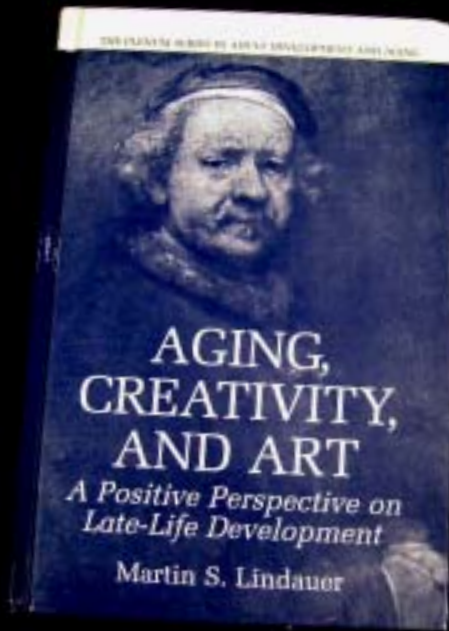


**Thoughts about “Old-Age Style,”
and other thoughts about “Late Style”**

This has been adapted in 2010 from a paper originally
presented at the 2007 American Psychological
Association conference in San Francisco

Thoughts about “Old-Age Style,” and other thoughts about “Late Style”

I am going to try out three versions of what old age art might look like, using for examples the work of two great masters and one far lesser one, and the images they made of procreation and death in youth, maturity and old age.



For the first version, I will use Martin Lindauer's stylistic descriptors of the styles of old-age and youth as they might apply to the work of three artists first in their youth, and then in their old age...

The descriptors of youth style as "skilled... composed, follows rules, pictorially structured," and the descriptors for old-age style as "thick, freely executed; bold, rough, spontaneous,"

But art only matters if it's about something, and so I will try to suggest what the content was that called forth those styles at those times of life.

The “descriptors” for old-age style from Lindauer’s *Aging...*

“Presented with paintings that the subjects had never before seen and for which they had no previous information, among the most frequent descriptors they chose for works by older artists [old-age style?] were ‘intense, economical, thick, freely executed; bold, rough, spontaneous, suggestive, skill and effort not obvious... technique is impatient...’

“The following terms referring to youth were appropriately *not* chosen: ‘refined, stylistic, skilled, finicky... well formed, composed, follows rules, pictorially structured...’ ”

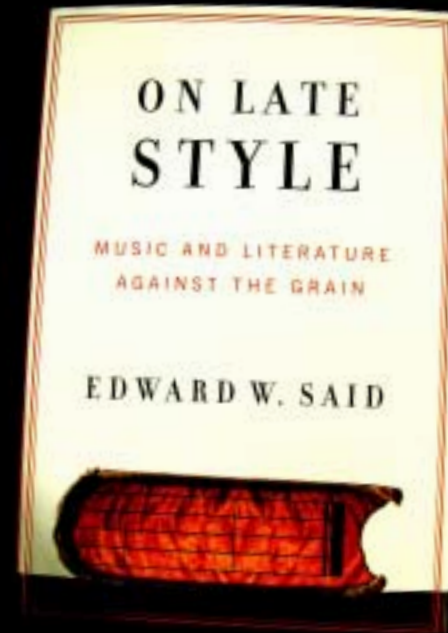
—Lindauer, *P. 195.*

The “aesthetic characteristics”
from Said’s *Late Style*...

