

Cultural Daily

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Sketching Colville .. an interlude

Maurice Amiel · Wednesday, February 17th, 2021

In the past company of Canaletto, Corot, Plath, Bradford ...

What these artists and creators have in common is a love and mastery of free-hand sketching.

In the past I have tried to sketch their work as a way to train my eye-hand coordination and hone my pen and ink technique. See my CW piece, "[A Winter Interlude.](#)"

... and in the present company of Colville.

Why Alex Colville? Because of his sensitivity to social-spatial situations rendered in characteristic hyper-realistic technique ... a real challenge for pen and ink rendering!

What interested me particularly was his work dealing with *meaningful movement, be it propelled, pending, critical or ambiguously invited*, work that I shall present and discuss below, in relationship to my sketching of it.

Propelled movement: "Sunrise", 1970



propelled movement

Colville was well known for capturing and communicating the feeling of social-spatial situations thanks to studied geometric patterns to that effect.

In this case, as seen in the feature image reprised above, the slope of the rock is echoed in the leaning of the paddler as he brings the canoe around it.

Note how by placing the far away bright rising sun, right over the nearer dark paddler's hand, *as it is starting to come down to propel the canoe forward almost out of the frame*, Colville had succeeded in expressing the feeling of an eminent propelled movement.

Note how in my sketch of Colville's original print, I have attempted to do the same although, by *accentuating the leaning of the paddler's body*, the viewer may gather that the movement down to propel the canoe is already ongoing.



Sketch of propelled movement

Pending movement : “Milk Truck”, 1959



pending movement

Note how Colville includes such details as: the edge of front right tire and its curved trace on the pavement, the precarious balancing act of the delivery boy against centrifugal force, and the twisted head of the driver to the left, all pointing to *the beginning of a sharp left turn* toward the houses, (as shown above).

Note how I have, in my sketch, focused rather on the head of the driver twisted to the left as if looking at the sloping lines of the crossroad ahead, and on the perpendicular position of the truck vis a vis that crossroad leading to houses, all leaving the viewer with the feeling *of a pending movement to come, rather than one that has already begun*, (as shown below).



sketch of pending movement

Critical movement: “Road Work”, 1969



critical movement

Note how Colville gave a preeminent place to the helmeted security agent, leaning on STOP sign to flag down approaching traffic, suggesting the “criticality” of the steamroller movement to be controlled in road work . (as shown above)

Note how in my pen and ink sketch I have focused on the machine, cutting off the security agent and *placing the steamroller’s front and center, at the edge of the sketch, as if it could literally come out of the sketch. (As shown below)*

This could evoke, for the viewer, *a feeling of approaching danger* accruing to the one of *criticality* that Colville conveyed in his painting.



sketch of critical movement

Ambiguously invited movement : “At Grand Pré”, 1982



ambiguously invited movement

Note how in the presence of the multiple horizon lines of Colville’s painting, and the nearness of the steep drop in the road ahead, the cyclist could be tempted to gain speed with little effort, or, she may feel the need to slow down at the approach of a village at the foot the hill (as shown above)

Note how in my sketch I have focused on the sloping road, *clearing out any ambiguous narrative underlying the situation, and letting the divider double lines to become, for the viewer, the defining element of an invited movement situation* (as shown below)



sketch of ambiguously invited movement

Discussion

Feeling that the noticeable presence of actors in Colville's paintings, practically all seen from the back, may be causing the viewer to remain an objective rather than an involved observer of the situations, what I have done in my sketches was to simplify the situational dynamic by excluding these actors, in three of the four original paintings, thereby freeing the viewer to define the situations.

Doing this caused me to re-interpret Colville paintings, not just to render them in my sketches as presented and discussed in the piece.

Credit

The works of A. Colville were scanned from the following publication:

- Burnett D., *Colville*, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, 1983

All pen and ink sketches to be credited to Maurice Amiel

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