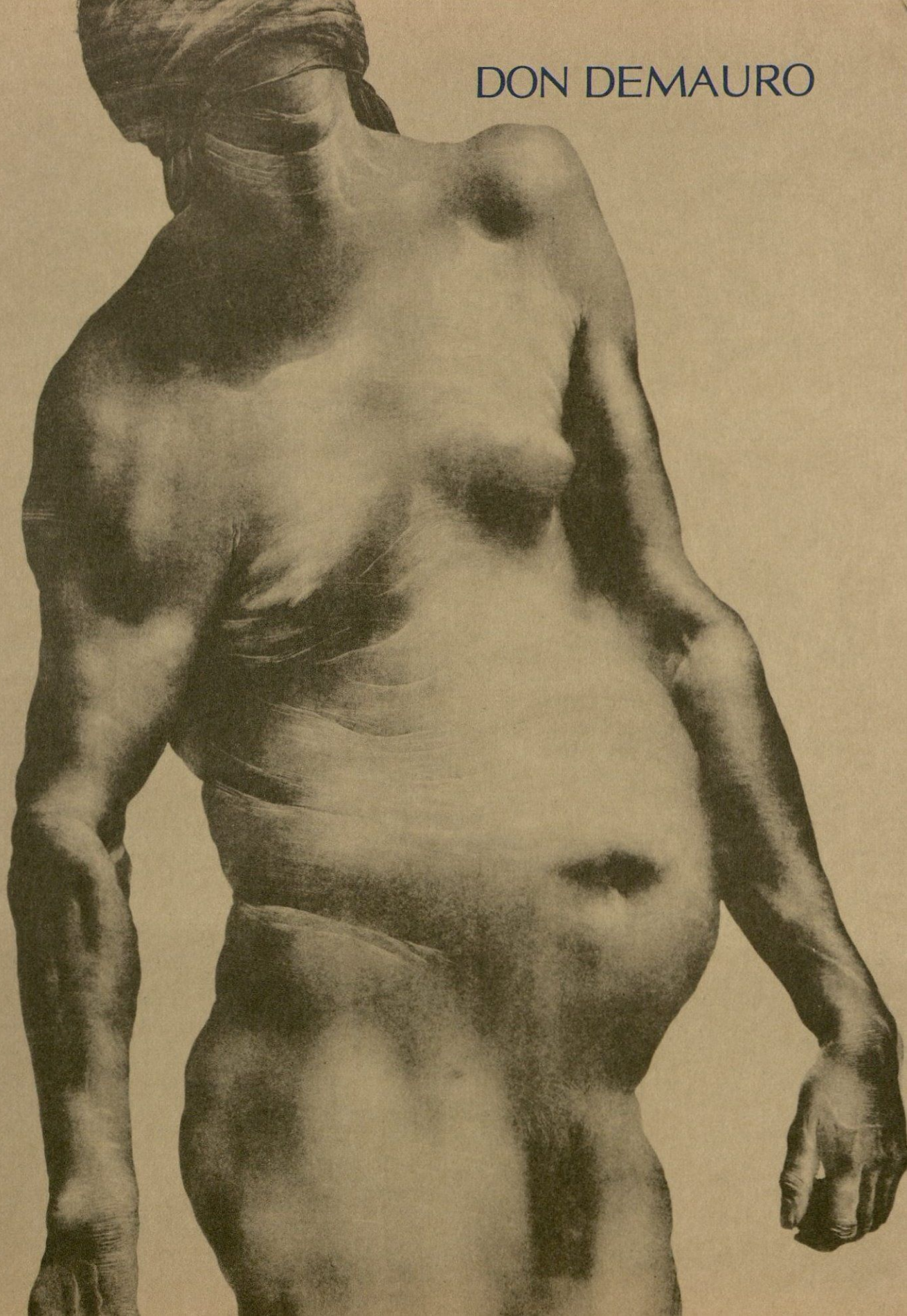


DON DEMAURO



Cover lithograph: *Torso*

EXHIBITION
OF PRINTS, DRAWINGS,
AND PAINTINGS

DON DEMAURO

February 6 - March 4 1977

University Art Gallery
State University of
New York at Binghamton

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Fig. 1: Untitled, *Form* series (mixed media)

