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National College of Art and Design

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Brad Holland: an illustrator in a process of change
by Conor Langton

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HEWLETT
PACKARD



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Table Of Contents

	Page
List of Plates	4
Introduction	6
Chapter 1: Background	8
	The Early Years
Chapter 2: Black And White Work	12
	Early Period
	The Underground Press
	<i>The New York Times</i>
	The Illustrations
Chapter 3: Colour Work	25
	Background
	The Portraits
	<i>The Frankfurter Allgemeine</i>
	<i>Magazin</i> Visual Essays
	Pastel Work



Summary and Conclusion

40

Bibliography

43

List of Plates

Plate		Page
1.	<i>Ribald Classic</i> , 1968, Brad Holland.	10
2.	<i>Mad Magazine Cover</i> , 1963, George Woodbridge.	12
3.	<i>Ribald Classic</i> , 1968, Brad Holland.	13
4.	<i>New York Ace Cover</i> , 1972, Brad Holland.	14
5.	<i>The East Village Other Cover</i> , 1971, Brad Holland.	15
6.	<i>Junk</i> , 1974, Brad Holland.	16
7.	<i>Self Portrait</i> , 1891, Kathe Kollwitz.	17
8.	<i>Camille Corot</i> , 1969, Leonard Baskin.	18
9.	<i>Illustration for The New York Times</i> , 1974, Brad Holland.	18
10.	<i>Lettuce</i> , 1973, Brad Holland.	19
11.	<i>The Scarecrow</i> , 1972, Brad Holland.	20
12.	<i>Drawing for Welfare Article</i> , 1974, Brad Holland.	21
13.	<i>Northern Lights</i> , 1976, Brad Holland.	22
14.	<i>Utopia</i> , 1974, Brad Holland.	23
15.	<i>Nixon and the Press</i> , 1975, Brad Holland.	24
16.	<i>Nixon</i> , 1975, Brad Holland.	24
17.	<i>The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas</i> , 1976, Brad Holland.	25
18.	<i>Eye to Eye with Mister T</i> , 1978, Brad Holland.	25
19.	<i>Painting for article on the Divestment of American Businesses</i> , 1984, Brad Holland.	26

Plate		Page
20.	<i>Somerset Maugham</i> , Brad Holland.	27
21.	<i>Minister Farrakhan</i> , Brad Holland.	27
22.	<i>Manachim Begin</i> , Brad Holland.	28
23.	<i>Micheal Jordan</i> , Brad Holland.	28
24.	<i>Ayatullah Khomeini</i> , 1980, Brad Holland.	29
25.	<i>Jumper</i> , 1987, Brad Holland.	30
26.	<i>Jumper</i> , detail, 1987, Brad Holland.	30
27.	<i>Subways</i> , 1988, Brad Holland.	31
28.	<i>New York City High Schools 1</i> , 1988, Brad Holland.	31
29.	<i>Slapstick Or Lonesome No More</i> , 1976, Brad Holland.	32
30.	<i>The Metaphysical Implications of Billiards</i> , 1988, Brad Holland.	32
31.	<i>The Esthetics of Basketball</i> , 1988, Brad Holland.	33
32.	<i>New York City high Schools 2</i> , 1988, Brad Holland.	34
33.	<i>Surfin Standing Up</i> , 1988, Brad Holland.	35
34.	<i>Ancient Life 1</i> , 1948, Brad Holland.	37
35.	<i>Why Artists Behave Like Crocodiles</i> , 1994, Brad Holland.	37
36.	<i>Ancient Life 2</i> , 1948, Brad Holland.	38
37.	<i>We're All Experiments</i> , 1994, Brad Holland.	38
38.	<i>Express Yourself cover</i> , 1996, Brad Holland.	39

Introduction

I have chosen for my area of debate, the illustration of Brad Holland (b. 1943). The reason I came upon this subject owes a lot to Holland's power to absorb one into his drawings and paintings. They won't leave you alone. They won't let you forget. They are the work of a rare individual's genuine concern for people. They are the result of Brad Holland's respect and stubborn belief in those people. His work has intrigued me since I was first introduced to it in my second year of studies and it begged further examination.

To my delight I discovered that Holland has entertained numerous styles and techniques over his career. It seems he is quite a creative artist with many strong beliefs about the integrity of illustration and my discussion could have taken a number of different directions. However, I have chosen to discuss his constant will to reinvent himself. This sanctions an in-depth critical analysis of his progression in terms of style and methodology.

The assignment was by no means an easy one. Material relevant to my subject was extremely difficult to find, simply because it doesn't exist. Aside from some articles and reviews, there is no comprehensive study of his work apart from his book *Human Scandals*, which was a collection of his early work for *The New York Times*. Unfortunately the book has been out of print

since 1977 and it was impossible to locate any copies, especially from outside America. Any information and facts have been compiled from articles written on Holland and his contemporaries. Regarding the analysis of his work, the vast volume of this is original. Perhaps the lack of solid material has been fortunate for it ensures one thing – the work must speak for itself and I hope I do it justice.

Chapter One

Background

The Early Days

Brad Holland was born in 1943 in Fremont, Ohio. His childhood, however, was spent in Fort Smith, Arkansas where his family moved soon after he was born. Coming from the Southern home of Mark Twain, William Faulkner and Eudora Welty a breeding ground for stories where “language is used to illuminate rather than exaggerate” (Wood, 1995, p.7) may explain Holland’s affinity for story telling, only in visual form. Visiting old relatives in Arkansas he was fascinated by their pictorial language and how so few words were used to achieve an effect. The minute he had heard his Grandmother tell a story he knew he “had heard art” (Wood, 1995, p.4). Holland began his own story telling, only he chose to employ paint instead of words.

Holland recalls a turning point in his career when at the age of twelve he remembered his father saying he wanted to find work where he was outside and not in a factory, so he taught himself carpentry skills. Watching this Holland decided “to start planning ahead and have some control over my life”(Coyne, 1977, p.50). Holland never really entertained any other career options other than those that involved art. He learned to draw quite competently at an early age. Even at the age of twelve or thirteen when he

was receiving rejection slips from Walt Disney, *Boy's Life* and the *Saturday Evening Post* he was an astonishingly gifted draughtsman. His drawings look like the slick accomplishment of an experienced artist and his youthful flights of fancy give early notice of a cartoon mentality underpinned by a daring sophistication of technique (Vickers, 1987, p.57). The climate in which an artist develops is extremely important as many ideas and values are shaped in the first few decades of an artist's life. Holland did not have a traditional art school education. Growing up in a small town, his notions of "commercial art" were conditioned by his surroundings; "I always figured it meant drawing tractor parts". So he learned about it from source magazines such as *Mad* magazine, which has been a kind of museum between covers for would be cartoonist/ illustrators.

At the age of 18 he took off for Chicago. It was Holland's first real step at independence. He had some trouble finding work as his drawings had a very undisciplined variety of styles and looked very homemade for commercial art. He did manage to get work in a tattoo parlour where he did "while you waits" until eventually he got a job in John Dioszegi's studio. This was an unusual studio specializing in overflow work, mostly all through the night. Holland's drawings were very accomplished and there was some interest in his pencil sketches. It was just his rendering and ideas that seemed to horrify everyone. Really what he was doing was making a living by doing work for commercial artists who couldn't draw. Chicago wasn't really ready for him

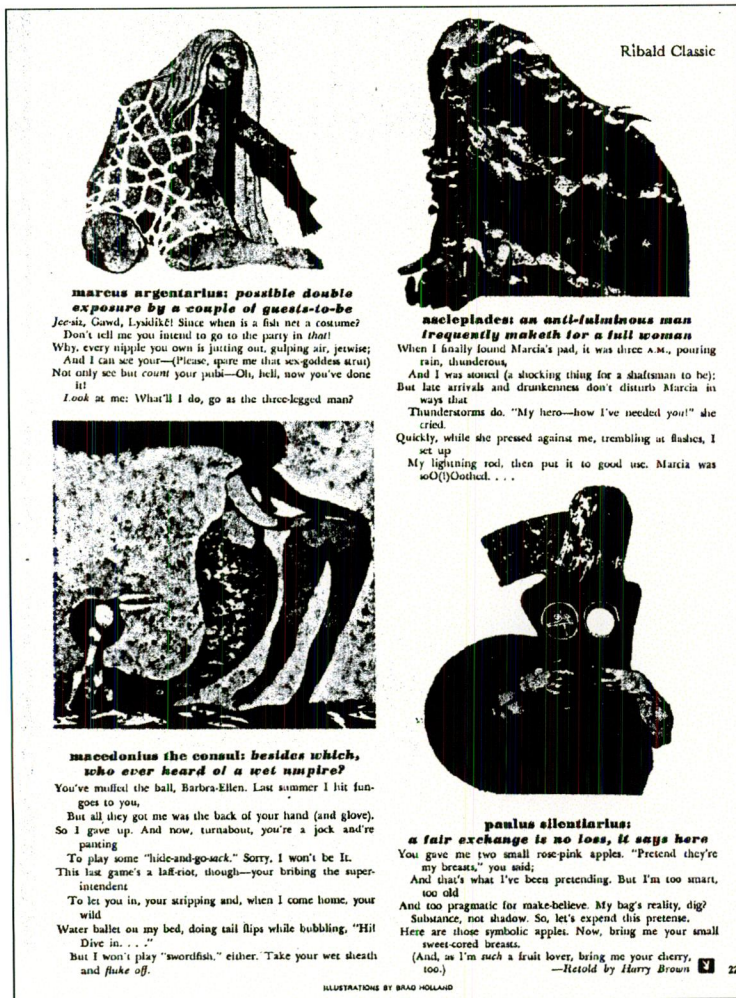


Plate 1: "Ribald Classic" Double spread of modernized epigrams from the Greek, published in Playboy, p.227, 1968, pen and ink, by Brad Holland.

and after two years Holland moved to Kansas City and a job with Hallmark Cards.

