DWAYNE LOWDER

I BET YOU WOULDN’T GIVE IT TO ME EVEN IF I ASKED
Full support for this catalog generously provided by John M. (Jack) Carney.
IN MEMORIAM

DWAYNE LOWDER, NOVEMBER 2, 1936 – AUGUST 16, 2018

Dwayne was a fantastic artist whom I greatly admired. We both joined the faculty at Western Michigan University in 1966. We taught similar foundation classes though we both had little teaching experience. So we worked together to establish a syllabus vocabulary for the various design elements, which helped us teach color theory and assign specific class projects. We compared results and refined our course content together over the years.

With the arrival of the baby boomers, Western’s enrollment and campus was rapidly expanding. The University was actively buying all the residential houses west of Sangren Hall to Howard Street to make room for the growing West Campus. The Art Department, as it was known at the time, was given more than twenty of these houses for a student art gallery, as well as BFA, MFA, and faculty studio space. I shared one of these bungalows with Dwayne. He was actively making wood sculptures at that time. His accumulating sawdust and my darkroom were at odds with one another yet it worked out. It was fun to see his artwork evolve and share philosophical discussions. He later bought a home in the country with a large barn that he converted into studio space. My family enjoyed many dinners at Dwayne’s with the girls running around his property, garden, and his studio which was their favorite. We made three fishing trips into Canada over the years which is another story.

We kept in touch after his move to Virginia in 1982 through letters and eventually email. We often exchanged images we were working on, made commentary, and shared local news. I made three trips over the years to his farm in Virginia and was always amazed with his new art and the heavenly landscape he was creating.

I grew to know him as well as he was willing to let me know him. He was always that gracious southern gentlemen, yet, there was always a distance. I miss him.

John M. (Jack) Carney
December 2019
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DWAYNE LOWDER:  
THE COMPLETE INCOMPLETE COLLECTION

Indra Lācis, PhD

“I wanted to hold space  
without effort,  
to grasp it,  
to brush it aside,  
catch it and expel it.”

—Dwayne Lowder, 1963

Late in the afternoon on the first warm day in May of 2019, WMU Professor Emeritus Jack Carney emailed me saying he was aware that a cache of paintings by his late long-time friend Dwayne Lowder were in peril. “Call me,” Jack wrote, “I want to help.” True to his word, Jack helped rescue Mr. Lowder’s paintings from a much less fortunate fate. One long story later, Western Michigan University’s Art Collection is delighted to accept a gift of forty paintings by former WMU School of Art Professor Dwayne Lowder via Jack Carney, his colleague and friend.

Comprised of more than two dozen paintings, several sculptures, and a smattering of ephemera that document Mr. Lowder’s life as an avid gardener, the exhibition I Bet You Wouldn’t Give It to Me Even if I Asked honors Mr. Lowder’s legacy and Jack Carney’s gift of what might be best described as a “complete incomplete” collection. In writing “complete incomplete,” I mean that this lot of paintings—many unfinished, untitled, or undated—seem to represent an image of Dwayne Lowder that was much like the man himself. Descriptions of him give the impression of a certain set of opposites: resolutely present in each of life’s exchanges, but simultaneously distant; truthful and honest like his work, but also opaque, and in some instances difficult to reach.
Despite that I arrive at Mr. Lowder’s work as a complete outsider, one point feels astoundingly clear. To refer to Mr. Lowder as an artist, and an artist only, would be terribly inaccurate. Like many great painters and sculptors before him, Mr. Lowder drew enormous pleasure, comfort, and inspiration from gardening. He was, in fact, as dedicated to gardening, especially to cultivating his prized orchids, as he was to fine art. This scenario calls to mind the preoccupations of many late 19th and early 20th century artist-gardeners who witnessed and partook in the exponential growth of the global botanical trade throughout the 1800s. Claude Monet, for example, confessed late in his life that, “Gardening was something I learned in my youth when I was unhappy. I perhaps owe it to flowers that I became a painter.” Likewise, Vincent van Gogh wrote that he came to understand “the laws of simultaneous color contrast” through his study of flowers. Still other modernists, including Paul Klee, Gabriele Münter, and Wassily Kandinsky compared—or conflated—gardens and the act of gardening with something otherworldly or divine, the pursuit of their creative work, respectively.  