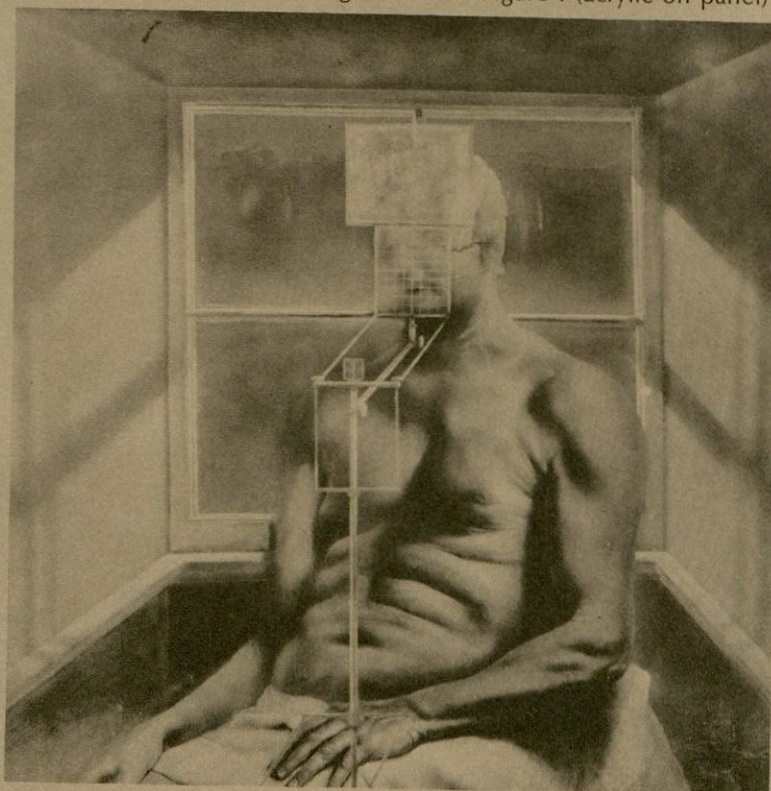


Fig. 4: *Skull* (drawing)



Fig. 5: *Figure, Skull, Bird, Landscape* (drawing)

Fig. 6: *Interior Figure I* (acrylic on panel)



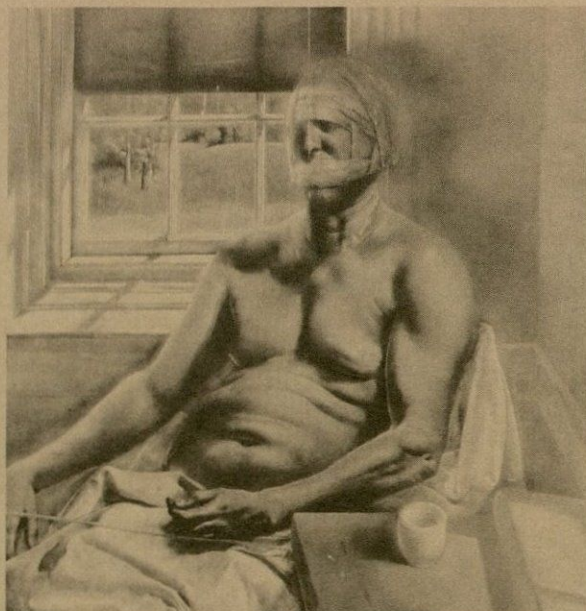


Fig. 7: *Interior Figure II* (acrylic on panel)

DON DEMAURO

AND THE STRUGGLE AGAINST THE ARTIST'S MYSTIQUE

Albert Boime

Dedicated to the Studio Faculty

The most prominent aspect of the life and career of Don DeMauro is the coincidence of his temperament and his visual imagery. There is an integrity about the whole person and the things he produces. Introverted and shy, he paints an intensely private vision; philosophical to the extreme, he conveys an all-pervasive psychology of form and content. Struggle marks every phase of his activity including his thought, speech, and physical nature. He looms large and heavy, and when he walks he gives the impression of dragging himself through a dense medium. He speaks slowly, seriously, seeking to conceptualize problems in a broad philosoph-

ical framework. He seems incapable of superficial chatter: his speech is weighted with gravity and laden with terms like "unfolding," "probing," "groping," "searching," "striving," which reflect an ongoing process struggling to realize itself.

DeMauro's ponderous physical and mental character find expression in his images hauled up from the depths of his seclusion. His figures appear to move through a hindering medium. He constantly revises and adjusts his work, setting the figures aside for long periods of time and returning to erase, block out, or veil over already painfully elaborated

sive colleges in the country, boasts an unranked faculty and an interdepartmental curriculum notable for its programs on the Third World, feminist studies, radical studies, ecology, and environment. The DeMauros explored in depth existential philosophy and phenomenology, and participated in the lively protest movements. Their activity here provided the foundation for their later deeply committed opposition to the Energy Parks.

The various social groups at Goddard, however,—reflecting the national situation—splintered into separate ideological factions and tended to become exclusivistic. Although a necessary prelude to a deeper cohesion among radical groups, the factional atmosphere at that moment proved disquieting for DeMauro who has consistently opposed such absolutist positions.

It was at this time that Aubrey Schwartz obtained a job interview for DeMauro at SUNY-Binghamton. The more politically neutral environment of this area appealed to him while at the same time the rural areas permitted a life-style not far removed from the Vermont situation. The DeMauros settled down to raise a family, run their land, and handle a myriad of functions answering to their vision of a full life. DeMauro's teaching position yielded a new area of competence in an institution where specialties are advertised but not fetishized. He was a person on the faculty before being an artist. As in Vermont, he did not have to "sell" his life-style, and he could elaborate his field of impressions in a broad philosophic scheme rather than in public negotiation.

