

Art School as an Expression

Given the years between 1962 and 2017, one would think I would have made some progress in thinking or at least in the products. But alas, as I will explain, there is no difference. It is a bit like the Existential movement in France after the war, life keeps approaching in the same color coat. I think my high school text book by Jean-Paul Sartre, "Les Jeux Sont Faits", described my non-transition to the next aesthetic.

There was a break in my schooling when in 1963, I left classes for half a year to travel down the Mississippi River in a (hand made) 21' cruiser that Pop (Professor Aarre Lahti) designed and built.



Ahde lifting the 50 HP outboard for repairs

We navigated from St. Paul to New Orleans on the river, then took the Intracoastal Waterway to Key West. The trip was interesting, because the police actually warned me to be careful in St. Louis, because we were docked down in the Harbor, which apparently wasn't a savory place. Below is a watercolor I did looking up the river in St. Louis. The atmosphere and

waters were murky. One could do a simple pollution check by counting the condoms floating by. Three or more in view was not a good swimming place. One thing that I found that while traveling, is that it is hard to do art. Why? Because there are too many interesting sights to take in. I have found that I am most creative when it is quiet and boring, only then can I begin to convert images to paper. I have begun to treat writing with the same reverence I had for drawing back in the early years. Here is a thought I had about the future: The montage of life can never be seen twice like a movie. We can see the outtakes but never the script or the reel. Looking backward, you will see your footprints, but only you get to write the ones ahead. Dance lightly and make the most of all your prints!



Watercolor, Union Light Power plant 1963, St Louis

The trip was an interesting experiment in confined living spaces, which I later used while teaching Architecture at Cal Poly Pomona (1970-72) and at SCI-Arc (Southern California Institute of Architecture, 1973-95). Looking back, I can see my "footprints". We taught classes using restraints, like Bill Moss (who I worked for in Ann Arbor) who designed lightweight structures of fabric and glass fiber flexible rods.

The teaching also used small building modules like the Rhombic Dodecahedron in "close-packing" structures made from the platonic solids.

Here are images from the Rackham graduate show with large sculpture and my printmaking works. I still have some of the bronze sculptures and wood pieces from that era.



8' elm sculpture, 1965 Rackham Show, Bronze & Wood & Paper (unknown visitors)

I actually have the same tools here today, the chisels, the mallet and the old chainsaw which doesn't start very well any longer. I will mention that the inspiration for these sculptures was because of a motorcycle trip to Montreal "Expo 67". Where I saw impressive massive wood sculptures at the entrance to the show. Maybe the show itself wasn't as important as the trip through Canada east then turning south to board the Yarmouth-Halifax ferry back to Maine.

Another eventful experience while in Art School, was in 1966. I traveled with Steve Molitoris to Europe. We both left one snowy morning on my 250 cc Suzuki two stroke, six gear motorcycle. We had enrolled in the Accademia di Belle Arti in Florence. By the time we got permission from the draft to leave the country, it was February. We left in the worst blizzard and had to hitch-hike a ride on a flatbed steel truck through

Pennsylvania, to Maryland. The driver talked incessantly, but wouldn't let us off in the snow, until we were on dry warm roads. What a great turn of events that was, from being trapped on the turnpike to sailing in the sun.



Steve and I leaving Ann Arbor for Europe, Cycle on truck to Maryland.

Ship was late so we had to stay in N.Y. two extra weeks which we hadn't counted on with our limited budget. Finally, when we sailed (13 days) we hit force 7 winds off Spain.



Steve and Ahde on the Yugoslavian Freighter to Genoa

Landing in Genoa, was our first test of coping with little or no language. We headed directly to Germany to get Steve a cycle, way too expensive. Instead he had to get a VW bug, which we immediately turned south to Italy. Arriving in Florence we found we were too late to start the art school. They would only let us in for the fall (the beginning of the school year). In Florence we stayed at a Youth Hostel, Villa Camerata. There while waiting for the Hostel to open, Steve introduced me to Daphne and Ganea. Coffee was good. We all took off to Rome, why bother with school.



Cruising in Roma and Watercolor of Capri



Ahde in Corinth Greece



Also out of gasoline at times near Positano, Italy & Steve in Greece

We traveled about 6 months together and separately. Daphne went to Isreal. Ganea came back to Paris where we toured until she left for Caracas. Here, we were at the 24 Heures Le Mans auto race. As we arrived at the

long traffic line, the car along side handed us a loaf of French bread. Later we given a free camping space from one of the campers (they had been book solid for months). What a beautiful time with wonderful people.



Ganea at "The Vingt-Quatre Le Mans"

Steve and I met back in Rotterdam for the return ship to New York. He left the VW bug on the streets of Rotterdam. I haven't seen him since about 1970, but we have chatted on email. If it weren't for Steve I wouldn't have met Ganea (my wife for 48 years). He was the gregarious raconteur who made things happen.

After my BSDes, I went on to Rackham Graduate School for a MFA, and below are Bronzes from the thesis show. Traveling through Bulgaria, I met a sculptor who influenced my bronze casting works.