This was quite a valuable educational experience for him, learning type and layout as well as devising some credible styles. It also gave him insight into the committee mentality that Holland believes runs right up to publications like *Newsweek*. At Hallmark Holland was in charge of a number of artists and he quickly devised a strategy to get work past the committee. On Monday he would submit their rejects for disapproval. This meant then that they need not worry about what they were doing because by Friday of that week their work would have to be accepted as there was no time left. "It was bullshit but you learned a lot" (Vickers, 1987, p.57). While in Kansas he also formed the *Asylum Press* to print "eccentric projects" with his friends.

Two years later, Holland headed for New York. "My idea was that I just wanted magazines to give me a page to do whatever I wanted - I didn't care whether they went with the articles or not." (Vickers, 1987, p.57) Here he managed to get a few commissions, like the one with Herb Lubalin illustrating the first issue of *Avant-Garde*. However, that connection ended when he refused to "look like Milton Glaser." Luck was to fall on Holland again when on a trip visiting his girlfriend in Chicago he scheduled an appointment with Art Paul of *Playboy*. This resulted in a ten-year relationship illustrating the regular feature "Ribald Classic" (plates 1 and 3).

Holland worries that nowadays there are too many artists around. He should worry. There is always someone wanting to employ the smart kid from Arkansas. From a US postage stamp to a UN building mural, from a Billy Joel album cover to the celebrated erotic slide show of Adrian Lyne's *9 ½ Weeks*, Holland's work has always been in demand.

Chapter Two

Black And White Work

Early Period

For the first twenty-five years of his life Brad Holland worked exclusively in black and white. He had considered using colour at an early age but regarded his experiments as basically pathetic. Black and white penwork at that time had never left the art scene but was very much overshadowed by full colour. Not since the pre-colour days of the 1900s, with artists like Howard Pyle, Edwin Austin Abbey, Franklin Booth, Joseph Clement Coll and Charles Dana Gibson, had this medium bore such fashionableness and acceptance.

The photograph dominated early sixties ads and Holland was one of the first conceptual artists onto the scene. For his earliest illustration work, he used a particular bold black-and-white style because it would reproduce without halftones. (Heller, 1986, P. 148) They were rendered like drawings done with a stick dipped in ink. Compared to drawings he had made as a child these were darker and less cartoon-like. With regard to artists that Holland acknowledges as having influenced him, he singles out George Woodbridge of *Mad* magazine for special mention (plate 2). “I liked the way he drew teeth. He drew these guys with about a thousand teeth. When they smiled

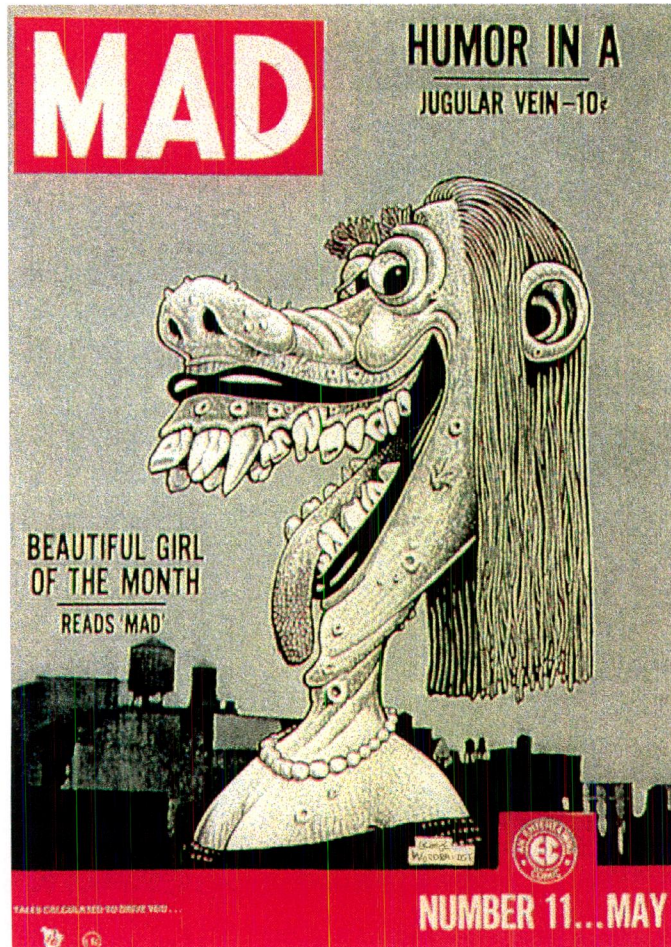


Plate 2: Front cover for Mad magazine, no. 11, May 1963 by George Woodbridge.



Plate 3: "Ribald Classic" Double spread of modernized epigrams from the Greek, published in *Playboy*, p.226, 1968, pen and ink, by Brad Holland.

they looked like they had corncobs sideways in their mouth". (Heller, 1986, P. 146) Also alluded to are two other *Mad* artists, Wallace Wood and Harvey Kurtzman.

When Holland reached New York in 1968, his work was stylistically akin to the black and white work he was doing at *Hallmark*. From past experience, he believed that art directors tended to treat black and white work as secondary. This, he felt, would mean that he would get less flak over what he was doing. Unfortunately, his theory failed. Art-directors still had trouble with Holland's methods: firstly, that he would only do his own ideas and, secondly, that he was only ever going to use manuscripts as a frame of reference.

The exception was *Playboy*, where he was left unimpeded by art-director Art Paul. *Playboy* would send him the manuscripts and Holland would send in the finished artwork and there were no intermediate steps. This gave Holland complete freedom to do what he felt appropriate for the content and space (Coyne, 1977, p.52). Perhaps his most important contribution to "The New Illustration" of the 1970s, was pursuing an idea that art should have its own integrity and changing the smothering way illustration was used by practicing a radical concept that illustration needn't mimic the text literally. Taking his theories into account while examining the layout of Holland's work it occurred to me that there is little or no relationship of text to illustration. For



Plate 4: Front cover for *New York Ace*, pen and ink, January 1972, by Brad Holland.

example, *Playboy*'s regular feature "Ribald Classic" (plates 1 and 3), here Holland does not play his drawings off the supporting text, the two are left completely separate, they only relate because the illustration is placed above the text. In an interview with *Creative Review* Holland spoke of learning layout and type during his time with *Hallmark* (Vickers, 1987, p.57), it might appear strange then to why he never really used this experience to his advantage. I do not think that this is the case. Holland is so preoccupied with the importance of art alongside text and the idea that art has its own integrity that he has continued even today to separate any of his illustrations from areas of text, eliminating any supporting roles and allowing his work to stand on its own.

The Underground Press

Many observers of Holland's work have often been perplexed by sudden shifts in style as his artistic spirit developed. For instance, there was a brief stage in the late 'sixties, when although successful with his style of illustration, he traded it virtually overnight for a decidedly rugged cartoon approach to work on "underground comics". He was immediately accused of stealing from comics and degrading his talent but what his critics failed to comprehend was that this was a natural transition from a relatively decorative to a more conceptual approach. Holland himself believes that during this period he was more concerned with "... discipline, for one thing, which in

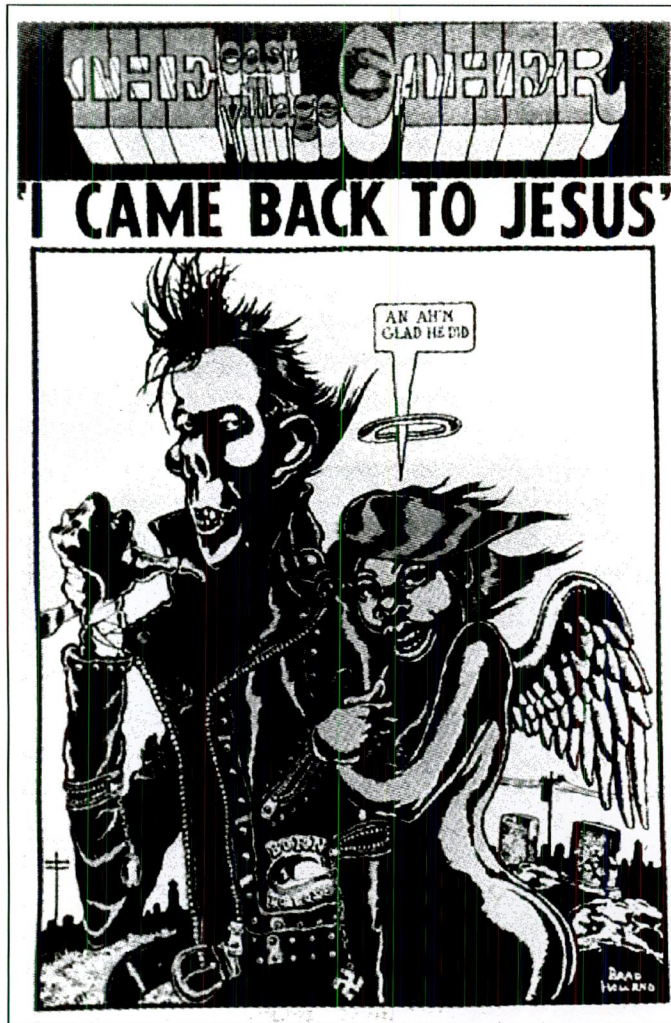


Plate 5: "I came back to Jesus" front cover for *The East Village Other*, pen and ink, 1971, by Brad Holland.

art means craft. Beyond that, I was just trying to learn how to describe the life I was leading on the Lower East Side" (Heller, 1986, p.149).