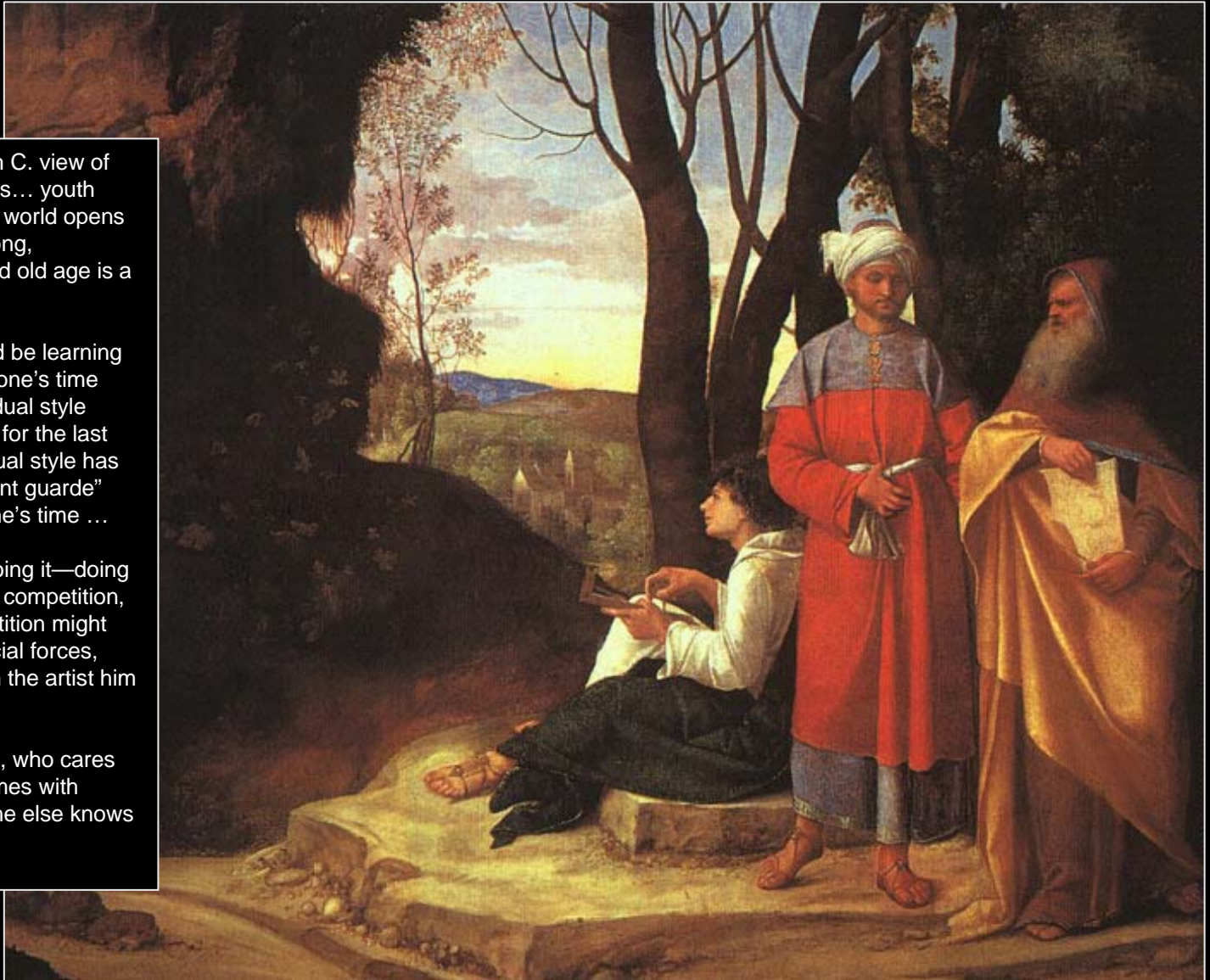
““Are there unique qualities of perception and form that artists acquire as a result of age in the late phase of their careers? We meet the accepted notion of age and wisdom in some last works that reflect a special mode of maturity, a new spirit of reconciliation and serenity. But what of artistic lateness not as harmony and resolution but as intransigence, difficulty, and unresolved contradiction? A late style that involves a sort of deliberately unproductive productiveness going *against*...”

“In the history of art,
late works are the catastrophes”.

—adapted from Edward Said, *On Late Style*, p5



For the second way of looking at the three artists, I will use some of Edward Said’s ideas about what he calls “late style.” And that is certainly different than Lindauer’s “old-age style.” Said says the last works may “reflect a special mode of maturity, a new spirit of reconciliation and serenity.” or, perhaps, “intransigence, difficulty and unresolved contradiction? A late style that involves a sort of deliberately unproductive productiveness that is going *against*... In the history of art, late works are the catastrophes.”



This is Giorgione's early 16th C. view of what to do with our three lives... youth searches and learns and the world opens and expands; maturity is strong, successful and in charge, and old age is a sage with a star chart.

The youth for a painter would be learning the tradition and the style of one's time and then finding one's individual style within that period style—and for the last hundred years, one's individual style has been one of trying to be “avant garde” beyond the period style of one's time ...

Maturity would be, simply, doing it—doing it full blast, beating down the competition, in whatever form that competition might take—other artists, other social forces, other psychic contents within the artist him or herself...

