

Original Paper

HOMMAGE to von Dutts

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Abstract

William Sherman Dutterer (1943–2007), an American artist, leaves us an interdisciplinary body of images which track his investment in a wry dialogue with the *good, the bad and the ugly*. The author culls from more than 35 years conversation with him; his journals as well as his finished pieces, to locate the evolving images, symbols and themes that record his decades of research into a personal lexicon...a population of images which is shot through with his wicked sense of humor, an art form in and of itself.

Introduction

In the visual world created by Bill Dutterer (*aka*: ‘Dutts’; ‘von Dutts’; ‘Dutterererer’; ‘Billiam’), throughout the four decades he worked, the time is always *now* and the space is invariably rational. A richly animated vocabulary - visual and verbal, is often zany and tweaked with skillful double - sometimes triple - entendre. “...*the more layers of meaning and interpretation that a work has, the better. Fuck facts. I want some good fiction, because good fiction is just as real as a block of concrete.*” (Interview w/ Mary Swift, *The Washingtonian*, 1979)

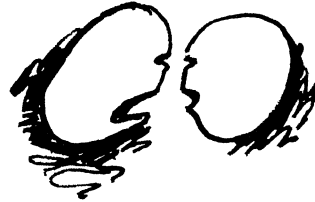
Discussion

Symbols, icons and narratives report out his discoveries in the nature of opposing personal realities. We see them in numbers throughout his life work - molded, re-modeled and groomed by a relentless teasing of the surface as well as deep ‘dives’ into his own inner being for the treasures to be found within his psychic sees/seas. Sculptor Anthony Cafritz offers: “*Bill...is a true sage...very much aware [of] how seemingly opposing beliefs dovetailed.*” (To the Author, Spring 2007).

Along with the formal presentation of bodies of work, research in his personal iconography is ever ongoing, decade after decade in numbers of journals, sketchbooks, notations as well as multitudes of tiny drawings done on anything at hand: a napkin; a paper matchbook, in the margins of agenda for the co-op meetings governing his N.Y.C. loft at Broadway and Broome; as part of the text for notices posted in the common elevator, advising tenants of the health and well-being of the aged boiler which only Dutterer could coax into cooperation. “*Backburner work*”, he called it, for his students at the Corcoran School of Art in Washington, D.C. One potent form, the ‘Heads’, seen in the sketchbooks of the ‘90s, are drawn

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hundreds and hundreds of times, each attempt coaxing a bit more from the line, the shape, the possibilities for allusion; the expressive potential in animation; the repetition beginning to form narrative sequences...all in an exploration of every variety of face-to-face interaction he could imagine.



Dialogue. Conversation. Interfacements. The space between the Self and the Other, the triangulation between the 'I', the 'Thou' and the Image is intensely explored in the lifetime of this artist. Of their frequent, impromptu breakfasts, Mel Levinson says: "...we had no agenda...you talk with Bill, intimately, about everything!" (*To the Author, Spring 2007*). He maintained years, decades, of direct, continuous conversation with a wide circle of close friends, many of them 'e-buddies' with whom he shared his love of music, dance, animals and anything where the rubber meets the road. Cars and motorcycles were a passion.

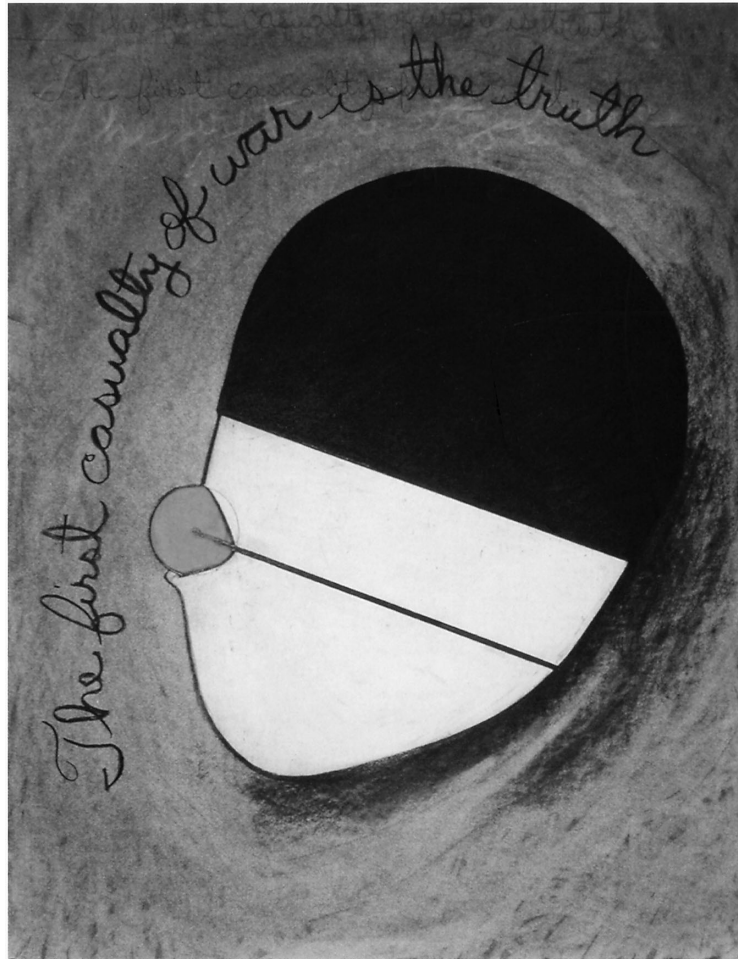
They built the Hagerstown [MD] Speedway across from our house in 46/47...I've been racing ever since... (WSD, Journal, c.'76-'78)