Playboy was ideal for Holland; it had given him an economic base that allowed him to choose commissions. The underground press that was transmitting from New York's Village was a logical step for him. Here he would have more control over the work he wanted to do. And as far as he knew, he was the only artist who started with *Playboy* and *Redbook* and worked his way up to papers like *Screw*, *Rat* and the *New York Ace* (plate 4). "...those crazy papers were great for what I wanted to do. They were all so new that their editorial policies were nearly indistinguishable from anarchy. You could do a drawing and paste it up and see it printed a few hours later". (Heller, 1986, p. 149)

The work that Holland was doing for the underground press, particularly *The East Village Other* (plate 5) owed a lot to the cartoon exaggeration of David Levine and Gerald Scarfe. The style that he used was also influenced by a cartoonist that called himself Yossarian and some Puerto Rican friends of his whom he met when they were robbing his apartment. He also recognized the task of Robert Crumb. Crumb's art was born of the tradition of social commentators like George Grosz and Otto Dix. He was taking pop values as an end in themselves and putting a spin on them. Holland found this as a real



Plate 6: "Junk" from *The New York Times* Op-Ed page, illustration for an article on the narcotics problem by a former drug addict, pen and ink, 1974, by Brad Holland. Art director: Jean-Claude Suares.

stimulus. He was inspired by Crumb's courage to condemn society's values but when Holland tried, he saw himself trying to trash these values outright.

During this period, he met Jean-Claude Suares, art director of the *New York Free Press* who, in 1974, moved to *The New York Times* and brought Holland's drawing to the op-ed page. When Holland transferred back to mainstream publications one of his former employers celebrated the change by pirating a glossy Holland cover and adding the caption "From *Slime* to *Time*."

The New York Times

Holland's work for the *Times* was a real breakthrough, really established his reputation. He was doing the kind of work that five years previously would have only been in underground magazines. Suares brought Holland to meet Harrison Salisbury who was the editor of the op-ed page. Harrison seemed to understand Holland's ideas on illustration, that magazines and newspapers don't have to use art as illustration. "He went through the drawings with real interest and picked out several to use for articles. I had done a drawing of a junkie, so they got a junkie to write an article about himself to go with it. The first time in my whole career that an editor had actually understood the work exactly the way I intended it" (Heller, 1986, p. 151) (plate 6).



Plate 7: Self portrait, 1891 by Kathe Kollwitz.

During his time at *The New York Times* Holland again devised a new style of illustration. He admits himself that this was a turning point in both his life and career: “I was sitting at a friend’s house on the Lower East Side one night, and I just started drawing with a ball point pen on an old paper sack. I was no longer trying to control the drawing by calculating the effect I would get with textures and lines. The style just came instinctively; it felt so comfortable it was just like writing a letter to somebody. I looked at the drawing and said, ‘ Now why the hell can’t you do that all the time instead of worrying about technique.’ Art was no longer a threat. From that point on it truly became fun, and I never looked back” (Coyne, 1977 p.50). This form helped define the appearance of the *New York Times* op-ed page, which for the mid to late 1970s was the primary outlet for his work.

This more technical approach was influenced by the expressive prints of Kathe Kollwitz (plate 7) and Leonard Baskin (plate 8). Stylistically, their work is similar to what Holland was producing and often it is difficult to tell them apart. I have included Baskin’s wood engraving of Camille Corot (plate 8) not only because I think the style of drawing in it is similar to Holland’s, but also if you compare it to a drawing Holland did for the op-ed page (plate 9) there is quite a resemblance in their facial expressions. Furthermore, Holland creates the mood of the drawing by similarly placing a light source to the right above the figure’s head, casting these great shadows over more than half of the character’s face. Holland was also inspired by Hokusai’s linear



Plate 8: *Camille Corot, wood engraving, 1969, by Leonard Baskin.*



Plate 9: *Editorial illustration for The New York Times Op-Ed page, pen and ink, 1974, by Brad Holland. Art director: Pamela Vassil.*

economy and Francisco de Goya's linear strength. Holland trained himself by copying details of their work as a student might draw from a plaster cast, or by rendering entire compositions to master a technique. (Heller, 1993, p.36) These influences were never kept secret: Holland often titled a derivative piece in honor of the artist who influenced it, such as an editorial drawing published in 1968 called *Basking*, for which Leonard Baskin's expressive line was borrowed.

Holland's work for the op-ed page also gives us a remarkable insight into his concerns. While Holland was illustrating the Vietnam War and the Nixon presidency for *The Times* his concerns were closer to home "I wasn't one of these guys who loved to draw Nixon. And I wasn't really doing drawings about war or poverty or drugs either. Those things are too abstract to get a handle on. What I did was personal. For example, the drawing of a junkie was a guy I knew on Eleventh Street. He overdosed after getting out of jail on Riker's Island" (Heller, 1986, p.151) (see plate 6).

By the time Holland left the op-ed page his work had been seen in a new context. Instead of his drawings complementing a writer's article, he had a panel with a title and a byline showing a drawing backed up with one or more quotes from the current news. He hopes for the day when they might run with nothing more than a title. (Coyne, 1977, p.52)





Plate 10: “Lettuce”, illustration about Cesar Chavez’s United Farm Workers’ strike against the lettuce growers, 1973, pen and ink, by Brad Holland.

The Illustrations

Holland draws with a beauty that is seldom matched. He used this ability to accomplish some of the most innovative, original and imaginative drawings ever to have appeared in print (plate 10). My intention is to explore what makes these illustrations so successful.

His work for *The New York Times* has been such a benchmark in his career because it put him into the public eye. I believe that Holland was only able to successfully define the illustrative style of the *Op-ed page* because of all that he was allowed master under the Art-direction of Art Paul of *Playboy*. “There was a period when I was groping, playing with the styles too much. I know they didn’t like it, and I didn’t like it, but Art had the presence of mind to say, ‘Well, this is one of these periods that anybody who’s stretching is bound to go through’, and he rode it out.” (Coyne, 1977, p.52) When Holland arrived at the *New York Times* he had already been put through the many preliminary stages that would help him devise such a credible and profound handling of penwork.

I have chosen to examine in detail his *Op-ed page* style. There is something more fresh about these illustrations compared to a lot of Holland’s earlier work and better drawings and ideas. Not only did Holland instinctively feel more comfortable with this compared to any other earlier style, but also it



Plate 11: From "The Scarecrow", an apocalyptic strip invented and drawn by Brad Holland, pen and ink, 1972, published by Yo-Yo inc.
Art directors: Brad Holland, Baby Jerry.

was to be the last endeavor of his early black-and-white period. It is possible that Holland felt that the work he was doing at that time, which had matured from all his earlier experiments, had been brought as far as he had wanted in black-and white. And as style was only ever going to be an end in itself, he slipped out of the black-and-white scene. Each illustration is worthy of mention. Unfortunately, this would be impossible so I've made a selection, discussing each illustration under a different heading.

General Technique

To understand the roots of Holland's Op-Ed approach, we must also examine drawings he did for a comic's magazine called *Yo-Yo* before his move to the *Times*. Its' editor Babi Jeri got Holland to do a story for it, mostly through drawings with very little text. These drawings (plate 11) were more skillful and accomplished than his underground work and show Holland's first step away from his underground style. The work begins to look more refined and not as heavy in chiaroscuro and although still quite aggressive and unfinished, it is beginning to touch on the more subtle approach he would use for the Op-ed page (plate 10). Holland does, however, hint to his underground style in his early Op-ed work. For example, Plate 12 is an illustration he did for the Op-ed page and evidence that he was still keen on using these heavy blocks of black. This reveals that he had not shaken his underground style off

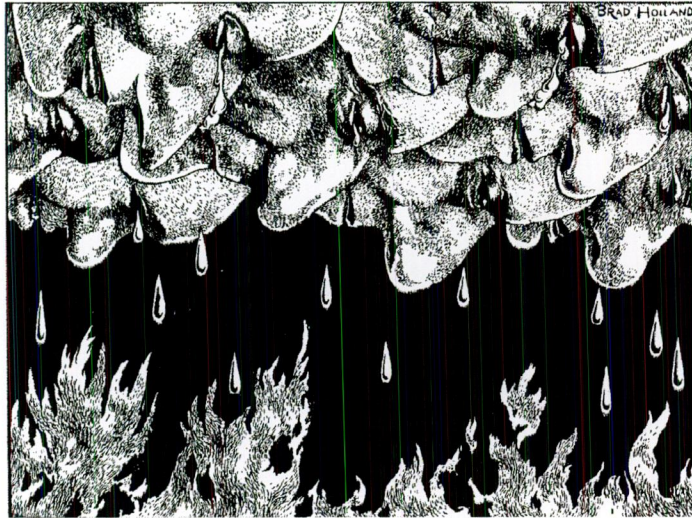


Plate 12: *Op-Ed page of The New York Times, drawing for article on welfare, pen and ink, 1974, by Brad Holland. Art director: Jean-Claude Suares.*

completely and just arrived at the *Times* with his most accomplished black-and-white style under his arm.

His rendering also changes. Line also begins to play a more prominent role. In the illustration (plate 11) we see Holland's early attempts at cross-hatching, such as on areas of the children's clothes and hair. Holland became increasingly concerned with the blending of tones around areas of clothing and faces. This was something that did not interest him while working for underground publications (plate 4, page 14) but a technique he would master for the Op-Ed page.

His illustrations for *Yo-Yo* indicate a development in his attention to detail and texture, particularly in his figures. The figures are less cartoon-like than his underground characters and more anatomically correct. Developing all these changes, Holland was able to bring a new illustration to the Op-Ed page, which I would consider to be Holland's fully developed black-and-white style. The result is more energetic and atmospheric illustrations compared to any of his earlier black-and-white attempts.