As a result of this seclusion, DeMauro has remained largely outside the mainstream of activity. But although he works more or less independently of modish currents, he belongs to a generation of figurative painters working in various ways under the label of New Realism, most of whom were born in the decade of the 1930's and reached artistic maturation in the 1960's. He shares with them a concern for pictorial imagery which has important references to what the eye sees in the natural world rather than in the realm of art. He also reflects their political awareness heightened by the turbulent

domestic events of the last decade and their rejection of non-representational styles developed in the aftermath of World War II.

Modernism trumped up the notion that painting naturalistically was a form of deviant behavior; nothing could be farther from the truth. Naturalism was never a sickness, but what occurred is that some practitioners often allowed a formula to replace visual comprehension of what stood before them. Not that pictorial conventions are inherently evil: a convention is a container of accumulated wisdom and safeguards transmitted by the past for the benefit of the present. It is only when conventions are too cleverly manipulated that certain artists lapse into standardized production. Nevertheless, the modernistic attack on naturalism created a context in which figuration gained a freshness, and DeMauro, like others of his generation, could turn to the figure with renewed inspiration. In the process these painters learned that non-objective and abstract formulae could become as academic as illustrative works.

DeMauro differs, however, from a major group of the new figurative painters in his attitude toward subject matter. This group stemmed from Pop Art and exploited its use of banal material, whereas DeMauro uses art to make sense of his immediate experience and involvement in society. Abstract modes are limited in their capacity for expressing this relationship; Pop Art and Photo-Realism are too glib with subject matter. Both Pop and Photo-Realism exploit "canned" subjects—subjects derived neither from careful investigation nor from unfolding experience. Indeed, shows of modern art in the last two decades have tended toward a certain uniformity like displays of industrial products.

No one questions the sincerity and motivation of abstractionists, Popsters, and Photo-Realists, but in the manipulation of colored bands, stripes, light bulbs, flags, comic strips, and photographs of commonplace objects, subject matter becomes a "sure thing." The pictorial motif approaches sheer decoration and enjoys success with little or no risk to the painter. Even the Abstract Expressionists who talked continually of risk-taking before the

canvas, quickly crystallized their personal gesture into familiar trademarks.

DeMauro, on the other hand, harks back to an earlier tradition incarnated by Michelangelo, which starts from a more or less vague point and gains clarity in the searching process. DeMauro's approach culminates often in failure, judging from the numerous revisions he makes. Whereas most post-World War II modernism shows few intellectual changes in the conceptual idea once established, DeMauro responds to his changing experience by setting out a *tentative* idea of form. He prefers to work from a standpoint of doubt within a figurative context; one can posit any number of premises about art according to the individual temperament, but for him it would be erroneous to take as universal any one of these premises.

Unlike most modernists who place undue emphasis on originality, DeMauro shares with contemporary figurative painters a favorable view of eclecticism. Eclecticism is rapidly losing its pejorative connotation to take its place once again as a positive quality. DeMauro assimilates impressions from his vast reading and is reluctant to name specific sources because they are continually integrated into an ever richer tapestry. But one gleans from his observations and his images an elective affinity with a family of artists known for their depictions of mortal anguish: Michelangelo, Pontormo, Goya, Redon, Rodin, Bacon, Albright, Lebrun, and Baskin. Yet he feels no confusion between his present eclecticism and his personal identity: their art does not provide a *priori* forms or motifs but rather is absorbed into his works through a kind of osmosis.

DeMauro stands in a highly complex relationship to the Renaissance tradition especially in its later academic manifestation. At first glance, his work seems to resemble the academic style of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including such features as the literal transcription of objects imagined or observed in nature, the emphasis on the nude, the fascination with anatomy, and meticulous workmanship. He rejects many of the charms associated with anti-academic art; the darting spontaneity, the happy marks of

chance and error, the impulsive gesture. He is involved with punctilious detailing and elaborate statements: he rarely executes idle notes or random sketches and on all occasions attempts the achieved, self-sufficient artifact.

Yet on closer scrutiny, DeMauro's approach contradicts the academic system with wicked irony: he uses its basic vocabulary to turn it inside out. The academic method always emphasized the totality of the human figure and depicted it from head to toe, generally with a crisp contour. DeMauro never shows a complete figure, and akin to Philip Pearlstein segments it by the picture plane. Instead of proceeding from line A to line B, DeMauro begins in the middle of his picture and works outward in all directions. He works from side to side, more preoccupied with the forms than the planes—a method related to Michelangelo's drawings for the Sistine Chapel. The line ends where it meets the edges of the drawing surface. In this way the form seeks itself out; the figure participates in, and evolves out of, the flux. Unbounded by a conceptual outline it grows organically out from the center, establishing its own composition. DeMauro's figures never appear to be inserted into the pictorial space as in orthodox academic procedure.