30" Bronze, Warrior & Woman

I will move to the present day and show a few works and try to show the evolution from the Art School works.



Sculpture Ahde and Doug Bungert: "Last Stand" and detail

At the Art School, I happened to be sculpting at a time when Elm trees had to be removed. I was able to ask the Pure Oil gas station (corner of Traver Road and Plymouth Road adjacent to The Broadway Grocery) to hire their tow truck to bring entire logs back for my work. Now I have smaller logs, which I banded together to gain the mass. I was more productive back then, didn't drink so much, probable only three cups of coffee a day, all made with the little Italian Espresso machine: Bialetti, Moka Express.



Today I still salvage that which has fallen. Here is a table made from an Oak that came down one stormy day, in our yard, no transporting necessary.

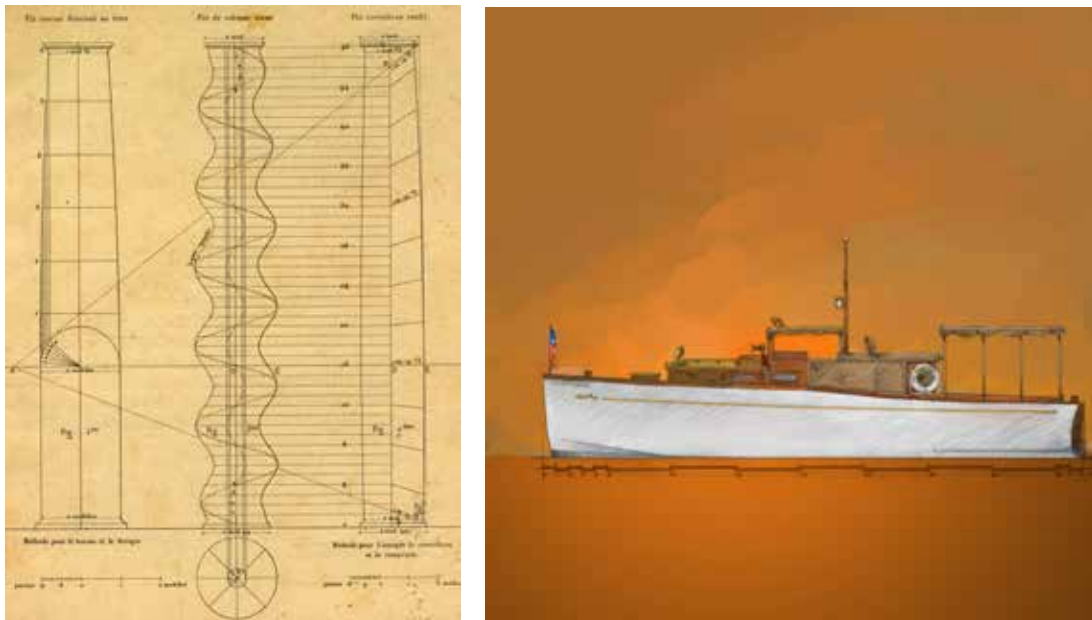


"Live Oak" brought down in a storm & Oak 5' Table

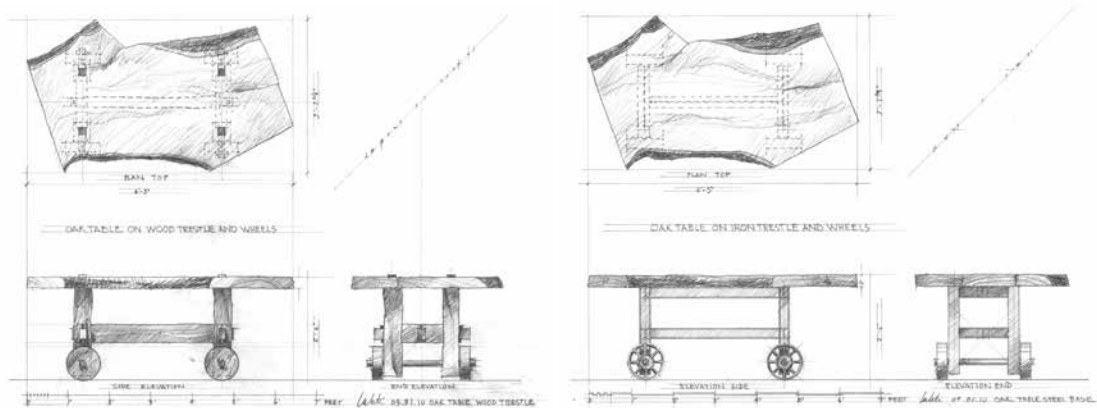


"Live Oak" 7' Table

I still do graphics, painting and illustration. One book I cherish is from Ann Arbor (Pop's from a French Bookstore back in 1933): "Vignola, The Five Orders of Architectures", 1891. The lesson from this etching formed my illustration style; that was to leave in all the referential lines, so that the drawing was self-explanatory.



Vignola Etching & my Rendering of "BOSS" for the "Mariner Magazine"



Sketch with wood trestle or welded steel frame.

The Art School has had a lasting and permanent influence on my life. What else can one ask of education?

Ahde Lahti, Ojai, California 01.13.2017