Although Mr. Lowder never spoke effusively about gardening in relationship to his work as an artist per se, gardening emerges as central to his life and personhood. Jack Carney recalls that when he shared a studio with Mr. Lowder in the 1970s, “there were always plants” and the breezeway of the bungalow they occupied on Western’s campus was transformed into a greenhouse. After Mr. Lowder left Western and settled with his friend Gifford Pletcher in Allsionia, Virginia, he founded The Dowery Orchid Nursery. He filled mail orders and partnered with an orchid grower in Malaysia. As The Roanoke Times reported in July of 1993, Mr. Lowder bought one little orchid for $2.50 and this grew into a nursery of 30,000 plants. “I certainly don’t want to become large-scale,” Mr. Lowder is quoted saying rather deadpan, “That would scare the hell out of me.” In addition to his orchid obsession, Mr. Lowder also tended to flower and vegetable gardens of a more ordinary kind, doting fondly on details of his endeavors in letters to friends. Writing Doris Longman in 1999, Mr. Lowder mused, “The flower gardens were great and we still have lots of daisies, asters, goldenrod, and late poppies in bloom. With a few leaves beginning to change color already, I can sense a beautiful autumn for this year.”  

Hardly alone in his dual identity as an artist-gardener, Mr. Lowder also shares with scores of other artists the urge—or elemental need—to destroy one’s own work. Pablo Picasso painted over canvases with which he was unsatisfied (in his youth, this was partially a way of means). British painter Francis Bacon’s studio in London contained nearly one hundred slashed or destroyed canvases at the time of his death in 1992. Louise Bourgeois reportedly pushed small sculptures she disliked off her kitchen table, watching them crash with delight. John Baldessari’s performative burning of all his unsold canvases made between 1953 and 1966 with help from his University of California students reads as an almost gleefully historic event. Belgian Luc Tuymans, whose paintings sell for millions of dollars, regularly destroys his paintings. What do we make of Mr. Lowder’s company amongst artists in hot pursuit of erasure?

Destroying work, it seems, is at times on par with creating. As much as this deletion takes away, it also gives us the artist, fully formed, always whole in his or her vision of the self. How could we possibly lament or scorn the realization of this editorial impulse that we each wish we could enact, defining who we are and staking out the boundaries of our lives? Mr. Lowder likely understood why forests must burn to come back. If only we all had the guts to become complete through this very incompleteness.

As Jack Carney points out, Dwayne Lowder never learned, nor wanted, to play the art world game. And as John Link states in the pages following, “Dwayne did not find inspiration in trends.” Still, the temptation to provide an ever-loose chronology of Mr. Lowder’s work persists. Such a pseudo history might run from the loaded, gestural, painterly brush so endemic to late 1950s Abstract Expressionism head-on into what feels like an unexpected, mid-game-chess-move toward 1970s hard edge painting and the sudden abrogation of narrative. There then, we see a turn toward the richly splintered 1980s, where luscious motif-lade paintings are as structural as they are sculptural. Later still, in the 90s and 2000s, a fresh, raw, openness appears to take over in Mr. Lowder’s work.

Now surely, Mr. Lowder would agree that even a modest effort to account for his development is fruitless, and well besides the point. Instead, we hope this presentation of Mr. Lowder’s work makes artists run back to the studio, back to what is real, back to where one feels hopelessly and rather happily, completely incomplete.

—Indra K. Lācis, PhD
Director of Exhibitions, Richmond Center for Visual Arts
NOTES

1 Dwayne Melvin Lowder, New Materials New Space, Thesis, Master of Art in Creative Art, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1963. See page 7, where Lowder writes of his early 1960s sculptures, “Space, as a natural element, became like rushing air. Fine particles of matter became moist, moving. I wanted to hold space without effort, to grasp it, to brush it aside, catch it and expel it.”

2 The leading exhibition and catalog concerned with histories of late 19th and early 20th century artist-gardeners and the importance of gardens in art of this time was published by the Cleveland Museum of Art and London’s Royal Academy of Arts in 2015 to accompany the exhibition Painting the Modern Garden, Monet to Matisse. The exhibition was curated by William Robinson of the CMA and Anne Dumas of the Royal Academy of Arts, London. See “Painting the Modern Garden: An Introduction” by William H. Robinson in Painting the Modern Garden, Monet to Matisse (Thames and Hudson, Ltd., London and Harry N. Abrams, New York, 2015): 17. See René Delange, ‘Claude Monet,’ L’Illustration, 4374 15 January 1927, p. 56 – 60, for the original context of Monet’s quote.

3 Ibid., 22.

4 Ibid.


Dwayne Lowder's studio, Allisonia, VA, 2012
He was a complicated man.

He was private yet openly gregarious; he was friendly when he wanted to be. He grew up in Albemarle, North Carolina, and had the manners of a gentleman. He was a loner, as many artists are, because then he could have his life on his terms. You could invite him for dinner and he would never accept the invitation, yet he would invite you to dinner. He liked some people, but only on his terms. I needed to make a trip to Milton, West Virginia to buy stained glass for projects I was making. I asked to visit him since I would be “in the area.” He said no and my reply was, “it may be the last time I would see you.” He then said, “OK.”

During one of our conversations on my visit I mentioned the word “friend” and he said he did not have friends. I asked why, and he answered “because they are obligations” which he did not want. While there, he drove me around to places of interest and he introduced me to some of the locals as an “acquaintance from up north.”

