

Harold Boyd

bodies of work



Harold Boyd
Retail \$16.00
Student \$10.00



Trying To Interest William Carlos Williams In My Puppets, 1977. Charcoal and graphite on paper.

Photo: Ken Kashian

From the Middle to the Beginning

Timothy Porges

I. The Middle in Which We Begin

Harold Boyd has had two distinct careers as an artist. This exhibit constitutes a mid-career retrospective for the second one. The difference between the two careers has nothing to do with the team sport aspects of art (representative or non, modern versus post- or pre-) in our time; it's not a matter of choosing up sides. It's more a matter of before and after, though what fits in the middle remains something of a puzzle.

The life of the work, like that of its maker, begins in the middle. And where is that? Prince's *Dictionary of Narratology* (p.52) informs us that the *middle* is the set of incidents in a *plot of action* between the *beginning* and the *end*. It further notes that the middle has both a prospective and a retrospective orientation, and that it paradoxically progresses toward the end while at the same time postponing our arrival there.

Born in 1938, Boyd remembers an unremarkable childhood in wartime and postwar Des Moines, followed by college at the University of Kansas at Lawrence. He was happily surprised, there, to discover that you can do art that is not commercial—surprised that so much freedom was available. And that's pretty much what he's done ever since. There were years in Ohio and New York, at school, at work, in the army, and then back to Lawrence



Detail of *Pruning*. 1984.

Boyd is a time miser; you see this everywhere in his work. He describes himself as a sociable hermit, but this has less to do with the pleasures of company than the physical pleasure he takes in the prospect of vast amounts of unoccupied time. And the time that has piled up in his work makes the viewer an accomplice, as if in a secret vice. This isn't ordinary time; it's more like Scrooge McDuck's imaginary gazillions of dollars. It's time that has been enjoyed, and not in the abstract. Someone has been rolling in it.

The body, in this work, takes on the kind of simplicity, radiance and potential that, say, whiteness has in Robert Ryman's paintings. Like that whiteness, the figure is fractal: fully present in any of its fragments, but indefinitely extendible; always becoming more. The most important event in the series is always the next one. And the incompleteness of the series is present in all of the work, which remains, in part and in whole, unfinished, and alive.

When I first visited Boyd's studio in 1999, one of the collage drawings tacked to the wall was *The Spotted Boy*, here dated 1993. At the time, Boyd said it was about ten years old, and had been more or less stable for about five years—therefore, I guess, the date assigned to it now. But in the catalogue issued by the McLean County Art Center for the Boyd show they mounted that October, you see a slightly different *Spotted Boy* from the one present for this show and catalogue. The boy on the chair has an outsize left hand now. Why Boyd chose to go back in and rework a piece that he dates as finished some nine years ago is beyond me, except for this: it's a kind of invisible time stamp—a bit of current work to set the years of dust-gathering in perspective, something to remove in the next cycle of penitenti, on a surface that erasure has already long since given a chamois-like softness and tooth. The same kind of thing is true of *Pruning*, in which a finally-



Hokusai Boy

charcoal, pencil, acrylic, aluminum, rivets and screws on Japanese papers

81 x 60 x 5 inches

1999



Young Methuselah

charcoal and acrylic on paper

40 x 30 inches

1999



The Dinner Party

watercolor and charcoal on paper

22 x 30 inches

1985

In-progress clay models for Central Illinois Regional Airport ensemble, to be cast in bronze and installed in fall 2002.

