: Jessica Grace Stewart (Freeman) in 1968; Marjorie Ericka Stewart (Tosney) in 1970; and Fletcher Clark Stewart III in1981. The elder Stewarts moved from California to Knoxville in 1977. The aunt arrived the following year, and after the father's death in 1979, both Grace Stewart and her sister Julia joined the Stewart household, forming a three-generation family. Julia succumbed to cancer in 1992.

SINCE TAKING UP HIS TEACHING duties in Knoxville, Stewart estimates he has made around five hundred works. More than a few have been purchased by corporate, public, and private collectors, the former including McGraw-Hill Publishers, Coca-Cola, the Hospital Corporation of America, the McDonald Corporation, and the Opryland Hotel. Private owners tended to be artists, psychologists, philosophers, and sundry university professors. As gratifying as this response has been, Stewart well realizes he could not have survived financially without the recompense of teaching. It has not been possible to track down the destination of many sold works, but he does not long for them: "I really like my pieces to leave—they are not done until they are in someone else's hands." He has participated in around three hundred solo and shared national, regional, and local exhibitions. He dislikes following the leader, or working in co-operatives. On the other hand, teaching has saved Stewart from becoming the self-obsessed recluse, who, as Blake expressed it in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, "sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern."[19]

And Stewart feels teaching has taught him much of what he knows. For a time, however, in the 1970s, he did associate with a creative brotherhood that consisted of former art department student Barry Spann and colleagues Larry Gasper, Leon Weisner, and graphic artist Byron McKeeby, the latter a like-minded Surrealist with whom Stewart maintained an especially close relationship. Beside comradery, he gained important lessons from the others in a short period of time: how images can be put together in a new way or taken apart. "We all bounced off one another's ideas, especially about this kind of loose connection of images and the associations they engender." Irony was a shared passion for all of them. From the 1980s to the present, Stewart has worked most closely with faculty members Thomas J. Riesing and Marcia B. Goldenstein, although their aesthetic goals tend to diverge. A former student, Joe Companiotte, became Stewart's silent collaborator when, as the director of West Knoxville's Alpha Gallery, he developed a market for Stewart's boxes and early works. Companiotte was also an independently-minded frame builder who, without concern for cost, utilized the finest woods and matting material he could find. Another devoted local collector was Christine Aiken, the wife of a former University of Tennessee professor of Computer Science who now resides in Philadelphia. Returning in the late 1970s to her home in Bern, Switzerland, Mrs. Aiken opened an art gallery overseen by her mother, at which the work of Stewart, along with that of Riesing and Goldenstein, was frequently exhibited. Stewart has considered many of his former students—some of whom have posed for his drawings and paintings—as members of an extended family. Stewart has mourned




Byron McKeeby, F. CLARK STEWART

Lithograph • 25 x 20 inches • 1968



THE PASSION AND ENTRY OF VARVARA IVANOVA NARISHKINE

Collage/construction • 17 x 8 inches • 1977

*Collection of Arlene S. Goldstine*

the especially gifted ones, like Terry Burnett, who died in 1983, a year in advance of McKeeby's demise. Stewart's painting *Remember the Maine* (1983) metaphorically commemorates not only the decline of empire, but also the student's passing.

ALTHOUGH HE HAS frequently taught summer school at the University of Tennessee-affiliated Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, Stewart has preferred to travel abroad. In 1981, he took a sightseeing excursion through Russia. In that country, gilded Eastern Orthodox icons and the fanciful onion-domed architecture were of primary interest. As in Mexico, the religious artifacts provided charming examples of cultural misalignment whenever the unsophisticated forms of the vernacular cavalierly attempted to pass themselves off as *haute couture*. He went to France in 1985 in anticipation of producing a documentary photo album. Unlike the machines in his garage, however, the camera proved to be an unwieldy and distracting tool. Four visits to Bratislava, Republic of Slovakia, followed in 1994, 1999, 2003, and 2004, when he exhibited and lectured under the auspices of the National Academy of Fine Arts and Design. The approaches and departures from war-threatened Slovakia offered further escapes to Europe and other Central-European countries, where museums, galleries, and distinctive old buildings awaited him. (He has yet to make it to Italy).

IN A CATALOGUE ENTRY for the Smithsonian Institution exhibit, *More Than Land or Sky* (1981), Stewart expressed his appreciation for Appalachia's dense natural environment for both ideological and formal reasons. An embedded environment, he ventured, "foments a climate in which person-