He never wished for people to stop by his house, yet the right folks were good company. Sharing, civility, and respect were always an essential component of conversation.

The craft in his art was learned in his early years doing automobile body work. His art skills were copious, including welding, foundry casting, wood working, stained glass, color theory, as well as acrylic and oil painting. His aesthetic sensibility included not just visual art, but also building construction, raising sheep, landscaping, gardening, canning, raising and selling plants and orchids. He had runners scouring the Malaysian rain forest for those delicate plants. Eventually an orchid was named after him, Lowder’s Trichoglottis.

Dwayne did his undergraduate education at the University of North Carolina where he received a B.A. degree in painting in 1959. Then he was off to military service for two years in the Army where he learned photography. He then earned an M.A. in sculpture in 1963 from the University of North
Carolina. He moved to Michigan in the same year to be Exhibition Designer at the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts where he also taught photography and sculpture. In 1965 he returned to the University of North Carolina where he was Assistant Curator at the Ackland Art Museum.

Lowder joined the faculty at Western Michigan University in 1966. That year marked the largest hire of new faculty in the history of the University. He taught basic design, color theory, and painting. He also made contributions to the theater and dance programs by designing sets and costumes for productions. He was a highly regarded professor who had a lasting impact on his students. His mentorship was profound yet he greatly disliked the grading process that required him to pass judgment.

Teaching was a doable profession that allowed him time to explore his many talents and be a prolific artist. The one talent he lacked was patience for some of his faculty colleagues. He hated committee meetings thinking them to be a waste of time. Especially difficult was serving with those he disliked or did not respect. The critical aesthetical sensibility he imposed on his art was the same with people.

In the late 1970s he developed a close relationship with his dentist Gifford Pletcher who was several years his senior. Together they bought a farm in Virginia where Gifford could retire and Dwayne could be a full time artist. Gifford provided the funds and Dwayne the labor to build a foundry, painting studio, sheds to raise sheep, greenhouses, and storage buildings. The grounds became an art object through the aesthetically well placed variety of trees, shrubs, flowers, trellises, Koi pond, and large vegetable garden. All this became their environment. If Gifford wanted something built and Dwayne did not want to build, he told Gifford it could not be done. Gifford accepted that.

We had many enjoyable conversations during my visit in 2012. We talked about art and he said, or lamented, that he was a hard edge painter. Our actuarials were upon us and we discussed our estates and what was to become of them. Gifford had passed a few years before and his estate was to be available for Dwayne if need be. But that was not required because he had amassed his own sizeable wealth. Dwayne was the last of his family with no living relatives so he decided to give his estate to his alma mater, the University of North Carolina. I asked if he had defined the intent of his gift, such as an endowment or painting scholarships in his name. He said no and he did not wish to deal with that. I asked about his art and the reply was “maybe they will keep a few and throw the remainder away.” Typical Dwayne response.

As I reflect back to my visit with Dwayne, little did I know then that it would, in fact, be the last time I would see him. Fortunately, I did documentary photographs of him, his studio, the grounds, and some of the various buildings before I left. These images provide a visual reference for the world he created.

An estate auction was held in November of 2018 to liquidate his possessions. In the attic above the garage were stored 46 paintings with a total of about 250 to 300 running feet. There was no reasonable way to set that volume of work out for auction display. This work was not easy to access because of narrow steps, a small landing, and no railing leading to the attic. As a result, this work remained stored and was regarded as “residue” after the auction, meaning, junk for the dump because items surviving an auction are disposed of as trash. That was to be the fate for his art. The paintings had to be removed in order to sell the property.

Fortunately, the realtor, Howard Sadler, mentioned this work to faculty member Kenneth Smith at Radford University who was in the area. This professor visited the property and evaluated the paintings to be quality work created by a professional. The realtor volunteered to move the work to Radford which solved his need to get them off the property. Once the work arrived at Radford it became apparent that the quantity was more than its gallery storage area could accommodate. Egress doors were blocked and the fire marshal mandated the work to be removed. Some of the pieces could have been placed around campus but there was nowhere to accommodate the majority of the paintings and the University was about to close until fall semester. Therefore, Radford had to place this art quickly. They considered a sidewalk sale and/or just giving them away.

I hired a local person, Mike Wolfe, to fly to Virginia, rent a truck, and drive Dwayne’s paintings to Michigan. Mike was assisted by Western alumnus Charlie Brouwer with the packing. The work was released by Radford, transferring ownership of the estate’s “residue” to me.
Everyone who knew Dwayne had enormous respect for him and his creative talent. I felt it was essential for his art to be preserved and appreciated now and for future generations. Fortunately, Western Michigan University was willing to accept my gift of these paintings for their permanent collection.