Line

Strong line was Holland's basis for this technique. As I explained in Chapter One he learned to draw quite skillfully at an early age. This earlier work is

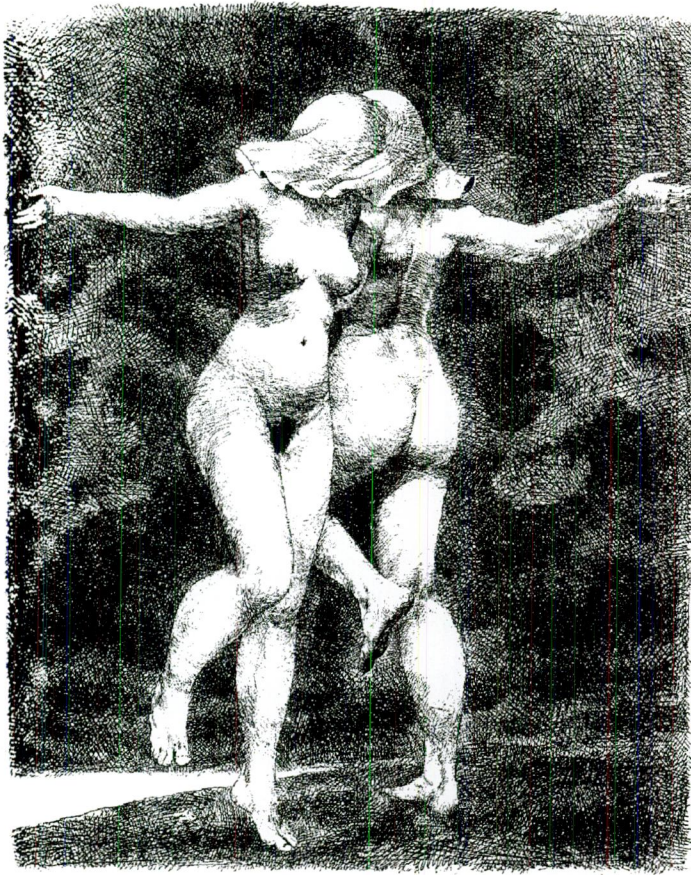


Plate 13: "Northern Lights", drawing for Op-Ed page of the *New York Times*, 1976, pen and ink, by Brad Holland.
Art director: Jean-Claude Suares.

harder to appreciate because of Holland's excessive use of bold lines and overcast blocks of black. On the pages of the *New York Times* his rendering had been purified and the line refined. Holland's quality of line is an intricate part of all his illustrations. I have picked the illustration in Plate 13 because it especially shows strong evidence of Holland's command over figure drawing. In fact, the strength of detail and texture is also fascinating here.

The illustration is a creative and anatomically brilliant life study. The two dancing figures both rendered in full detail reveal the technical competence of Brad Holland. The two blindfolded women pacing around in circles are splendidly complemented by Holland's high level of draughtsmanship. What is most obvious about this illustration is how competently Holland works with the entire figure. Equal attention is given to all parts of the figure. Holland also succeeds in making his figures come alive. The foreshortening of the legs are expertly portrayed. The figures are moulded out of Holland's crosshatched line, building tones by layers. They skip around each other; arms stretched out to this abstract and mysterious backdrop. The contrasting somber and stormy background gives the illustration such atmospheric qualities. Consider an identical drawing (plate 14) Holland had previously done in 1974 where the background was not considered and is completely set in black. The drawing lacks any sense of atmosphere and the figures look like cardboard cut-outs. The quick cross-hatching that Holland has mastered so well in the later drawing of 1976 (plate 13) fuses all the elements of the



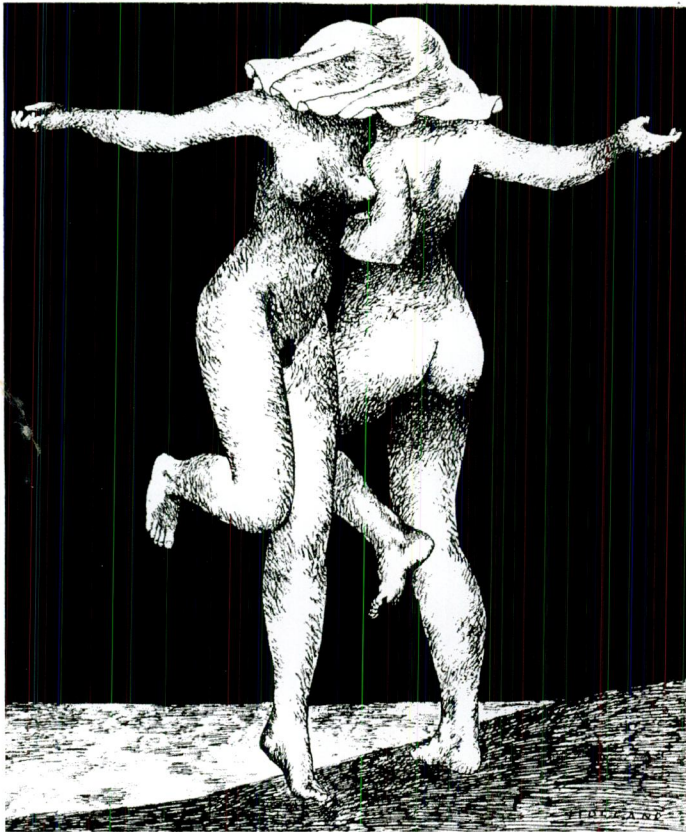


Plate 14: "Utopia", from *Intellectual Digest*, pen and ink, 1974, by Brad Holland.
Art director: Norm Schaeffer, George Kenton

illustration together. In the background, heavy areas of line create an overshadowing tone that is set against the light and more subtle use of pen that crafts the tranquil figures.

Effective lighting was crucial for Holland. Norman Rockwell used to say if a painting was going badly, put a dog in it. If it was really going badly, put a bandage on the dog's paw. Creating more and more light sources was Holland's way of repairing a painting (Holland, 1996, p.5). In his drawing, Holland sets the two figures in areas of clear light to stand out against the dark tones.

Texture and detail are also important elements in Holland's penwork. His figures are rendered efficiently, no portion being overlooked. They reinforce the strength of his illustrations, helping to transform his surreal compositions into realistic and believable scenes.

Mood

Holland believes "writing is just a way of giving form to feelings... Well, drawings are just feelings that have taken a different form...I just try to draw what goes on around me-to take a mass of confusing experience and find its anatomy, then to recreate the discovery in a simple form" (Meglin, 1978, p.76). Holland describes his drawings as "Visual metaphors" but believes that the strength of these symbols is in the strength of his figures. "The cast of the



Plate 15: Drawing for article on Nixon and the press, Op-Ed page of *The New York Times*, pen and ink, by Brad Holland.

Art director: David Schneiderman.

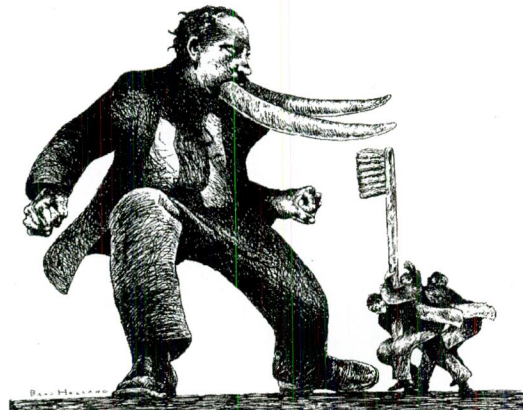


Plate 16: Cover drawing on impeachment of Nixon for *Changes* magazine, pen and ink, by Brad Holland.

Art director: Jean-Claude Suares.

eyes, the play of light, the expression in the hands” all work simultaneously to create the mood of his illustrations.

Holland’s drawings grow out of a very personal vision and experience. His concepts of good and evil, his feelings for justice or the lack of it are all present in his drawings. His preoccupation with man’s futility against tyrannical authority seems to stem from his Southern upbringing: “the Fort Smith, Arkansas, kind, where men get into fights with hammers and axes, and the gas station attendant is an ex-con and a preacher and where you can’t get a drink on any day of the week unless you make the liquor yourself” (Suares, 1974, p.56). J.C Suares, who brought Holland from the underground press to the pages of *The New York Times* believes Holland is “still covered with gunpowder and his eyes bloody from tear gas” and that “He still sees through these eyes” (Suares, 1974, p.53). Similar to his underground work his drawings still deal with death, birth, lust, magic, cruelty and self-destruction. In 1977 Holland’s most powerful drawings dealing with Attica, Watergate (plates 15 and 16) and the Vietnam War were exhibited as part of the Op-Ed show at the Louvre in Paris. These drawings were quite successful with the French public but more importantly with the French underground, usually cautious of anything as conservative as the Louvre, who wasted no time in declaring Holland their favorite out of the 30 artists included in the show (Suares, 1974, p.56).

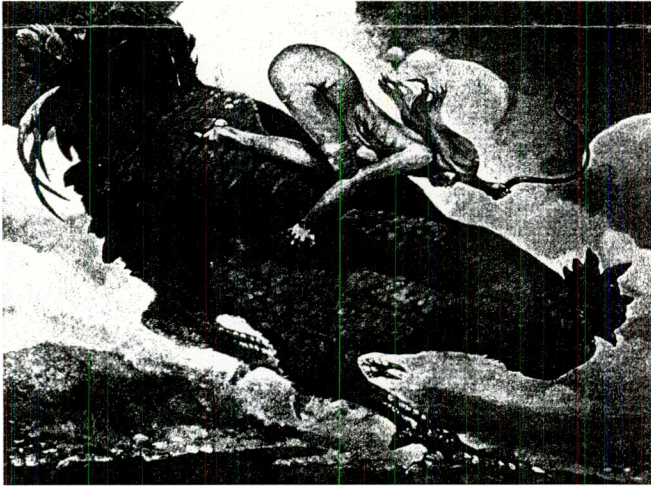


Plate 17: Illustration for an article entitled “The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas”, *Playboy*, 1977, acrylic, by Brad Holland. Art director: Arthur Paul.

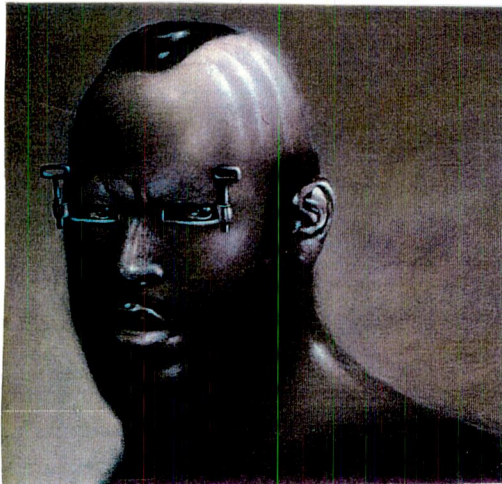


Plate 18: “Eye To Eye With Mister T”, *Playboy*, 1978, acrylic, by Brad Holland. Art director: Arthur Paul.