And old age—all games won, who cares what people think... play games with everything you know... no one else knows anything anyway.

Giorgione: *The Three Philosophers*, sometime before 1510

Youth, maturity, old age—
what do artists do with the three phases of their adult lives?

**To see the culmination of youth,
look at the “diploma picture” ...**

1. Titian, 1485-1576

2. Kathe Kollwitz, 1867-1945

3. Fred Martin, 1927—



Titian: *Sacred and Profane Love*. 1515
Titian is 30.

Titian is 30, and it's the early period of learning the tradition and finding one's style...

For Lindauer... The descriptors for style in youth are "refined, stylistic, skilled, finicky... well formed, composed, follows rules, pictorially structured..."

Well, I'm not going to take time to analyze the pictorial structure and rules of composition this painting illustrates, but you can see for yourself that if Lindauer's terms for youthful style are correct, this painting has it—

But, for the artist and the owner, this was a marriage painting to teach a young man how to grow up...

Profane Love is on the left— "Profane," that is of this world where a woman richly clothed holds the fruitful vase as the knight enters the castle and the rabbits (Venus' sacred animal) breed.

Sacred Love is on the right— Sacred, that is the radiance of the light and the flame held into the heavens...while beyond the hunters chase the hare, the shepherd tends the sheep, and the world spreads into infinity.

The Sacred and the Profane—the two opposites we each must live each day if we would keep our lives whole—sit on an old Roman sarcophagus. The front shows the taming of the stallion and of the satyr which every young man must achieve to reach maturity. Eros stirs the water (by Titian's time, the old sarcophagi had either been lost or become water troughs for livestock) and the fresh waters of life stirred by infant eros pour from a golden spout as flowers bloom.

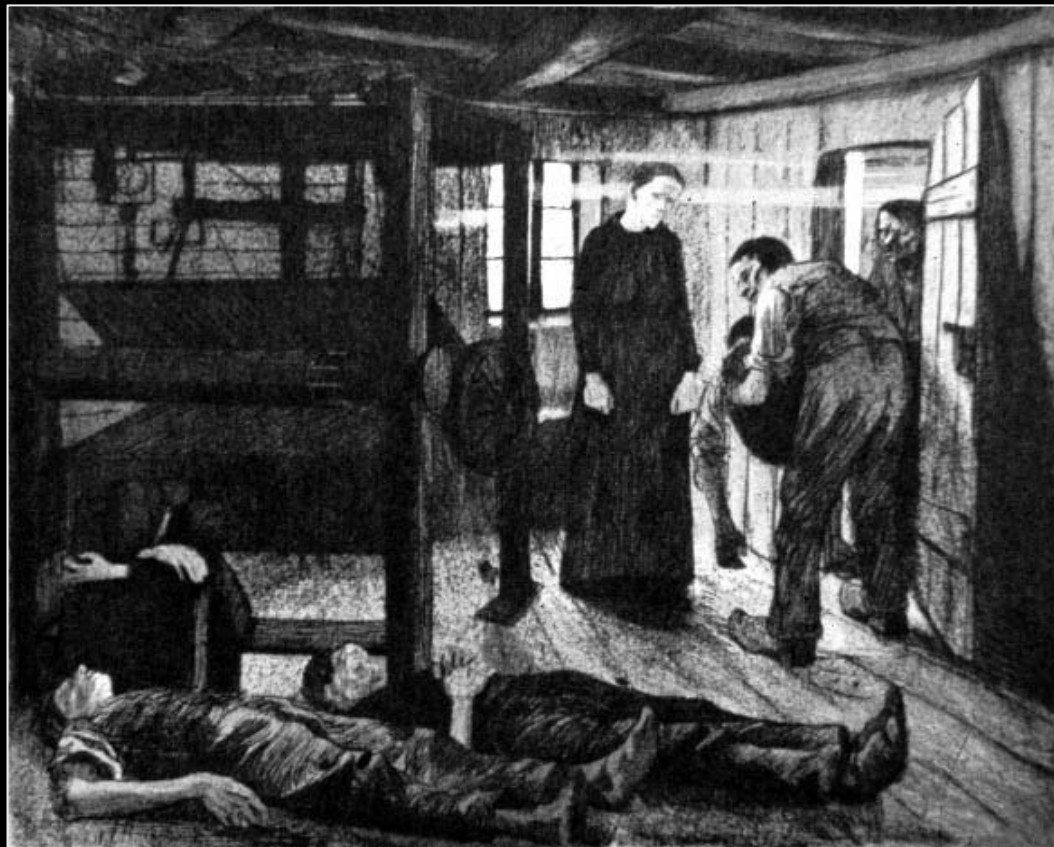
Kollwitz is 25 years old, and it's been more than 300 years since Titian died. The Church and Emperor, his chief patrons (who told him what to paint) had gone down with the end of the 18th C. Kollwitz was brought up in the 19th C. world of her grandfather and father who organized for social justice against the rising tide of the most inhumanly exploitive forms of industrial capitalism.

