The expedition

Shawn Quincy Foreman

Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

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THE EXPEDITION

A THESIS

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Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

In

The School of Art

By
Shawn Quincy Foreman
B.F.A., Louisiana State University, 2006
May 2009
“There is no shame in not knowing; the shame lies in not finding out.”

Russian Proverb
Acknowledgments

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Abstract

I want my audience to experience awe. I use this to express my view on the argument of reality. Can reality truly be known? I further explain the use of nontraditional and traditional painting techniques to produce my paintings and drawings. My thesis entitled “The Expedition” is an abbreviated journey through my life.
The Expedition

All truths are easy to understand once they are discovered.

Galileo Galilei

The Grasshopper

No, this is not a reference to David Carradine in *Kung Fu*. This is however the story of a genesis in my life. It happened in 1986 while my dad was stationed at the Pensacola Naval Air Station. I was 13 and attending Warrington Middle School. My homework assignment for science class this particular day was to pick an insect to draw from a handout, double it in size, make it as accurate as possible, and label the body parts. The next day the class voted for the bug that most resembled the ones on the handout. I won first place. I had been doodling since I could hold a pencil, but that day I saw that I could draw. I drew a grasshopper and I have not stopped drawing since.

27 Ways

I was born into the Seventh Day Adventist religion. One of the nicknames of this religion is the “no religion” because there are so many restrictions, rules, and forbidden things. Some examples are: no coffee, no TV on Saturdays, no meat, no secular music, no dancing, no standing on your head on Saturdays, NO NO NO! When I asked about the rules, the answer was always that I should not ask questions. The SDA religion has 27 fundamental doctrines that one must follow in order to be righteous and just for God. Several of them did not come from the Bible but from a founding prophet, Ellen G. White.
I left the faith when I was 21. I was tired of being reprimanded for questioning the doctrines, and I was tired of getting no answers to my questions. This led me to search for ways to disprove the existence of a supernatural being or force that created and manipulated the universe. I reasoned away the rules and found a place of comfort in my disbelief. I was happy. Then, unexpectedly, I was turned upside down in the Land of the Rising Sun.

**Anchors Aweigh**

Every first-born male in my family, from the early sixteenth century to the present, has served his country at sea. In the U.S. Navy my father was an aviation electronic technician. He was stationed all over the United States and Europe. I joined the U.S. Navy in October 1994 at the age of 24. I was trained as a combat medic. My training included advanced cardiac life support, advanced trauma life support, field surgery, and field hospital operations.

My first duty station was Yokosuka, Japan. I was assigned to the Intensive Care Unit and the Emergency Room, and also had paramedic duties. During intense emergency situations I was able to turn off my emotions, which allowed me to do my duty efficiently and effectively. Nevertheless I was still deeply affected by the infirmities of life. Experiencing death was always a shock. I didn’t know how to respond to grim situations, and witnessing the fragility of life dumbfounded me.

At the same time, experiencing the historically and spiritually rooted people of Japan was astonishing. I was confused with the processes of life. “Why” became my mantra. I later went on to serve at Oak Harbor Naval Hospital, Whidbey Island, Washington. During my entire tour of duty, drawing was a weekend ritual, though I never took it seriously.
The Rime

Four times fifty living men,
(And I heard nor sigh nor groan)
With heavy thump, lifeless lump,
They dropped down one by one.
The souls did from their bodies fly,--
    They fled to bliss or woe!
And every soul, it passes me by,
Like the whizz of my cross-bow!

From The Rime of the Ancient Marines

By Samuel Taylor Coleridge
Chaos and Control

Robert Wright wrote a book called *The Moral Animal*. His main premise is that morality is a result of the process of evolution. At the present time the consensus for explaining how evolution happens is that it is spontaneous. This is a very simple summation; nevertheless it is part of the continuum of my thoughts. Richard Dawkins has written several books: *The Selfish Gene*, *The God Delusion*, *The Blind Watchmaker*, and *Viruses of the Mind*, to name a few. In *Viruses of the Mind*, Dawkins states:

> If you have a faith, it is statistically overwhelmingly likely that it is the same faith as your parents and grandparents had. No doubt soaring cathedrals, stirring music, moving stories and parables, help a bit. But by far the most important variable determining your religion is the accident of birth. The convictions that you so passionately believe would have been a completely different, and largely contradictory, set of convictions, if only you had happened to be born in a different place. Epidemiology, not evidence.

Dawkins proclaims that there is no supernatural force, that the universe is just a continuous process of existence, and that there is no God. Paul Davies has written many books on physics, including *God and the New Physics*, *The Mind of God*, *The Ghost in the Atom*, and *The Fifth Miracle*. He explains that there are extremely precise and multi-level processes throughout the universe. In *The Fifth Miracle* Davies notes that “there are indeed a lot of stars – at least ten billion in the observable universe. But this number, gigantic as it may appear to us, is nevertheless
trivially small compared with the gigantic odds against the random assembly of even a single protein molecule.” In *Chaos*, James Gleick writes of the discovery by Henri Poincaré of Chaos Theory, a process that explains how the underlying interaction of matter plays out. Chaos may seem random but is actually very ordered and deterministic. These are competing views of how the world works, one of randomness, the other of order, one of possible marvelous origins, the other of artless origins. I look at questions and commentaries from both the scientific and religious sides of this argument. This investigation is the premise of my work.

