Clark Hulings and the Art of Work

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By

James D. Balestrieri

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing

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This book first published 2024

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-0364-1057-5
ISBN (Ebook): 978-1-0364-1058-2

For Elizabeth Hulings

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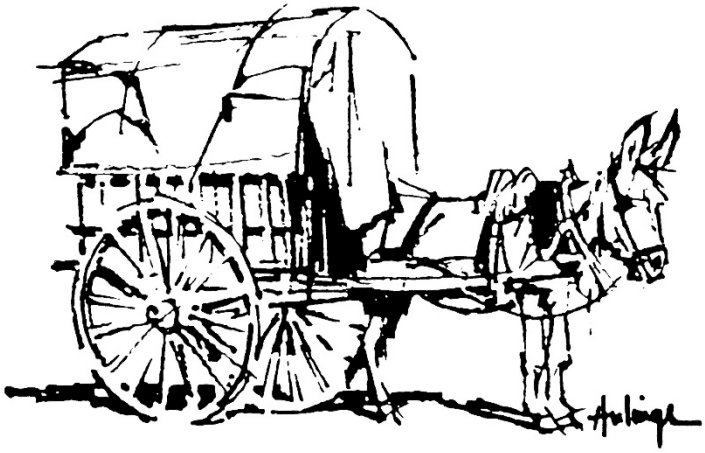

[FIG Illustration-1] *Donkey and Cart Logo*, 1968. Pen and ink.

PREFACE

[FIG Preface-1] Clark, Elizabeth and Pauline creating *The Spanish Moss Gatherer*, 1969.

This photo to the contrary, I never wanted to be an artist. I'm not suited for it, and that position was already occupied in our family by someone doing a stupendous job. Research, Finance and Event Planning were also well in hand, thanks to my mother. Before marrying my father she built a decades-long career at the advertising behemoth Young & Rubicam, capping it off as Head Legal Secretary. On the other hand, no one was covering Strategy or Navigation—undertakings for which I am, luckily, well suited.

Don't get me wrong, my father managed his career with tremendous acumen, determination and courage, creating figurative work when it was not in vogue, and finding a market for it. But his single minded focus did not always include practical concerns, like closing the rear door of the car before backing out of the garage. And, while my mother deftly balanced six checkbooks and hosted multiple dinner parties and collector events every week, she would take her hands off the steering wheel if you asked her to turn left and hold her thumbs at right angles to see which hand made the letter "L".

So it fell to me to watch both forest and trees. When we set off on our extended trips, they were well-researched, and the goal was clear: find things to paint. We would fly to the city closest to the designated hunting ground (Marrakech, Oaxaca, Palermo….), and stay the night at a reserved hotel. The next morning we would strike out, wandering for up to three months with no further reservations or agenda. It was hard work meandering off the beaten path, punctuated by periods of anxiety (transportation strikes, black-outs, lost passports, no rooms at any inn….). Many times we looked up from our books to realize the sun was setting, my father had wandered off, and we were in the middle of nowhere. Asking the name-your-language-speaking farmer in whose yard we had stopped rarely yielded suggestions we could understand (although it did often result in an offering of delicious fruit, cake or moonshine).

Not surprisingly, I acquired a passion for languages early. My father, for his part, spoke good French, functional German, childhood Spanish and Catalan, excellent Italian, and a smattering of other languages. We always joked, though, that he actually spoke two: English and everything else. If the first word that came to mind did not get his point across, he would try another, and another. Eventually, communication would take place. After all, shared understanding was the point, whether verbal, or visual.

As Jim excellently describes in this book, my father celebrated work and workers—that is who he was, and what his art conveys. He admired everyone who shows up and does whatever their work is. And he worked very hard—six hours a day seven days a week. If other activities threw him off one day, he would work twelve hours the next day to make up for it. He was incredibly disciplined. That said, his work day was not 9:00-5:00. He would often go to bed really early, and then get up around midnight or 1:00 AM and work for several hours. As a teenager I'd be getting ready to go out as he was getting ready for bed, and he'd be up working when I got home.

Work included anything relevant to the success of his art business: painting, preparing or stretching canvas, taking collectors to dinner, keeping up his sales and inventory logs, correspondence, shopping for materials, surfing through his extensive source material to decide what to work on next, listening to Rachmaninov or Eurythmics or whatever struck the right chord, pouring over the work of other artists he admired, etc. He would ruminate about different compositional elements he might combine. Sometimes he would take many days feeling his way toward his next project. Other times he would be so excited about the next thing that he would have to push himself to finish what was in front of him. Regardless, he always showed up for himself and did the work.