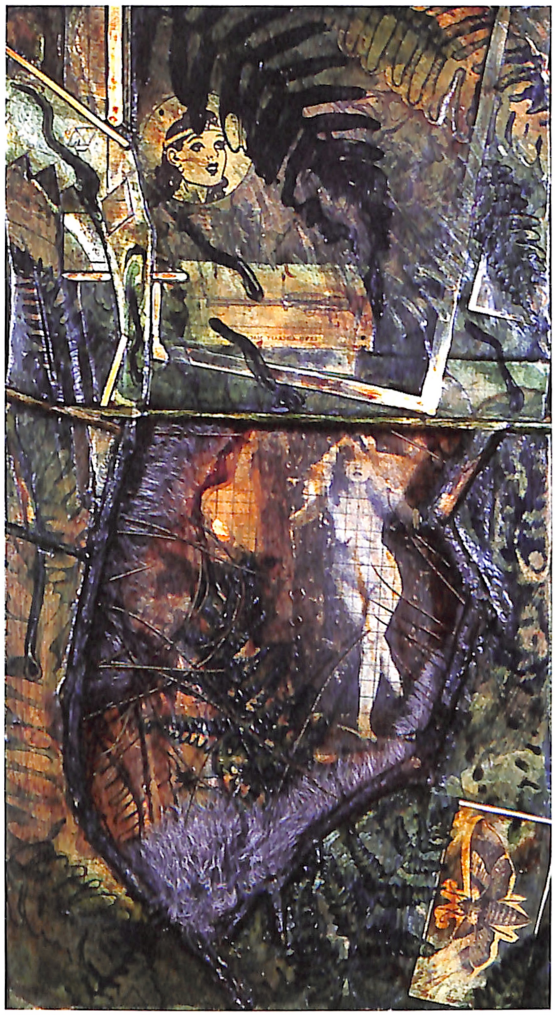


REMEMBER THE MAINE

Acrylic and colored pencil • 30 x 20 inches • 1983

*Collection of Bill Martin*

al artistic idiosyncrasy is perhaps easier to maintain than in the atmosphere of the compelling artistic currents of more sophisticated areas."[20] In other terms, the mountainous landscape encouraged the artist to resist the obligations which the urbanized artist, at the risk of losing his livelihood and social status, could not. Parenthetically voicing the opinions of many other so-called regionalists, Stewart resents the fact that the galleries,



JUNGLE JANE

Collage/construction • 15 x 8 inches • 1977

*Collection of Fletcher C. Stewart III*



museums, and publishing houses that happen to occupy a four-square-mile section of southern Manhattan Island somehow continue to set the aesthetic standards for the entire art world.

EVEN SO, IT WAS LESS the local landscape and more the figure that occupied his thoughts. In the guise of the artist's muse and tormentor, the nude female dominates the early drawings. It was bound to be. Thinking back to California, Stewart regrets having been shielded from the female. "The opposite sex was always a great mystery to me, and unobtainable." Now in maturity, his fate was to live in a matriarchal household and teach classes in which a majority of students were female. *Evening Sight Fish* (1972) is a fine example of the artist's early-Knoxville concerns. The nude female here quite typically plays the role of vamp and the Queen of Heaven. Surrounded by a perfectly designed nimbus and wearing a tiny crown, she triumphantly pilots a leviathan over an Alpine landscape, using oars ingeniously fabricated from a bat's wing. All of nature is at her beck and call, and she smiles wickedly in self-acknowledgment of this fact. The woman's taut, armor-plated body is centered perfectly within the frame's lunette curve. A conventionalized mountainous landscape that reflects Stewart's historical interests and model collecting lies beneath her. An old train crosses a

EVENING SIGHT FISH

Graphite • 12 x 5 3/4 inches • 1972

*Collection of Dr. Robert M. Hunt*

wooden trestle. An unpaved wagon road leads to an incipient industrial site, similar to those that dotted the Hudson River in the 1850s and the Tennessee River in the early 1900s. We are snapped back to the present by a grotesque intrusion. Forcefully grasping a graphite stylus, Stewart's own hand invades the pictorial space from below. The very hand and drawing tool that conceivably made the picture we have been admiring, attend to some unfinished business: the rendering of an unraveling filament that connects the everyday space outside the picture with the tail of the improbable beast within it. This *tromp l'oeil* trickery perfectly demonstrates how the act of drawing can transport the human psyche from one realm of existence to another; that is, from the past through the present to the future, as well as from the material to the spiritual realms. The vignette also makes obvious the fact that since the artist's hand has formed the image of the terrifying woman, it must also possess the power to curb her destructive powers. But can it? In a related drawing, *Jessica Perceiving Awareness of Birds* (1974), the omnipotent femme fatale, like Zeus or the protean Buddha, is a hybrid comprised of the features of both a human being and a goose. With face averted and her stringy hair flying, this migrant being powers her way into the firmament with an almost audible Wagnerian flourish. Meanwhile, amid harmlessly swirling paper airplanes, the artist's



JESSICA PERCEIVING AWARENESS OF BIRDS

Lithograph • 27 x 14 1/2 inches • 1974

*In several collections (edition of 25)*




young daughter, garbed only in a diaper, watches her future self from an antediluvial rock. As Stewart began to combine his renderings with collage-building, the female type also began to change her character. The protagonist of the collage, *Window Dancer Before the Act of Creation* (1976), is less the Amazon than a beguiling and ingenuous Alice in Wonderland.

THE ARTIST'S MODEL, if not the female presence, is banished altogether from Stewart's precious Cornellian objects. *African Violet 2* (1977), *Votive Offering (Les Mysteres des Pyramides)* (1977), the simulated book cover *Oracle–Hear Ear* (1976), and *Allegorical Game Pyramid* (1979), among other composites that playfully reference Euclidean geometry and optics, explore a linguistic double-play as well. *African Violet 2*, which gives off the delicious dark glow of a medieval icon, is named for the flowers that are pressed between glass panels at its center. Not only dainty strips of gold leaf, but also the momentarily convenient wallpaper that adorned the studio in which it was fabricated, was utilized during the collage's production. The secondary theme of *African Violet* is humorously developed by cameo appearances of an elephant, a rhinoceros, and an alligator. *Oracle–Hear Ear* is similarly dependent upon a verbal-visual trope. In this work, the "auricle" is illustrated by transferred pictures of a conch shell, in which one "hears" the ocean. Opening the cover, the viewer-reader discovers a scientific diagram (with an accompanying printed explanation) of the inner ear beneath a Grecian figure. These images face across