Chapter Three

Colour Work

Background

As noted earlier, style and technique are just a temporary state for Holland. They are not premeditated, which is why Holland has perhaps been so successful. Holland has confidence and knows that something will always materialise be it through potluck or instinct. In the mid- seventies he trades in his black-and-white drawings to begin a career in colour. He began working essentially in acrylics because nothing else was quick enough at drying. It began with this one painting he had done of a man with cat’s eyes that was subsequently used by J.C Suares in a book about cats. *Playboy* liked what he had done and approached him to do more like it. Within a year more calls began coming in. Commenting on his acrylic work the art critic Graham Vickers writes, “At their best they seem perfectly poised between the one-liner statement and the fine art statement” (Vickers, 1987, p. 58). This move didn’t fall short of criticism either. Holland was immediately accused of “piddling his talent away on crass sci-fi art rather than continuing on his established course. But again, his critics failed to discern that this effort signalled an organic transition from a graphic to a painterly orientation” (Heller, 1989, p.68). Plate 17 is an example of one of his first pieces for *Playboy*, his critics did not welcome this fantasy art style but Holland felt it



Plate 19: *Painting for an article in The New York Times Magazine on the divestment of certain American businesses, 1984, acrylic, by Brad Holland.*

suited his development from pen work to paint. Once he began experimenting more with acrylics his style would change.

Holland paints from dark to light. This means he begins by treating his canvas with black or another dark colour, then by putting enough white and lighter tones in so that the figures begin to emerge from the darkness. You have to have a lot of courage and confidence to allow your canvas to look so miserable for such a long time. Holland's work also takes a different type of courage; he makes only the marks he needs to make and leaves everything else out (see plate 18).

But whatever the surface change, Holland is spiritually and emotionally consistent. Commenting on his acrylic work Steven Heller writes, "Holland does not produce a cardboard caricature, but rather, a familiar individual. So when one sees Holland's painting of a man unravelling his head of string, (plate 19) its power comes not from the idea alone, but from his compassionate identification with the specific individual's predicament" (Heller, 1989, p.142).

The Portraits

Holland's portraits of the noted and newsworthy such as Somerset Maugham (plate 20), Minister Farrakhan (plate 21), Manachim Begin (plate 22) and

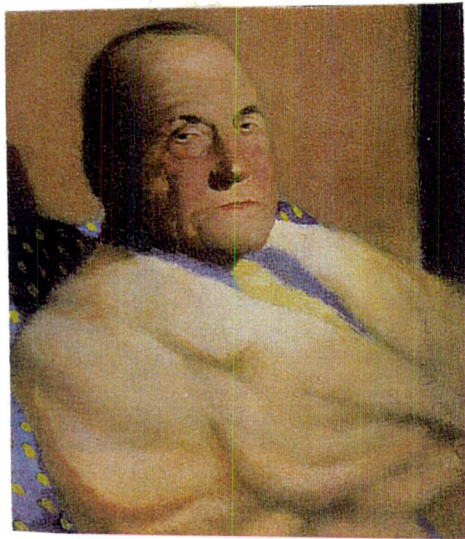


Plate 20: *Portrait of Somerset Maugham, acrylic, by Brad Holland.*



Plate 21: *Portrait of Minister Farrakhan, acrylic, by Brad Holland.*

Micheal Jordan (plate 23) have decorated the covers of top American journals like *Time Magazine* and *The New Yorker*. Holland has the incisive eye of all good portrait painters. Though he prefers to work from a live subject rather than a photograph, sometimes Holland has to take second best and deal with photographs with featureless uniform lighting. A master of chiaroscuro, in these cases Holland had to invent shadows. This required positioning his assistant to where he could then apply those basic shadows to the information of the photograph. “I hate having to invent a whole landscape for a face. Photos don’t give me the angles I want. And I don’t want faces lit like those old Technicolor movies, where all the light sources are competing” (Wood, 1995, p.7).

Holland also claims he would rather paint an anonymous person than a famous one. This allows him the freedom to change the facial features to how he wants it to look. It is the restriction to reproducing a likeness that hinders Holland, being unable to elongate a nose or change a feature and not wanting to draw someone that he would not even want to consider drawing. “It’s as if I want to paint a person who’s half of them and half of me. I don’t know whether that’s ego or lack of ego. If it’s ego, I can’t figure out why I never paint myself.” Holland has never done a self-portrait in his adulthood (Wood, 1995, p.7). The closest Holland has ever got to a self portrait is what he calls “a psychic self-portrait” (Meglin, 1978, p.117). He refers to his process of doing portraits “When I draw the forehead, I want to feel the weight of my

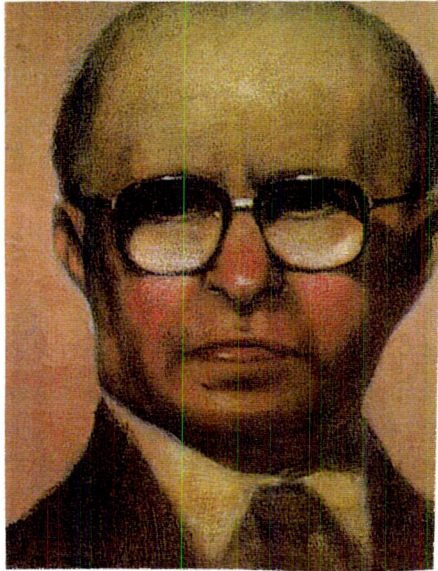


Plate 22: Portrait of Manachim Begin, acrylic, by Brad Holland.

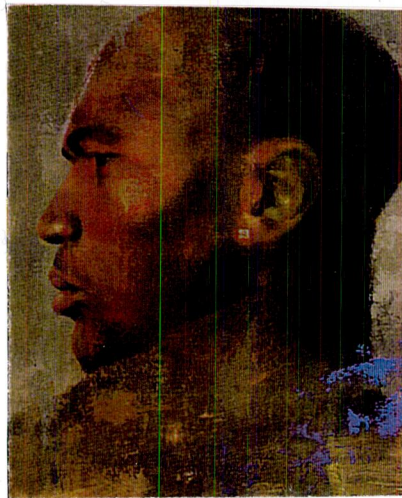


Plate 23: Portrait of Micheal Jordan, acrylic, by Brad Holland.

own forehead. It's like acting. You can't just look at someone; otherwise it's you against them. You have to inhabit them" (Meglin, 1978, p.117).

The mysterious, sombre and shadowy air that is about Holland's portraits entices clients who want villains for book covers or story illustrations, but Holland forbids stating the obvious. For instance, when given a brief to illustrate Adolf Hitler for a hundredth birthday publication and to make the subject look evil, Holland stepped in. "I said: How do you make Hitler look evil, his face is like a deaths head. Paint him smiling, he'll look evil" (Wood, 1995, p.7). They also hired him to do a portrait of Lee Harvey Oswald. The book was claiming that Oswald was the lone assassin of Kennedy and Holland painted the portrait of Oswald with this almost Mona-Lisa type smirk. It wasn't an obvious enough Oswald for them. They asked him to repaint it having Oswald with a bullet between his teeth. In both cases Holland did have to compromise. He didn't change it and they didn't publish it.

Holland's plight against the obvious is also aided by his charitable view of people. In an article in *New York* magazine, a political artist who wished to remain anonymous remarked that Holland's work was "useless decoration that passes for statement" and how it seems he seldom points the finger of blame for what is wrong in the world. Holland believes "Even in political drawings, no matter how much you might be gunning for someone, you can't

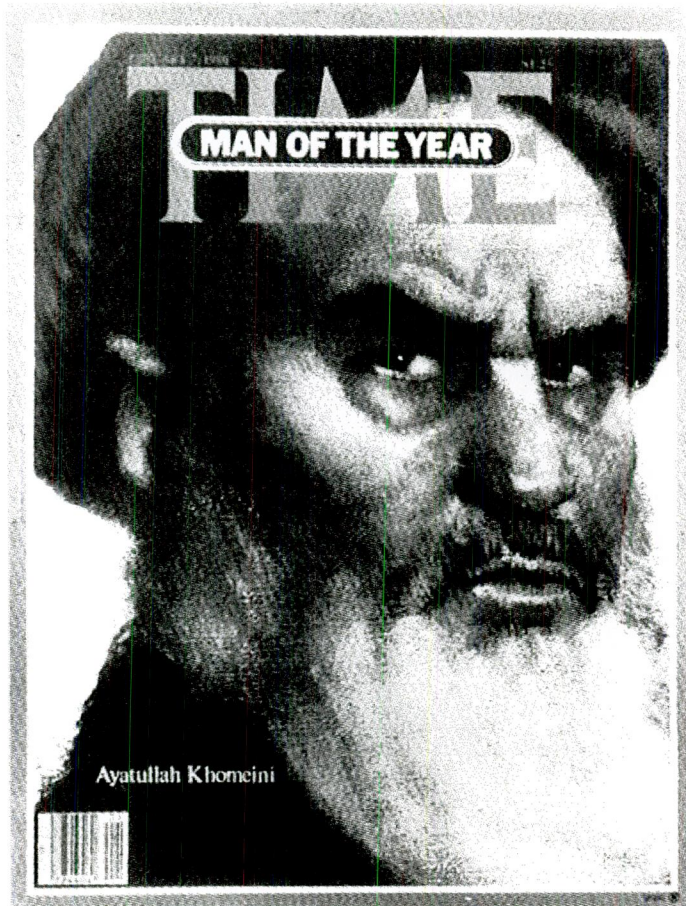


Plate 24: Ayatollah Khomeini cover for *Time*'s "Man of the Year" issue, 1980, acrylic, by Brad Holland.
Art director: Walter Bernard.

forget to feel for them as people. Art always has to wear at least one of the faces of love. Otherwise it's just one more thing added to all the things already in the universe" (Meglin, 1978, p.117).

