

ARTIST STATEMENT

Schemata: Rural Life and Leisure Pursuits

I began this series after having spent time in Great Britain observing the active participation of a variety of individuals in traditional activities, events, rituals and celebrations that supported village life and incorporated a social, cultural or economic dimension that over time shaped the culture of a people. These forms of ritual engagement enabled villagers as a people to share their experiences of interacting seasonally with the landscape as they lived, worked and played upon the land. During my research I also took note of the proliferation of the many printed training publications, assembly and repair guides, instructional and operational manuals, visual diagrams and directional maps that have historically been available to those in the United Kingdom to procedurally educate and prepare individuals to advance and achieve the degree of wherewithal, competency and self-sufficiency necessary for mastering both, rural life and leisure pursuits. Yet, Great Britain is a kingdom with a deeply embedded class system begging the question for this foreign artist of not, “how-to” aspire or improve but “why” and “to what end” in our present, 21st century global culture.

What struck me as interesting is that many of the rural life and leisure pursuits that have retained their popularity among enthusiasts (and are currently marketed as a kind of sustainable, aspirational heritage lifestyle) grew out of these traditional experiences of interacting seasonally with the landscape and each other to survive, subsist and sustain their families. These seasonal practices and rituals over time came to characterize and shape both, village life and the heritage of a people. Some of these rural pursuits are perceived (especially when viewed through the lens of class, race and economics by those living in contemporary urban environments) as elitist pastimes enjoyed by a select few countryside dwellers since a number of the rituals – particularly those activities surrounding hunting, gathering, foraging and fishing that were formerly engaged in for providing actual food – have become either redundant, obsolete or deemed unnecessary (in this era of global industrial corporate agribusiness and supermarket chains) as they have been transformed from subsistence activities to that of sport. Nevertheless, these ritual pursuits are not only practiced and enjoyed by a great many urban and rural people regardless of class, race and one’s positioning on the economic scale but are still considered an important economic, social, and cultural mainstay in the calendar year providing sources of income, community spirit, social contact, environmental awareness and an historic sense of place and purpose in the context of contemporary culture.

A complex structure exists linking present day country dwellers to their ancient history that involves negotiating public and private land use, access to resources, the rearing of produce, crops, beasts, fish and livestock, game birds and the ongoing maintenance by human beings over time of an intricately managed landscape that includes mountains, forests, fields and waterways. When so many contemporary urban and rural people are dependent upon the products, by-products and income generated by these seasonal pursuits and these ongoing events offer both, structure and punctuation to the calendar year I feel it is important to somehow document the endeavors of villagers and visitors alike in the countryside enjoying the beauty of its seasonal changes and the very rhythm of life while providing some humorous visual instruction as a form of methodology for recontextualizing and practicing these rituals whether they be on the hills, moors, fens, rivers, lakes, cliffs, downs, bogs, mountains, chalks, dales, wolds, broads, heath or wash of contemporary Great Britain. The art work itself initially began as a series of deeply embossed prints onto which I continually combined additional media eventually applying predominantly layers of gesso, paint and pigment to increase the textural quality of the pieces and transform the works on paper into paintings with incredible depth of surface to reflect the transformational qualities of these seasonal changes addressed in the thematic content.

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