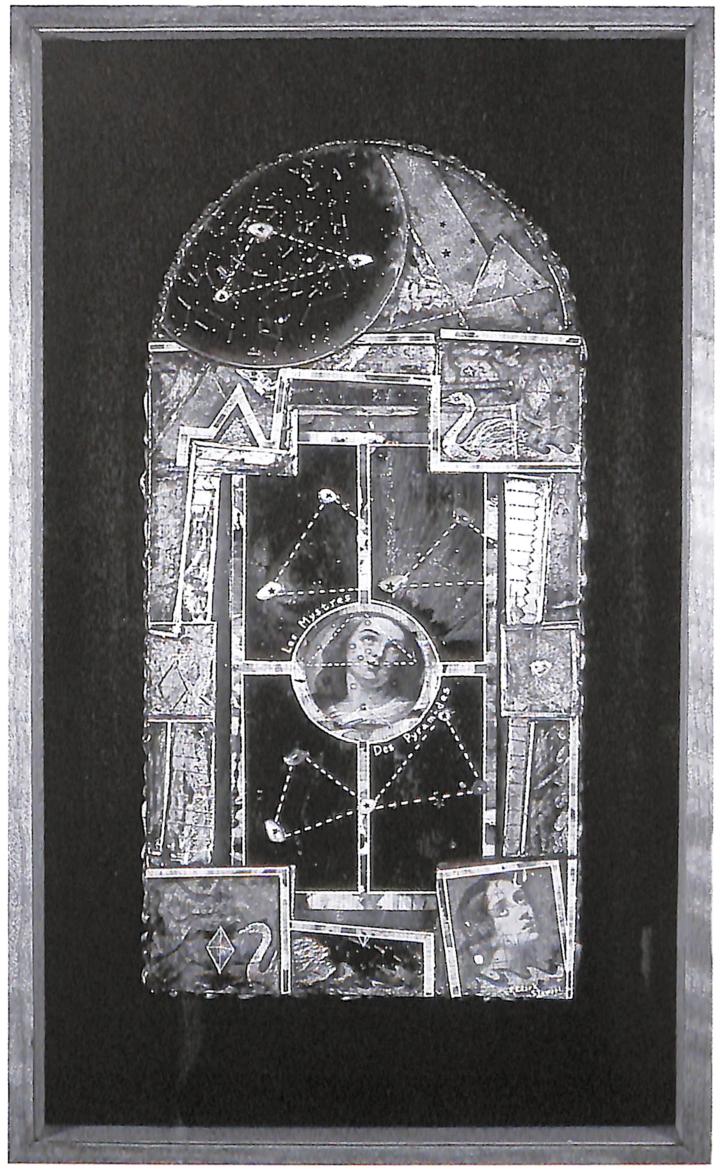
inside detail from ORACLE–HEAR EAR

Book collage/construction • 8 3/4 x 5 1/2 inches • 1976

*Collection of Christine & Robert Aiken*

the book's spine to an actual shell and a truncated classical column. The ear-like configuration of this shell connects with Venus who legendarily rode one like it to shore, while the column equates with the "oracle" where ancient Greeks and Romans consulted their deities about future events. Like many of the object constructions, *Votive Offering*, also a collage, is reminiscent of the *tromp l'oeil* representations of flat-to-the-surface letter racks made by late-nineteenth-century American still-life specialists William Harnett and John Peto—images which had also enervated young Cornell. In Stewart's *Votive Offering*, the faces of beatific women, which have been clipped from reproduced masterworks, alternate with decorative decals of swans, connoting Victorian romance, and rudimentary astrological diagrams, to substantiate the Wittgensteinian proposition that all human cognition depends upon the severe limits and vagaries of whatever language a civilization uses.

AMONG THE PYRAMID PIECES Stewart crafted in the late 1970s, *Allegorical Game Pyramid* is the most complex. It consists of a steep golden shaft that is textured with acrylic fossil leaves and spermatozoa. The spire rests on a glassed-in reliquary framed in ivory strips which, in turn, rests on a narrow wooden plinth that contains a hidden drawer. The relic Stewart chose for the central compartment was an object no less consequential than a staircase finial, appropriately gilded and painted, which the artist "liberated"