I so admire how honest my father was with himself about when he was working, and when he wasn't. I aspire every day to have the courage and discipline to level with myself about what counts as work for me. It's not cut and dried. Since I work on strategy, sometimes staring at a wall or taking a walk is absolutely the most productive thing I can do. Other times I do those things to avoid the real work. We all experience this, but we aren't all so good at being clear-eyed about it. My father learned this brutal honesty and discipline from his father.

My grandfather, Courtland Hulings, was an art collector and creator. We have lovely furniture he made with wood he chopped down himself. But it never occurred to him that one could earn a living from making art. Courtland was a force to be reckoned with. He fought in France during World War I, rising to the rank of colonel. After the war, he and a friend bought land in Brewster, Florida, with the idea of growing oranges. A chemical engineer, Courtland planned to apply that expertise to raising resilient crops. His dream fell apart, however, when my grandmother died of tuberculosis in 1923. Heartbroken, with two small children, my grandfather took a job in Valencia, Spain, applying his cutting-edge fumigation techniques on others' orange groves instead of his own. For the next 30 years, he stayed firmly on a business track, never realizing his dream of being a farmer.

Twelve years later, Courtland's son began using a paint set he'd gotten for Christmas to make copies of The Calmady Children by Sir Thomas Lawrence, and the works of Ashcan School artists that were on display at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, waxing on and on about Sargent and Eakins and, and, and…until Courtland finally gave in and sent the boy for lessons. By the time my father graduated from high school, the TB that he'd inherited had reared its head, requiring extended rest and delaying college. Courtland let him go into New York City to study drawing, as long as Clark spent every afternoon in bed.

A year later, he was stronger and begging to attend art school full-time, but Courtland rejected that idea out of hand. To the Colonel, art school would not prepare his son to support himself economically, and though his health prevented him from fighting in WWII, he still needed to support the war effort. So my father earned a degree in physics. Needless to say, college did not vanquish the muse. After the war, my father began painting portraits, which immediately brought him acclaim. Governors, debutantes, and businessmen alike sat for him. In 1948, Courtland once again gave in to his son, and supported him while he returned to study art full time.

In 1952, Clark launched a career in illustration. He would often get book cover assignments late in the afternoon and work all night to produce preliminary sketches, which he would deliver as soon as the doors opened. Then he would trek back to his apartment and fall into bed, only to be awakened by his father calling to make sure he wasn't wasting away the day! After six years of working like a donkey and saving every penny, my father took a line of credit, pulled up stakes, and went to Europe to "turn himself into an easel painter." In 1966, Grand Central Galleries gave him his first solo show, and he never looked back. He repaid every cent that Courtland had invested in his art training. The muse had had her way in the end, but the Colonel had instilled the backbone, intransigence and resourcefulness that brought success as well as first rate art.

This is the first book about my father not written by him, and I am so excited that Jim has not only placed his work in context, but that he has gotten at the core of Clark Hulings 'philosophy, world view, and courage. My father continues to be a role model for me. I miss him every day, and I am thrilled to share him with you.

Elizabeth Hulings

[FIG Preface-2] *Fisherman and Child, Torremolinos* (Spain). Pen and Ink.

FOREWORD

You are about to read the story of an important American artist. It is the most unusual revelation of an artist that I have ever read but it is not a biography. *Clark Hulings and the Art of Work* is a page turner that presents a man whose trade was seeking out and exploring the art of work. Although Clark Hulings received a degree in physics from Haverford College, that was never to be his foundation for a career. His goal from an early age was to be an easel painter.

Fortunately, Clark was a loner. His stubborn and earthy independence, revealed in letters he sent back to his family from Taormina, Paris, Milan, Rome, Hamburg, Florence Norway, Vienna, Istanbul, Konya, Cairo, Luxor, and other stops in his journey are ample evidence that the analytical mind of Clark Hulings would figure it out and he would become one of America's important painters of the Twentieth Century.

I first met Clark Hulings in 1980, shortly after his painting *Pink Parasol* stunned Western Heritage collectors and the American art market at the Shamrock Hilton Hotel in Houston, Texas when it fetched $170,000 in the auction arena. It was acquired by Jim Fowler, owner of Fowler's Period Gallery West in Scottsdale, Arizona. I was executive director of Fowler's gallery and my assignment was to entertain Clark and his wife Mary during their visit to Scottsdale in October and to lure them to representation by Period Gallery West.

