

EDWARD RICE: RECENT MONOTYPES



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DAVID HOUSTON

For the past twenty-five years, painter Edward Rice has been depicting the vernacular architecture found along the border of Central Georgia and South Carolina. During the 1980s, he became well known for his meticulously rendered paintings of many of Augusta's older structures. Rice's subtle illumination of his subjects made of them something that is both lyrical and literary. Painted on-site, these radiant works resulted from a slow, precise, and complex process through which a sense of place, a season, and a time of day were captured in the accretion of telling detail. Viewed retrospectively, it seems obvious that the element of time is critical to the success of these works from both the artist's and the viewer's separate perspectives. Rice's own understanding of time places his perceptions and the physicality of the canvas in a phenomenological stasis that resembles meditation.

During the early nineties, Rice undertook a reexamination of his subject matter and openly questioned the methods and results of his hard-earned success as a realist painter. This period of reflection and study culminated in a series of twenty-one paintings of a fig tree that grew behind his studio. Executed in a wide range of styles, from the realistic to the expressionistic, this body of work freed him from the tyranny of predictability. A conscious revolt against the self-imposed tedium of the working method that he had developed for his architectural paintings, this transitional work consolidated a decade of experience into a quicker, more generalized approach to familiar themes.

By the mid-nineties, Rice had reaffirmed the importance of architectural subjects to his work, but the paintings of this period were executed with less rigorous attention to detail and had lost some of the romantic dreaminess of his earlier work. The architectural themes were still specific, but by this time they had become archetypal forms exploring the boundary between perception and representation. By the late nineties, Rice was painting his most confident work ever. Working primarily with architectural subjects and landscapes, his new work was more spontaneous and luminous than ever, and it successfully

struck a balance between the accumulation of small details and an overall formal generalization.

Edward Rice's exploration of the monotype process, begun in 2002, is not unlike his earlier, experimental paintings of his fig tree. Quicker, looser, and more instinctive in approach than his oil paintings, these prints offer both a brief overview and a summation of developments in his work of the last decade. A monotype is a bit like a jazz improvisation—direct, irreversible, and the product of a lifetime's experience captured in a single moment. The monotypes included in this exhibition offer a rare opportunity to experience a moment in an artist's career when the accomplishments of the past open, unobstructed, to the possibilities of the future.

Although these works represent a period of transition and growth for the artist, they should be understood as complete and mature works in their own right. Needing little text or interpretation, they are inspired by the artist's obvious pleasure in transcribing experience into images, the experience of which is intended to be as memorable and enjoyable to others as the creation of them was to him.

David Houston is the Chief Curator of the Ogden Museum of Southern Art, University of New Orleans, Louisiana. From 1991 until 2000, he was the director of the Rudolph E. Lee Gallery, College of Art, Architecture and Humanities, Clemson University, Clemson, South Carolina, and, from 1987 until 1991, he was the Visual Arts Coordinator for the South Carolina Arts Commission, Columbia, South Carolina.