Another startling aspect of DeMauro's ironic handling of the academic method is his manipulation of anatomy. He evidently has a comprehensive grasp of the skeletal and structural musculature of the body, for he makes it do extraordinary things. In his *Victim* series the gyrations of his figures go beyond anatomical elasticity. Their twisting anatomies are not athletically induced but explored for expressive purposes. Limbs are wrenched and dislocated to convey internal strain and unendurable psychological distress.

DeMauro's use of anatomy points to his ultimate subversion of academic ideology. The academic vision expressed itself in terms of the ideal body, harmonic proportions and tranquil balance. It postulated an arcadian realm free from strife and physical pain. Over and against this view, DeMauro projects subhuman forms, dismembered and blasted. His figures are

alone and bruised, middle-aged and flabby, defenseless and stupefied. He replaces the ideal type with faceless creatures, rendered anonymous by mummified masks, bags, and liquefied skeins. Instead of Arcadia, DeMauro gives us Hell on Earth.

In this sense, DeMauro's work may be considered anti-academic, opposed to the strait-jacketed approach once reflective of conservative, bourgeois values. Just as the capitalist system turned the person inside out in fact, so DeMauro responds by turning the pictorial content of the system inside out. Naturally, this subversion is not the primary aim of DeMauro's art but is part of a larger philosophical perspective. His use of the figure is finally a function of his social commitment. From the first he was drawn to the human figure as a vehicle for his innermost emotional orientation, and this involvement parallels his attraction to broad social issues.

DeMauro's thought is permeated by the image of the earth-bound and time-bound creature. His personal sense of rootlessness and the depersonalizing forces in modern society motivated the *Victim* series—DeMauro's first sustained concept—which expresses a sense of weakness and dereliction before these forces. While these figures possess a sensational and morbid aspect, they have a unique and revelatory power. His pictures are representative of bourgeois society in a state of dissolution. A society coming apart or shifting into another form contains many possibilities for revelation. The individual is thrust out into the open, naked and alone. DeMauro's metaphoric nude may have been borrowed from academic tradition but it signifies the temporal and contingent aspects of material existence.

DeMauro's range of interests once embraced Heidegger's *Being and Time*, Heisenberg's Principle of Indeterminacy, and the work of Gödel who showed that even mathematics—the very model of precision and intelligibility—is doomed to incompleteness. When DeMauro reached maturity, the threat of nuclear extermination and the fact of genocide finished forever the humanistic tradition of post-Renaissance thinking. The old image of Leonardo's Man bore a new, stark, and

highly questionable aspect.

There is now an attempt to return to the sources, to a new truthfulness, and a concomitant desire to cast away empty forms and ready-made presuppositions. Much of this stripping down appears as destructive and negative, but imperialist wars, deadening alienation, and pestilential air leave no alternative.

DeMauro knows that the deliberate attempt to communicate social and political ideas often appears tendentious and may even conceal a lack of genuine commitment. His social meaning comes out of the integrity in the work; as the artist examines himself in the act of creation he naturally attunes his work to his moral, social, and political position. All ideology posits an absolute which exceeds what the existentialists refer to as being *en situation* and tends to negate unfolding of the encounter with in-the-world-experience. Paradoxically, this attitude also constitutes an absolute; what makes DeMauro's approach unique, however, is his willingness to express the inherent contradictions in pictorial terms.

He defines himself as a "relativist," although his work concretizes and particularizes experience. He gives definition to his search through structure, a structure not given in advance but which results from groping through experience. Self-conscious evaluations and criticism in relation to prior expectations are suspended through responses to inner intuitions, non-verbal truths, and the desire to commit them to form. This desire to cast ideas into representational modes requires a personal integrity, lest the ideas become vacuous: when subject matter outruns the inner need to formalize ideas, it degenerates into surface illustration or decoration.

Things in the world exist in an often tense and contradictory relationship to us as we ourselves move *through* the world. The human mind seeks to impose order and establish patterns of organization without itself becoming reified. DeMauro's recognition of the relative status of things does not prevent him from accepting the givens of tools, surface medium, and particular graphic conventions. An attitude of extreme relativism would lead to a schizophrenic relationship to the world.

What is important for DeMauro is the seeking out and preventing his activity from falling into routine and standardization. It is essential to have confidence in one's experience, in what is real at any given time for the individual. Finally, it is necessary to balance off contradictions and function within a complex web of possibilities.

Certainly, these thoughts preoccupy all artists in all times and places. DeMauro, however, is singular in pursuing these problems in a broad philosophical framework. Even his technical methods bear witness to his searching disposition, as well as express contradictory, hence relative, states. DeMauro claims that he starts at no particular point on the surface: he sees a web of relationships and makes marks within that web, at the same time struggling to hold everything in tension. These marks try continually to hone in on the subject and avoid all diagrammatic relationships. The work must evolve out of the momentary flux or the concept becomes static. When actually engaged in drawing, he feels a need to bring it toward him from an internal point, push it back, and then recirculate the lines and masses to arrive at the form idea.

