WARD DAVENNY

THE TROUT GALLERY
THE ART MUSEUM OF DICKINSON COLLEGE

NOISE

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October 28, 2022 – April 15, 2023 / THE TROUT GALLERY / The Art Museum of Dickinson College
For close to three decades, Ward Davenny taught Dickinson students how to make art through an approach that encouraged a mediation of direct observation and lived experience. Art professors are known to often repeat their favorite mantras, and Ward liked to stress that art had a better chance at success if started with a specific source—visual information that could provide specificity, nuance, and something with which to grapple. Time and again he proved an uncanny ability to help students develop the kind of heightened perceptual awareness that is an essential foundation towards being a successful artist or excelling in any visual field.

This exhibition offers an opportunity to experience how these sensibilities have shaped his own studio practice and incredibly rich visual language. It is also a chance to celebrate someone who had an impact on our department and studio art program that will be lasting. Just today, I was referencing Ward in my drawing class and explaining the painstaking lengths he goes through to experience the moments we see depicted in his work. The humanizing aspect of experience is essential because his work is more than simple verisimilitude, its ability to convey sensation can be spiritual and otherworldly. While the photographic documentations of these experiences might represent choice visual moments, they are also an embodiment of the unseen—the larger search and struggle to find something worth relating.

It is from a video during a storm-chasing expedition in 2004 that Ward exclaims, “Stop. Yeah, I think it’s coming right at us.” This statement, said in a collected, yet slightly nervous tone, takes place in the middle of a frantic sequence in which he is attempting to outrun a storm. As it turns out, the running is not going so well. He and a fellow chaser are in what seems like an endless cycle of turning the car around and changing direction because every way seems to be the wrong way. The moment does well to show that the emotion and intensity experienced during this process of searching is integral to the final form of the completed piece. It also exemplifies something else that Ward liked to impress on students, which has to do with the give-and-take of the process and non-linear discovery—or maybe here, more adequately, is that at times the artistic process finds you chasing something with confidence, while other moments find you retreating in uncertainty. Though as Ward likes to stress, that dichotomy brings a necessary tension to the work.

The Department of Art & Art History wants to offer Ward our deepest gratitude for everything he has contributed towards the betterment of our program. We have been fortunate to be in the company of an artist in the truest and most committed manner whose work has gratified and challenged us over the years. And, especially, for being such an incredibly thoughtful and insightful colleague and friend all these years.

**Todd Arsenault ’99** (student of Ward Davenny)
Associate Professor of Art, Art & Art History Chair 2022-23
It has been said that music can define the inner psychological and emotional sensations that words and visual images are unable to reach, and that it can do so with incomparable precision. Perhaps perceiving music as a spatial phenomenon can produce a similar effect. It is extraordinary to think that music, like light, an immaterial substance, can have such power and can exert its power instantaneously. The fact that music is a temporal medium distinguishes it from most other artistic practices. In mysterious ways it allies itself with the rapidly shifting thoughts and shadows of the brain and appears to do so without reliance on translation. The precision I alluded to above cannot be accurately described in words. It exists in another realm, a realm in which multiple streams of nonverbal information can be transmitted simultaneously.

Ward said to me recently after hearing a concert of orchestral compositions conducted by his sister, Susan Davenny Wyner, “I hear music spatially.” The comment stimulated a great deal of reflection on my part. It led me to analyze and define my own way of hearing music, a way that is certainly not spatial. (As reference, I have spent my life as a musician, playing, conducting, composing.) I process music in terms of time, rhythm, pitch, register, dynamics and the connecting of tones in close or remote relationships. But in space?

I confess that I’ve reached no conclusion about the process of making sense of the onslaught of aural phenomena. But the point I want to make returns to Ward’s statement: “I hear music spatially.” This struck me as interesting, provocative, unusual. I return to it because it projects a rich resonance, a thoughtful, personal perception. As such it typifies the intensity of Ward’s consciousness and intelligence as well as the originality of his awareness of life around him, regardless of the form it takes. It was through his statement that I came to recognize that music can be perceived and processed in manners and paths unimaginable to me.