VOTIVE OFFERING

Collage/construction • 17 x 9 inches • 1977

*Collection of Dr. Jack M. Barlow*

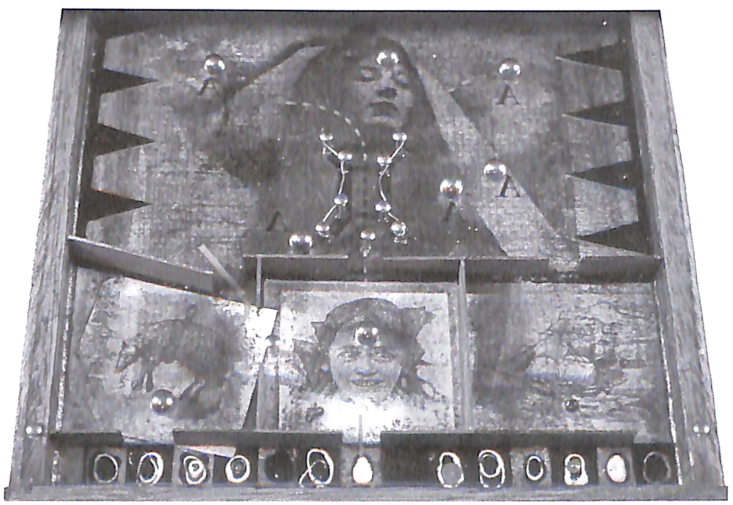


CONTEST OF STRENGTH

Acrylic and colored pencil • 20 x 30 inches • 1999

*Collection of the artist*

from an aging studio staircase. A sequence of reproductions from old prints (several faces, a sloth, a sailing ship), acrylic fossils, and a game board equipped with metal pinballs are revealed when the drawer is opened. Redolent of Cornell's shell-game format, the player-viewer is encouraged to pursue winning possibilities by landing balls in one of three predestined locations: "the straight and narrow path of enlightenment"; "the path of suffering and martyrdom"; or "the path of high adventure." The ironic notion that human destiny could be determined by the chance roll of a ball or, as Mallarme's poem expresses it, by the roll of the dice, was hardly new: the Dada movement cut its teeth on the concept during the First World War; and, of course, *I Ching*, the Chinese manual of divination that centered on the toss of yarrow stalks or coins, dates back at least five thousand years. Stewart, who dislikes novelty for



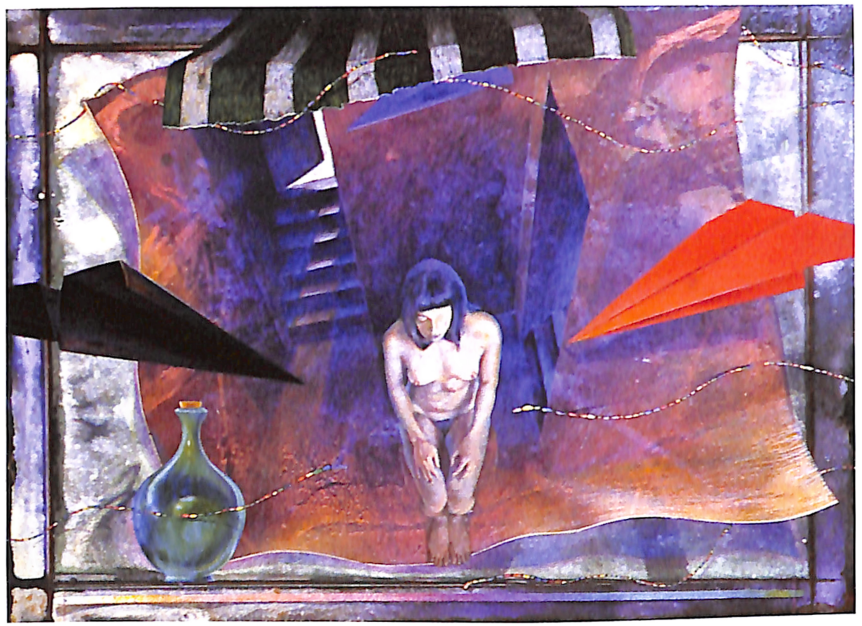
drawer detail



ALLEGORICAL GAME PYRAMID

Construction • 27 x 8 inches square • 1978

*Collection of Christine & Robert Aiken*



GREEN CELADON JAR

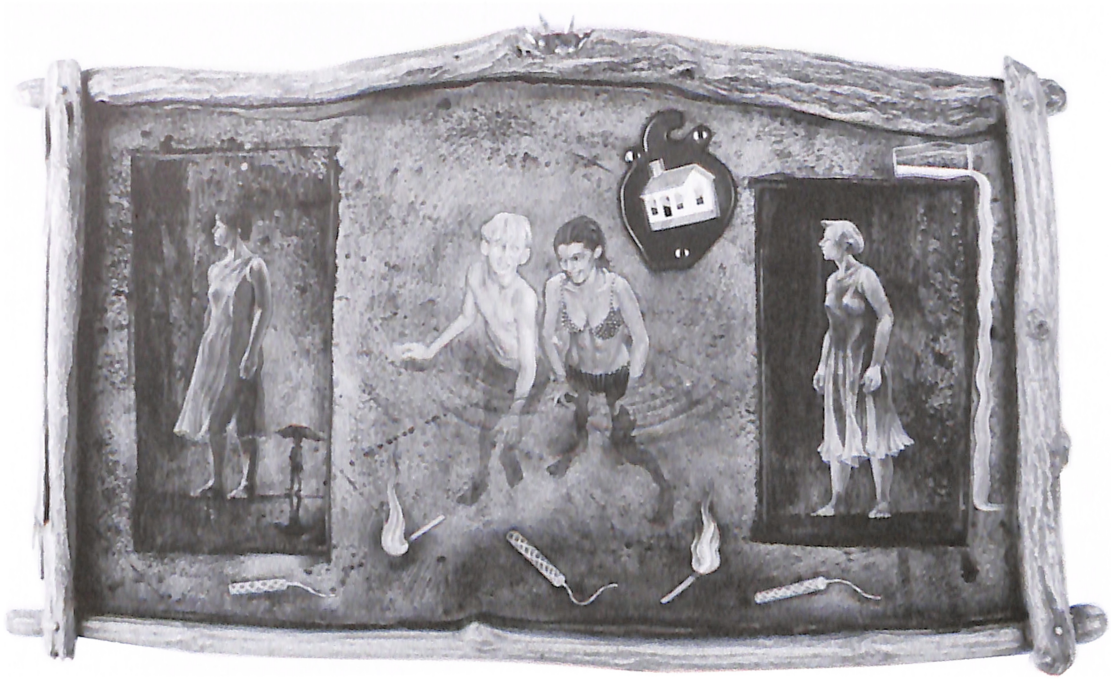
Acrylic and colored pencil • 22½ x 30 inches • 1983

*Collection of Joe L. Rosson*

novelty's sake, realized he had tapped into something very old and yet quite timely. This was made especially clear when biochemists of the 1970s began comparing the logic of *I Ching* to their updated understanding of DNA amino acids and the human genome.