A 150 page condition report was created detailing each piece. Indra Līcīs, Director of Exhibitions, Mindi Bagnall, Exhibitions Registrar and Curator of the University Art Collection, as well as Rozlin Opolka were central to this evaluation. Some works were not completed paintings and many had some damage as a result of past storage and various moving(s). Many of the works had been stored in the garage attic for years and had accumulated dust, dirt, and bird droppings. When the paintings arrived at Radford, they cleaned them with a power washer. One large painting was not on a stretcher and it was laid on the grass for cleaning. Unfortunately, it was not dried before being folded face to face. When it arrived here and unfolded, the acrylic imagery had transferred due to contact with itself and the canvas was total mold. This painting was discarded as a result.

For all of us who knew Dwayne Lowder, he was our Leonardo da Vinci. It was always exciting and of great interest to see what new work flowed from him. It might be wood sculpture this month, a bronze next month, and a color study painting the following month. His interests continually evolved. The plethora of ideas may have been due in part to being an avid novel and history reader. A typical day would be early rise, chores, a project, work in the studio, noon dinner, novel reading followed by a nap. Then back to the studio, an early supper, and then retire early with a book. The readings were followed by dreams that often became objects of curiosity and, at times, inspiration. On many occasions he commented about his dreams wondering how to express them.

Everyone wished to own a Lowder. When asked to sell a piece his common refrain was, “I won’t sell it to you, but I might give it to you.” And, he did, for those he admired or liked. Not wanting to “sell” was his aversion to establish value, a price, something that smelled of ego to him which he disdained. The vast majority of his art was given away, donated, or trashed because he did not like it. There are many fans and patrons who acquired their piece of Lowder from the “dumpster.” If there was a Dwayne in sight, someone wanted it. There is a record of one fellow who went dumpster diving and then turned around and sold Dwayne’s discard as his own art.

It is sad that Dwayne never received the national attention his art deserved. Unfortunately, to be part of the art scene, one needs to play that game. He could not bring himself to self promotion, to sell himself, to be a prostitute. He thought that to be demeaning. During his early career he had an exhibition in NYC and that experience, the scene he encountered, was horrifying to him. He could not bring himself to drive to the city and pick up his art after the show. So, he called the gallery and asked them to destroy everything. They did. He had tried the gig and hated it.

He made art because he had to. Creativity was the essence of his being; he could not avoid it. It is only natural for an artist to desire some recognition for their effort. Validation possibly, and that was true for Dwayne. He put his toe into the water one or two more times and pulled away when nothing happened. He never had gallery representation.

Nevertheless, he just kept making art.
OR DO THEY?

John Link

No one has ever explained art or what it means, not even those who are profound in their use of language. Unfortunately, interpretations often masquerade as such. When they do that they obfuscate more than they illuminate. Whatever art might be, an interpretation that claims to explain it reduces the work to the limits of the interpreter, rather than freeing art to be itself. Yet, interpretations are legitimate when they are properly understood as the power art has to stimulate our imagination. And in some cases, a relevant interpretation can cast a certain light on art so that it becomes more accessible to the viewer. Such might be the case with the works of Dwayne Lowder, at least for me. But I want to emphasize from the start that delving into interpretation is tricky, because in good art, it is always subservient to whatever it is that makes art, art.

Franklin Einspruch recently wrote in the December 2019 issue of The New Criterion that the difference between illustration and art is that illustration proceeds by logic and art by feeling. That is a good way to address Dwayne’s pictures.

His body of work can be interpreted as a dreamed paradise in which key images are playfully placed within the framework of an opulent and well-articulated visual order. That sounds jazzy enough, but it could be said of many artists. Vivid color, simple forms, and deftly applied materials are deployed which attract and satisfy the viewer’s eye. That also could be said of many artists. The images Dwayne used are much more specific to him and therefore more relevant to his work than a generality that applies to many artists. Vivid color, simple forms, and deftly applied materials are deployed which attract and satisfy the viewer’s eye. That also could be said of many artists. The images Dwayne used are much more specific to him and therefore more relevant to his work than a generality that applies to many artists. The images Dwayne used are much more specific to him and therefore more relevant to his work than a generality that applies to many artists. They clearly stimulated Dwayne’s imagination and so can they ours. He used the arch, bird, blanket, boat, bones, bowl, cardinal, chicken, dog, door, duck, flames, ginkgo leaf, gun, human body, honey comb, house, ladder, mandorla, moon, owl, poly-wavy, pylon, rabbit, ring, rod, self-portrait, sausage, sheep, shooting gallery, sun, target, teapot, trefoil, water, watermelon, and wienie images in a variety of combinations over the course of his career. In the early 1980s a list of the meanings he personally associated with some of them was created by the Kalamazoo Institute of the Arts. You can read it elsewhere in this catalog. It is interesting and may help you access his artistry.