Kollwitz wrote in her diary, "From my childhood on my father had expressly wished me to be trained for a career as an artist, and he was sure that there would be no great obstacles to my becoming one... But when in my 17th year I became engaged to Karl Kollwitz (who was then studying medicine)... he was very skeptical about my intention to follow two careers, that of artist and of housewife... Shortly before our marriage in 1891, my father said to me, 'You have made your choice now. You will scarcely be able to do both things. So be wholly what you have chosen to be.' "

"I saw the first performance of Hauptman's *The Weavers* in 1892. I was very moved and decided to make a series of prints drawn from images in the play. [The play was about the revolt of the Silesian hand weavers against the capitalists' new machine weaving mills. The hand weavers lost.]... It was arranged for *The Weavers* to be exhibited in the major show and it was given the small gold medal. The Kaiser vetoed the recommendation, but from then on, I was counted among the foremost artists of the country.

"This triumph came to me as a surprise, but by then I was beyond the temptations of success."

For the artist, it was her first significant achievement. And it said her social conscience and her series of prints sent that message to the world. And they also said Death.



Käthe Kollwitz: *The Weavers VI, The End*. 1892
Kollwitz is 25.

Vincent Van Gogh said somewhere, "Like every work of art, a self portrait." I don't have an early self portrait to show my face; this will have to do—it shows my soul. We never used those words then, and I hadn't read Van Gogh's remark.

I was 21 years old and all I knew was [and I had learned it by accident] that if I mucked around in the paint for a while or maybe a long while, an uprush would come with an image that meant—well, it depended. That first time—the accident a year before this painting—it was a man with enormous genitals battling a giant snake (and, yes, looking back now and I certainly knew it then, that was my problem).

This time in 1948, it was male and female that came up in the muck (he's left and she's right). A title came in my head along with the image—*The Great Gate* (I was probably thinking of *The Great Gate at Kiev* in Moussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*). And that gate I did not know what it was, was the woman I would soon find that fall and then marry two years later.

And as for Lindauer's descriptions of style—due to "Modern Art," even when we were kids in 1948, we used our medium more as Lindauer's old-age style, because "rough, bold, etc." had become the characteristic rules of the day as we learned them from our teachers and the Museum of Modern Art.



Fred Martin: *The Great Gate*, 1948
I am 21.

**We've now looked at three artists
at the moment of graduation
when they had learned their lessons
and found their vision.**

**Now, what they did with their maturity,
each in their way to conquer the world.**

Titian is 77, and as Vasari wrote, "There was almost no famous lord, nor prince, nor great woman, whom he did not paint." And the Emperor himself had called Titian the "Prince of Painters."

As for Lindauer's descriptors for style, I think the painting exemplifies neither youth's style of "...refined, stylistic, skilled, finicky," nor the old-age style of "thick... rough, spontaneous, suggestive... technique is impatient..."

So, this must be Titian's middle period, the time artists are doing it full blast, knocking down the competition... even other artists called the Titian of these years "a sun among small stars."

And as for Said's "Late Style," well, Titian still has 23 years to live.



Titian: *Self Portrait*, 1562
He is 77.

Take a look at maturity almost 400 years later for Kathe Kollwitz in Germany.

Kollwitz is in her late 30's.

"I became acquainted with the difficulties and tragedies underlying proletarian life, when I met the women who came to my husband's clinic for help and so, incidentally, came to me. I was gripped by the full force of the proletarian condition...

"After a time, I began to make a weekly lithograph describing their lives for the satirical periodical *Simplicissimus*."

Kollwitz made at least a hundred, and her protest against the horror, cruelty and hopelessness of the proletarian condition was seen each week by hundreds of thousands of people.



Kathe Kollwitz: *Self Portrait*, 1904
She is 37.