left page photos: Randy Reid
right page photos: Robert Clark



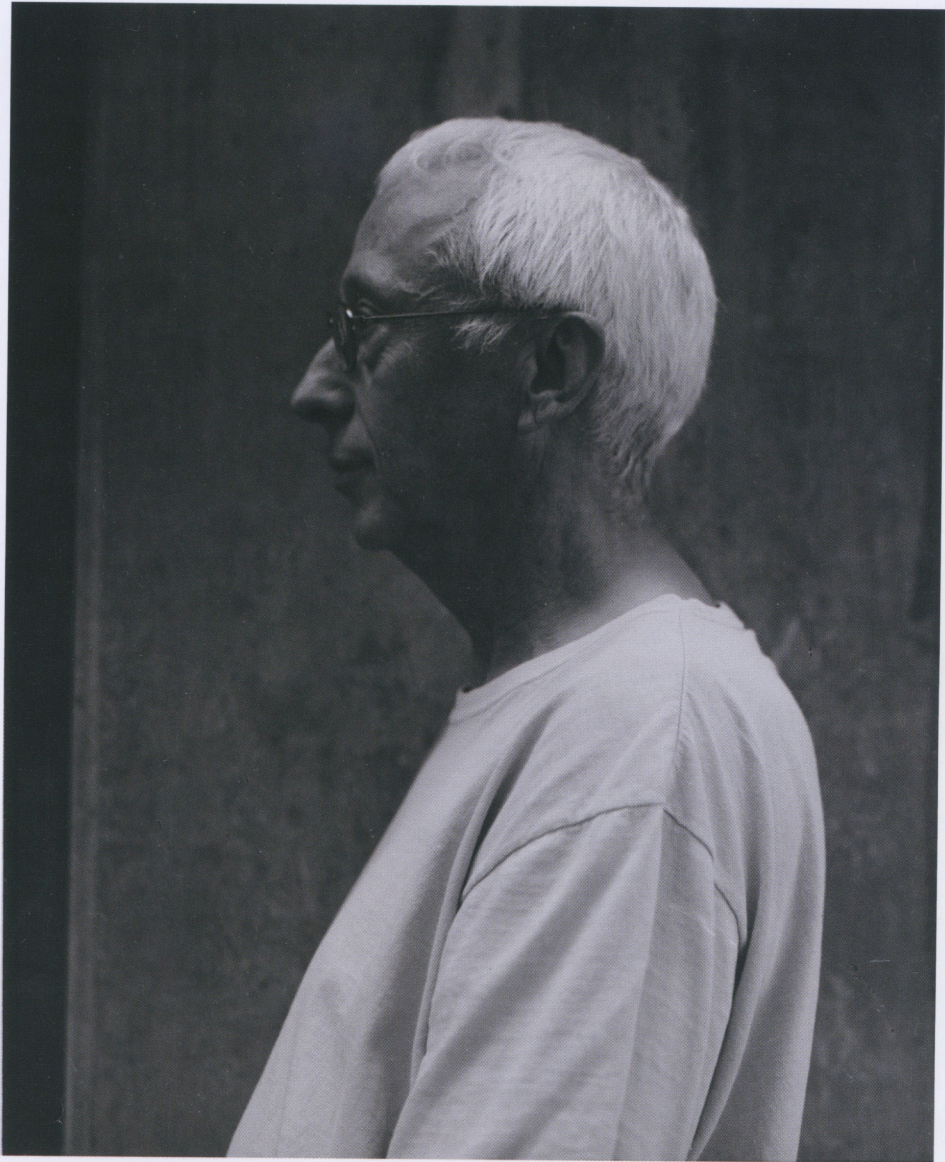
Boyd in Profile

Barry Blinderman

Harold Boyd's career as an artist and university professor spans more than thirty-five years. A master of line and psychological nuance, he sculpts, paints, draws, and cuts out figures engaged in conversation, song, acrobatics, and puppetry—all poignant yet comic musings on life's precarious performance.

Political and artistic luminaries such as Adlai Stevenson, Eleanor Roosevelt, William Carlos Williams, Mahatma Gandhi, and Marlene Dietrich populate Boyd's fluid, imaginary landscape, either as walk-ons in inscrutable dramas, or, as in the case of Stevenson, as protagonists in starring roles: the politician, the gardener, the conductor, the lover. Unlike work by many of his figurative contemporaries, there is little emphasis on sex or violence. In Zen terms, Boyd's is an art that springs from mindfulness, an acute but detached awareness of every passing moment. Since the mid-1980s he has increasingly ventured into collage, cut-metal assemblage, and sculpture featuring non-idealized aging male figures. Biographically or autobiographically inspired (his father, himself, Adlai Stevenson), yet fictional in result, these figures embody the classic dualities of endurance/frailty and aspiration/resignation that we find in the mature work of Goya, Rembrandt, and other artists who excelled at putting themselves in others' shoes.

As an art student in the 1950s—a period widely hailed as the triumph of American painting—Boyd was, and still remains, in awe of the larger-than-life presence of Willem de Kooning and Jackson Pollock. Though I doubt he especially intended it as such, his cut-metal painting, *Tennis*, is one of the most striking 1980s homages to Abstract Expressionism I have encountered. Without a trace of the illustrative flippancy characterizing Mark Tansey's *Action Painting* (1981) of the same period—in which a female artist sets up her easel at the scene of a car crash—Boyd's representation of a 1950s Adlai Stevenson swinging a tennis racket no less than two dozen



Portrait of Harold Boyd by Rhondal McKinney, 2002.

works in the exhibition

All works were photographed by Ted Diamond unless otherwise noted.
All dimensions are in inches; height precedes width precedes depth.