Barry Brown, a close friend since their student days at the Maryland Institute College of Art, recalls that Bill's favored email address, 'von Dutts', actually comes from the famous "Von Dutch", a sparkplug in California's hot-rod 'Kustom Kulture' from the 1950s onward (*To the Author, Spring 2007*).

Bill's passionate engagement with his world was contagious. He loved his life and said so. A sketchbook from 1978 shows a tiny, circular line drawing: a tire? Doughnut? Urobouros? Tattoo design? Two concentric, hand-drawn circles are bisected at 10' o'clock and, again, at 4 o'clock. Off-center, inside one 'half' of the 'tube', Dutterer inscribed the words: 'love' and in the other half, 'life' (*"Love Life", 1980*).

Bill literally 'wore' some of his most cherished interfacements, and regarded his first tattoo, done in Seattle in the studio of Madame LaZonga in '73, as a 'right of passage'. A small rose on his right shoulder has a special significance in military heraldry as Mars was born from a rose. With tattoo artist Mike Bakaty, Dutterer designed images for a 'vest' of tattoos. First, a fish - symbol of endurance, as well as a gatekeeper for the denizens of the watery underworld. Then, peonies - '...roses without thorns...' - protectors against storms at sea, according to the traditions of the Samurai. These images were followed by the attacking falcon, or 'sea eagle'. War, water, and selected mythologies function both as 'connections' as well as 'masking' and became a working thematic vocabulary that would occupy Dutterer for decades.

The tattoo as psychic armor? Woven into Dutterer's themes, imagery and embedded mythology, are references to social injustice, violence and war. We see the helmets of the knights and crusaders; we read the list of items 'Joe Diver' (an alter ego from an '80s series) might find under the waves: cannon balls, shell casings, swords, bombs, skeletons and we see the late, anguished 'Heads' - tightly bound - as if wounded or awaiting execution. Most eloquently, in one of his very late, hooded 'Heads' with ball-gagged mouths, Dutterer gives us a disarming image entitled: *"The First Casualty of War is Truth" 2002-2004* in which a cartoon-like execution contrasts sharply with the dreaded message...a Dutterer trademark.



Presented in a 2003 joint exhibition with Enid Sanford in her Spring St. studio, the press release states:

Dutterer explores the face of emotion—the reflection of external events on the human countenance. His imagery uses the face itself interchangeably with masks, seeing each as a metaphor for each other. This theme, along with the concept of the ‘bystander’, a witness who is so close as to be a possible victim of irrational acts, has run through Dutterer’s work since the mid-1970s.

Over the years, Dutterer’s occupation of ‘the space between’ - that point of contact between himself and the viewer - finds a progression of forms and themes, becoming ever more embedded with meaning over the years. In the earliest body of professionally presented imagery - silver, formalist paintings from the late '60s -, we see central flat fields - voids - articulated only by contrasting borders at the edges of the canvas (*“Silver Progress”, 1976*). No touch of the hand is evident. Aesthetic evolution in American visual culture at this time was searching for forms that avoided the spatial organization of the ‘Renaissance Window’. Gene Baro, curator at the Corcoran Museum, wrote of this work: *“We are teased by our physical relation to these paintings - to their object quality - for we receive them not as bulking forms, ponderous weights, but as optical sensations”*. (*Gene Baro, 1969*)

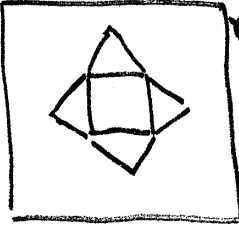
The character of that particular space, that point of contact between Dutterer and the viewer was an ‘inherited idiom’ - a vocabulary at hand in the visual culture and vigorous at the time he entered the field of discourse. The bodies of Bill’s work evolving from that base are eloquent testimony to the fact that in America, an artist can be born into any cultural time, adopt the vocabulary current, and proceed to

evolve imagery which tracks the changing character of a uniquely evolving Self, that special charge of the American artist, whose images can be seen as signposts along that solo journey.

...I love to change (Personal biography, c. 1980)...I never know where it will come from, where a piece of information is going to appear from and clobber me...(Interview w/ Mary Swift, 1978)...Like Tom Green says: "I retain the right to change my work at any time it's necessary..." (WSD, Journal, 1983)

Surprising transition-markers appear in notebooks; in small studies as well as the larger formal pieces. Dutterer moves on from the early "*Light Surfaces*". Both a 'poet and a plumber', von Dutts cuts a path in the unstretched canvas, by hand, toward the central 'void' ("*Silver Splits, 1971*"). Journaling in June of 1974, he writes:

The painting I'm working on
has an opening ^{cut} in the center...
standing in it
painting it from the center out
is a strange feeling.... It's
it bringing me closer to
"The Center."