IF ALL ARTWORKS tell a story, then Stewart's object art tells it differently than do his representational tableaux. In the first category, the given shape of what has been chosen speaks about itself and about Euclidean concept. The second, through artistry and technique, dramatizes living human incidents on a flat surface. We sense that Stewart's several-year abstinence from drawing in the late 1970s made his return to it all the more ambient. And the hieratic female nude, albeit considerably modified, rode the crest of this resurgence. *Green Celadon Jar* (1983) and *Red Paper Planes Nocturne* (1984), both horizontally formatted acrylics with Prismacolor accents on Arches paper, and both exhibiting complex *tromp l'oeil* interchanges, exemplify Stewart's aesthetic homecoming. In the former work, a vase made by Japanese manufacturing techniques is prominently displayed at the left side of a stage-like opening. Given to the Stewarts some twenty years earlier by a University of Redlands ceramicist, the jar—corked but empty—subsequently became a familiar prop in other pictures. In the direct center of the picture, a female nude, passively seated as if in a chair with hands on her legs and her feet under water, is viewed

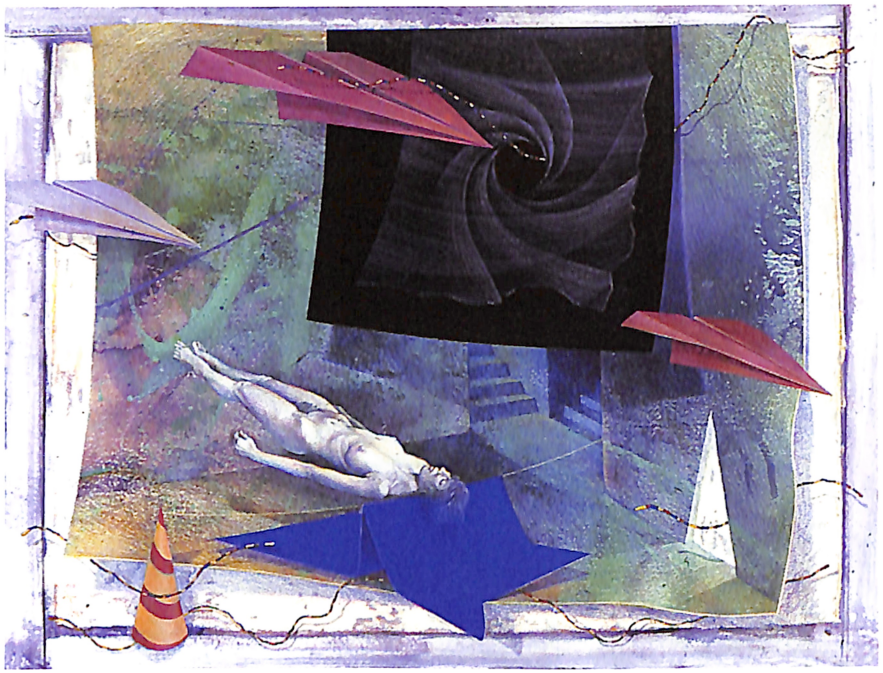
from a vertical position. Her identity is uncertain, even though Stewart insists "all my figures are people I know." Stretched out behind and below her is represented a violet scrim that loosely floats a foot or more above the substantial white ground beneath it. A transparent image of the artist's old basement workspace in the Forest Hills home—concrete stairs leading to a half-opened door—shows through the scrim. At the summit of the page, another overlapping layer of fabric, a striped awning, projects forward into the viewer's space. Large paper airplanes zoom inward from the sides, aiming their dangerous points directly at the woman. Elsewhere, thin multicolor filaments, equally suggestive of earthworms and of the geneticist's illustration of chromosomes, casually extend themselves slightly above the imagined picture plane. *Red Paper Planes Nocturne* presents a comparative view of a woman, planes, chromosomes, and the basement workshop, except the female—now prone and apparently asleep or unconscious—floats in space, her feet slightly elevated, and is perceived by us from a diagonal perspective. The jar of the other work has been replaced by a spiral cone. A counter-clockwise vortex, reminiscent of the hurricane's deadly eye, appears imprinted on a black page at top center.