Undoubtedly one of Holland's most important professional political portraits was the Ayatollah Khomeini cover for *Time*'s "Man of the Year" issue, January 1980 (plate 24). With the hostage situation in Iran at that time, Holland knew the cover would be a sensation so he wanted to make sure it would have quite an impact. Originally it was done as a waist length portrait but at the last minute he asked for it to be cropped so it ran as just part of the face. The head is placed against a vacant framework; the face looks over the right shoulder to stare into the viewer. The eyes are the crucial elements, the right eye occupying the centre of the work. They are the centres of expression and uncanny indicators of the Ayatollah's character. They reveal a powerful, serious man. His stare, almost peering, as he appears to examine the viewer.

The Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung Magazin Visual Essays.

Holland was involved in another of his erratic transformations in the late 'eighties. Tired of painting, he bought a box of children's crayons to experiment with and was impressed by the tactile results he got. The shift was not as dissimilar to his current style nor was it as extreme a move compared to other previous shifts but it certainly begins to draw upon childhood



Plate 25: “Jumper”, painting for an article on Rodeo Clowns, *The Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung Magazin*, 1987, acrylic, by Brad Holland.

Art director: Hans-George Pospischil.



Plate 26: “Jumper”, detail.

preoccupations. Holland was discreet about his departure. His previously balanced, tight rendering was progressively substituted by a more whimsical impressionism.

In 1987/ 88 Holland tested the waters with five visual essays for Germany’s *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung Magazin*. Its art director Hans-George Pospischil gave Holland complete leeway and freedom to develop his own stories. I have decided to examine these five essays in detail because I believe it is Holland’s most developed use of colour to date. It also it opens new areas of discussion so I can avoid repeating what I have said in the last chapter. Stylistically dissimilar to previous work, they are also persuasive portrayals of five uncommon themes such as inner New York City’s high schools, rodeo clowns (plates 25 and 26), the metaphysical implication of billiards and the aesthetics of basketball, which reveal Holland’s humanistic concerns.

Allowing only the readers of this German publication to watch as his shift developed, Holland even refused to enter any of the pieces into competitions. It appeared that imitators were repeating his work too often and he decided to change direction. “It got to a point,” he notes, “that one of them pinned me down so well that I couldn’t remember whether I had done the picture or not” (Heller, 1989, p.69). But there is a more rational reason for this change of style. This move was not one of the radical facelifts we have come to expect from Brad Holland, but a rather simple and deliberate modification of

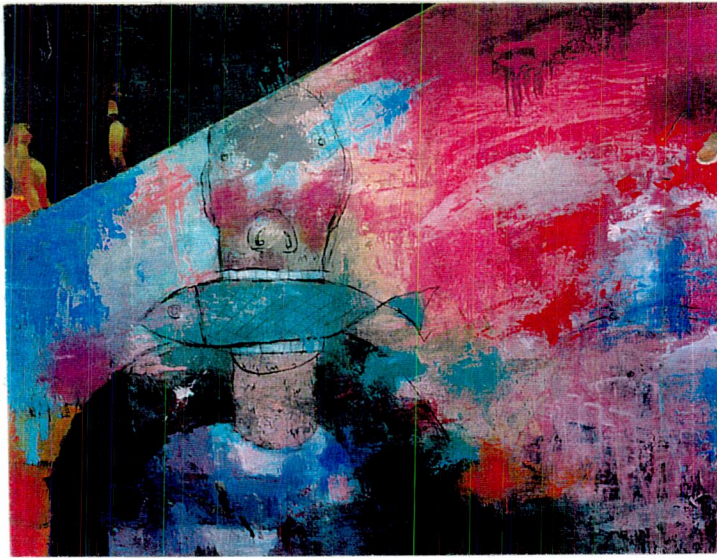


Plate 27: "Subways", painting for an article on New York Subways, *The Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung Magazin*, 1988, acrylic, by Brad Holland.
Art director: Hans-George Pospischil.

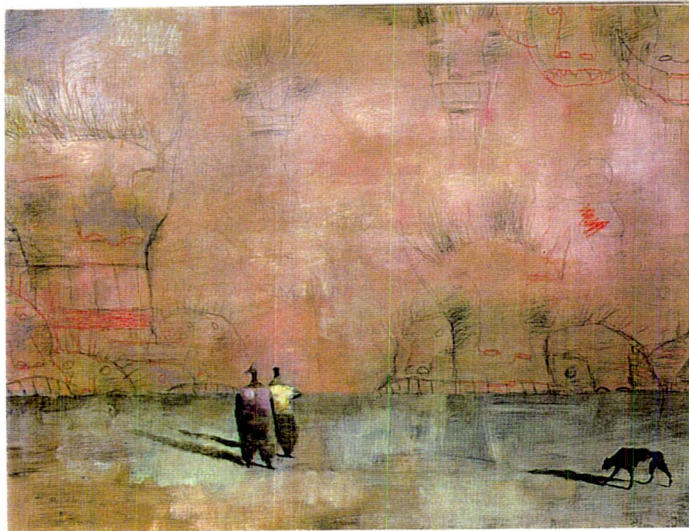


Plate 28: Painting for an article on the raw life of New York's inner-city high schools, *The Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung Magazin*, November 27 1987, acrylic, by Brad Holland.
Art director: Hans-George Pospischil.

pictorial emphasis. For example, in his essay for the magazine on subways (plate 27) he allows a wall to occupy almost all of the illustration; he decorates it by experimenting with colour both painted and sprayed, drawing over it and then smearing areas. The painting itself resembles a piece of abstract graffiti, except for the two focal figures placed in the top left, exposing the environment that Holland has actually painted. Another reversal of pictorial interest is also evident in his essay on New York City's ghetto high schools (plate 28). Holland allows the texture of the crayon that creates the impressive hieroglyphs on the playground walls to stand as the predominant part of the illustration instead of the two figures below.

After years of being over concerned with the reality of his backgrounds, it seems that Holland returned to the more enigmatic, unknown backdrops, such as those of his classic *New York Times* black-and-white Op-Ed drawings (Heller, 1989, p.71).

Colour

What is most important about Holland's later work is how he chose to use colour. The change from black and white was as unpredictable as ever. Holland didn't gradually ease himself into the colour circle; instead he jumps straight into the deep end. Some of his first painted pieces for *Playboy* (plate 29) are quite complex and display Holland's in-depth understanding of how

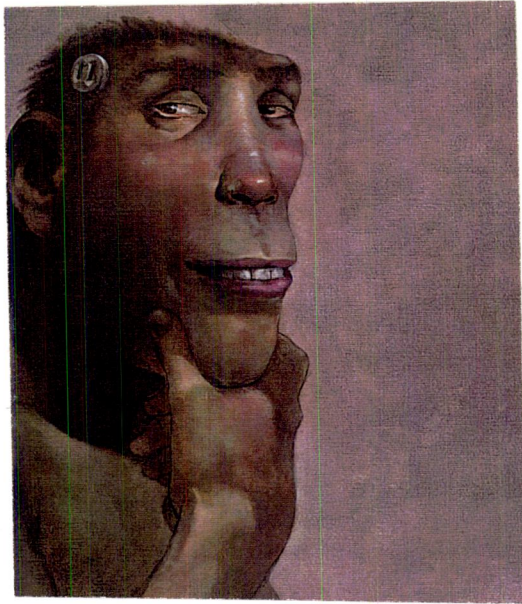


Plate 29: "Slapstick Or Lonesome No More", detail, *Playboy*, September 1976, oil on canvas, by Brad Holland.
Art director: Arthur Paul.

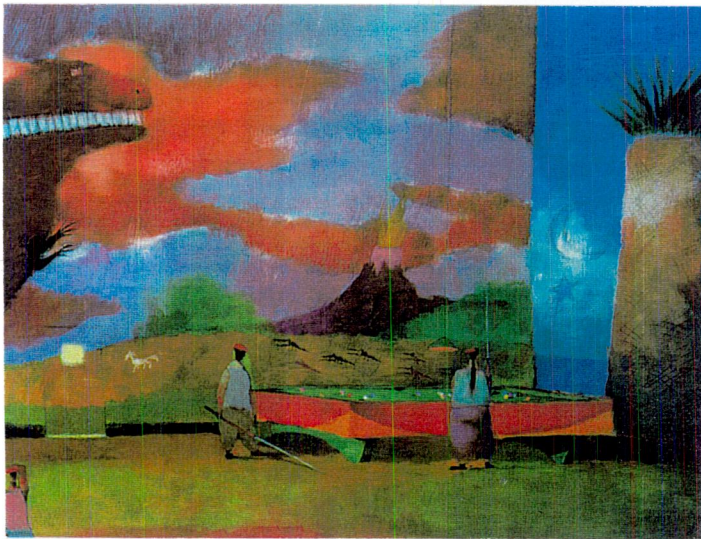


Plate 30: Painting for an article on the metaphysical implications of billiards, *The Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung Magazin*, March 13 1988, acrylic, by Brad Holland.
Art director: Hans-George Pospischil.

paints react on different surfaces and how colours respond among themselves. To discuss Holland's command of colour I have picked the illustration (plate 30), included in his essay titled "The Metaphysics of Billiards."

The illustration displays a billiard room where two figures play at a table surrounded by huge towering walls that are decorated with vibrant recreations of cave paintings. The walls immediately grab the viewer's attention. Holland's energetic use of bright colour coupled with his drawing of a huge prehistoric dinosaur symbolising the serious and often vicious approach of many competitors, it enters the illustration from the left, leading us to the right and the painting of a prehistoric plant pictured at night. To the centre of the mural, dinosaurs battle against a white horse echoing the actual game of billiards. It doesn't suits the dangerous atmosphere of the illustration if it is too obvious that these are just murals and not real landscapes, so Holland merely hints to the outline of a door on the bottom left of the wall. The focal point of the illustration is the game of billiards, which is placed just below the wall, out of the way of so no action is interfered with.