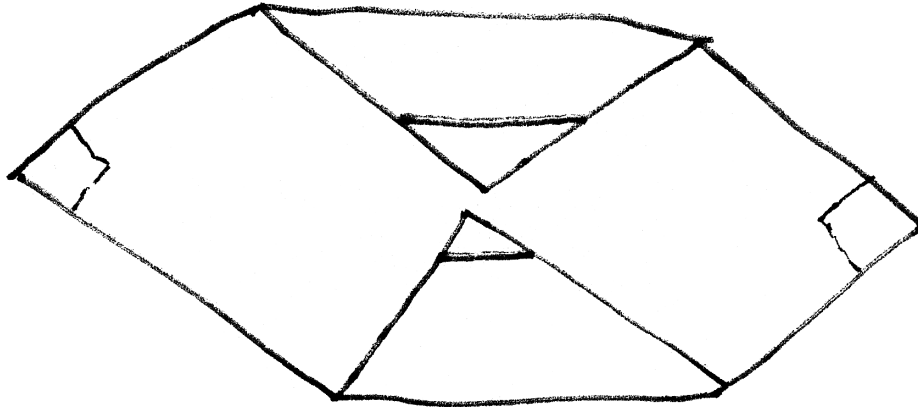
The early 'silver voids' morph into a related body of work called the "*Moorefield Paintings*" (1970-75) which further explore dualities in the object quality of pictorial presentation: back/front, inside/outside, horizontal/vertical, which are played against the polarities of 'object/illusion' by a process of folding and cutting the unstretched canvas. For example, the corners of the canvas might be folded inward or a section folded forward from a slit made in the side of the canvas fabric, bringing the back to the front, teasing the viewer with questions about the possibility of inaccessible pictorial information. The surface of the painting becomes the interfacement to that secretive behind - and the whole becomes as literal as sculpture.

If Gertrude Stein's "...a rose is a rose is a rose..." is clear, then it seems reasonable to me that the same is true for squares, triangles, circles, etc. To my mind, the visual art of the last decade, in particular, the work of the minimalists, is as literal as Stein's rose. In other words, my work is as abstract as any work I know and simultaneously as literal. (To Mary Swift, 1978)

The cuts and folds in some of the "*Moorefield Paintings*" suggest garments, implying that the surface is covering an invisible, living form - underneath and centered (*Peaches Makes Herself, 1974*).

What I'm dealing with is what "The Bachelors" found when they "Stripped the Bride" [ref. Marcel Duchamp, "The Bride stripped bare by her Bachelors", 1923]. They found a hermaphrodite in the person of "Peaches" "Peaches in Regalia"... "Peaches in a Funk" depressed about the state of art & the world "Peaches Broadside" optimistic bellowing showing her length and breadth... "Peaches

Winks because she knows” “Peaches Makes Herself” hermaphroditic self generating sometimes as slow as her natural counterpart the snail but steady & self generative.....no one but me & art....one snail & all of a sudden 10 then 20 ad infinitum (WSD, Journal of May 20th, 1974).



‘Back-burner’ images of this time are very direct and matter-of-fact: small, hand-held paper studies exploring the implications of scale in the fold, the PUNCYURE, the tear and the cut. These comparatively tiny pieces are early examples of Dutterer’s mastery of scale...intimate, due to their size, but carrying implications of much larger dimensions. In this visual vocabulary, ‘fact’ again, can flip to ‘illusion’ at any time, as in the small line drawing of several rows of drawn triangular ‘holes’ in the paper, made illusory by ‘dangling chads’ (*Study, 15 Flaps*, 1970).

One thing I’m certain about...scale is the unifying factor in all the stuff I’ve done in the last couple of years...That formal element is the hardest to define verbally... it’s one element that I’m sure is the closest to being purely visual...it’s at the heart, the core of the work [,] everything seems to spin off that element...(WSD, Journal, May 30th, 1974)

And on August 12, 1974, he observes:

Color decisions are the hardest formal considerations—

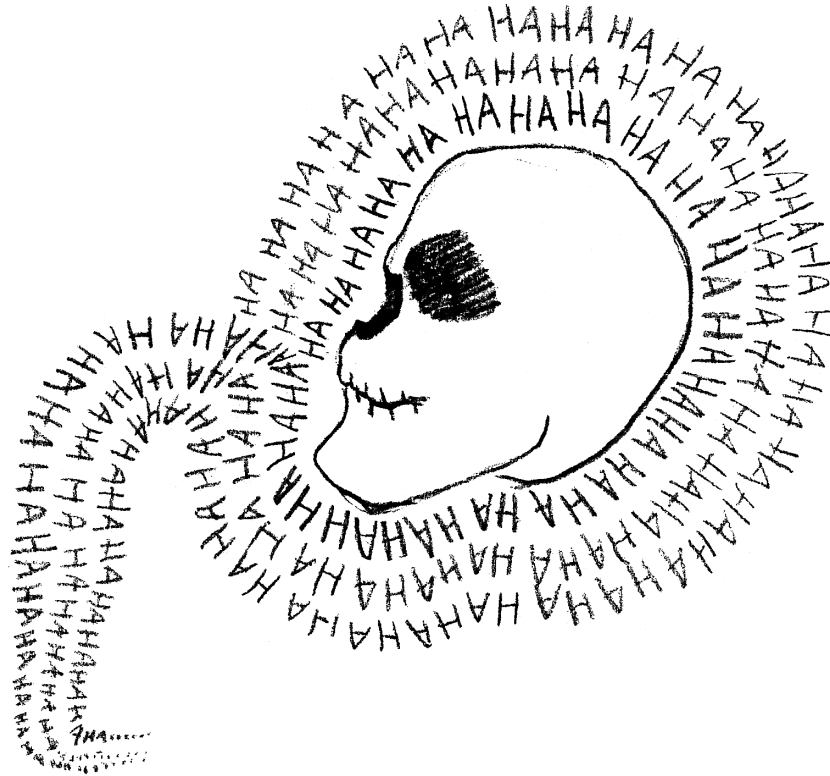
During the mid to late ’70s, Dutterer explored an interactive vocabulary of symbols, signs and icons in a series of ‘word paintings’ on paper, “...my own kind of library...”, (*Mary Swift, 1979*). Certain themes - ‘Helmet’ ‘Bystander’ and ‘Garment’ - emerge intensely. In works such as “*Scratching the Surface*”, 1976, von Dutts incises an image or icon into delicious areas of layered paint, and frequently pairs them with highly embedded word-combinations. Incisements carry over from the previous cutwork but they are also important to the ancient history of body art, the tattoo - scarification being the most basic form.

Getting tattooed the first time..in 1973 [Studio of Madame La Zonga, Seattle]...kicked this whole batch of work off...that’s where the very earliest drawings started.” (To Mary Swift, 1979).

In this series of drawings, Dutterer lays out the surface with lush, calligraphic layerings and patches of paint - mostly in neutrals or grayed pastels. Bill’s ‘painterly hand’ emerges as a strong, personal visual element which runs a rich scale - from the sumptuous to the commercial to the deliberately crude...whatever his chosen ‘voice’ might be at the time.

...Bob Stackhouse has opened my mind about drawing...(WSD, Journals, 1969–1971)

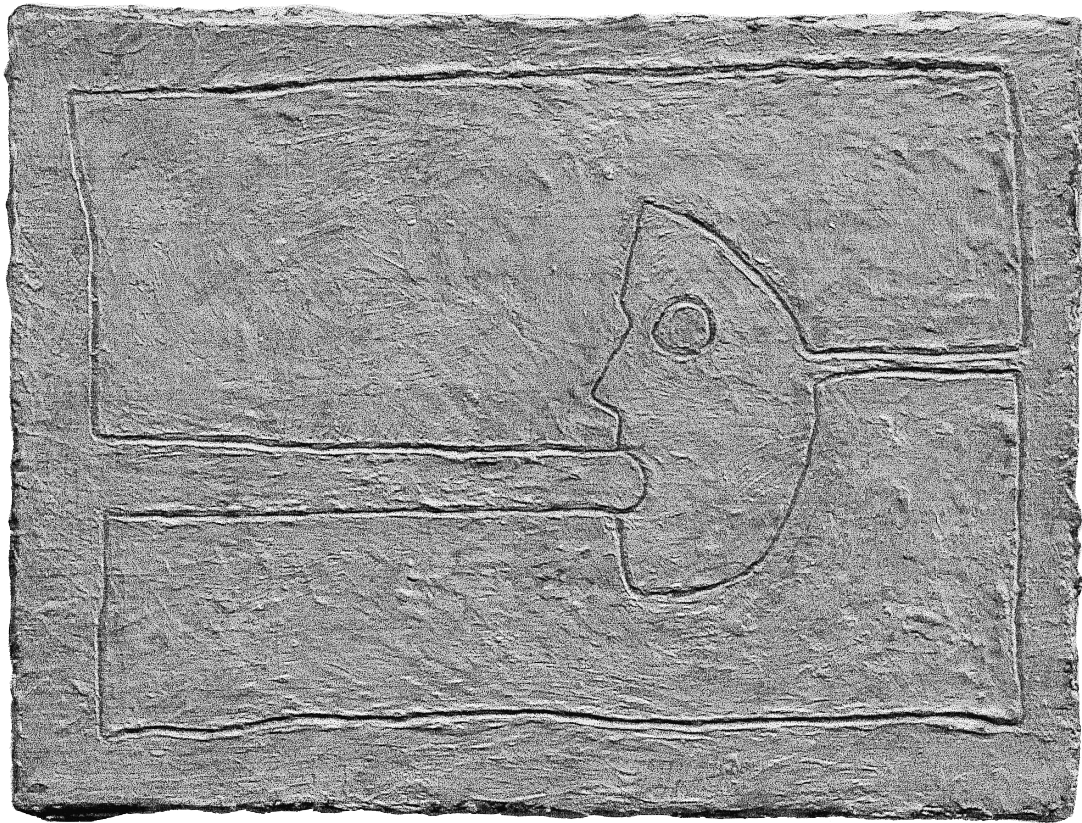
The layers of paint are incised with a symbol or icon, centered, and a word or phrase hovers above in poetic relation to the image. Among these pieces, a forked dowsing rod appears, wrapped in the same funereal manner as are the images of mummified people, a cat and a bull's head. A sarcophagus appears, as do bones and a reliquary. Words paired with these images - "Humanoid Boogey", "Ibis, Ibis, Ibis", and "To Gaudi" signal the formal emergence of Bill's witty tamperings with language which distinguished his speech, emails, doodles as well as finished pieces...layerings of meaning, a distinctive Dutterer idiom. See below: "HA HA AH HA", a journal sketch from 1976.