Narrative #12 orchestrates a number of these archetypes. They are made to shimmer by rendering them in relatively saturated colors that are carefully adjusted to each other, which is especially evident in the several shades of green, and their relationship to the blues and yellows, which are the primaries for green. They dance, float, and fly too, thanks to their immunity from the law of gravity, a law that Dwayne usually banished from his pictures, but not his sculpture.

Dwayne does not closely render the things that inspire him. Instead he uses caricature-like derivatives of their look, cartoons if you like, but not with the insipid attitude one finds in recent cartoon-based work that is supposed to be art. That is how he can include strong color and tight design into his compositions to make them a playground for the eye, without letting them wallow in

Narrative #12, 66" × 97 ½" (framed), acrylic on canvas, undated
the empty anarchy of the now trendy but banal “avant-garde comic book”. Dwayne did not find inspiration in trends.

Thus, the world inside the frame of his paintings appears to be stripped of life-as-lived’s power to hurt, frustrate, and uglify all that it touches. Dwayne’s dreams are rendered with serious artistry that overrules this bad stuff with the satisfaction intrinsic to art. Jack Carney notes that Dwayne often disposed of his pictures, work that many of his fans would like to have for their gaiety and seemingly wanton indulgence in the pleasures of the eye. They present with hedonism on steroids. Or do they?

There is a severity of design that underlies everything Lowder does, often to the point of rigidity. I noticed it the first time I saw his work in 1977, but many of his fans seem to miss it. However, if you relax your eye when you look at his pictures, it comes across as a rigidity that should negate their playful appeal, but curiously does not, not at all. Which explains why his fans may think this essay is nuts. And it may be, but the rigidity is important to the way his art works. It certainly is unusual to see it in playful pictures. But his do not rock and roll, they stare you in the face – stern as compared to relaxed, just like the early “minimal” works of Frank Stella and Darby Bannard, but without the deadness of Donald Judd.

As Carney also notes, Dwayne was an avid reader of novels. I am confident he probably read Thomas Hardy, who wrote under the influence of the 19th century philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, an enthusiastic pessimist. Schopenhauer’s major treatise was titled The World as Will and Representation. The world that is easiest to access, the world that offers immediate pleasure, is where we engage.

Lowder presents Schopenhauer’s representations (and Plato’s shadows) on his canvases as pleasant, playful caricatures, suspended from the laws of gravity, in a felt space of his own design. But they are at odds with something less fun. That something correlates with the monolithic, eternal, insatiable, and unkind “Will” that Schopenhauer and Hardy wrote about. The Will functions like Aristotle’s First Cause, only it is the nasty version. It creates ship-wrecks at the end of every pleasure, chaos at the end of every plan, and ignorance as the outcome of any attempt to grasp the nature of things. The Will amounts to the pessimistic version of pantheism.

For both Schopenhauer and Hardy, the only way to deal with the false world of pleasure is asceticism. If you read Hardy very much you might notice how all of his main characters descend, step by step, into a darkness of spirit. No matter how hard that denies the urges of both one’s own ego and id. If you read Hardy very much you might notice.

For both Schopenhauer and Hardy, the only way to deal with the false world of pleasure is asceticism. If you read Hardy very much you might notice.

William amounts to the pessimistic version of pantheism.

In such a world, the only way to deal with the false world of pleasure is asceticism. If you read Hardy very much you might notice how all of his main characters descend, step by step, into a darkness of spirit. No matter how hard they work to bring satisfaction to their relationships, sex and romance lead to devastating heartbreak, a circumstance that played a large part in Schopenhauer’s own life. There is no way to avoid the inevitable, but those who manage life as well as it can be managed, do so by discipline and avoidance of the pleasures of the world. They are not happy, but they are less unhappy.

I imagine that “managing life as well as it can be managed” could be a direct quote from Dwayne’s speculations that he often enunciated in his letters. Except he would add: “which isn’t that well.”

A similar severity is present in his seemingly joyful pictures. It is not prechary nor is it sentimental. It is just there, waiting to be noticed, but not shouting for attention.

Soon after I met him I learned that he routinely loaded his pickup with pictures and took them to the dump - stretchers, frames, canvas and all, then he would embark on another series practically the next day. It is as if the destruction of a picture was the final step in finishing it, just as suffering is the final step in having pleasure in Hardy’s novels. Dwayne’s disregard for the pictures we see here by leaving them in the attic of a mouse infested barn is a rather jolting fact to contemplate. But it seems to be a circumstance of their creation in the first place. This is both my interpretation and a fact of my experience that I cannot deny without being dishonest. Whether the reader agrees, it does tie the manner in which Dwayne treated his work with the work itself.

When art is inspired by the noblest intentions imaginable, it does not necessarily come out well, as it happens in a lot of art inspired by politics and morality. Medieval “miracle and morality plays” are good examples. They are pure if not puritanical, but result in substandard artistry that has a lot in common with today’s preachy performative art, which happens to be the secular translation of Everyman, with polical utopia as the substitute for Heaven, and the performance artist him or herself as God.