The following year I sat at the table with Jim, his wife Halle and daughter Corinne at the Western Heritage sale. We had not planned to buy Hulings's painting but when bidding reached $325,000.00 Jim punched Corrine in the ribs and up went her bid paddle and we were the owner of Hulings's *Kaleidoscope*, a 29 by 46 inch oil that set a new world record at auction—at the time—for a living artist.

I failed to secure Clark's representation but we became friends. Truth was, Clark didn't need representation. His work was so sought after by major collectors of American paintings that he kept a waiting list in his studio. It was simply a matter of calling the next collector's name in line when he completed each painting to tell them their painting was ready to be delivered.

Over time I opened Morris Fine Arts in Scottsdale and later, when I partnered with Tony Altermann to create Altermann & Morris Galleries in Dallas and Houston, Texas, Clark began to share a painting or two each year with me. In 1990, when we were together at the Hubbard Museum of the American West where Clark was a finalist for the Hubbard Art Award for Excellence, he said he felt it was time to build a good relationship with a gallery. He mentioned Nedra Matteucci's Gallery in Santa Fe and I told him he could not have selected a better, more prestigious gallery to represent his paintings.

In conversations over martini lunches and later, in his home and studio Clark seemed to enjoy my perspective on the art market and my observations. I had been executive director of the Greenville County Museum of Art for fifteen years. Our focus was on American paintings and sculpture and I was responsible for bringing in a collection of 26 paintings by Andrew Wyeth for our permanent collection as well as an extensive collection of lithographs by Jasper Johns who is a South Carolina native.

In 1999 Clark asked me to represent his work east of the Mississippi. Over the following years, until his death in 2011, I was able to include his work in the Scottsdale Art Auction, where I first read James Balestrieri's insightful descriptions of Hulings's work, and in exhibitions in Hilton Head Island and Charleston, South Carolina and organize exhibitions and sales at J. N. Bartfield Galleries—where Balestrieri was gallery director—and Forbes Gallery in New York City. Clark would always tell me not to worry about sales because it would mean that I would have inventory… but I knew that he had never had an exhibition that didn't sell out. Fortunately, I kept his record intact.

My interest in American art history has a wide range and it is my opinion that Clark Hulings is an important American painter who has not received the recognition he deserves from scholars of American art history. It is my hope that this book will add weight to make that case. Many people enjoy representational painting and Hulings's paintings attract viewers that appreciate real-life depictions, paintings that take a moment to consider what he has frozen in time. Hulings was able to recognize the poetry of nature in the ordinary recurrent things of life. While many of his contemporaries arranged photo shoots, the people who populated Hulings's canvases are always as he found them—and as he himself was—authentic.

Jack A. Morris
Chairman Morris Fine Arts

[FIG Foreword-1] *Conversation*, 1975. Pen and ink.

FOREWORD

I was both flattered and excited when Jim asked me to contribute in this small way to his monograph on the work of Clark Hulings. Flattered that this prolific scholar, author, and critic would consider me worthy of this undertaking and excited by what I may learn from his examination of Hulings's life in work. This enthusiasm did not wane after a first reading of the book. Rather, it was amplified by recognizing that my own approach to the interpretation of a work of art—to the examination of light, shadow, color, form, and iconography—was itself expanded by distilling Jim's thoughtful and provocative treatment of this previously under-recognized painter of work.

There is likely no one better equipped to undertake the challenge of writing this book about work, including the work that goes into the creation of reality, than Jim Balestrieri. Both well-read and well-written, his background and skills in many areas of knowledge recall the notion of the Renaissance man, were the archetype not so over-attributed as to lose its impact. But that is who we become familiar with in reading Jim's work—a skilled writer, professor, historian, gallerist, and critic, to note a few of the many hats he has worn.