DeMauro prefers dense *chiaroscuro* to the line for evoking volume. Although he formerly began with a crude contour, he increasingly relied on mass to establish his forms. In principle an outline catches the edge of a volume curving out of sight, but graphically it appears to delimit the object. The most extreme form of this is the comic strip image which we literally "read between the lines." The contour is in fact a highly abstract concept about experience which evades the substance of a thing for its periphery. It prevents the artist from getting inside of the thing and pulling back—the attitudinal movement DeMauro requires for his outlook. Involved with process, he gradually eliminated boundary lines—which he sees less and less in actuality—and exorcized the agility that they often encourage.

In his most recent work he dissolves both masses and edges into constitutive marks and gestures. As he increasingly takes for subjects himself, his wife, his friends, the world of his studio and its

environs, he requires a wider range of values than those offered by black and white media. His forms have to be integrated at more complex levels, and this in turn has encouraged a shift to full-time painting. Color and pigment permit a more complex synthesis than drawing, or at least minimize dependence on line.

DeMauro tries to transcend the inherent characteristics of his media, which are for the most part "mixed." He may start a painting with acrylics, then use the palm of his hand or a rag to obliterate its sense of niceness, or he may combine it with oils to destroy its integrity. He prefers rigid graphic instruments and smooth papers for drawing, but attempts to achieve a look contrary to the nature of these materials. He dislikes toothy papers, grainy canvases, all surfaces which assert a strong prior identity. Instead, he employs smooth surfaces like masonite and works for a rough effect. He stamps out, sprays out, sands out, and erases constantly in the course of execution to undermine the nature of his media. Heavily textured materials offer too many possibilities for random results; DeMauro wants to achieve contradictions through his own will and not through the given character of his materials. Thus he dismisses the favorite modernistic ideal of "truth to medium" as well as the notion of "correctness" in drawing: these dogmas tend to obscure the kind of truth he is after.

DeMauro often speaks of his "overlays" in connection with the idiosyncratic treatment of the pictorial plane. Using an aerosol spray can or air-brush, he lays down a film of pigment over an already established form which shows through as an eerie apparition. He then works directly into this veil, bringing parts of the old layer back in modified form and forcing other passages to advance or recede. Throughout the stages of execution he keeps alternating a well-wrought surface with an obliterating veil—a tedious process which attests to his passion to avoid complacency and sustain things in a relative state.

Most painters do much of their working out directly on the canvas itself, embedding into the final surface a history of errors, accidents, and rejected alterna-

tives. But DeMauro's willful blotching out of a meticulously worked surface differs radically from the norm, and again may be explained primarily within the context of his philosophical notions. For further clarification, it is appropriate at this point to cite the French existentialist philosopher, Gabriel Marcel, who recognized a new realism which is "the active recognition of something permanent, not formally, after the manner of a law, but ontologically; in this sense, it refers invariably to a presence, or to something which can be maintained within us and before us as a presence, but which, *ipso facto*, can be just as well ignored, forgotten and obliterated." (*The Philosophy of Existentialism*, New York: Citadel Press 1968; p. 35.)

DeMauro's latest development occurs within the framework of his present stable and settled existence. Formerly, his situations were more temporary and improvised which prevented him from orchestrating all of his ideas. Most of the intensely private and subjective images such as the *Victims* date from this period, and are partly autobiographical reflections within the negative political and cultural context. He even experimented with abstraction in this period, although the results relate closely to the frontality, organic movement, and even the theme of the figures: like an animated X-ray, their calcified, bulbous forms seem to reveal the heavings of internal stress (Fig. 1).

His more permanent studio situation allows protracted periods for the gestation of ideas and opportunities to examine objectively his surroundings. An example of this new objectivity is the drawing entitled *Apple Branch* which dates from 1972 (Fig. 2). The patient detailing and texturing discloses as many knots and layers of peeling bark as the viewer is willing to scrutinize. One can imagine a puzzled bird or insect encountering this work. But most astonishing is the way the branch seems to grow outward from an unseen trunk, sprouting new twigs in all directions as it extends through space, even revealing a broken twig to recall the process of decay in the midst of growth. DeMauro conveys in this fragment a sense of evolution analogous to a stop-action film. Paradoxical, too, is the way the

branch, rendered so close-up in detail, seems just beyond our reach.

His stay at Friendsville, Pennsylvania, thus forms one of the two major phases of his career to date, of which the most recent is the self-portrait series. Between the *Victims* and the portraits we can identify a transitional period comprising two or three subsidiary themes which often overlap in time: these include figures seated next to windows, still-lives with animal skulls and a dead crow, and a series called *Mask*, which integrate the mood and ideas of the *Victims* with the environment and accessories of DeMauro's studio.