What strikes me most about Holland's use of colour in this illustration (plate 30) is how well his colours work with each other. Holland uses an even balance of cold and warm colours in the illustration. For example on the right, his use of cobalt blue that describes the night sky is strengthened by the orange of the plant it surrounds and also the orange of the clouds alongside on the main wall. The two contrasting colours green and red are also used

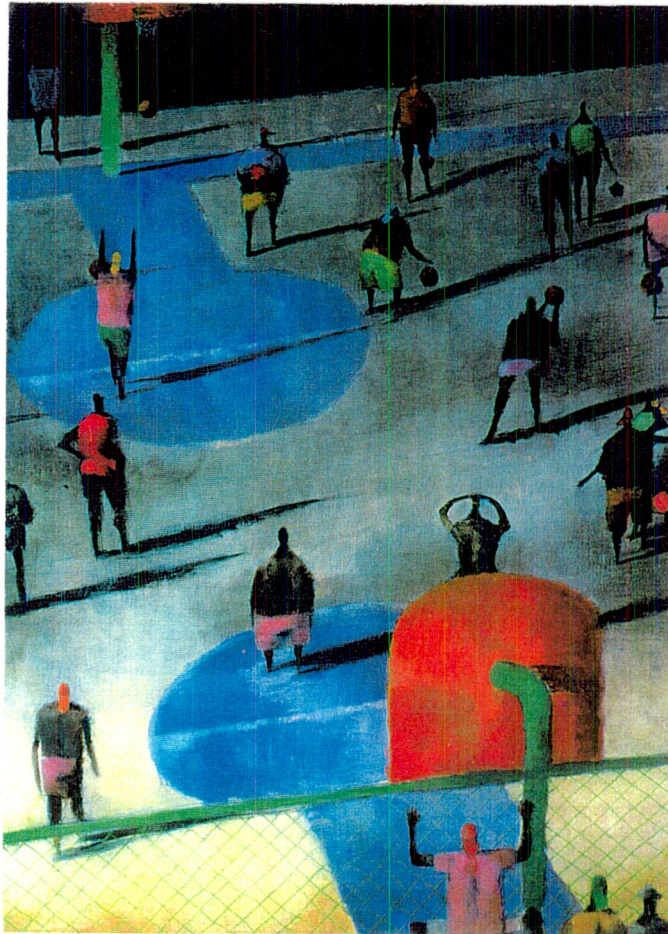


Plate 31: *Painting for an article on the esthetics of basketball, The Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung Magazin, November 4 1988, acrylic, by Brad Holland. Art director: Hans-George Pospischil.*

together in the illustration, for example, the green cloth on the billiard table versus the red of the table's frame.

Holland applies his paint using a dry brush technique. This is evident from the many layers of colour that remain visible after other layers have been painted over them. For example, the floor of the billiard room in the foreground of the illustration, which is painted green in keeping with the grassy landscape of the mural but still has hints of earlier layers of red and orange. As I mentioned on page 26 Holland paints from dark to light. It is clear he used this technique when painting the clouds on the mural, leaving earlier layers of dark blue uncovered to give a dark border to the clouds helping them look less flat and more realistic.

Figure Drawing

Holland's figures are not as stiff and rigid compared to his earlier work. For his five essays he begins to experiment with the shape of his figures. I have chosen the illustration (plate 31) for a piece on the esthetics of basketball. I believe it has some great examples of how his figures have improved by becoming more loose and fluid.

According to Heller "He was introduced to the work of painter and printmaker Ben Shahn, whose realistically detailed, socially conscious

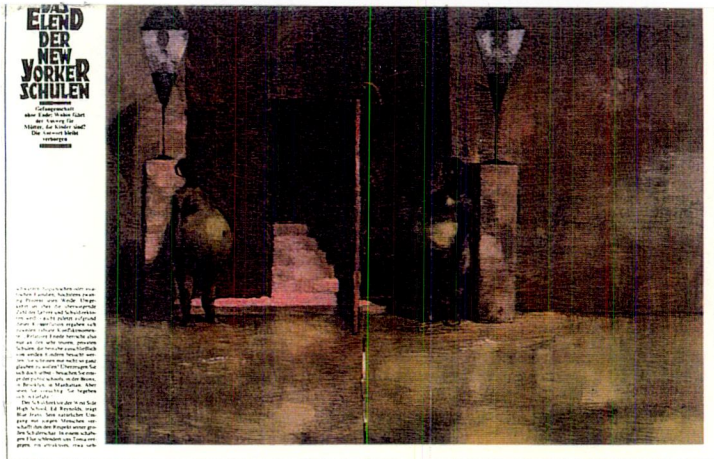


Plate 32: Painting for an article on the raw life of New York's inner-city high schools, *The Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung Magazin*, November 27 1987, acrylic, by Brad Holland. Art director: Hans-George Pospischil.

depictions of factory workers and farmers led Holland to change the way he rendered people, from anonymous stereotypes to expressive individuals.” (Heller, 1993, p.36) Influenced by how Shahn worked, Holland was also trying to interpret his surroundings.

Texture and Detail

Texture and detail are elements that Holland uses selectively. He tends only to include them when necessary and when they benefit the idea behind the illustration. I have chosen one of the paintings for his essay on New York City's inner city schools depicting the entrance to a school that is guarded by two pregnant girls (plate 32). The essay on New York schools includes a wealth of journalistic information. The school for example, “is guarded, not by Arabian fakirs, but by two pregnant girls (a reference to the fact that teenage pregnancy in New York is at an all time high); real-life Guardian Angels patrol the schoolyard; and the graffiti on the walls are accurate composites” (Heller, 1989, p.71).

Holland's paintings are quite realistic and there is a lot of importance put on texture. To begin with, Holland uses a masonite canvas, which is a fine grain paper that has been primed for acrylic painting. The concentration of acrylics allows this texture to remain visible. Holland often varies his media to suit a certain subject. As mentioned earlier, when he needed to reproduce childlike

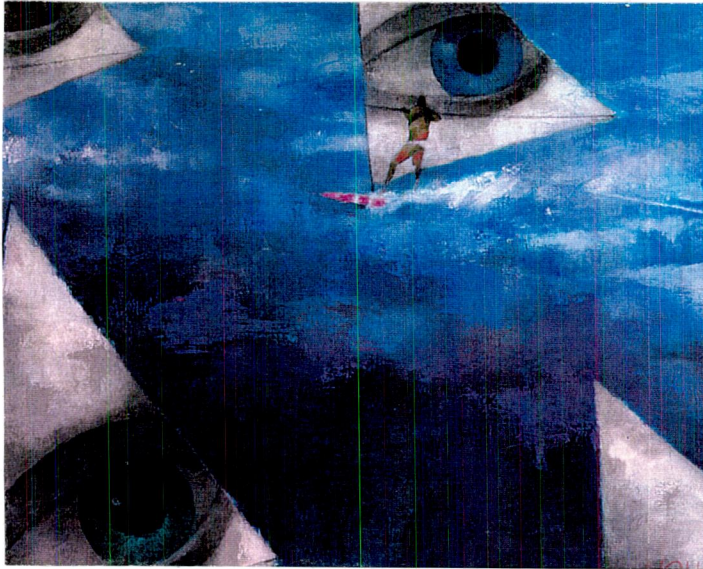


Plate 33: “*Surfin Standing Up*”, painting for an article on windsurfing, *The Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung Magazin*, 1988, acrylic, by Brad Holland.
Art director: Hans-George Pospischil.

graffiti, he relied on the tactile results of children’s crayons (plate 28). Texture is also often left to chance, as is evident with his illustration for Plate 33 where the texture of the waves are created by the careless and untamed application of paint.

Composition

The illustration I’ve chosen for discussion was for Holland’s essay on windsurfing titled “*Surfin Standing Up*”(plate 33). In fact, the strength of detail and texture is also fascinating here. Only some areas such as the eyes on the sails are rendered in detail while the texture of the waves are created by quick smears of paint. Holland has an excellent command of composition. The elements in all his illustrations work together exceptionally well. This one is no exception (plate 33).

As explained in Chapter One, Holland remembered how when hearing stories as a child, so few words were used to achieve an effect. Here we see how he has applied this idea to his drawings, including only what the drawing needs. To the foreground we can only see the top of two sails that stand out against the darkness of the sea. Their peaks direct us to the other two windsurfers that occupy the upper part of the illustration. The canvas also crops these. The one on the left is almost entirely out of shot as it sails past. By cropping the surfers, Holland stresses the swiftness and unpredictability of his subject.

His compositions are more surreal, atmospheric, fresher and personal, especially compared to his black-and-white drawings. One main reason is his increased use of abstract space. “I take a square or a rectangle, arrange things around the edge and leave a hole in the picture. It’s like writing your memoirs and leaving yourself out. I’ve noticed that if there is something in the middle of a picture, it becomes an impediment. So I keep moving around, find a new solution... Sometimes you have to keep yourself off balanced” (Wood, 1995, p.4) This illustration (plate 33) is no different. To begin with, the four almost flat triangular blocks of white are all that break up the changing colour of the ocean. These are arranged around the edges of the illustration where they are partly cropped. They create this “hole” in the illustration leaving the centre and majority of the illustration empty.

Holland’s work for the *Frankfurter Allegemeine Zeitung Magazin* suggests his increasing knowledge of art, science and literature. His interests in writings by Bertrand Russel, Arthur Koestler and Loren Easley have provided him with a wealth of intellectual reference. Holland’s images substitute for words. These often personal and surreal images unlock our subconscious. Holland’s surreal imagery seems to actually amplify the real (Heller, 1989, p. 142). All of Holland’s imagery is drawn from life. As noted earlier, all of the images for his New York schools essay were been taken from life-on-the-spot and just progressively filtered out onto his page.