[My images come from]...Memory and invention. I'm involved with memory. I like all its idiosyncracies. (To Mary Swift, 1979)

Strong transitional images are characteristic of Dutterer's creative process. From the late '70s, we see an important milestone in an effort to bridge his early formality and his growing personal 'library' of images, many of them archetypal. Displaying his remarkable candor, *"I Don't Know What to Put in This Space"* 1978, is a large painting with a dark cruciform on a light background, rather like the crosses worn over the chests of the crusaders, which bleeds the edges of the stretched canvas. In each corner of the light background, simple line incisions outlining crusader helmets occupy the negative space of the four corners. Then, he smudged across the central horizontal of the cruciform, the handwritten words *"I don't know what to put in this space"* - an interrogation, both literal and figurative. Dutterer challenged his own center to reveal itself.

Becoming comfortable and confident with his chosen vocabulary - with one hand on his 'library', the other skilled in the tools of the trade - and sparked by his ready wit - von Dutts circles backward in his creative process and, coming forward again, gives us a beauty of a small canvas: *"Picture Eater"*, 1979.

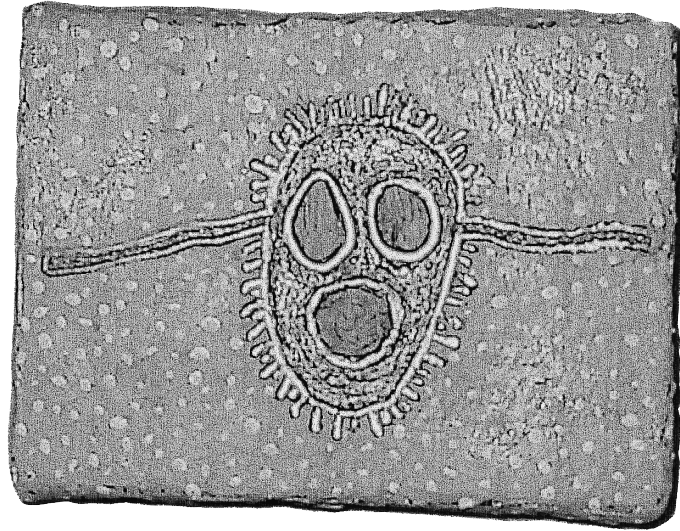


1979, Collection: Jamie Johnson

Its mottled silver surface references the earlier *“Light Surfaces”* but now the paint is thickly layered and surfaced with the marks of Dutterer’s ‘hand’. Lines are incised rather than applied, as earlier, and define the border edges. But this border turns inward, from middle left, moving through the erstwhile void, and directly into the mouth of a mask - centered and in left-facing profile! Horizontally, from the (uninhabited) back of the mask, float two ‘tie-strings’ that create a symmetry with the edible edges, a kind of double-image. The ties can also morph into a ‘tube’ through which the mask is being blown up like a balloon! The mask has claimed the center and is gobbling up the ‘frame’ as well as redefining the ‘space between’. A *“...straight ahead painting...”*, as von Duttts might say!

Masks and ‘the Waters’ appear strongly in Dutterer’s 1979 solo at the Jack Rasmussen Gallery in Washington, D.C. The powerful, mythic presence of *“Grrrrr” 1979*, possibly Dutterer’s most classic piece, is haunting in its implied paradox of danger and pure, visual beauty. Single line incisions outline a simple mask in real size, ties floating horizontally, right and left. A ‘Gorgon’, with round, empty eyes and mouth, no nose, it’s small size nevertheless commands a vast space in this museum-scale painting, layered with lush, grayed pastel, active, liquid, with the mark of Dutterer’s hand. Do we hear the ‘Grrrr’ of a tiger, slinking well behind the wise hunter who moves through dense atmosphere wearing a protective mask on backward to avoid an ambush?