The *Mask* series is based on a hybridized image of animal skull and human face—a visual pun laden with macabre irony. It was inspired by a TV-talk show on which politicians were interviewed about the Watergate scandal. DeMauro's disgust with the hypocrisy of the guests is reflected in the first of the series, *The American Dream*, which fuses a caricatural stereotype of the politician with an animal skull (modeled after the actual object found near his farmhouse) fitted into the head like a muzzle (Fig. 3). In conversation with me, DeMauro noted the paradoxical fact that rural America could reject a person like McGovern who incarnated its professed ideals, while embracing Nixon who embodied everything they professed to despise. Some of this irony enters the *American Dream*: the bestial allusion to man's basic, *inner* nature (*anima* into *animus*?) is exposed on the surface of the face as a skull which analogously inverts the physical fact. The resultant image is a powerful indictment of the perversity of American politics since Kennedy's assassination.

DeMauro's subsequent examples in the series gave increasing prominence to the skull until at last the bony mass floats free in a dark void (Fig. 4). These later skulls do not form part of a larger head but constitute a mask-like configuration with human eyes peering furtively beneath the sockets. With a touch of sly whimsy, DeMauro's skull parodies the ancient symbol of the *vanitas* theme which alluded to the transience of human existence. Normally cast to one side in a still-life,

the skull now assumes center stage and overshadows the human references. DeMauro was undoubtedly fascinated by the marvelous visual properties of the skull, with its internal divisions and crevices, its concavities and convexities, as well as with the X-ray and anatomical souvenirs which haunt his entire production. But in the end, the skull with the furtive eyes beneath yields a terrifying image of fear and anxiety.

Bird, Landscape and Figure joins the skull mask to a *Victim*-type which seems to rise like a phoenix from the dead crow—another prop found near the house (Fig. 5). A bizarre composition which plays on several levels of ambiguity like a mirror-image effect, DeMauro skillfully knitted its components by a complicated gridwork and a pattern of curves delineated in the contours of the body, the folds of the flesh, and the rounded arcs of skull and bird. Yet the composition does not extend to the edges of the picture plane, and the parts project the look of a collage. In addition, the gridwork, which at first appears to contain the composition, is broken through at several points by the figure and it cuts off the landscape vignette like a window view. While the gridwork is busy creating several overlapping and interpenetrating two-dimensional planes, the work is further complicated by the illusionistic rendering of the bird and landscape and the shadows cast by the bird and figure. Finally, the bird is meticulously painted while the rest of the picture has been drawn. Thus the illusionistic elements and the two-dimensional features are confounded in a contradictory jumble.

Nevertheless, the situation is tense with human and fowl in dramatic confrontation. The latter, with its areas of color and exquisite finish, suggests more vitality than the live human element in grisaille hovering above it with an horrific abdominal slit and skull helmet. The curious contrast transforms the dead crow—a carrion eater—into a bird of prey, emphasized by the artist's fascination for its claws and beak. In this context, the gridwork serves a symbolic as well as visual function: it appears like a series of telescopic sights zeroing in on a defenseless

target. Again normal experience is inverted: the human would bestride the "dead game" like the hunter but in the act confronts the possibility of his own extinction. The paradoxical confounding of the landscape—closed off by the grid lines—the bird, skull, and human, discloses the alienation of the individual from nature.

DeMauro's attempt to reconcile and synthesize so many conflicting elements has not been entirely successful; its very ambitiousness undermined the profound thought behind it. It is too self-conscious in its complexities and ends up getting in the way of itself. I suspect that the artist was painting a kind of manifesto about his shift from drawing to painting and pictorially tried to justify the shift. All the graphic conventions he lately has eschewed are present in the drawn figure, while the painted fowl is an example of his greater synthesis. As such, however, it stands as the paradigmatic example of his transition phase.

DeMauro's overlays, his grid lines, skull-human interplay, ambiguous inside-outside relationships, and the contrasts between interior and exterior, hardness and softness, are constant motifs. While often they sound a literary note, they probe the contradictory elements in experience and keep things fluctuating. The gridwork imposed on many of his imaginative pictures and some self-portraits is a case in point because it sometimes seems like a self-conscious device inserted after the fact. On closer inspection, however, these interior lines—like those of Francis Bacon—give the sense of the prison cell. The floating rectangles in their regular geometries pose a kind of subtle barrier, a claustrophobic fence erected by a technological society to contain the freedom of mental and physical action. At the same time, they interpose themselves between the spectator and the image in such a way as to call attention to the act of picture-making. DeMauro felt uncomfortable with the extreme three-dimensionality and did not want technical virtuosity to get in the way of his deeper layers of meaning. The intercession of the two-dimensional gridwork interrupts the viewer's acceptance of the three-dimen-

sional image. Thus DeMauro plays off the rational, technological feature against the live form and contradicts the otherwise naturalistic image. His contradictions create certain tensions and keep the viewer moving in and out of the pictorial experience. DeMauro jogs the perception of his viewer in the same way he continually jogs his own perception of reality.