Look at my own maturity and achievement in early 1960's-80's San Francisco.

I had become Director of the College of The San Francisco Art Institute in 1965, increased the enrollment from about 500 in 1965 to a little over a thousand by 1970, had shepherded our new building into existence in 1969, had my "mid-career" retrospective at SFMOMA in 1973, and resigned my position at SFAI in 1975. After that, I had taught at UC Berkeley, UC Davis, San Jose State University, Diablo Valley College, the California College of Arts and Crafts and John F. Kennedy University in Orinda, CA. I had written for ArtForum and Art International, and was writing a bi-weekly column for Art Week.

In 1982 the opportunity came to make a very large drypoint as a self portrait. I made this of myself as a herm—a Greek fertility emblem to mark the corners of a fields. The head broken off, a broken wing (herms never had wings), the erect phallus wound with ribbon (the herm always had an erection as the sign of fertility), the solar plexus the sun, a winged heart and a vagina just visible...



Fred Martin: *Self Portrait, as Herm*, 1982
Dry point, 60 x 40 inches.
I am 55.

**We have seen what each of our three artists
did with their maturity,
each in their way to conquer the world.
But now it's old age...**

We've looked at three artists at the moment of graduation when they had learned their lessons, found their vision and set out to conquer the world.

And we have seen at least a little of what they did with their maturity each in their way to conquer their world. But now it's old age... and to each of us in whatever form of triumph we may have, may come also that other—the down—turn of fortunes' wheel...



From a Marseilles Tarot deck.

X. The Wheel of Fortune, Contemporary copy of an 18th C. original.

From being the big blue monkey with a sword and a cape and the crown that we were, to being now just another rat on the way down that we are.

And it's that trip down and what we do with it that is for each of us the story of our old age.



Titian: *Self Portrait*. 1576

He is 90.

Here is Titian's self portrait in very old age, and this is what people were saying about him...



The Flagellation, (1570)

Titian is 84.

The Spanish Ambassador and Philip II's chief art collector in Venice wrote "There is no doubt that Titian's old age means that he can now produce nothing but smudges." And one of Titian's studio assistants, Palma il Giovane, reported that Titian was by then "so old and blind that he painted more with his fingers than with the brush."



The Flagellation, detail. (1570)

What makes the disaster? For Titian it would seem the rotting away of the body that we each will have—unless something else kills us first.

Was Titian senile? Should he have quit? Old age “rage against the dying of the light” does not befit the Prince of Painters.

But as for the stylistic descriptors of Martin Lindauer’s Old-Age Style... “intense... thick... bold... technique is impatient...”

And for Edward Said’s Late Style, “...of lateness as intransigence, difficulty, and unresolved contradiction?... In the history of art, late works are the catastrophes.”

Well, that’s what both the Spanish Ambassador and the studio assistant said, and they should have known.

But for life periods when all games have been won, why care what people think—play games with everything you know... no one else knows anything anyway.



Kathe Kollwitz: *Self Portrait*, 1933.
She is 66.

Look at old age for Kathe Kollwitz. She is 66, but the disaster was when she was 47 and the guns of August 1914 came and her first son—Peter—was dead by the end of October.

She wrote in her notes, "I do not want to die ... until I have faithfully made the most of my talent and cultivated the seeds that were placed in me until the last small twig has grown. This does not contradict the fact that I would have died—smilingly—for Peter... how gladly, how gladly.

"Peter was the seed for the planting which should not have been ground. He was at the sowing. I am the bearer and cultivator of a grain of seed corn."

And as for the "descriptors" for old-age style from Lindauer's *Aging*... "intense, economical, thick, freely executed; bold, rough, spontaneous, suggestive, skill and effort not obvious... technique is impatient..."

Just look at that arm. I guess it's old-age style. Next year she begins *The Death Series* of lithographs in what might be called Said's "Late Style." And, Hitler came to power the year she made this print.

"I thought that now that I am really old I might be able to handle this theme [of death] in a way to plumb the depths of... but that is not the case... At the very point when death becomes visible behind everything, it disrupts the imaginative process...