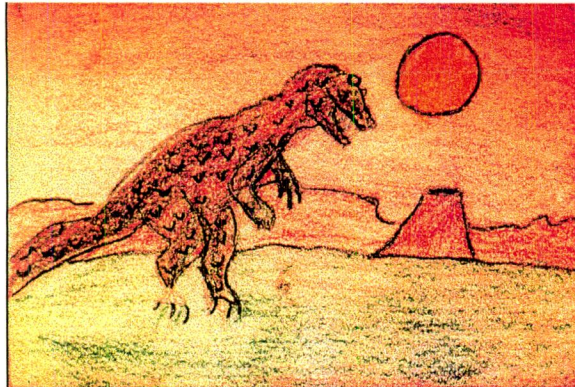


Plate 34: Drawing bound on paper by artist's mother and put into notebook called *Ancient Life*, 1948, by Brad Holland.



Plate 35: "Why artists behave like crocodiles", *The Atlantic Monthly*, July 1996, pastel, by Brad Holland.

This style of illustration has achieved success for Holland and it must be noted that unlike previous styles Holland continues to use this technique today. On several occasions, however, he has put it aside to develop certain other styles such as his pastel work.

Pastel Work

Holland is currently involved in another of his unpredictable transformations; a change that is perhaps Holland's most extreme to date. Looking over the work for his five essays it occurred to me that his new work is perhaps a further examination into this release of rendering and playful impressionism that he now seems so obsessed with. For example, if you were to remove the two figures and everything else painted in acrylic on the illustration (plate 28) and only leave the graffiti on the walls that is rendered in pencil, you would be left with a piece of illustration similar to what he is currently doing.

But there is a more valid justification for these new drawings. At an early age Holland was quite an affluent artist, he furiously scribbled dinosaurs and cavemen in crayon on whatever surface he could find, including the walls of his parents home in Arkansas. His mother frowned at these attempts at recreating the cave drawings of Lascaux, but nevertheless bound the drawings on paper into a little book titled "Ancient Life". Lost in an attic for decades

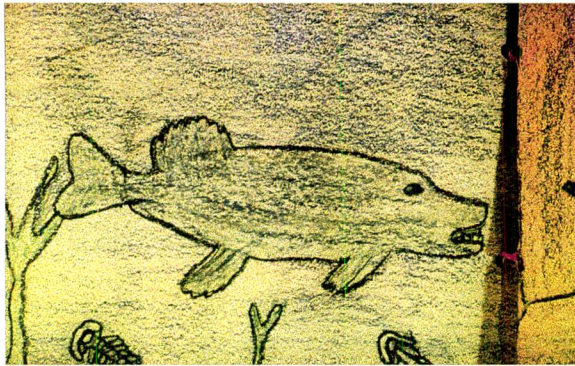


Plate 36: Drawing bound on paper by artist's mother and put into notebook called *Ancient Life*, 1948, by Brad Holland.

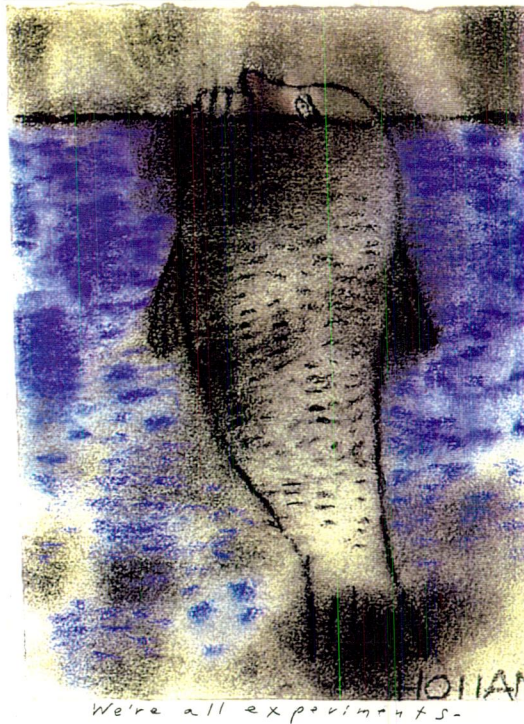


Plate 37: "We're all experiments", *The Atlantic Monthly*, July 1996, pastel, by Brad Holland

the book was discovered not long ago and Holland himself was surprised to find that he is he drawing the same way he did then, even his subject matter. "All my ideas look like this, like children's drawings, when I start out," he says, "and I objectify them. Some ideas never go beyond this stage." (Heller, 1998, p.81)

If you compare Plate 34 drawn when he was five years old to plate 35 which was done at the age of 51 and likewise plate 36 to plate 37 the subject matter and compositions are exactly the same. The new illustrations resemble a sort of abstract portrait with the subject's features as symbolic references. It seems the Holland's has discovered a medium and form that will ends his phobia of not been allowed to alter facial features when doing portraits (page 27). He has abandoned acrylics for pastels and limited his palette to black, white, red and blue, a sort of compromise between his black-and-white and his colour work. Compared to his visual essays, the backdrops are a step even closer to those that draped his drawings during his time with Op-Ed page. Such a profound shift of style has not effected his client list that includes The Art Directors Club of Switzerland, *Illustration America* and *The Atlantic Monthly*. He has recently finished a series of these illustrations for *The Atlantic Monthly* to accompany an article he wrote called "Express yourself it's later than you think" (plate 38).

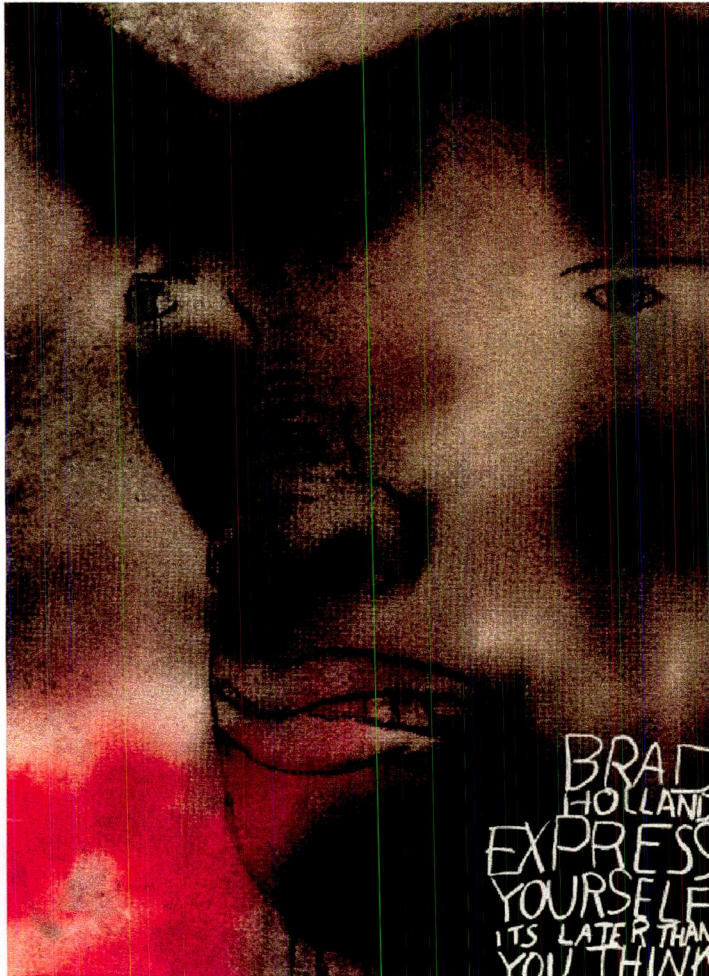


Plate38: Cover for “Express Yourself It’s Later Than You Think, *The Atlantic Monthly*, 1996, pastel, by Brad Holland.

Holland’s recent work is a departure in the application of paint and the creation of form, yet is perfectly consistent with his requirements to tell a story. It is also the bringing together of things personal and universal, which effectively settles the conflict he has always had between illustration as a service for others and as an outlet for himself (Heller, 1989, p.142).



Summary and Conclusion

My aim in this thesis was to analyse the illustrative work of Brad Holland. To examine the pinnacle of his talents but more importantly how style for Holland was only a temporary state, as a result, confirming my theory that this constant change of style has allowed Holland's work to grow and progress.

I have tried to piece together the often undetectable routes between Holland's transitions. In an article for *Print Magazine*, Steven Heller writes, "If one were to systematically chart his evolution by delineating each stage with a stylistic reference point, the graph lines would resemble a Jackson Pollock drip painting"(Heller, 1989, p.68). This is evidently true, however, I have discovered that on certain occasions these lines graphing Holland's work remain consistent. For example, his method of illustration first used for the *Frankfurter Allegemeine Zeitung Magazin*, which Holland has continued to use on certain recent projects. It became clear that only recently has Holland discovered how to work with many different styles at once. It has, undoubtedly, helped him overcome certain common problems in illustration, such as incidents where a particular style may be unsuitable for rendering certain ideas. He now has the competence to return to whatever style and media as want and need demand.

Initially I explored the possible sources of Holland's visual language. Holland found the stories of Mark Twain, William Faulkner and his grandmother to be a real stimulus. I discovered that Holland pursued their detailed and pictorial language, where so few words are used to create powerful effects only he employed paint instead of words.

In Chapter 2 I discussed Holland's work for the New York Times. Tracing his development from the first black-and-white work he did for *Playboy*, I discovered that the Holland was trying to refine and discipline a style that would best describe the life he was living. I believe that Holland's time with the underground was probably his most valid experience. By the time he was working for the op-ed page he had devised a comfortable style, surrealistic drawings helping him to convey a range of political ideas through personal symbols.

In Chapter 3 we explored Holland's transition into colour. It was interpreted as a natural move from a graphic to a more painterly approach. He uses colour with a remarkable delicacy while still retaining vibrancy in his work. It is evident from Holland's colour work particularly his five visual essays that his style has developed through more dynamic compositions, the reversal of pictorial emphasis and the individuality of his figures.

Discussing his pastel work I put forward the idea that perhaps the gap between personal and universal has finally been closed, although it probably just one more stage in his life of change. Steven Heller describes Holland's pastel work as "a full circle" (Heller, 1996, p.80) and it seems quite fitting to be able to end my discussion almost at the start of the artist's life,

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