But Dwayne avoided such preachiness, there are no “lessons” to be learned from his work. They present a rigidity similar to that found in preachy work, but it is neither deadening nor nagging. There is a narrative, but it does not intimidate. His pictures seem to move, but don’t really move at all until, perhaps, they are destroyed. Dwayne is drawn to the joyful, but never actually trusts it. Composition is imposed on the whimsical cartoons, taming them, putting them in their place, leaving his pictures feeling like they came from two different feelings, except they did not.

So think about this: His pictures do not look relaxed like, for instance, the unfurleds of Morris Louis, or the nudes of Renoir, or the shapes in Miro. Then check if a new feeling is expressing itself when you look at the reproductions in this catalog, or better yet, the pictures themselves. It’s there,
waiting to be perceived, as far as I can tell. Like Kant said, when we make an aesthetic judgment, we feel it is the only one that anyone could make. It takes the intellect to conduct a compromise with those who might disagree and propose something like "there is no accounting for taste" or "taste is purely subjective." But feeling comes first and trumps intellect, every time. That's why Dwayne's artistry persists.

Another philosopher, A. N. Whitehead, wrote that the most powerful art is one that successfully unites aspects that are in conflict with each other, at each other's throat, so to speak. I agree with Whitehead. Dreams are a good source for whatever an artist feels because they are not governed by the intellect. Clearly Dwayne used them to significant aesthetic profit. Dwayne's destructive habits manifest a darkness that is just as important as the playful forms he extracts from his dreams. It is there, quietly and obsessively exerting its influence. It boils down to he does not really like what his images represent.

While the far (and not so far) left insists upon moral purity in art, the art that is worth looking at often disagrees. The undercurrent of rigidity prevents Dwayne's works from becoming imprisoned in decoration that would be the logical outcome of their playful, pleasurable aspect. I find them quite stiff, even locked. This might sound like a criticism, but it is praise, for it is essential to the conjoined feeling that is their strength. It demonstrates that art is not logical but felt, when feeling is honest.

Dwayne Lowder addresses the ideal which supposedly orders all the cosmos, but finds himself in a complicated process that does not yield to the playfulness that dresses his imagery. For all their joy and celebration, his works pose the possibility that these aspects are a time-out from a force that eventually strikes down anything that is in front of it, regardless of value. This is the paradox that Dwayne navigated and which makes it impossible for me to say his work is "fun" or even "fanciful." But I can say it is good because, like Greenberg once wrote, it makes me feel like I'm dancing three feet off the ground when I look at it. I could never ask for more than that.
NOTE TO THE READER:
Many of Mr. Lowder's paintings arrived without titles and with dates unknown. For internal purposes and to provide our audience with a way to refer to Mr. Lowder's paintings, we have divided the lot into two numbered categories—compositions and narratives. In the pages that follow, these applied titles appear in light gray and serve as reference only; they are not intended to impose meaning on the work. For the purposes of this catalog and exhibition, we have listed dimensions first, following the title or assigned referential title, because in many cases dimensions were the only concrete set of data available to us with certainty. Considering the general lack of documentation for these works, the designated medium of each was determined through careful observation and assessment.
This painting was completed during Dwayne Lowder’s years of undergraduate study at University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.
COMPOSITION #2

36 ¾" × 46" oil on canvas, undated
HUGO AND THE BRIDGE

78" x 93" oil/ acrylic on canvas, undated
COMPOSITION #7
88” × 56” oil on canvas, undated
SYSTEMS #38

72" diameter, acrylic on canvas, 1977-78
NARRATIVE #3

77 ¼” diameter, acrylic on canvas, undated
WARM AS HOUSES #2

32 ¼" x 32 ¼" (framed), acrylic on paper, 1982
RIDGE RUNNING

123" x 73" acrylic on canvas, 1982
NARRATIVE #11

102" x 68" acrylic on canvas, undated
NARRATIVE # 5

54” x 36” acrylic on canvas, undated
I BET YOU WOULDN'T GIVE IT TO ME EVEN IF I ASKED

128 ½” × 68” acrylic on canvas, 1982
NARRATIVE #14

118” × 67” acrylic on canvas, undated
NARRATIVE #8

54" x 36" acrylic on canvas, undated
COMPOSITION #9

66 ⅜” x 105 ⅞” oil/acrylic on canvas with wood panel additions, undated
OFF THE BACK PORCH

78 ¼" x 106" oil/acrylic on canvas, undated
COMPOSITION #3
54" × 60" oil on canvas, undated
IN THE BAG
92 ¾” x 56 ½” oil on canvas, 2004
MOWING HAY

80" x 52 1/2" acrylic on canvas, 2003-04
NARRATIVE #20

76" x 57" oil on canvas with wood panel addition, undated
SPRING’S PROMISE

54” x 60” acrylic on canvas, 2007
NARRATIVE #12

66” x 97 ½” (framed), acrylic on canvas, undated
RESCUED WORKS
COMPOSITION #11
30½ × 31” mixed media on canvas, October 1, 1954.