The surfaces of my paintings, I think, have a liquid quality in them that I like a lot, the play of light on the surface, the multiple layers. You can see the surface and you can see underneath as well. (To Mary Swift, 1979)



"I Saw Spots Before My Eyes", 1979 Acrylic, 3" x 4"
Collection: Jim Brookens

Masking is the most ancient, primordial interfacement between the psyche and the cosmos. It signals a change of identity, an evolving persona. The individual 'I', hidden, enters the 'We' consciousness of traditional cultures which see events in human experience as buffeted by chaotic forces. In a polytheistic world view, spirits and people interact unpredictably. So, masking signals a distress with regard to the certainty of ethics and control. How can we define 'order' and 'justice' if the cause and effect of events shifts, arbitrarily, in terms of responsibility? The ancient mask, the veil, the hood and the helmet carry an ambiguity, if not anxiety, about the future of the 'Self'. As these archetypal images have migrated through cultural time, they have been reframed by later monotheistic world views. These intend to mitigate the angst of chaotic existence by assigning to the 'Divine' a positivistic intention that can be secured by the observance of 'spiritual rules' or laws, which promise to bring some governance to willy-nilly 'cause and effect'. The cultural psychology then changes from a base in a collective 'we' to an 'I' driven consciousness. Morality becomes the responsibility of the individual and the guiding touchstones organizing this 'Self' must be searched out.

Dutterer symbolically illustrates a 'quest' in his body of work, *"The Saga of Joe Diver"*, an early to mid-'80s series shown at the Frank Marino Gallery in N.Y.C. in 1982. 'Joe Diver', alter ego, is seen in one of the old rubber diving suits, peering out through the glass portal of a metal diver's helmet as he plumbs Dutterer's psychic seas/sees...shining a beam of light into the painter's void. Dutterer's notes on the symbolism in the painting: *"Here's Looking at You" c. 1982:*

Diver's helmet as eye Air line - umbilical cord The water - isn't that where we come from? ...all the more apparent that "looking" is hard enough wether [sic] it is inward or outward & that "Seeing" is almost impossible."

Other titles in this series - *"Deep See"*; *"Joe Diver: Always Ready with the Everready"*; *"Eye Contact"*; *"The Pursuit of Wisdom and Knowledge"*; *"Flicker of Recognition"* - show that the search is wide and discoveries surprising. In *"Daddy Diver Takes a Peak"*, Joe Diver (Everyman?) is working underwater with a torch, cutting a hole in the bow of a ship, the symbol for a life in which an individual must choose a goal and steer a course, in search of the Self and its guiding ethics.

As mentioned above, Dutterer had listed 19 things he might find in the depths - all of them inanimate

objects. (*WSD Journal, 1982*) But what he really found were living things: a giant octopus, a turtle and a ray. There is a snail, eel, crocodile and dinosaurs - chthonian creatures - gatekeepers of the primordial depths and familiars of the Hero on a Quest.

These large magnificent narratives are executed with a wide visual vocabulary. Courageous and celebratory is the hand of this artist pouring himself out in generous paint to inventory the liquid havens, searching for aspects of a 'Self' in its grottos. Joe Diver shows himself modeled in light and shade as well as in flat outline. Sometimes he is small and obscured in the murky depths, only to reappear in another piece glowing with color. Joe is seen whole or in part, dominant in the frame or diminutive in the face of some stunning apparition. His reactions range from the studied and bemused to awe-stricken. In one spectacular scene, Joe's final appearance, he is embraced by a splendid, spangled mermaid, the mythological counterpart of his chosen life muse, Jamie Johnson Dutterer.

Dutterer continues a focus on water creatures - reptiles and amphibians, following the 'Diver' series. But these are presented more simply, appearing at rest (or quietly sneaking up on a target?), stretched out long on the surface of still waters - half in and half out of the water with their reflected profile joining their bodies at the surface - a reptilian Janus? A diver is profoundly aware of the tension broken as the body passes through the surface of the water and it sends ripples of primordial memory through the remnants of our own reptilian brain. Dutterer renders, now much more simply, the eerie light, moist air (smells? sounds?) of a dense watershed. These paintings conjure creepy associations with slimy swamp-water on skin and a sense of a stealthy, cold-blooded threat. In "*Als Ik Kan*", 1990, we recoil at the blade-like creature, slashed in two colors only, from one corner of the canvas to the other. Then, we just have to laugh. There goes Dutts again, tampering with one of the rules of art-school teaching: NEVER slice the composition in two with a strong diagonal! ("*Mud Puppy*" 1989)

Prophetic, without a doubt. In 1990, Bill's own resident reptilian remnant - his appendix- attacked, burst and laid him up for months! Recuperating alone at Enid Sanford's upstate country house, Dutterer filled a little 'Get Well' sketchbook - gifted by Enid - with images of train engines, flying through the night, projecting strong beams of light ahead, recalling the 'Everready' lights of the 'Joe Diver' series. As he rested, he could hear the nearby Amtrak and Conrail trains passing nearby...and we remember that Dutterer's father had worked on the Pennsylvania Railroad. He was killed in a car accident when Bill was 19 years old and, in his autobiography, Bill writes that this event was the reason for his major commitment to art.

The sounds of the nearby trains were all Bill could 'see' of them and sound, in all its forms, had always been one of Dutterer's greatest pleasures - from his years of playing clarinet in high school, to his lifelong love - and huge collection - of all kinds of music, which he shared with his close friend and musician, Bill Holland. In hundreds of tiny drawings of train engines going down the track, Dutterer exercised his powers of invention to represent the sounds of the trains visually - in endless variety.

