



Contradictions | Bobby Ross

DRAWINGS AND PAINTINGS



About the Exhibition

Viewing a work by Bobby Ross, you're looking at time. In the case of the smaller black-and-white drawings, less time; in the case of the large colored paintings, more, much more time. Despite parallels between the paintings and the drawings, the former are not studies or "test-runs" for the larger-scale works. Color is not committed to lightly. It requires precision, patience, and exactitude to achieve the hyper-realistic effects (at times verging on illusion) to be found in every square inch of the paintings.

An idiosyncrasy of Ross's process one might hear about on a guided tour of his works is that they all commenced at a certain point – with a figure to surround or a space to fill – and grew out organically from there. Not unlike collage, effects are generated bit by bit as elements grow up and evolve in each other's wake. The differentiation and interplay of ideas is spontaneous, but not random. You sense that if you knew the composition's starting point and the order in which each figure, element, or object was painted or drawn after the initial one, then a chain of associative meaning would present itself to cohere the sprawling scene into a meaningful, personal story. But the starting point could be any point. Just pick one

and create your own chain of associative meaning from there, moving in whatever direction you choose. It's contradictory, but Ross's process of commencing each work with a specific texture and improvising other surfaces around, behind, and before that one until the work is complete, multiplies rather than limits the number of entrances to his drawings and paintings. Find the story, even if it's the wrong one. Come to your own conclusions about what it means, even if nothing at all.

As you contemplate Ross's unique approach to creating narrative illusions, you'll note some topical contradictions. For example, current societal concerns about media saturation, mass violence, and environmental destruction are acknowledged with irony and humor while also expressing reverence for the workings of nature and the human spirit. In *Trance*, a shy, vulnerable man handcuffed to an empty shopping cart contemplates his choices: gun violence, theft, or the pixelated digital vortex keeping it all turning around. In *Family Farm*, a rooster is hoodwinked by corporate agriculture and its environment despoiled.

When an artist overtly identifies the theme of their art as contradiction, it's

important to recognize this principle in flux rather than as a fixture in their work. Contradiction begs questions, but doesn't answer them. Viewing a work by Bobby Ross, you may ask:

- Is this (element/figure) inside or outside? *Within the frame of a work by Ross, more framing is happening by way of walls, screens, and other elements defining insides within outsides, outsides within insides.*
- Is this realistic? *Amazing hyper-realistic textures achieved by painstaking effort and care render abstractions: impossible thoughts, conflicts, and dreams.*
- Is this a portrait, a still life, or a landscape? *Each work might have commenced with a particular figure, but some other person, thing, structure, or scene invariably rivals its dominance in the frame.*
- Is this about violence, or is this violent? *Fill in the blank: _____*