RITES OF PUBERTY

Acrylic and colored pencil • 15 x 25 inches • 1998

*Collection of the artist*

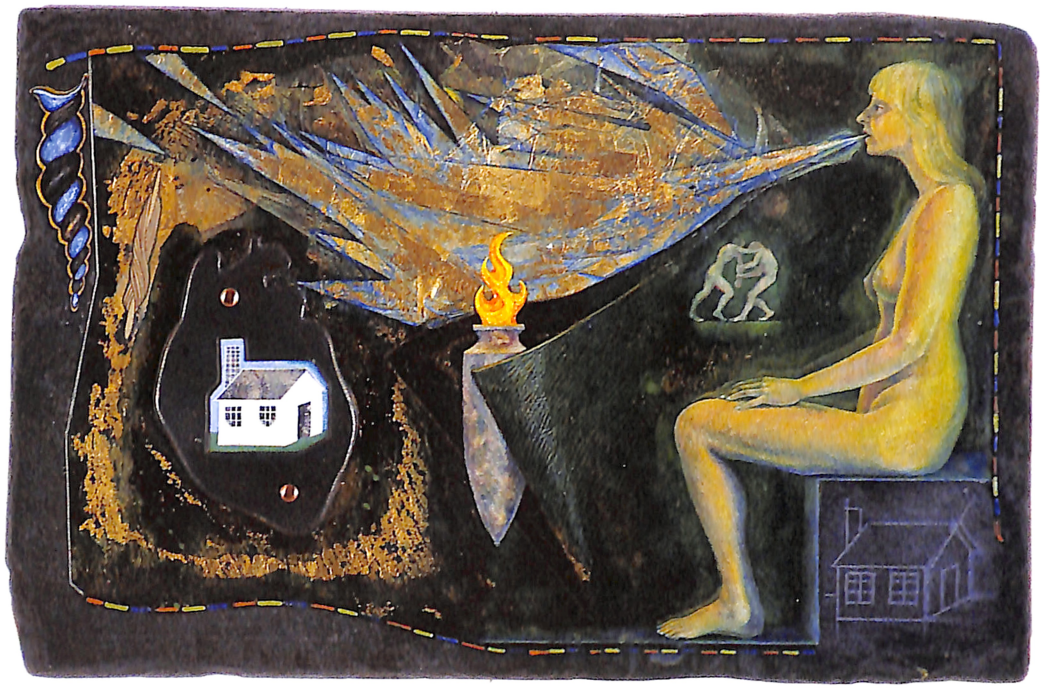


RED PAPER PLANES NOCTURNE

Acrylic and colored pencil • 22 x 30 inches • 1982

*Collection of Jessica & Tom Freeman*

INVITED TO DECIPHER these paintings as if they were puzzles, the viewer, without special prompting, can no doubt distinguish among the gathered objects a wide assortment of stimulating associations and mental inclinations: the endlessly intriguing confrontation between illusion and reality; things that relate to child's play and festive entertainments; things that impinge upon the picture "plane"; life-enhancing scientific discoveries; water as representative of a primeval source of life; various kinds of Euclidean truths; the working principles of aerodynamics; weather-related catastrophes; and an Oriental meditative philosophy, as manifested, for example, in the blissful Buddhist state of Nirvana, which occurs when the consciousness is purged of all desire. In a less esoteric way, the floating woman illustrates for Stewart's viewer that shared human moment when one is on the verge of falling asleep or, in the case of the seated figure in *Green Celadon Jar*, the fleeting seconds of total silence that descends upon an auditorium after an orchestra has completed the symphony, just before the house bursts into applause. That the celadon jar literally happens to be full of "emptiness" expresses the same thought in a slightly different way. Other associations are more privileged. After the Russian trip, which Stewart's avid reading of Dostoevski and Tolstoy made all the more vivid, the leaking basement would forever after remind him of a KGB interrogation chamber. No matter how productive were the

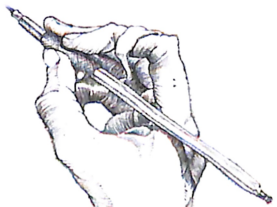


HEARTFELT

Acrylic, colored pencil, lead, gold leaf on slate •
14 x 18 inches • 1992

*Collection of Ebbie & Ronald Sandberg*

hours spent here, Stewart could not entirely leave behind old intimations of a Kafkaesque doom. In his mind, the strident vortex more specifically related to "a cutting into a state of awareness." Concerning the content and interpretation of works like these, the artist affirmed that the clues and symbols he depends upon "are often broadly cultural, a la Jung/Freud/Joseph Campbell. I think many of my pieces are fairly decipherable if the viewer will just think about them and bring their own experiences to bear.... Some of the early work is more cryptic, but I feel the viewer can bring their own interpretation into the piece. I generally speak of my content as an implied or inferred narrative, rather than having a strict narrow meaning."[21]



IN WHAT PROVED TO BE the most extensive series of single-theme paintings, the question of content and interpretation becomes a far more critical issue than it does in transitory compositions like the ones just discussed. After Jessica's birth in 1968, Stewart, with increasing frequency, incorporated his growing family in his pictures. Numbering perhaps three dozen, the greatest concentration of these appears in the 1990s. While contemporary American artists such as Alex Katz, Fairfield Porter, and Richard Diebenkorn enjoyed painting family members and friends in a detached, disinterested manner (all the more to prove their "cool" regard for interpersonal relationships and life itself), Stewart used his pictures to evaluate family sovereignty and succession. That is, these works periodically document the relative happiness, health, and progress of the family unit, while in a less direct way they comment on the possibilities of its survival. One event that had an enormous short-term impact on the Stewart familial community occurred in 1992 when Aunt Julia died of cancer. *Heartfelt*, an acrylic with lead and gold leaf additions on slate, cryptically marks the unhappy event. Through visual and verbal puns, Stewart seems at first to ridicule the high emotional stakes involved in the dying but secondarily affirms them all the more. At the left, an isolated spiral form conjures what for all concerned was, and is, a "wrenching" experience. Flames, both passionate and hot, as well as "cold as death," issue forth from a funerary urn. A relatively young woman, whose naked body glows with an eerie chartreuse light, sits stoically at the right. From her mouth spews forth a menacing layered cloud of sharp spiky objects, surfaced both with gold leaf and blue paint. A vignette before the woman illustrates grappling nudes—they wrestle with the demon that is within her—while an inset panel beneath her bears the dim inscription of a rudimentary house form. This child-like drawing, which the artist frequently used in the 1990s, is a campy distillation of post-Second World War housing designs, like those mass-produced at Levittown, Long Island, in the early 1950s. A similar house icon appears at the left of this picture on a flattened piece of lead that has been made into the shape of a human heart, quite literally representing in its new context a "heavy heart." That the lead heart has been mechanically secured to the ground by cold brass eyes makes Stewart's conceit all the more effective.