I first met Jim when he contacted me with interest in reviewing a new exhibition I developed for the Grohmann Museum called *A Time of Toil and Triumph*, highlighting a collection of American art from the WPA-era. He has since returned to write about another recent exhibition of industrial art, *Patterns of Meaning*, by Pittsburgh artist Cory Bonnet and his contemporaries. Through our initial correspondence, I learned that Jim grew up in Milwaukee, and was planning to return to the area to continue writing and teaching near his hometown. I also learned of his work on Clark Hulings, as he mentioned it both in letters and in that first review for *American Fine Art Magazine*

The Grohmann Museum is unique in that it is one of few, if not the only, museums that deals exclusively with the art of industry, labor, and human achievement. Simply put, everything we collect or showcase in our feature exhibitions has running through it the thread of productive work. I have written extensively on the sociology of work, the art of work, and labor through the ages. It seemed natural to Jim to ask this curator and director to contribute to his work on Hulings. However, I must admit my embarrassment in being unfamiliar with Hulings and his contributions to 20th century American art. Through the present treatment, I am pleased to say that is no longer the case. I am intent on learning more about this physicist-turned-artist.

That physics played a major role in Hulings early life and education, and subsequently his art, is important when considering Jim's approach to dissecting the work of this prolific artist. By invoking the idea of quantum realism and expanding it to the myriad quanta that inform the creation of a Hulings composition, we feel a bit closer to the artist and his work than if this was simply a standard survey of paintings. In thinking of portraits of workers in historical context, we can note the variety of reasons work becomes a central theme in art. Be it for romantic reflection, social realism, paid commissions, or participant observation, many artists have been compelled by scenes of work and the worker. Hulings was likely influenced by all these factors, but foremost in his work is the idea of the arrangement of the quanta comprising his art and his affinity for capturing a sense of place.

Among the most daunting of subjects, physics, and the examination of art through its lens, may not be the first line of inquiry deployed by the writer or curator, but Balestrieri applies it with aplomb. Alongside treatments of bodies, mosaics, burros, tarpaulins, stained glass, and even red rags, we are consistently drawn back into the notion of quanta and Hulings's creative formula. This formula, coupled with that of the author, provides a compelling framework from which to survey Hulings's umwelt, bringing his life and work into focus while offering numerous avenues for further study.

James Kieselburg
Director, Grohmann Museum
Milwaukee School of Engineering

[FIG Foreword-2] *Man Sweeping,* 1999, pen and ink.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

[FIG Acknowledgements-1] *Skopje Market People* (Croatia), 1959. Pen and ink.

All art books are, by their nature, labors of love. Love of art and artists and love of those who love art. They are, nonetheless, labors and like all labors the writing of *Clark Hulings and the Art of Work* required a balance between the freedom to imagine and the need to craft that freedom into a book. Elizabeth Hulings has helped me maintain that balance and her confidence has been the driving force behind this project. Elizabeth would like to thank her husband, Pat Diamond, their son Nicolas, Clark's wife, Mary, and Hulings family members Bee Ottinger, Sue Ottinger, Barbara and Paul Ferri, and Stephanie Belfi Diehl—whose efforts eventually helped secure the images of *Berlin Wall* and *Troops Deplaning at Sembach, Germany,* images without which this would be a lesser book.

Sofia Perez is the finest editor a writer could ask for. Carol Halebian's exquisite eye helped me interpret Hulings's paintings and her layout skills are unmatched. Mitchell Cohn's devotion to this project and his ability to think outside the box led to numerous revelations, including the discovery of Cambridge Scholars. Ellen Premack brought something new to every conversation. Penelope Thomas kept the wheels on the bus. Jack Morris's friendship with Clark Hulings and his steadfast belief that Hulings deserves a higher place in the pantheon of American art gave constant energy to the project. The late Steve Zimmerman championed my writing on the arts and advocated for me as a candidate to write this book.

Miles Boldrick, Hal French, John and Rosemarie Hendry, Shirley Holland, Seth Hopkins, Susan Goldstein, Shirley Lemmon, Paula Mele, Tim Newton, Joe C. Thompson, Peter Trippi, Matteucci Galleries, Representative Teresa Leger Fernandez, Bobbie Ferrel, Enrique Guerra, Mike Fox, and many others have provided material and moral support, direction, publicity, and access to images of Hulings paintings. Michael Frost set me on a course that led to this book. I must also express my thanks to several people and institutions for permission to reproduce images of artworks that give depth to Clark Hulings's practice and story: Heidi Rosenau at the Frick Museum, Monica Truong of Sikkema Jenkins for permission to use Kara Walker's work, the New York Historical Society, the Myron Kunin Collection of American Art, Honor Sargent at Sotheby's, and Kayla Carlsen, Executive Director of the Albany Institute. Artist friends Scott Yeager, Rich Lithgow, and Carl Hantman offered insight into the ways of painters. Without them, I would be on the outside looking in.