Occasionally, DeMauro plays tricks on himself in connection with the gridwork as in *Interior Figure I*, where it has been transformed into a glistening mechanical apparatus reminiscent of the dentist's lab and the surgeon's operating room (Fig. 6). The seated nude is immobilized by the confrontation with this metallic monster which acts as a barrier to sight as well as locomotion. As in the previous work the rectangular divisions of the apparatus resemble the hairlines of a telescope sight. The window behind echoes its geometries, masterfully carried out in the diagonal refractions of light on the wall which reinforce the eerie effect of the whole.

In the outstanding example of the transition period, *Figure with Interior* (purchased by Pennsylvania State University), the grid has been reduced to a naturalistic hairline hovering before the protagonist's head like a spider's thread (Fig. 7). It even casts a shadow on the head which heightens its ambiguity. As in his other works employing the grid lines, it creates a plane in the front of the figure and questions the viewer's expectancies. However, its naturalistic treatment and its subtle integration into the vertical compositional rhythm established by the mullions of the window and the fluted moulding make it less jarring and more persuasive. Like the slender rope stretched across the figure's lap, it serves to emphasize the character of the passive victim warped into paralysis. The head is bound with cloth like a mummified being with only the nose and eyes exposed. In this state the figure is only dimly aware of his condition—a theme echoed by the half-shaded window. The bareness of the interior, the haunting shadow behind the figure, the white cup on the table, the icy light on the window sill and the figure's right shoulder constitute a visual analogue to

the mood of Kafka's *The Trial*.

Thus the transition period carried with it many of the themes of DeMauro's first mature figural works; but at the same time there is a new interest in the concrete objects of his environment which signal the portrait series. This series is the most objective and particularized of all his works. While certain of the self-portraits retain the gridwork, the most effective examples are those which eliminate this feature. The late portraiture, moreover, heralds a thematic as well as visual shift. Meant to be read at eye-level, the portraits hold the viewer with hypnotic intensity. They achieve a mythic power totally at variance with the mood and character of his previous explorations. Instead of the inverted and subverted types of his *Victim* series, he gives us figures which are erect and commanding; instead of incapacitation, passivity, and captivity, power, confidence and awareness.

DeMauro's latest portraits hold out possibilities of rehabilitation—a new mood of optimism in place of the earlier gloom and doom works. Not that they are radiant with hope: indeed, they continue to project the gravity of his previous essays but now it is rooted in a sense of self-knowledge and courageous confrontation. These portraits suggest that change in the world is possible through recognition and self-realization. The stark gaze of the *Portrait of Elizabeth* is emphasized by the neutral backdrop which presses the figure close to the frontal plane and by the way she creates her own space. Her fixity of resolve is further reinforced by the heavy folds of the scarf which express a granite-like toughness.

In the *Self-Portraits* DeMauro confronts himself in what may be the epitome of the subject-object crisis, where the self is taken as the "other," and the "other" is taken as the self (Fig. 8). The extreme realism almost detaches the heads from the picture plane but is kept in check by the sprightly marks of execution and an all-pervasive psychology. While the portraits are brought to a high degree of completion, the details of flesh, hair, and beard possess a vitality which never turns off. DeMauro works and reworks his portraits over a prolonged period of time,

during which physical traits alter and different temperamental aspects are noted continuously. As in all his works, DeMauro refuses to form *a priori* judgments about his sitters and tries to enter the physical and psychological changes in time. The multifaceted personality that emerges may be likened to the Cubists' notion of simultaneity. We sense in the physiognomies various nuances of personality change achieved through persistent probing. Although ordinarily self-portraits lure the artist into a romantic vision, DeMauro's examples manifest no illusive vision or dreamy absentness. They exude the integrity, self-examination, and confidence of an individual who "knows what he's about."

The history of art has produced representative types for all the major epochs in the development of Western civilization, for examples, the Renaissance Man and the Enlightenment Man. We are living too close to the present to discern clearly our own representative type; but it may be safely said that unless things change in the last quarter of this century, it will be images like the *Victim* series that future epochs will construe as the Twentieth-Century Person. It is not too late, however, to shape our view of existence into emancipation and self-realization in accordance with DeMauro's own later projections.

I am grateful to Jerry Boime, Gerald Kashish, Aubrey Schwartz, and Michael Tanzer for their suggestions in the course of writing this essay. Above all, I wish to express gratitude to Don and Elizabeth DeMauro for their generous co-operation in every phase of its development.