COMPOSITION #2
36 ¾ × 46" oil on canvas, undated

COMPOSITION #6
83½ × 77" oil on canvas, undated

COMPOSITION #5
38 ½ × 23½" (framed); oil on canvas, undated

HUGO AND THE BRIDGE
78” × 95” oil/acrylic on canvas, undated

COMPOSITION #7
88” × 58” oil on canvas, undated

COMPOSITION #10
84” × 28” (canvas), 96” × 32” (wooden stretcher), acrylic on canvas, undated

NARRATIVE #9
42 ½ × 48” acrylic on canvas, undated
I BET YOU WOULDN'T GIVE IT TO ME EVEN IF I ASKED
123" × 73" acrylic on canvas, 1982

NARRATIVE #8
54" × 36" acrylic on canvas, undated

RIDGE RUNNING
125" × 73" acrylic on canvas, 1982

NARRATIVE #11
102" × 68" acrylic on canvas, undated

NARRATIVE #6
54" × 36" acrylic on canvas, undated

NARRATIVE #19
54" × 36" acrylic on canvas, undated

NARRATIVE #8 (VERSO)
54" × 36" acrylic on canvas, undated

NARRATIVE #5
54" × 36" acrylic on canvas, undated
COMPOSITION #8
68 ½” × 103 ½” oil/acrylic on canvas, undated

NARRATIVE #4
50 ½” × 82” acrylic on canvas, undated

COMPOSITION #9
66 ¾” × 105 ½” oil/acrylic on canvas, undated

NARRATIVE #1
73 ¾” × 14 ¾” acrylic on canvas stretched over board, undated

OFF THE BACK PORCH
78 ¼” × 106” oil/acrylic on canvas, undated

NARRATIVE #17
52 ½” × 96” acrylic on canvas, undated

NARRATIVE #18
57” × 89 ¼” oil on canvas, undated

NARRATIVE #20
78” × 37” oil on canvas with wood panel addition, undated
This untitled, undated canvas arrived severely damaged without a stretcher. We include the image for the sake of thoroughness and for purposes of study.
GOOD MORNING MR. LOWDER

May 20, 2019

Good morning Mr. Lowder.

You didn’t know me. I came into your life not long after you passed away. In your Will, you instructed the bank to handle your estate. Fine people. Dedicated to their duty as Trust Officers to make sure that your estate was handled the way you’d want them to.

Well, your place in Allisonia was certainly treated gingerly by those bank folks. But they needed some help. So, they called me to help them with getting your place ready to sell - like you wanted. They had an auction of your personal property back in November... you knew a lot of folks there and they sure remembered you too! But after the sale, there was a lot of leftover stuff so the bank asked me to help clean things up a bit. Although you and I never met, I was happy to see what I could do.

I’ve gotta be honest; I had a bunch of help from some younger guys that keep me straightened out at my own farm from time to time. So, after several days of hauling, we were down to the last things. Your art. Now Mr. Lowder, I don’t pretend to know much about art but I do know a thing or two about valuing a man’s work.

One day I was out there by myself in your garage and shop where all of your paintings were stacked. It kinda took my breath away looking at all that work. It was damn cold that morning. You remember the sound of that west wind howling across the fields into the garage, I’m sure. Well, I stood there looking at your paintings and I began to shake a little. I don’t know if it was from that wind or if it was from the notion that I was gonna be responsible for what might happen to your paintings.

I gotta tell you Mr. Lowder, the more I studied those paintings, the more I felt that your soul was on those canvases. I could see the frames holding your work tight and straight were built with a gentle hand and lots of sweat. And, being somewhat of a builder myself, it didn’t take me long to realize that the frames were a work of art too. Whew. I thought the Marine Corps taught me a little bit about everything but nope, I was wrong. Not this kinda thing anyway.

Well, I decided right then and there that if I was gonna do anything, I would make sure that somewhere, somehow your life’s work was safe and appreciated. There must’ve been some divine or other guidance in all of this because it wasn’t long before I met an artist at Thanksgiving and told him about your paintings. It’s a long story but he took up the challenge with me to save your art.

Mr. Lowder, you won’t believe this, but we moved everything out of that cold garage and stored it at Radford University for a bit. And then, my other new friend, the artist, was able to get some interest stirred up at your old school, Western Michigan University. Those folks came down and got your paintings and then they called me the other day and told me that they had them safe and sound up there. Sounds like they are mighty happy to be able to show them off and keep them safe.

Well, that’s about all I know right now. I’m glad I could help.