As for me, I am most grateful to my wife and children who entertain my aesthetic diatribes with heroic grace. My parents were blue collar; they were also opera singers, stage performers, and lovers of music, art, and words. My brother Peter, a fine artist who deserves his own book, introduced me many years ago to the writings of Andre Malraux and others whose words and thought form a good deal of the armature of this book. Editors over the years such as Josh Rose, Rochelle Belsito, Laura Beach, Greg Smith, Madelia Ring, Michael Clawson, Sarah Gianelli, and Lorna Dryden have let me have my head among the world's finest artworks and have seen fit to print what I've had to say. And in the end, going all the way back, Mary Basson was the only writing teacher I ever needed.

INTRODUCTION

OF OTHERNESS AND OPINION—
EXCURSIONS TOWARD A QUANTUM REALISM

This is a Backpack Manifesto—

—one I hope Clark Hulings (1929-2011) would have made room for on his travels, one I hope he would have filled with marginal drawings and notes, one I hope he would have been passionate about, taken issue with, and found inspiration in.

If you're a Hulings collector or aficionado, this book is meant to present Clark Hulings anew, to show you aspects of the beauty of his art and the depth of thought behind it that you may not have considered—the sheer breadth of his empathy, for example. If you're new to Hulings, this book is meant to introduce you to a working artist whose subject was work—agricultural work, village work, market work, and daily life in ancient places grappling with modernity in their own unique ways. If you're an artist, this book is meant to invigorate you by discussing some of Hulings's art-making process, his facture. His approach placed him at the top of realist technique in his time, and this book intends to disseminate some of his techniques to any and all who want them. If you're an art historian, this book asks you to consider Hulings not only alongside his contemporaries—think Andrew Wyeth—but also in the long continuum of European and American realism and in the crucial context of the threads of modernism that made their way into his art.

If you have ever read anything of mine before now, you will know that I do not shy away from the "I," even in writings about art that are typically voiced in the third person, with their occasional, "One sees…" or "When one considers…" that hint at an actual person behind the bricks of words. To this day, those who read my fiction and plays wonder why my narrators always seem to possess a persona, and voice opinions.

To me, you see, we are all always making art. Perception—that tireless biochemical engine, ever fluidly adjusting our design of the world—is an art-making act. To make sense of the world is to make art.

It is an axiom that artists ought to "paint what they know," and so on. I myself have heard the sentence, "write what you know" ad nauseam. It is, and I say this unreservedly, awful advice, not just for writers but for all artists. In an increasingly virtual world, where apartness is fast becoming the norm, and algorithms we are blisslessly unaware of determine what we read, hear, see, wear, and buy, it's no longer so simple to claim "what you know" as your own.

[FIG Intro-1] *Produce Market, Basel, Switzerland*, 1981. Oil, 29 x 46 inches.

Even when you do paint or write what you know, my feeling is that you should treat "what you know" as an explorer and come away knowing the place for the first time.

Clark Hulings took the axioms "paint what you know" and "paint the way your peers paint" not to heart, but as a glove in the face, a gauntlet to run; in short, a challenge. All of his mature easel paintings are of people unlike him, people from socio-economic backgrounds divergent and diametrically opposite to his, people living in places unknown to him, living lives whose surfaces he strove to capture in order to investigate and convey something of the common humanity that runs between artist and subject.

The Title of this Book

Clark Hulings trained as a physicist, was headed to Los Alamos in 1944, fell ill, and rejected the world of the atom bomb for a life painting humble workers in timeworn spaces. Though he turned away from a career in physics, he kept up with ideas in the field and took a scientific approach to his art.

Because of this, the title of this book was going to be *Clark Hulings: Quantum Realist.* Quantum" wasn't meant to imply anything mystical or spiritual. It was meant to be construed in its scientific and philosophical sense. But because the word quantum is misused everywhere, attached meaninglessly to wonderful words like "healing" and less wonderful words like "mania," it seemed as though its inclusion in the title might create a false impression about the artist and his art. Still, the idea of quantum realism provides an invisible armature for this book.

[FIG Intro-2] *Abstract*, 1959. Oil, 9 x 13 inches.

Quantum physics really begins with the realization that the world is not material, separate from us, and that observation includes the observer. So when I look at a work of art and say, "This is what I see," what I am saying at the same time is, "What do you see?" The friction between these answers is itself a creative, art-making act, one that should not be hidden behind the omniscient mask of the third-person academic narrative.