SETH R. WOOD

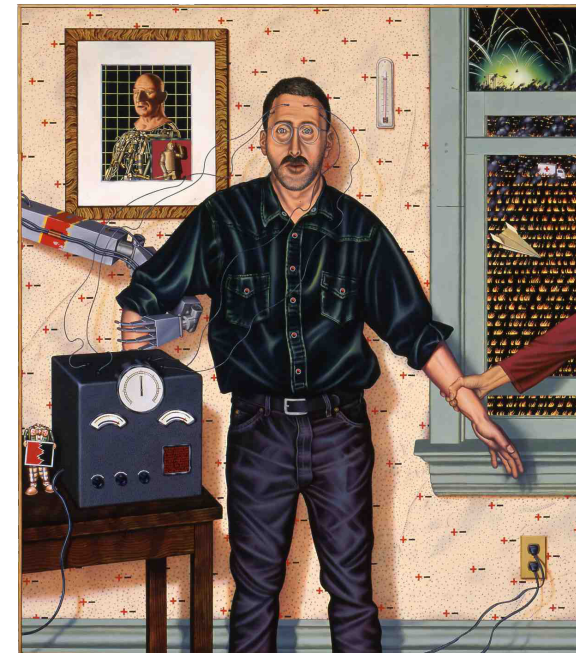
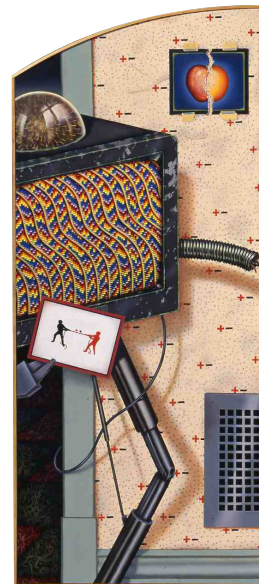
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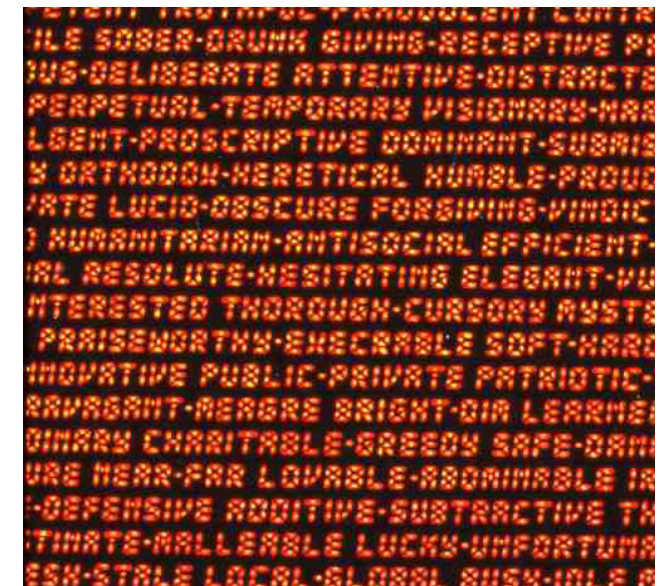
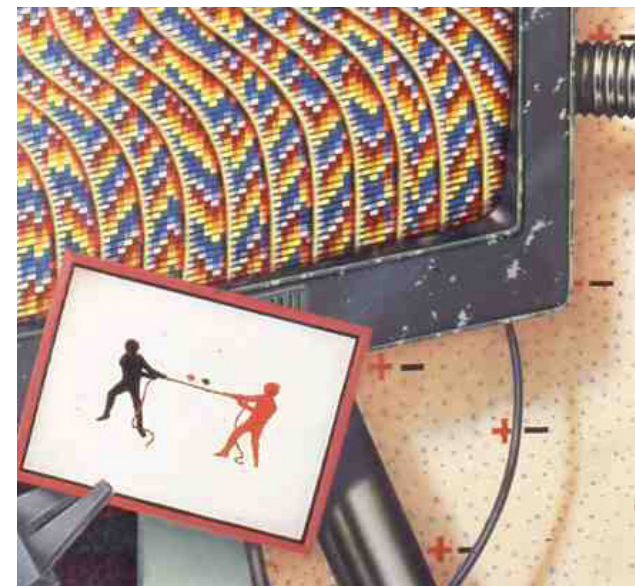
Blind Man's Bluff, oil on canvas, 1987. 39 x 42 inches.



Trance, oil on linen, 1989. 66 x 80 inches.