His apparently off-the-cuff remark was yet another exposure of the essence of Ward’s psyche. He is an artist to the core, and an artist in myriad realms. His drawings, paintings, prints and photographs reveal a significant view of the natural world, as well as a profound revelation of how we are affected by it, by its design, its mystery, its eloquence. And Ward’s sensibility permeates all other activities of his life, how he builds, collects, designs, arranges and displays things with beauty, brilliance and wit.

I love this man, not only because of all these admirable qualities, but because kindness and humanity pervade his life and prevailingly affect the lives of those around him.

Draw Onward for piano (2022) by Yehudi Wyner
is dedicated to Ward Davenny.
It was commissioned by the Trout Gallery at Dickinson College to celebrate his years of teaching at the college and to honor him in his retirement.
The “random walk” refers to a mathematical equation describing the process of molecular movement in liquids. ‘Brownian motion’ (pedesis) describes the same actions in air and vapors. There are myriad formulae that are inherent in and apply to all matter, all involving particle collisions and dispersion; eddy diffusion, molecular diffusion, turbulent diffusion, heat diffusion, surface, gaseous, electronic, and rotational diffusion, etc. There is trans-cultural diffusion, which lays out a methodology for studying the spread of cultural ideas. These processes (almost) never stop.

 Definitions and formulas may not capture how we perceive and deal with all the assaultive literal and metaphorical movements around and through us. I think of this underlying structural motion as a kind of noise. These insistently mobile particles define transient states both visible and unseen that the world provides, with its beauty and sensations and poisons and irritations; light and color, smoke, heat, sound, flavors, odd and wonderful smells, and weather. They also echo through society and collective and individual personal interactions. Media and other forms of communication can mimic these processes, as can my own varied reactions and interpretations.

I can ignore much of this “noise” on some level, though it can be efficient at obscuring events and reasoning, visual and otherwise. Despite projecting how things came to be, and expectations of what is to come, narratives are often overridden by surprising and sometimes unpleasant turns. We don’t always get to set the terms. One thing might lead to the next.
Yellow Plumes, 2019, oil and lampblack on canvas, 72 x 96 inches
Intersecting Plumes, 2019, oil and lampblack on linen, 56 x 42 inches
Hovering Cloud, 2019, oil and aluminum paint on canvas, 24 x 20 inches
Untitled, 2019, Oil and lampblack on canvas, 26 x 20 inches
Smoke Plume Study #2, 2019, oil and lampblack on canvas, 8 x 10 inches

Smoke Plume Study #5, 2018, oil and lampblack on canvas, 12 x 10 inches
Peach Smoke, 2022, oil and lampblack on canvas, 14 x 18 inches
Alter Series #2, 2017–22, oil on lenticular photograph, 16 x 11 ½ inches
*Alter Series #4*, 2019, oil on lenticular photograph, 13 ½ x 9 inches
May 20, 2022, archival pigment print, 24 x 19 inches
Cupola, 2022, archival pigment print, 19 x 15 inches
Skewed Grain, Kansas, 2012, archival pigment print, 19 x 30 inches
Gathering Series #6, 2010, archival pigment print, 13x24in
Accumulating Storm, 2020, archival pigment print, 24 x 18 inches
Field Fire, 2000, archival pigment print, 39 x 84 inches
Museum Storage #5, (The Tower Museum), 2010, archival pigment print, 8 x 12 inches
Swamp Fire, 2022, archival pigment print, 10 x 15 inches
French Factory, 2018, archival pigment print, 13 x 24 inches
Rain, 2015, archival pigment print, 10 x 15 inches
Reformation, 2019, archival pigment print, 14 x 19 inches
Portrait by Fire, 2022, archival pigment print, 12 x 12 inches
Safety in Numbers, 2022, archival digital print, 10 x 15 inches
*Systems of Belief #2*, 2018, archival pigment print, 8 ½ x 15 inches
Exhibition Series #1, 2015, archival pigment print, 9 x 12 inches
Systems of Belief #4, 2021, archival pigment print, 19 x 24 inches
Exhibition Series #4, 2018, archival pigment print, 10 x 17 inches
Museum Storage #2, 2022, archival pigment print, 12 x 16 inches
Museum Storage #3, 2022, archival pigment print, 10 x 17 inches
Ceremony Series #3, 2019, archival pigment print, 10 x 18 inches
Ceremony Series #1, 2019, archival pigment print, 10 x 18 inches
Waiting, 2019, archival pigment print, 14 x 10 inches
Yellow Horizon. 2011, archival pigment print, 11 x 16 inches
Led, 2022, charcoal on paper, 22 x 30 inches
Sheltering, 2022, charcoal on paper, 25 x 37 inches
A Gesture, 1997-2022, charcoal on paper, 28 x 39 inches
Searching in Shallows, 2022, charcoal on paper, 11 x 16 inches
Sandy Hook, 2013, etching, 6 x 8 inches