Furthermore, quanta, the packets of energy that link up to form the illusion of our space-time reality, do the work of building the world we inhabit. We can't see them and, for the most part, we ignore them, just as we mostly—though less so of late—ignore the working people who make and sustain the reality we inhabit, a reality whose fragility we are, at the moment, coming to appreciate. Quanta and working people are all but invisible, yet, at the same time, they are also indispensable. If you have read the *Harry Potter* books, you will recall the house elves—rarely seen, and largely ignored and rejected, yet without them the whole magical world grinds to a halt. The metaphor applies tidily both to quanta and to the essential working people in our own lives.

And then, of course, since thinking you've invented something should always be a cautionary tale, I turned a corner at the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art at Cornell University and there, staring back at me, was a captivating abstract painting called *Water*, by the Iraqi modernist Mahmoud Sabri (1927-2012) from his series—*Quantum Realism*. In a reversal of Clark Hulings's process, which begins with physics and moves to art depicting working people, Sabri began his career painting ordinary Iraqis at work, discovered quantum physics, and created a manifesto and method of reproducing the dynamics of molecules, atoms, and atomic particles on canvas. *Nihil sub sole novum*—"there is nothing new under the sun."

Clark Hulings and the Art of Work is a book about the work that goes into creating reality—a reality that inspired Hulings to create art—and the works of art that resulted. Because Hulings saw himself as a working artist, and took pride in that fact, he identified with the people he painted. At the end of his working day, which was always long, Hulings wanted to feel that he had worked as hard as the people he painted, that he had shared, in some measure, in the

circadian rhythms of their lives, seeing them in every light and shadow, and that he had done all he could to capture their lives and labors. *Clark Hulings and the Art of Work* is intended to be more of a first word than the last word on Hulings, a mosaic of essays and ideas that will, with luck, reshuffle a few quanta and lead to other investigations.

Rebelling Against Rebellion

Otherness is in. As is right. Difference and diversity are to be celebrated. As is just. Revising—re-visioning, really—history is everywhere. As is necessary and overdue. In the arts, ironically, to explore otherness comes with caveats and corrections, as do all explorations of the self, even of one's own culture and heritage. Perhaps this, too, is just. The peril in exploring otherness, at present, is the charge of cultural appropriation—that the artist is exploiting, as opposed to exploring—that can accompany it. The peril, even in exploring one's own culture and heritage, is that meaning seems as though it must precede making these days; that is, the message of an artwork must be its impulse, its process, and must be readily apparent in its reception. The themes that viewers—as well as hearers and readers—should feel and take away fall today on a scale somewhere between affirmation and irony. The resilience of the human spirit, belief in one's self, and new juxtapositions of elements from the past that shed light on their influence on the present are perhaps our era's most frequently articulated messages and methods—in art, as well as in art criticism.

Art is always made "in terms of" something or someone—I include the self as a someone—or a group of someones. Art is always with or against—or with *and* against. Artists today, however, sometimes seem to limit themselves to stories from their own experience and avoid stories they want to tell that fall outside that experience. This is true across gender, race, and ethnicity. I would argue that these limitations—silos is a word you hear to describe it—act as force multipliers in the discourses of colonialism, white male supremacy, and Eurocentrism that dominate art in practice and theory and have done so for centuries. These discourses have been systemic and implicit—though you don't have to look far to find explicit examples of racism and sexism in art—and represent systems of thought that are badly in need of revision and rejection. Yet as long as artists think and create in terms of existing structures of power, those structures will persist and continue to dominate.

Isn't it long past time that the "canon" that has grown around assumptions of cultural superiority reacquires its lost "n," becoming a "cannon" of assumptions that artists spike and blow to atoms? Isn't it long past time to stop making art in terms of power and begin to create as if power doesn't exist? Just to see what might come of it? Just to see if it's at all possible? Finally, isn't it time to find the edges of society and culture again, venture beyond them, and set up camp in the margins? I am on the lookout for a vacant lot or abandoned brewery, or some piece of scrubland overgrown with wildflowers—that people deem weeds—sprouting up between broken bits of cinder block and rebar. I am looking for art and artists in these overlooked and undervalued places, art that has not yet acquired a www., Twitter (X) handle, or TikTok dance, where the artists 'sexy anonymity, or a cabal of hedge-fund and petrogarch investors, or involvement in cryptocurrency, NFTs (already dead and buried it seems, praise da Vinci), and A.I. (a useful tool or short-lived sideshow, with luck), is not all that makes it interesting.