* not reproduced

Cut-Metal Paintings

Adlai and Eleanor, 1983

acrylic on metal with rivets and velcro
in wood frame
25 3/4 x 46 3/4 x 4 1/2
collection of Jan Elfline and Drake
Zimmerman

The Boat, 1983

acrylic on metal with rivets and velcro
in wood frame
56 1/2 x 103 x 3 1/2

Conductor, 1983

acrylic on metal with rivets and velcro
in wood frame
74 x 36 1/4 x 2 1/2

Pruning, 1984

acrylic on metal with rivets and velcro
in wood frame
73 1/4 x 54 1/2 x 7

The Luncheon, 1984*

acrylic on metal with velcro and electrical
wire in wood frame
28 x 32 x 3

Tennis, 1984-85

acrylic on metal with rivets, rope and
velcro in wood frame
74 1/2 x 92 1/2 x 3 1/2

Formal Negotiations, 1985

acrylic on metal with rivets and velcro
in wood frame
49 3/4 x 86 x 3

6:00 A.M., 1985

acrylic on metal with rivets and velcro
in wood frame
49 3/4 x 73 3/4 x 3

Collaged Works on Paper

Jak's Merle, 1999

acrylic on museum board collage
14 x 11
collection of Ken and Jan Holder

Quince's Merle, 2000

acrylic on museum board collage
20 x 16 x 2 1/2

Millie's Merle, 2000*

acrylic on museum board collage
20 x 16 x 2

Marl's Merle, 1999*

acrylic on museum board collage
14 x 11 x 1
collection of Harold and Marlene Gregor

6:00 A.M. (Study), 1984*

watercolor, acrylic, pastel and charcoal
on paper
23 x 56 1/4

Him, 1993

charcoal under tracing papers, collaged
over drawing paper
36 x 54 x 2 1/2

Her, 1993

charcoal and acrylic under tracing
papers, collaged over drawing paper
36 x 54 x 2

Spotted Boy, 1993-94/2000

acrylic on plastic board, and charcoal and
acrylic under tracing paper, collaged to
drawing papers
83 x 81

Hokusai Boy, 1999

charcoal, pencil, acrylic, aluminum, rivets
and screws on Japanese papers
81 x 60 x 5

Chinese Boy, 1999

charcoal, pencil, acrylic, aluminum, rivets
and screws on Japanese papers
84 x 60 x 2

Shy, 1999*

charcoal, pencil, acrylic, aluminum, rivets
and screws on Japanese papers
85 x 60 x 3

4 selections from the *Mr. Music* series, 1992

acrylic on paper collage
30 x 40 each

Paintings, Drawings and Watercolors

Best Girl, 1986
acrylic on canvas
72 x 96 1/4

East Hampton I, 1981*
watercolor and conté on paper
22 x 30
collection of Lisa Boyd

East Hampton II, 1981*
watercolor and conté on paper
22 x 30

Artie, 1983*
watercolor, pencil and charcoal on paper
22 x 30
collection of Benjamin Boyd

Gandhi, 1983*
watercolor on paper
22 x 30
collection of University Galleries
Normal, Illinois

Old Man On Bed, 1983
watercolor and charcoal on paper
32 x 45 1/4

The Dinner Party, 1985
watercolor and charcoal on paper
22 x 30

Muses, Models and Mentors I, 1996*
watercolor, pencil and conté on paper
22 x 30

Muses, Models and Mentors II, 1996
watercolor and conté on paper
22 x 30

Spoon Feeding, 1996
watercolor and conté on paper
22 x 30
collection of Ron and Holly Mottram

Ménage à Trois, 1989
conté and watercolor on paper
30 x 66 inches

Young Methuselah, 1999
charcoal and acrylic on paper
40 x 30

Methuselah, 1999
acrylic on paper
40 x 30

Sculpture and Reliefs

Child, 1994
cast cellulose and celluclay
20 x 16 x 3
photo: Ken Kashian

Three Theodorès, 1992-93*
cast cellulose and celluclay
20 x 16 x 2 each
photo: Ken Kashian

Trio, 1996-97
celluclay
variable dimensions
photo: Ken Kashian

Roy, 1997
bronze on steel base
21 x 36 x 52 1/4
photo: Ken Kashian

Man Seated On His Hands, 1996
terra-cotta
59 x 48 1/2 x 22 1/2
photo: Ken Kashian

Resting, 1998
bronze on found steel base
10 x 15 x 7
photo: Ken Kashian

Small Singer, 1998
bronze on wood base
9 3/8 x 8 x 6 3/4
photo: Ken Kashian

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