Three years later, Bill stepped off a NYC curb, the street caved in, and both legs were badly broken. He spent the next year in a wheelchair. Ten more sketchbooks of trains, running on track, with light and 'sound' were produced. Dutterer developed a staggering lexicon in this collection. Every bit of visual vocabulary imaginable was applied to animate the engines and give sight to their sound. Bill's ability to explore (exhaust?) the possibilities in an image is relentlessly exercised in these sketchbooks and they reveal another skill: the ability to 'morph' from one image to another, with 'memory' layered, embedded and carried forward in the process. Looking back, it is possible to see crocodiles morph into an urobouros and then into the train's engines. Later, we can see the 'faces' of the engines turn into a variety of masks. The 'Gorgon' mask morphs into a veil, a skull, a gas mask and on into the androgynous 'Heads' of the mid '90s. Many look like capsules or 'Mexican Jumping Beans'. They carry references to factory whistles,

metal helmets, clowns and even the eye/windows and nose/headlights of the train engines.

In the early '90s, von Dutts pursued an array of interests and amassed a few cherished collections: Mission Furniture, American Crafts pottery and he added to his collection of masks - always seen hanging in the loft, which he and Jamie had started in the mid 70s. But he seemed most excited about his job 'ranching rugs' in a Soho store owned by his close Afghan friend, Rahim, whom he called 'brother'. Bill loved Afghan tribal rugs and his study of them enriched his sense of line, color and space.

Conclusion

Exposure to the current social and cultural condition of Afghanistan focussed his longtime concern for social justice and personal responsibility. After a humanitarian trip to Afghanistan in 2004, he sent an essay to many friends: *"Letters from Kabul", 2005*. An EXERPT:

Dust, everywhere dust, a smell on the afternoon wind as bitter as the tension in the air...Baghram Air Base interrogation center and Blackhawks whap whap whap at tree top...heavy weapons and smiling boymen in camo everywhere...

Dutterer captures potent images from his encounter with Afghanistan, but one struck this writer deeply. Dutts describes being 'received' in the playground of a school in Rahim's hometown. The townspeople had gathered and the men danced a traditional welcome for Bill and Jamie. Bill was then asked to return a dance, to be proper. There is only one photo of this event, but knowing how Bill loved to dance, the writer imagines this performance to be some deeply felt synthesis of Michael Jackson and Zorba the Greek!

On returning to the studio in the mid-90s, Dutterer had launched into an extended period of risk-taking, expansion and exploration. He searched for further possibilities in the expressive potential of the 'Heads', using a wide range of materials: tempera, gauche, hardware cloth, plaster, particle board as well as found items and papier mache. A number of these pieces are deliberately rough and rude albeit charming (*"Nelson and Jeanette" 1995*). He also produced a number of computer-generated images during this period that are visually gorgeous.

In Dutterer's huge body of 'Heads', the variety seems endless...but they are in the main, androgynous. Some have stubbly beards but Dutterer just called them "*it*" or "*heads*" (*JJD to the Author, 2007*). They are not seen with necks nor ears and, aside from "*Picture Eater*", there are only a couple of bulbous clown noses and one 'Pinocchio' nose. In the sketchbooks, Crusade helmets reappear and evolve into an expanding 'mask' vocabulary. There are the familiar 'costume' masks on apron-like 'veils' - which later become the *Burkha*. Masks become 'Heads', displaying every position and expression imaginable. Seen alone as well as in groups, the 'Heads' converse, sing, scream, pout, whistle, kiss and spout invectives. (*WSD, "Morning/Mourning Drawings #2" 2002-2003*)

Whole 'Heads' are born from the mouths of others; stacked as totem-poles or whirling in Dervish-circles. We see a 'Head' in Brancusi-recline as an 'island', another as a 'landscape' and morphing into a flaming planet streaking across the sky. Later in the '90s, the 'Heads' appear often as the Janus and we also see a Brancusi-like pair in a highly embellished 'lip-lock'. They are most often bald and teeth appear infrequently but when they do, they are human, not animal fangs, as seen in masks from traditional cultures. Dutterer's vocabulary becomes as 'packed' and reduced as Giacometti's figures, which had captured Bill's admiration during an exhibition in New York.

Dutterer's images morph back and forth between 'head', 'mask' and 'helmet', becoming highly reduced with a single line describing a roundish 'head/mask/' with empty, rounded eyes and a simple circle for a mouth. This icon becomes the "Screaming Venus" series, based on the Venus of Willendorf (c. 24-22,000

B.C.). Jamie Johnson sees the 'breasts' of the Venus as the 'eyes' of these 'Heads' - and the 'belly' as the 'mouth' (*To the Author, 2007*).

This researcher, reviewing the literature for other precedents, was surprised to find one contemporary mask to be the most similar to Bill's icons. Gorgon-like, it is made of Kevlar, metal and polyester by American Body Armor and Equipment and worn by Swat teams in apprehending snipers. The makers assert that this mask has the same psychological impact as the ancient ones of myth and legend. They intimidate and mystify the target as well as transform the warrior's behavior, lending a primal confidence.