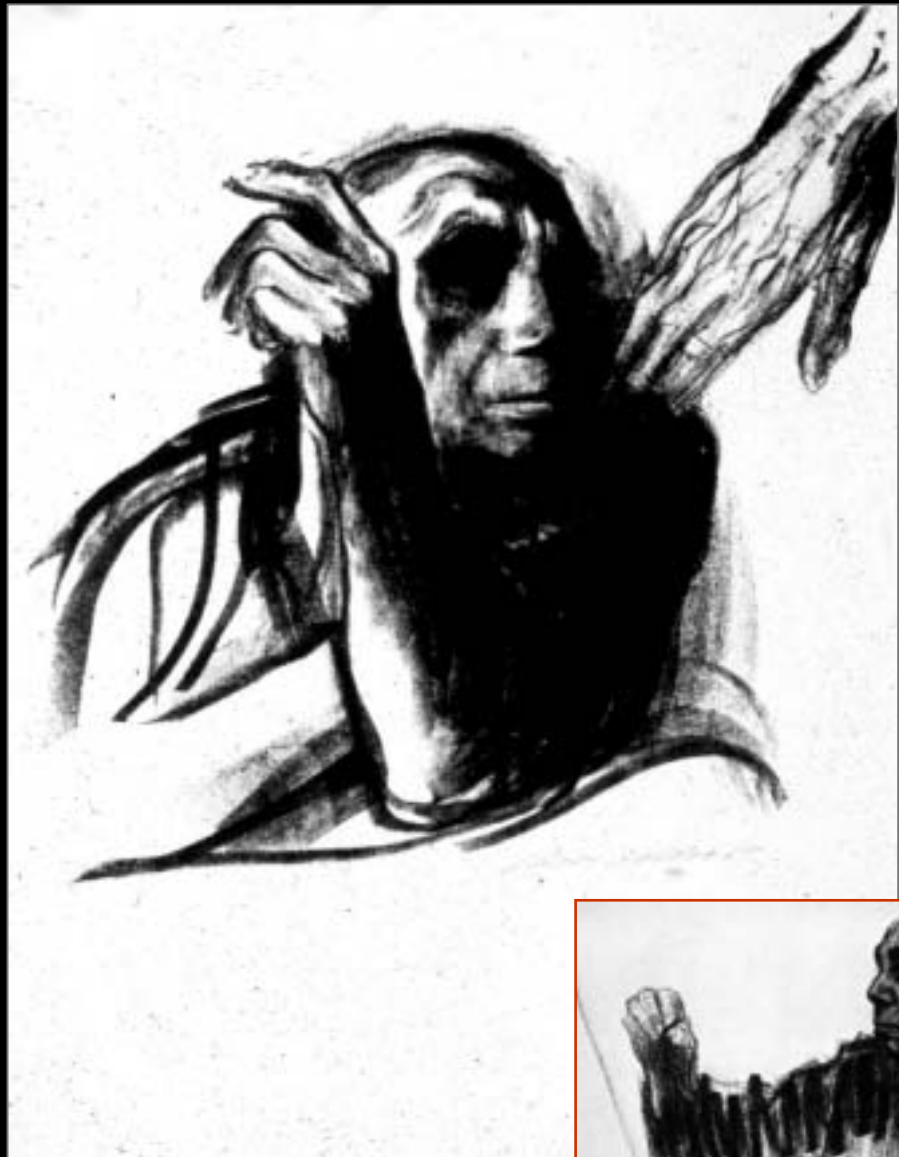
"I start off indecisively, soon tire, need frequent pauses and must turn for counsel to my own works from the past.

"One can allow oneself emotional outpourings only after strenuous intellectual labors."

By the way, we will see the image in this print—a woman with children in her skirts—again in her last print. Then too in her very last work she must "...return for counsel to my own works from the past."



Death I, Woman Giving Herself Up to Death, 1934-5



Death VIII, Death Calls, 1934-5



Yes, Death calls, but Kathe Kollwitz still has work to do...

It's been almost ten years now since the Death Series; World War II is raging on all fronts and Kollwitz is 75.

"I have finished my lithograph 'Seed for the planting must not be ground.' This time the seeds for the planting—16 year-old boys—are all around the mother, looking out from under her coat and wanting to break loose. But the old mother who was holding them together says, no! You stay here! For the time being you may play rough-and-tumble with one another. But when you re grown-up you must get ready for life not for war again."

Is this Lindauer's old age style of "intense, economical... freely executed, bold... suggestive, skill and effort not obvious... technique is impatient..."?

What about Said's Late Style? Is this "... a new spirit of reconciliation and serenity"? Or is it "...intransigence, difficulty, contradiction..."?