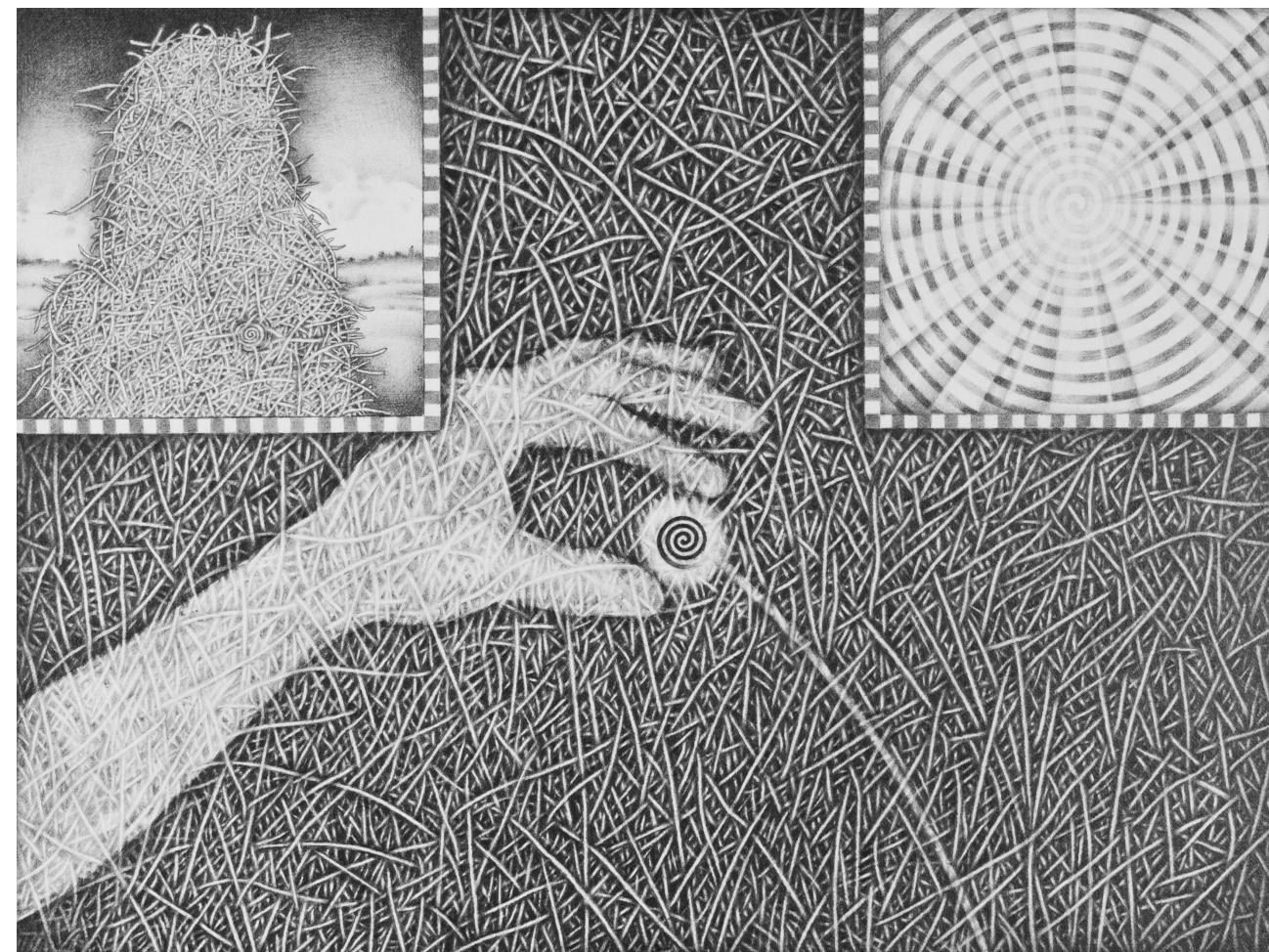


Above: Tug of War, oil on three linen canvases, 1993. 56 x 98 x 2 inches, total. Below: Details.





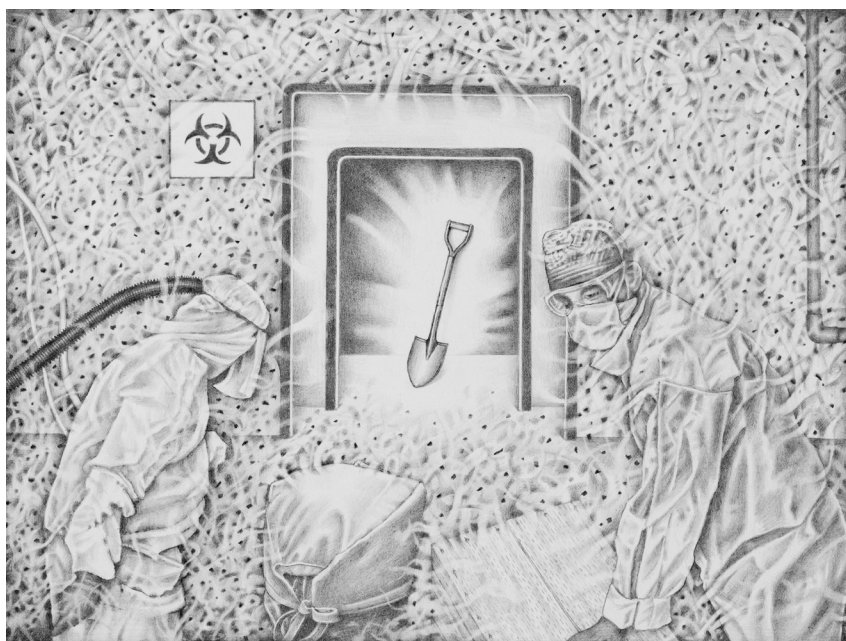
Life in the Big City, oil on canvas, 2007. 28 x 30 inches.



Strawman, graphite on paper, 2009. 9 x 12 inches.



No Exit, graphite on paper,
2009. 9 x 12 inches.



Storm #5, graphite on paper,
2020. 9 x 12 inches.



House of Fear, oil on canvas, 2017. 39 x 42 inches.



Above: *Family Farm*, oil on canvas, 2020, 28 1/4 x 30 1/4 inches. Right: Detail.





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