AS A NUMBER OF STEWART'S late works make clear, the most essential component of family dominion was the perceived moral character of the children. Like the leaves in a family photograph album, the paintings and drawings of Jessica and Ericka proudly and confidently confirm the girls'



ERICKA

Acrylic and colored pencil • 18 x 11 inches • 1996

*Collection of Ericka Stewart*



HOME FIRES

Acrylic and colored pencil • 18 x 13 inches • 1996

*Collection of the artist*

civic worthiness, outstanding scholarship, and their grace, beauty, modesty, and courage. Ericka, who went to Africa to study rural governing (she is at present a Hollywood producer for Sony Animation), was a risk-taker, a fact celebrated in various paintings by an emblematic hand that is being singed by a candle flame. Young Fletcher Stewart's rebelliousness, on the other hand, overshadowed the idyllic prospects of risk and caused his parents deep concern. The son became a versatile musician, by choice a guitar player/singer, and from an early age attracted a multitude of young admirers, especially girls. He is currently a member of the punk-rock ensemble "The Cheat," which has appeared locally and regionally. In several paintings, *Homefires* (1990) and *Paternity I* (circa 1992), Fletcher, dressed in swimming trunks, gleefully cavorts against a verdant backdrop, as if jumping into a backyard pool.

THESE SNAPSHOT VIEWS of Fletcher are equivocal. They could easily be interpreted as proud ovations to the exuberance, as well as the innocence, of youth. However, a phalanx of symbols and signs that run through *Homefires*, *Paternity I*, as well as *Domestic Metaphor* (1991), *Portrait of Fletcher* (ca. 1992), *Blue Boundary* (ca. 1992), *Volvo Woman* (1992), *Blue Vigil* (ca., 1992), *Ericka* (1995), *Meanwhile in the Forest Were Witches and Wolves* (1998), and *Quest* (2000), tell us otherwise. In these appear women with their hair aflame; women whose heads are severed at the top edge of the paintings; trees that have been sawn or broken and whose rotted roots imitate skeletal hands; wrestling figures; cryptic icons that express unending "puzzlement"; migrating geese who flee unpleasant situations; the rabbit



as trickster; the snake as itself; the Minotaur; a wolf's shadow; and the ubiquitous knurled twig frames, all reinforcing the artist's concern for the family tree's survival. On the other side, the paintings also set forth images of virtue, hope, and constancy: the reassuring mental governance of Euclidean geometry; the fruit bowls and candelabra that attest to unbroken domestic traditions; books, the gateways to understanding; quiet domestic pastimes like reading or paring fruit; modest women and gentle manners; obedience and courtesy; and the house icon, which in *Paternity* is elaborated into a solid three-dimensional wooden frame to better express a state of enduring stability. Some symbols go in either moral direction. In *Homefires*, for example, the elemental depictions of the water through which Fletcher appears to swim and the nearby campfire are both homey and potentially dangerous elements. Other signs point to the artist's own willingness to equivocate or accommodate, even to deprecate, his paternalism. A majestic lion comically supervises a prancing Fletcher in *Paternity*. In the same work, an ear icon indicates what lay at the core of the generational dispute. About this motif,



PATERNITY

Collage/construction • 11 x 20 inches • 1995

*Collection of the artist*



Stewart commented, "I don't think he thought I listened to him; I thought that I did; and I don't think he listened to me." The fearful Minotaur that faces the feckless and destructive child in *Quest* was another self-portrayal. As Stewart recollected, this mythical animal was intended as much to satirize his own unswerving paternalism as it was to frighten a recalcitrant boy.

STEWART HAS HAD no desire to change the world through his art. Yet, especially in the family pictures, we see evidence that a moral conscience does indeed inhabit the sovereign pleasures he has entertained during his later creative life. When David Ribar pointedly asked him if he was a moralist, Stewart responded, "Well, I'm certainly interested in [morality], but I don't think I've become one in a black and white sense. I must acknowledge the issues I raise are complex. But I do think that absolute moral certainty becomes artificial to the point of absurdity. So, it's ultimately humor that's important—laughing at deflated pretensions. I think that's what a lot of my work is about."[22]