Abandoned Field, 2014, etching, 7 x 10 inches
*California Hill*, 2014, etching, 8 ½ x 11 inches

*Procession*, 2014, etching, 9½ x 7 inches
Systems of Belief, 2016, etching, 5 ½ x 10 inches

Backyard in a Suburb, 2017, etching, 4 ½ x 6 inches
New Haven Rooftop, 1991, lithograph with powdered pigment, 12 x 16 inches
Biographies

Ward Davenny

Ward Davenny is Professor Emeritus at Dickinson College, where he taught from 1992 through 2020. He previously held teaching positions at the University of Hawaii at Manoa and the University of Connecticut at Storrs, among other institutions. He obtained his B.F.A. from the San Francisco Art Institute in 1977, and his M.F.A. in printmaking/painting from Yale University in 1982. He has had numerous solo exhibitions in university, museum and commercial gallery settings including The Contemporary Museum of Hawaii in Honolulu, Virginia Tech University, Connecticut College, Dominican University, the University of Long Island, Dickinson College and the University of East Anglia in Norwich, England. His solo gallery exhibitions have included shows at the Seraphin Gallery in Philadelphia and six solo exhibitions at the Mary Ryan Gallery in New York City. The recipient of many juried exhibition awards, Davenny has also received numerous grants, including a Mid-Atlantic Council for the Arts Fellowship Grant, and two National Endowment for the Arts Individual Fellowship grants. His work is held in permanent collections that include The British Museum in London, the National Gallery in Washington, D.C., the Fogg Museum in Boston, the Minneapolis Institute of Art, the The Honolulu Museum of Art, the Hawaii State Foundation for the Arts, the Yale University Art Gallery, the U.S. Department of State, and the curated collection of the Cleveland Clinic, among many others.

Yehudi Wyner

Pulitzer Prize-winning composer and pianist Yehudi Wyner has created more than 100 works for orchestra, chamber ensemble, solo performers, theater music and liturgical services. In addition to composing, teaching and performing, he has directed two opera companies and conducted a wide range of ensemble repertory. He has taught at Yale, Harvard, Brandeis, Cornell and SUNY Purchase; served as president of the American Academy of Arts and Letters; and has received commissions from Carnegie Hall, the Boston Symphony, BBC Philharmonic, the Library of Congress, the Koussevitzky Foundation, and National Endowment for the Arts. His 2005 Naxos recording “The Mirror” won a Grammy Award.
Acknowledgments

I want to offer profound thanks to my wife, Kate Stewart, and my entire family (past and present), my colleagues in the Department of Art, Neil Weisman, James Bowman, and all but a few of my former students.

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This publication and exhibition were produced in part through the generous support of the Helen Trout Memorial Fund and the Ruth Trout Endowment at Dickinson College.

Published by The Trout Gallery, Dickinson College
Carlisle, Pennsylvania 17013

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Copy Editor
Cheryl Winters-Tetreau
Design
Phillip Unetic, UneticDesign.com
Printing
Brilliant Printing, Exton, Pennsylvania

ISBN: 979-8-9869735-0-0

Printed in the United States