

Art work: “Dysfunctional Family Tree”

By Artist *Stephen Hansen*

Presenter: Brenda Murphy – May 2017

Let’s look at this Stephen Hansen’s piece. It’s a print – actually, a 13 ¾” x 10” hand colored etching.

To refresh your memory, an etching is a type of intaglio technique in which acid is used to erode lines into the surface of a metal plate. The metal plate is covered with an acid-resistant coating called “ground”. The design is drawn through the ground, but not into the plate, with a sharp, pointed tool. The plate is then placed in acid, which eats away the spaces where the metal is exposed. And voila, you have your plate for etching your prints. Obviously, a number of prints can be made from this plate, each of which is really an original print. The print was then colored by hand, most likely with watercolor.

Inspirations for Hansen’s work often emerge from a play on words, a common phrase or a bit of conversation.

In his artist’s statement which we will discuss later, Steve says he sees himself as the “director of a small repertoire company who costumes the actors and makes them tell the story I want to tell. They tend toward overacting.”

So now, looking at this print - I ask you –

Who are the characters here? (*allow for comments, observations*)

What do you see in this piece?

What is going on here?

The artist says he wants to “make my art intellectually accessible and aesthetically seductive, and offer distilled social observations.”

How does this piece reflect those thoughts? (*allow for comments, etc.*)

Now let’s look at the design elements of the piece. Which of these design elements do you find in this piece? (*allow for comments, observations*)

- Color
- Balance
- Emphasis
- Movement
- Pattern
- Repetition
- Proportion
- Rhythm
- Variety
- Unity

I haven’t actually told you the name of this piece. As Tolstoy’s Anna Karenina begins: “All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” Does anyone know the title of it or would anyone care to venture a guess as to what the title is? (*allow for comments from the group- if no one guesses, I tell!.*)

Here are a couple of other images of Family Tree art – (pass out to group) – as you can see, most are quite conventional. One is quite different, but none is remotely like the image Steve Hansen has created for us in the whimsical print.

Artist Information: Steve Hansen

Steve Hansen is a Self-Taught artist who has specialized in sculpture and printmaking. He uses Archival Arches paper, resin, hydrocal, bronze, steel and uses watercolor, etching, and engraving techniques for his graphic designs. One of his “artist statements” typifies his outlook on life and art: “You should never trust an artist who makes a statement, except under duress.” On a somewhat more serious note, he says: “As an artist I am not an explorer of the human condition, so much as a hapless tourist, making snapshots of whatever strikes my fancy. I work primarily in paper mache, the appeal of which is twofold. First, it is fast enough that I can try out ideas without any sense of commitment. Secondly, it is a material so humble that I can claim to make "cultural icons" or "distilled social observations" without feeling too pretentious. Stylistically, I think of my work as lifelike rather than realistic, a choice made out of a desire to represent ideas rather than individuals. I make sculpture with the idea that it should both attract and communicate. Towards that end, I try to make art that is intellectually accessible and aesthetically seductive. I approach my work day as though I were the director of a small reparatory company, with a group of actors that I costume and coerce into the characters of the story I want to tell. They tend toward overacting”.

His paper-mache pieces are meticulously created. Please note these are not your typical childhood wet newspaper creations. His cartoon-like creatures are known all over the world. They spice up many a museum and corporate collection from the Capitol Art Foundation Collection in Santa Fe to the Jyukano Research Institute in Tokyo, from United States Embassies in Italy and Venezuela to the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C. and even the Kalamazoo “International” Airport. For the past 5 years, Steve has only been working on a new series – his final one: 100 Great Moments in Art.