*—Dr. Frederick C. Moffatt*

detail from NATURAL HISTORY II

Drawing/collage • 18 x 12 inches • 1974

*Collection of Tennessee State Museum, Nashville, TN*

# endnotes

1. Stewart's painting *The Good Lesson* (2001) won a 2003 Liquitex Excellence in Art Purchase Award. See *Art In America* 91 (Annual 2003-2004), p. 47.
2. Susan W. Knowles, "Tennessee: F. Clark Stewart," *New Art Examiner* 16 (June 1989): 51; and David Ribar, "F. Clark Stewart: Drawings and Paintings," (Nashville: Fine Arts Center, Cheekwood, 1988), np.
3. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotes attributed to the artist originated from interviews the author conducted with Stewart on September 9 and 22, 2005.
4. Knowles.
5. Ribar.
6. F. Clark Stewart to author, September 16, 2005.
7. F. Clark Stewart to author, October 20, 2005.
8. Ibid.
9. The quote is attributed to Dr. Paul Wasserman, president of the Train Collectors Association. See Claire Wilson, "Antiques," *New York Times*, June 3, 2005, p. B36.
10. Jordan Kantor, *Durer's Passions*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Harvard University Art Museums, 2000), plates 39 and 61.
11. George Kubler, *Mexican Architecture of the Sixteenth Century*, Vol. 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), pp. 254-418.
12. For a recent summary of Ernst's collages of the 1930s, see Holland Cotter, "The Zelig Among the Modernists: Max Ernst: A Retrospective," *New York Times*, April 8, 2005, p. B27.
13. Margaret Potter, *Paintings from the Huntington Hartford Collection in the Gallery of Modern Art* (New York: by the Gallery, 1964), np.
14. See also Paul Barlow, *Time Present and Time Past: The Art of John Everett Millais* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), p. 22.
15. "Selected Bibliography," in William S. Rubin, *Dada, Surrealism, and Their Heritage* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1968), p. 218.
16. Alexandra Cortesi, "Joseph Cornell," *Artforum* 4 (April 1966), pp. 27-32.
17. Dale Cleaver, "Exhibition Review: Tennessee," *Art Express* (September-October 1981), p. 65.
18. F. Clark Stewart, in Barbara Shissler Nosanow, *More Than Land or Sky: Art From Appalachia* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1981), p. 119.
19. William Blake, "A Memorable Fancy," in Clark Stewart, *Marriage of Heaven and Hell by William Blake* (Knoxville, Darkpool Press, 1972), p. 21.
20. Nosanow, p. 119.
21. F. Clark Stewart to author, September 28, 2005.
22. Ribar.

F. CLARK STEWART

# *chronology*

**1942** Born in Evansville, IN, to Dr. Fletcher Clark Stewart and Grace McCrory Stewart

**1944** Family moved to New York, lived on Staten Island and in Manhasset, Long Island

**1949** Family moved to California, lived in Long Beach, Santa Ana, and Costa Mesa

**1960-64** Earned Bachelor of Arts in Art at University of Redlands, CA

**1963** Married fellow art student Judith Ann Newton

**1964-66** Earned Master of Fine Arts at Claremont Graduate University, CA

**1964** Trip with Judy to southern Mexico

**1965** Accepted teaching position at the University of Tennessee and moved to Knoxville, TN

**1966-2005** ***Participated in over 300 exhibitions (selected venues noted below)***

**1967** Entered first competitive exhibition: *12th Annual All-California Art Exhibition*, Laguna Beach, CA

**1968** Daughter Jessica Grace born
*The Artist-Teacher Today – USA*, The State University of New York, College at Oswego
Awarded First Purchase Prize: *Frontal Images*, Mississippi Art Association, Jackson, MS

**1970** Daughter Marjorie Ericka born

**1970s** Trip with Judy to England, Scotland, and France

**1979** *Five Sculptors*, Nobe Gallery, New York, NY

**1980** Solo exhibition: The American Gallery, Bern, Switzerland

**1981** Son Fletcher Clark Stewart III born
Trip to Soviet Union
*More than Earth and Sky*, National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Museum, Washington, DC
Trip to France

**1986** Solo exhibition: Hunter Museum of Art, Chattanooga, TN

**1987** *Contemporary Tennessee Drawings*, Cheekwood Arts Center, Nashville, TN
*Fact Fiction Fantasy, Recent Narrative Art in the Southeast*, Ewing Gallery of Art, The University of Tennessee

**1988** Solo exhibition: Cheekwood Fine Arts Center, Nashville, TN

**1990** Galeria Arte Hoy, Caracas, Venezuela
Museo de Arte de Barquisimeto, Barquisimeto, Venezuela
Centro de Bellas Artes, Maracaibo, Venezuela

**1994** *East Tennessee Art Currents*, Knoxville Museum of Art, Knoxville, TN
Visiting artist: Academy of Fine Art and Design, Bratislava, Slovakia
Trips to Czech Republic and Hungary

**1995** *East Tennessee Art Currents*, Knoxville Museum of Art, Knoxville, TN
*Narrative Drawings*, Clemson University, Clemson, SC

**1998** *Sacrifice and Bliss*, University of West Georgia, Carrolton, GA

**1999-2000** *American Visions, Knoxville 7+2*, Zichyo Palace, Gallery Z, Bratislava, and Jokoby Gallery, Kosice, Slovak Republic
Second trip to Slovak Republic

**2000** *Line Language, Twentieth Century Figurative Drawings*, Mint Museum of Art, Charlotte, NC

**2001** Solo exhibition: Tennessee Arts Commission Gallery, Nashville, TN

**2002** Third trip to Slovak and Czech Republics, Hungary, and Vienna, Austria on *Blood, Iron, and Velvet Program*

**2004** *Embodied, An Exhibition of Figurative Works*, Center for the Living Arts, Mobile, AL
Fourth trip to Central Europe on *Blood, Iron, and Velvet Program*

**2005** Retired from full-time teaching at the University of Tennessee