Remember that Said said that "In the history of art, late works are the catastrophes." A museum print curator once told me all Kollwitz' prints were catastrophes because they were not art but propaganda. However, this print and all of Kollwitz' work is not a catastrophe except that it came too late to stop all the millennia of killings before it, and has not been able to stop all the grinding waste of human seed in the seventy decades after.



Seed for the Planting, 1942
She is 75.



*Look at old age for Fred Martin
(1927—).*

I had made the very large drypoint of myself as a herm in the spring of 1983. Give it another twenty seven years, and one morning in May, the ear of good corn and the pomegranates from a little forty year old watercolor came back...

I had begun to paint that day by writing with a big bamboo pen on the surface of the paper, "The past is only roots long buried; the future is only a harvest yet to come. In art and life, be here always now."

When I looked at the writing, though, I thought it was so dumb, I painted over it with not only the roots long buried—the ear of ripe corn for man and the pomegranate for woman—but also the harvest yet to come: the unquenchable red of life, the red hot disk of "be here now."



Top: #9, May 2007. I was 79.

Left: Untitled, 1965. I was 37 years old.



#6, July 2007.
I am 80 years old.



This was my most recent painting at the time of delivering this paper in 2007. It's the male and female of that so long ago and so often repeated "Great Gate." She's on the left, he's on the right. And she's the vagina with the river of life, and he's the phallus with deep in it the ineradicable red cross of life. As I remember the last line of Goethe's Faust, "The eternal feminine leads us on." That's why he's got the ineradicable red cross carved deep in him, hungry for the quenching in her eternal river.

And when I had finished the two paintings that day in July 2007 and laid them side by side to dry on the studio table, there at the bottom between them was a smear on the table from some other paintings some other time. I saw that the smear showed the heart, the joining symbol... the great gate I had begun to seek sixty years before.

This is my most recent painting and notes about it at this 2010 time of revising this 2007 paper about old age art.

May 8, 2010, late night in the studio.

OK, the studio is for the dark of the soul—and **#1 May** is to be a self portrait, the me of 2010 as I look at the me of 1957. I see that the only way forward with my art now—I have been thinking of so many ways these last two weeks—is to stop thinking but just go “haptic” as the only way to get to anything. And so that is what I will do.

May 9, 2010, afternoon in the studio.

I have come back to the studio to look at the results of last night...

When I came in here and looked at it, I felt the urge to open my shirt and pants so the mirror—that’s the painting—could see me and I could become what it shows... and if more work were to be done, to do it here now with the hungry fact of my flesh in front of it.

Well, I kept my clothes on as I put the painting up on the wall, and the painting showed it wanted the vagina sign with cum stroke at the foundation. And I heard in my head the painting shows “Blood makes cum in the house of the life of the body.”

And I put the vagina sign in the foundation and the painting became the womb with egg and sperm and embryo and all and everything. I’ve got to stop fussing my work so much. Let the whole take care of the inadequacy of the parts.

May 9, late night in the studio.

I came back to the studio. The painting is finished. I saw a single light glowing above the altar in a cathedral and heard, “It was what it was, and is what it is—my path to eternity.”



*#1, May 2010. I will be 83 in a month.
Acrylic on paper, 44 x 30 inches.*

And what does all this add up to?

So, what's it's all add up to?

Science has changed its mind since the 1950's. when then it said we couldn't, and now it says we can.

Maybe our work will be in Lindauer's "Old-Age Style"—'intense, economical, thick, freely executed; bold, rough, spontaneous, suggestive, skill and effort not obvious... technique is impatient...' (And we won't talk about bad eyes and shaky hands as maybe the reasons we do it that way—my hand shakes sometimes when I paint, and I was having a cataract operation the day after I gave this paper at APA in 2007.)

Maybe our work will be in Said's "Late Style"—"...age and wisdom... a special mode of maturity, a new spirit of reconciliation and serenity... or maybe it will be "intransigence, difficulty, and unresolved contradiction." Well, as Said remarked, it will be surely for some of us that in the history of art, our old age stuff will be a catastrophe—and that will be the art historians' problem, not ours.

You may remember the lines...

"Lives of great men all remind us, we too can make our lives sublime;
and departing, leave behind us footprints in the sands of time."

We've had sandy footprints from two great artists and one minor dauber here this morning. And what did they say?

**Quit hanging out with the kids,
act your age and make something
that matters.**

END