In Bill's 'autobiography' of '76-'78, he says he hated to read until he was 27 years old. But after that, he read voraciously and confounded the Corcoran students with his '*ersatz reading lists*'. Most certainly he read mythology so it is possible to interpret his themes and the development of his iconography in terms of the Hero, Perseus, set adrift on the waters in a small boat to endure and surmount a classic transmigrational death and rebirth. Dutterer's work, from the mid-'70s onward, is full of references to mythology - tales recounting the growling sound of the Gorgon ("*Grrrr*", 1979).

This myth records that nymphs (is the mermaid embracing 'Joe Diver' one of the Oceanid Nymphs?) gifted Perseus with magical implements (recalling Bill's drawing, c. 2005, of an axe handle, drawn to scale, with the head of the axe wrapped?) with which the Hero decapitated the Gorgon. To accomplish this, Perseus donned a 'helmet of invisibility', allowing him to escape after dealing the death blow. To slay the Gorgon Medusa, which must not be gazed upon directly, the Hero aimed his weapon by focussing on the Gorgon's reflection in the 'silver void' of Athena's battle shield.

The Gorgon's disembodied face, centered in that silver surface, becomes an apotropaic talisman with a power so dangerous and ambivalent that it can only be wielded by a warrior who is guided by a strong moral code, to be used in the service of the general welfare. Indeed, the 'mask' becomes a 'Third Eye', a concrete plane of conscious contact between the Observer and the 'Hidden', which shares with the observer an awareness of the unseen powers. This conceptual 'interfacement' exists as a point of direct communication between this artist and the viewer.

From this point, we can see another ongoing theme in Dutterer's work appearing periodically as early as the mid '70s - the wrapped/bound 'isolated entities'. They are iconic and ambivalent - he saw them both as a 'mummy' and as a 'chrysalis' ("*Let Me Out*", 1979). Among the 'head' paintings, drawings and monoprints appearing in the first half of the present decade, we find ovoids, isolated within the frame, egg like, neckless, but strongly suggestive of heads. We see them in a series, completely wrapped in narrow strips of cloth, in full front and profile; with subtle tilts of pose. Bill saw one of them as the head of the dead Christ on the cross (*To the Author, April 2006*) The Janus reappears. There are diptychs and triptychs. A very simple mouth can be discerned under the wrappings and sometimes a subtle indentation or fold in the wrappings suggests an eye but no other features are suggested among the hooded, blindfolded and variously gagged ovoids.

In 2006, Dutterer briefly left this series to explore a variation. Rather than completely wrapped, 'mummy' style, the ovoids were tied about with a triangular 'kerchief' or 'bandanna', covering every feature except for the crown and back of the head. Passive, devoid of angst, this image is paradoxically alarming. Is this the blindfold of the captive, stripped of identity, awaiting interrogation, torture and the firing squad? Or are these just 'everyday Everybodies', blind to greater realities? A pair of them is kissing (one of several hommages to Brancusi) - "Hello" or "Goodbye"?

Shortly, the 'kerchiefs' are set aside as Dutterer returns to the wrapped ovoids, producing his last body of work: the "*Soto Voce*" series which continues his interest in suggesting 'sound' in visual imagery. Some of the voids are wrapped softly, as though bandages have been applied in mercy, to protect a wound. Others are bound so tightly across the flesh that they cut the skin, torture and we see blood seeping through the

wrappings. The agony is palpable. Clearly, the bindings of some heads, as they force open the mouths, signal a need to scream, but they are muffled. Only a growling can escape...grrrr.

These icons are relatively small in size and they have huge implications as to scale but Dutterer knows that they don't need to be any bigger than they are. He puts them in our personal space, and we feel the compassion surrounding them. The space between the 'I', the 'Thou' and the 'Image' has been brought to heart. We are invited to approach. To his teacher, friend and mentor, Grace Hartigan, Dutterer writes:

If, as you once said, "the diver paintings are symphonic" (I always thought they were operatic) the new paintings are chamber music, etudes. Quartets & duos [sic]...at once intimate but in your face because one can only hear/see them up close. Like chamber music they can be sensed from a distance, but it's the intimacy of nuance that really counts. I'm even having one of them put in a proper frame! My hope is that setting it off-isolating it-will enhance its intimacy. Even the title of the series, Soto Voce, is an act of intimacy...The irony of an image, a screaming/shouting head, bound in such a way as to reduce the scream/shout to a muffled growl. (WSD, February 17th, 2005).

In the "Soto Voce" series, Dutterer circled about, again, to conceptually reframe the early 'void'. The person of these images, as throughout Dutterer's work, remains hidden. We are struck by these potent icons, hanging between the artist and the observer, profoundly engaging, inviting our projections and we understand that the 'subject' of these paintings is not the image presented - but the consciousness of the being to whom these 'Heads' belong. We have never apprehended that person in Dutterer's work, face-to-face and eye-to-eye. Rather, von Dutts invites us all to meet him in the ultimate interfacement, on the plane of pure thought, in the collective awareness of contemporary culture, its icons, history and morality. There, we can continue our conversations with him. And so, as he often closed in an email: "...Moron all this later..."



W.S.D., Doodle, c 2004-5