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Outcome Report: “Yūgen” Artist Book

My initial proposal for the Miller Arts Scholars Award was a research project into the Japanese aesthetic property known as “yūgen,” particularly in the context of printmaking, my chosen area of study. “Yūgen” is a difficult term to define, but has connotations similar to mystery or majesty. At the same time, the word literally means “dim,” “deep,” or “dark” like a cave or a lightless forest. Both definitions would come to guide my aesthetic.

The initial proposal was divided into three phases. In the summer of 2014, I would dedicate time to life drawing in the wilderness, seeking out yūgen-spaces and rendering them in charcoal and Sumi ink painting. In the proceeding fall, I would use these reference materials to create a series of etchings, lithographs, and relief prints that tried to hone in on the yūgen aesthetic. In the spring, I would combine these various prints into a single, bound artist’s book. This project was overseen by Professor Dean Dass of the Studio Art Department, who has long been a valuable critic and mentor of mine both in printmaking and life at large.

Naturally, these plans did not survive contact with reality. Drawing and painting trees and rocks and caves served primarily to teach me that I was not particularly interested in those things. Updating yūgen for use in contemporary American art required more than simply rehashing the same themes and techniques in a new context. While I did vastly improve my technical skill in ink painting, it was not until I returned in the fall that I started to figure out what to do with myself.

Using the formal lessons I derived from Japanese ink painting, I began work on a series of prints applying yūgen aesthetic principles (or my rough approximation) to western cowboy comics – particularly a series known as *Rawhide Kid*. Marvel comics were a big part of my childhood, and I personally believe the mythos surrounding the Old West to be an essential part of the American cultural context, even today. This subject matter provided me exciting, dynamic compositions to dim down and make mysterious.

I experimented with a number of media – woodcuts and etchings in particular - but eventually found myself combining all of the various techniques I was utilizing in a given image. Almost my entire budget went into experimenting with exotic new media I might not otherwise have had access to. The

resulting images became part-collage, part-ink painting, part-print. Eventually I started introducing xerography – editing images on the bed of a photocopier in way that dimmed the images even further. The introduction of incredibly lowbrow photocopy techniques also sparks remarkable contrasts with the extremely highbrow ink painting flourishes found in the work. I think that the resulting content, pictured here, really captures some of the mysterious quality *yūgen* exemplifies. The pages themselves have yet to be bound (in fact the editing and refinement process continues even at the time of writing), but I am extremely proud of this work. It has complexity beyond what I thought I could produce.

All of the above in mind, I would like to take a moment to thank a few people who made this project possible. First, I would like to thank the J. Sanford Miller family and other donors who made the Arts Scholars program possible. Second, I would like to thank Dean Dass, who worked diligently with me throughout the length of this project. We met at least once a week to discuss this project for nearly a year. His criticism, encouragement, and expertise were invaluable to both this projects development and my own development as an artist.