Given all of this—and I freely admit to contradictory impulses in what I have just written—why Clark Hulings? As Susan Hallsten McGarry wrote in her 2007 catalogue essay, "Hulings confessed to loving the potential for romance and dignity waiting to be discovered in the colors, shapes, and textures of a junkyard of rusting cars." (6)

Once Clark Hulings became an easel painter, however, he only ever painted people different from him in race, ethnicity, gender, country, and culture. The world he painted was as foreign and alien to his upbringing and social status as Mars, yet he would not turn his eye and brush away from it. We know this, and can say this, because he was a realist in a recent era, from the 1960's until his death in 2011, an era when realism—his more classical brand, anyway, as opposed to Pop—went against the grain and flow of his contemporaries in the visual arts. He dedicated his art to inclusion in humanistic ways, ways we are only just beginning to come to terms with; his work simultaneously celebrates and negates what we call "otherness."

Clark Hulings's rebellion rebelled against rebellion.

What are we to make of a painter who never, throughout his long, mature career, painted privilege? Whose paintings, despite their recognizable shapes and surfaces, defy easy interpretation? I suppose the easiest answer would be to assume condescension, fling "cultural appropriation" at his canvases, call him antique because of his adherence to realism in an age of abstraction, and move on to some other gallery in the museum of American art that makes its home in minds like ours that have room, time, and an inclination for such things.

[FIG Intro-3] *Early Morning Light, Granada* (Spain), 1975. Oil, 32 x 48 inches.

[FIG Intro-4] Hulings working in L'Aquila, Italy, 2005. Photograph by Patrick Diamond.

You can do that. But to do so, I believe, would be to miss something rather important. Someone who sought out and chose "otherness" as his subject and then chose to depict it in a manner that ran counter to the prevailing aesthetic winds of his time, someone who actually made a life and career out of his sheer contrariness—his own brand of "otherness"—is someone whose art might just be worth a second look, even a linger.

It's possible that the message of Clark Hulings runs counter to everything, even messages. Looking at Hulings in isolation, one might infer that the artist's function is to explore everything outside the self, to leave interpretation open, and, in doing so, to call attention to interpretation as provisional and messages as suspect. As well, the artist's job is to find the medium, approach, style, that works, even if that means sailing against the wind. True, classical realism is back in vogue in ateliers around the world, but there isn't anything quite like a Clark Hulings painting. With Hulings, realism becomes just another -ism, another aesthetic choice, one among many possibilities; the war between realism and abstraction comes to seem artificial, phony, cooked up, and meaningless. At the same time, boundaries between other and self—in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, country, and culture—begin to tremble without any pretense that they don't exist or that they will fall away in some utopian fashion.

Otherness Obliges

In this book, I propose that we linger long enough for forms to arise out of people, places, and things instead of the other way round, as art history teaches us; that we linger long enough to reject first impressions; that we let the artist's enigmatic assemblages shape their own questions. Paint, light, and time itself dance across Hulings's paintings, yet the more I try to penetrate their surfaces, the more questions arise, hover, and linger. There's that word again. Linger.

The "Golden Age of Illustration" that Clark Hulings entered into was a white male bastion. In that world, Hulings painted the other as other—paperback covers of exoticism, eroticism, histrionics, and heavily novelized history, as well as the odd work of classic literature, Faulkner, for example. By and large, his portraits are of family and of people like him, of his color and class. These ingenious illustrations and skilled portraits are like musical notes and passages awaiting a big musical theme, a theme that arose out of his venturing away from the safe harbors of home and his heeding of the easel's call.

Traveling off the beaten paths and struggling with languages and cultures didn't dissuade Clark Hulings from devoting his career—and, by extension, his life—to "otherness." Not at all religious himself, he often painted churches or included them as parts of his compositions. Religious life was central to the people he painted; churches were gathering places and the sites of markets, therefore they had a place in his art. Hulings came from an industrial background and trained in physics but was drawn to—and drew and painted—pre-industrial life, though never with nostalgia, never as anthropology, never as travel or postcard art, never with condescension, and never within the confines of the picturesque. He was a student of forms and norms: societal and scientific; historical and pictorial.

"Otherness" as the picturesque articulates and highlights difference. You are meant to gaze at those who people picturesque artworks with condescension—they are simple, quaint, unrefined, untainted by "high" culture. You are to admire these qualities and the unspoiled landscapes these people inhabit from afar. You are to envy them their simplicity. Ultimately, you are to repudiate them for the qualities that drew you to them in the first place.