**Paintings**

I want to inspire awe. My compositions are controlled arrangements of abstract fields. In a number of them I incorporate drawn and painted elements. The abstract fields symbolize chaos, or the underlying process in which matter is manipulated into a real form. The symbol is complemented by the process that is used to execute it. I take a primed or unprimed canvas, or plywood, place it on the floor and apply acrylic paint by squirting, brushing, or dripping it directly onto the surface. Then I lightly blend the paint with a brush, palette knife, or large putty blade. After that, I spray water on everything and let it dry. I do this several times until I am satisfied with the outcome. An example of this process was used to make *Volcano* (see figure 1).

Another approach is to lay a piece of fabric on top of a previously stained support. I then place the paint directly on the fabric, spray it down with water, and allow the paint to diffuse and trickle through the fabric. As it dries, random patterns appear. This process is seen in *Vestige* (see figure 2).

A third technique I use is to apply paint to canvas or wood, wet it, then lay another piece of canvas or wood on top of it. I let it dry and then pull the two supports apart, creating a Gestalt ink blot
effect. I control everything that happens, to a point, depending on how much paint and how much water I use and how quickly the evaporation takes place. All these factors determine the outcome of how the paint rests on the surface. These processes are a physical representation of the Theory of Chaos; though it may seem random, it is the opposite.

I incorporate iconography that can be literal imagery or have symbolic meaning assigned to it. The animals in my paintings are references to historical and spiritual symbolism such as in Astronomy (see figure 3). The few that are not have a more personal meaning to them; an example is the blue-footed booby which I use in several of my paintings. I use them as a way to express the idea of questioning. I draw with chalk, charcoal, ink pens, and markers. I use oil and acrylic paint, sfumato and scrumbling techniques. By drawing in an object I allude to the idea that we cannot really know reality. When I paint in an object, it refers to the view that reality can be trusted.

\[ U = 880 \times 10^{24} \]

I have tried to metaphorically express the lessons relating to spiritual knowledge and truth I have experienced in my own life. The passage of time and the experiences of my life have informed this education. It has been my experience that in my search for “why,” I have somehow become grounded in faith, in trust. I have passed from a state of perplexity-induced stagnation and anger into a realm of inquisitive solace. In my practice I have developed foundational beliefs that allow my relentless inquisitions to be investigated without remorse or chastisement. In Gödel, Escher, Bach: an Eternal Golden Braid, Douglas R. Hofstadter writes:

When a system of meaningless symbols has patterns in it that accurately tracks, or mirror, various phenomena in the world, then that tracking or mirroring imbues the symbols with some degree of meaning—indeed, such tracking or mirroring is no less and no more than what meaning is
Depending on how complex and subtle and reliable the tracking is, different degrees of meaningfulness arise.

Knowledge is defined in the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* as “the fact or condition of knowing something with familiarity gained through experience or association,” or “the fact or condition of being aware of something.” I have limited information, yet I also have the opportunity to add to my knowledge. Truth has become a very important pursuit, and this show, this expedition, is but a continuation of this process. Knowledge seems to be an ouroborical cycle of mystery, revelation, and understanding. If Douglas Hofstadter is right, then this golden braid of seeking is enough to bring me to the place of hope, a place of assurance, a place where the intangibility of God may be experienced and the fog-encircled answer of “why” may be revealed. Awe is just the beginning.

Figure 1, Volcano, 4 inch x 4 inch, Mixed media on canvas, 2008
Figure 2, Vestige, 4 foot x 4 foot, Mixed media on panel, 2009
Figure 3, The Astronomer, 34 inches x 53 inches, Mixed Media on panel, 2009
Vita

Shawn Quincy Foreman was born on October 17th 1973 in Memphis Tennessee, to Lily and Wayne Foreman. Wayne was an electronics technician for the US Navy. Wayne’s naval career led the family all over the eastern United States as well as the Italian cities of Naples and Sicily. After his father’s retirement from the service, they settled in Walker, Louisiana were Shawn attended Walker high school, graduating in 1992. After working for a couple of years as a jack of all trades, Shawn enlisted in the US Navy in 1995 and served for four years active duty as a Corpsman (medic,) serving in Japan and in the northwestern United States. In 1999 after his tour of duty was up, Shawn moved back to Baton Rouge and meet his wife Julie while working at Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center. Both Shawn and Julie started there College degrees at Louisiana College in Alexandria, Louisiana. Julie received her bachelor degree from Louisiana College. Shawn, wanting a greater exposure to the art world, transferred to Louisiana State University in January 2002 to complete his Bachelor in Fine Arts. Shawn received his Bachelor degree in Fine Art in May 2006, and immediately enrolled in the Masters of Fine Art, Studio Art program at Louisiana State University. In May of 2009 Shawn received his Masters of Fine Art in Studio Art.