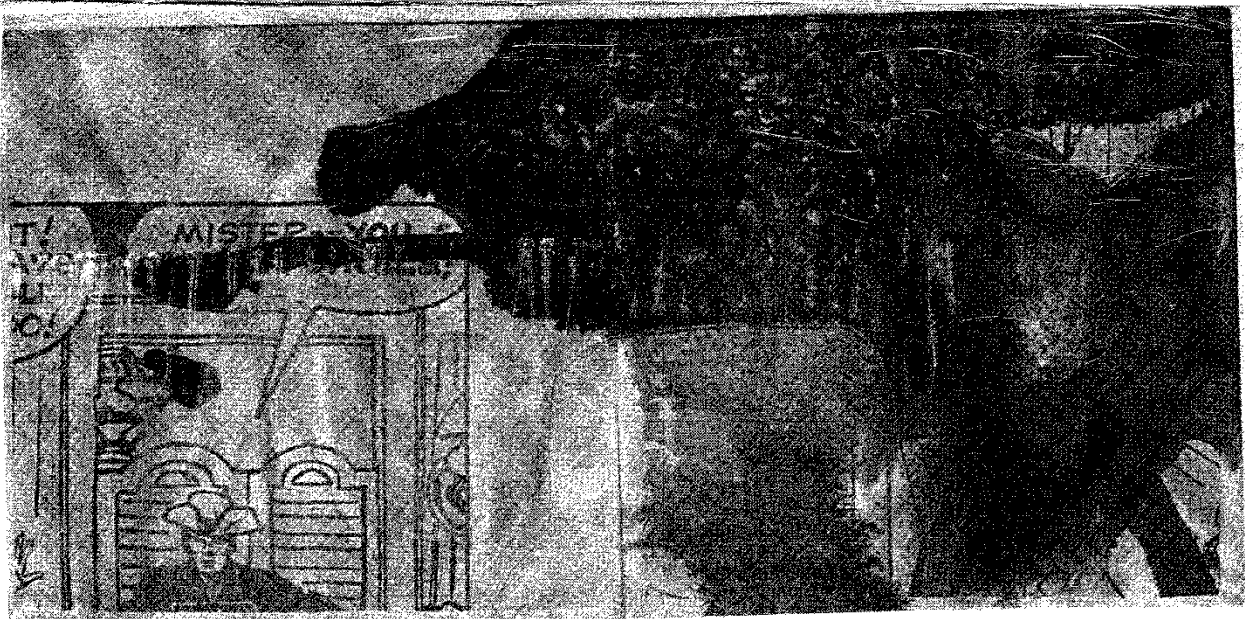
Images



Images in situ in Ruffin Hall



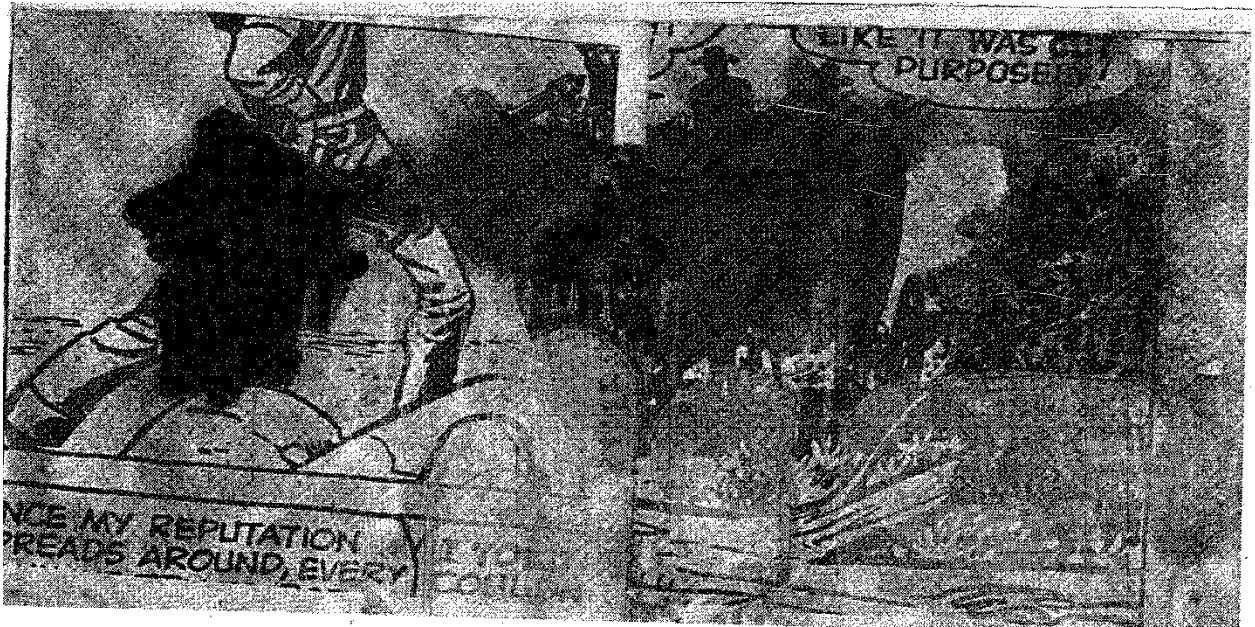
Pioneers for Too Long (Page 1)



Pioneers for Too Long (Page 3)



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