Where the picturesque casts the other as other—alien, ergo less than—for Hulings, otherness has the opposite intent and effect, insisting that we look, see, engage our senses, rational minds, and imaginations to try to understand and make a place in our realities for everyone. Occasionally, you find a Hulings that strikes you first of all with its classical beauty, yet even in these works, he never fails to include some hint of wear and tear, of the dogged persistence of life and time: weeds in the cracked cobblestones, layers of posters torn away from walls, wheel ruts far older than the wheels that traverse them. It's worth noting—and noticing—that you often find these elements in the more abstract areas of his work.

Hulings's background in physics emerges as an early key to his art. The idea that reality is relational rather than concrete, that the uncountable quanta of energy that create reality also restlessly and relentlessly reshape it finds an analog in Clark Hulings's attraction to complex, sometimes crumbling places at the margins of human society, places that exhibit qualities of the mosaic and the web, two concepts that underlie all of quantum theory as well as natural and human history.

[FIG Intro-5] *La Vucciria Market, Palermo* (Italy), 2006. Oil, 28 x 46 inches.

Imagine the cobblestones and tiles, the rocks and rivulets, the farmers and merchants in his works as nodes in an ever-shifting, relational web, and you may also see what I see. Physicist Carlo Rovelli describes reality as "a web of interactions," writing: "Everything is what it is only with respect to something else." (Rovelli, *Helgoland*, p. 199) Hulings's own studies of physics in college and his lifelong interest in the subject—as a philosophical metaphysics rather than as a hard science—permeate his art and are formative to any understanding of it.

It is precisely because the places and people he paints are simultaneously historical and marginal that we see the precarious socio-economic web that sustains them and also see their role in our own sustenance. Yet, in a manner similar to Rembrandt, Goya, Sargent, and even artists you might not consider—perhaps someone like Ivan Albright—Hulings challenges the viewer to recognize the beauty in reality, no matter what shape—harmonious, ordinary, or even repulsive—that reality takes. As Hulings says, speaking of his 1968 oil *Casa Suecia*, "beauty can be found even in a garbage cart and an old crone picking at her ultimate tooth." (Hulings. 1986. *A Gallery of Paintings*, opp. Plate 17.)

[FIG Intro-6] *Casa Suecia* (Spain), 1968. Oil, 20 x 24 inches.

Democritus, who first saw the universe as atomic in 4th and 5th century BCE Greece, made the connection between the alphabet and the idea of atoms, observing that though alphabets themselves were limited in number, their combinations created the limitlessness of the universe. All of Democritus's works are lost, known to us only secondhand. Perhaps the greatest loss to humanity in the history of humanity, the following thought, one he is said to have said, offers us a glimmer of what we have missed: "Sweetness is opinion, bitterness is opinion; heat, cold, and color are opinion: in reality, only atoms and vacuum." Ergo, by extension: paint is an opinion, painting is an opinion, and a painter is an opinion. Q.E.D.

Democritus is also called—and often depicted as—the "Laughing Philosopher," or the "Mocker," because he wrested wry humor out of the absurdity of life, especially the destructiveness of human greed and egotistical striving. And while there is some humor in Clark Hulings's paintings, it's when you step back that you apprehend a deeper irony. Stepping away from his work, I often hear his paintings, looking out at us, uttering the last line of just about every Sicilian fairy tale—a variation on the theme: "They lived happily ever after, but we still can't pay the rent."

At times, I wonder whether Hulings felt alienated—"othered"— from his own work, saying to himself not just "Who is that?" in the paintings, but "Who painted that?" and "Why?" This feeling is heightened when I look, and look again, and look again at a painting like *Málaga Barrio* as it shimmers in a plenitude of impressions and interpretations. But instead of equating relativity with moral relativism, as many have and do, Hulings, like Democritus, took the provisionality of reality as a challenge to appreciate and convey the myriad and beautiful shimmering gatherings of quanta while they last—a challenge best summed up by British novelist E. M. Forster, who wrote in his 1910 novel *Howard's End*, "Only connect," (p. 197) by which he meant that otherness obliges not only our understanding but our courage.

"Otherness" obliges.

What do you see?

[FIG Intro-7] *Two School Girls, Tremestieri*, (Italy) 1961. Watercolor, 14 x 22 inches.

[FIG Intro-8] *Two School Girls, Tremestieri*, (Italy) 1965. Oil, 20 x 24 inches.