I’m really glad to be the friend you never knew.

—Howard Sadler
SYMBOL DEFINITIONS USED BY THE KALAMAZOO INSTITUTE OF ARTS DOCENTS DURING K.I.A.'S 1982 DWAYNE LOWDER EXHIBITION "IN A SOUTHERN TRADITION."

1. **Arch**: opening, connecting principle that joins one space to another and separates one space from another. A border or boundary that contains. Used as a masculine symbol.

2. **Blanket**: a non-spatial landscape, a mental space.

3. **Duck**: an alter ego figure, one aspect of the self (of the artist). A migratory creature which divides its time between two homes. As a personality-innocuous, quiet, self-contained.

4. **Ginkgo leaf**: the fan-shaped leaf of the ginkgo tree. The only surviving species of an order of plants that lived millions of years ago.

5. **House**: traditionally considered the feminine aspect of the universe. Also equated with "repository of wisdom". Associated with enclosure, safety. Color designates a special character, e.g. yellow designated being closed in, red—being aggressed upon.

6. **Moon**: receives its light from the sun; a passive celestial body, constantly changing its aspect. Associated with the biological rhythms of life.

7. **Sausage-shape**: a whimsical sexual form.

8. **Serpent**: symbolic of energy, of force pure and simple. There is a clear connection between the snake and the feminine principle. Refers to the primordial, the most primitive strata of life. They can have evil or positive reference (forces that have been mastered, controlled—good luck).

9. **Sun**: symbol for warmth and light, for immutable constancy; hence, the reality of the things. Moon is female but sun is male.

10. **Trefoil**: three joined semicircles, the shape of a clover leaf, a symbol for both good and evil. In Christianity, it stands for the Trinity. Symbol of unity (3 in 1).

11. **Water**: life-giving, the beginning and the end of all things. Also identified with the intuitive wisdom.
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I wish to thank many of those who assisted me with this project. My wife Marijo’s ever present wisdom always gives me clarity in solving issues. Long-time, good friend John Link can make words dance, and I thank him for our many hours of discussion about our mutual “acquaintance” Dwayne, and for his help with my catalog essay. Susan Eckhard’s research at the Kalamazoo Institute of Art’s library and archives provided many additional facts for my essay. Dear friend Nancy Nott’s keen eye refined and tweaked the final words of my essay for print. Wonderful artist/videographer and friend Nick Anderson assisted with photographing the Lowder paintings and massaged the images for correct color. Mike Wolfe loaded and transported the Lowder paintings from Virginia to Michigan and alumnus Charlie Brouwer helped Mike with the packing. Indra Lācis, Director of Exhibitions, and Mindi Bagnall, Exhibitions Registrar and Curator of the University Art Collection, unloaded and cared for the paintings after they arrived in Kalamazoo; and Rozlin Opolka created the lengthy and detailed condition report. Remarkable Indra Lācis curated the exhibition and played a critical role as part of the team with talented designer Paul Sizer in the making of this catalog. Finally I wish to thank Daniel Guyette, Dean of the College of Fine Art, for accepting my gift of these 40 paintings by Dwayne Lowder for the Western Michigan University’s Art Collection.

—John M. (Jack) Carney

I extend my deepest gratitude to Jack Carney for his generous gift to the University Art Collection and for providing full financial support for this catalog. A tribute to friendship during a different era at Western Michigan University, this project memorializes Dwayne Lowder's legacy. Working with Jack to fulfill that goal has been and remains a true pleasure. Without early correspondence from Jackie Ruttinger here in Kalamazoo and Ken Smith and Steve Arbury at Radford University, this exhibition might never have come to pass. Howard Sadler was also deeply instrumental in all of this. The talent, expertise, and work ethic of the Richmond Center's team—Mindi Bagnall, Tanya Bakhia, Clara Peeters, Mel Wilcox, and our intrepid student gallery assistants—transform what might be called work into a genuine joy. It is an honor to share my day-to-day with each of you. Special thanks to Ellyssa Seager, librarian at The Mary & Edwin Meader Fine Arts Library at the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts, who kindly provided access to Dwayne Lowder's file. I am also deeply appreciative that Shirley Clay Scott and Jack Carney agreed to loan work by Dwayne Lowder from their private collections. My sincere thank you also belongs to John Link, who early on lent his perspective freely, encouraging me to try and “see” Mr. Lowder in my own way. Paul Sizer’s patience, eye for detail, and clean design aesthetic makes the completion of every project feel effortless. I am truly grateful for opportunities to work with Paul. Finally, I wish to thank Dwayne Lowder, whom I never met, but whose work embodies the kind of raw focus and creative energy that continues to give and give and give.

Thank you Mr. Lowder. May you rest in peace.

—Indra Lācis, PhD
Director of Exhibitions
Richmond Center for Visual Arts