Fig. 8: Self-Portrait (acrylic on paper)

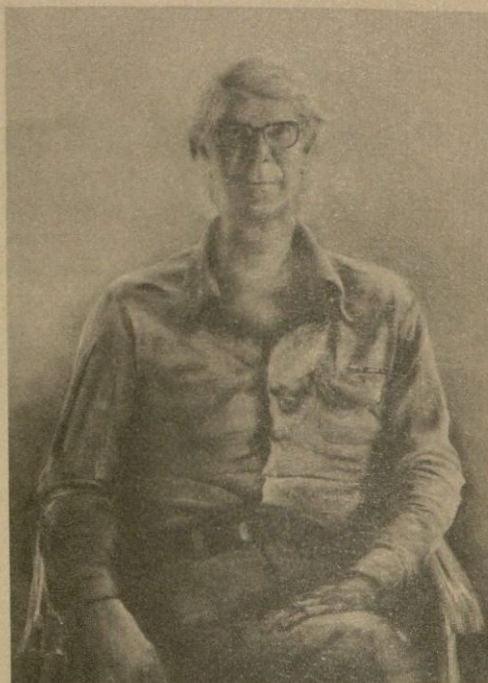


Fig. 9: Portrait of François Bucher (mixed media on paper)

PAINTER AND PORTRAYED

François Bucher

The summer of 1976 brought me to the large barn studio of Don DeMauro. We began to sit across from each other in an increasingly small cubicle of communication which was at first bisected and then transparently partitioned by the sparse design of an easel and a board upon which my portrait was being painted. The glances which went back and forth were those between a patient and a psychiatrist, furtive, probing, and professional. After a session we sat on the stone slabs of the sun-drenched terrace surrounded by playful animals and the cackling of a passing and returning platoon of guinea-hens. Elizabeth, nursing their new-

born daughter, children, and friends joined us. While the leaves began to turn the baby grew and the portrait began to evolve. To the sharpness of vision fixed upon me I responded with an increased acuity of observation and a sharpness of hearing which encompassed the rhythmic stomping of a steam engine driving a nearby sawmill.

Subconsciously the portrayed is a quarry, a net of opening experiences which have shaped him, and upon whom image-ined observations of another are being superimposed. The self, held in check for a moment, is brought into the sharp focus of recognition. The diffuse

process of life is halted. There emerges an increasingly fixed, unchangeable confrontation from which the sitter will later continue to develop, or veer off sharply, or both. Every first-rate portrait, from that of the decrepit family of Charles IV of Spain by Goya to those of Francis Bacon or Don DeMauro, are full, tangible, and precise interim reports of the sitters' status in life. The hieroglyphs expressed by the faces and bodies have been deciphered; personae, or masks, have been cracked to reveal internal emotional structures. In a frozen moment which sums up their past and possible future, the sitters become exposed to voyeurs. Death has been halted for an instant in which both the artist and the portrayed merge in the sympathetic and neutral plane of pictorial space which will immobilize and document a process. For every artist a portrait of another thus also becomes a vicarious self portrait, an intimate likeness of the landscape of the sitter, who, unable to project himself over time, is filtered through the painters' perception.

In contrast to most photographs which capture the mood of a moment, a true "likeness" includes a time element which should span all of adult life. The most direct expression of change etched into a face can be found in the self portrait. A comparison of the first and last self-images of Rembrandt shows his rich and tragic voyage of life. The same face caught in romantic and hopeful self-involvement in 1629, has, after precisely four decades, been stretched into an ironic smile which challenges fate while at the same time it accepts death and resignation. Art, by its very definition, is never realistic. Therefore, analytical portraiture offers the artist an exceptional formal challenge, and is impossibly full of strange contradictions. The more "real-

istic" the image seems, the more subtle becomes the exercise in non-objectivity.

Don DeMauro is visually comfortable with the immediately perceivable world, and he uses commonly recognizable denominators in objects without seeming to destroy their surface envelope. For him, as for every good painter, nature is an undefined vehicle for content. For the good portraitist the sitter is at first only a shell which slowly begins to radiate life. The multiplicity of facial expressions, a stoop, hand motions, the textures of skin or of a smile begin to pattern the external shape into an identifiable, specific human being. Nationality, status, dress, language, mannerisms, age, and other trappings behind which one is hidden are stripped away. The painter decodes genetic traits, deep experience patterns and emotional priorities which are reconstituted, and merged into a non-temporal statement of a personality so uniquely defined that it can only emerge once. There is therefore no superficially realistic portrait. The personal elements are flexibly regrouped to reflect the organizing principle of a particular being.

In Giacometti's world the model was stripped to the very essence of humanity so that, while keeping its most fundamental characteristics it simultaneously conformed to the artist's perception of life. Every portrait is, in the end, an abstraction. Time, a pinpointed light source, identifiable textures, and measurable forms are submerged in the non-verbal grid of the painters' and the sitters' systems of communication. In the final analysis DeMauro's portraits are a stripped and singularly concrete vision of the sitter portrayed, and the painter perceived. They are, like all paintings, a double portraiture which ultimately fixes a period in the development of humanity.

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