

CAMBLIN RETROSPECTIVE

1956 - 1993



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A CRITICAL SELECTION OF THE ARTIST'S WORK FROM 1956 - 1993
WITH DRAWINGS, BIOGRAPHIES, AND DEEP DIVE ANALYSIS

CAMBLIN
RETROSPECTIVE
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CAMBLIN RETROSPECTIVE 1956 - 1993

Foreword by Louis Casey

To step into the world of Bob Camblin is to embark on a journey through landscapes both familiar and profoundly strange, a passage into a "terra incognita of speculative experience" where the veil between the seen and the unseen is perpetually thin. This retrospective, spanning nearly four decades of relentless artistic inquiry from 1956 to 1993, offers an invaluable opportunity to trace the evolution of a singular American artist whose work consistently challenges, provokes, and ultimately enriches our understanding of art's capacity to explore the human condition. Camblin is not an artist who offers easy answers; rather, his oeuvre is an invitation to a sustained and deeply rewarding dialogue.

From his earliest works, Camblin demonstrated a masterful command of draftsmanship and a unique ability to imbue representational forms with a potent surrealism. His "Variation on Turner's The Parting of Hero and Leander" (1964) and "The Return of the Archer" (1964) reveal an artist already deeply engaged with the grand narratives of art history and mythology, yet filtering them through a distinctly personal and psychologically charged lens. These pieces, with their intricate linework and atmospheric intensity, established Camblin's fascination with the "unusual subject matter," creating worlds that are at once recognizable and imbued with an unsettling, dreamlike quality. His figures, often weary or enigmatic, seem to carry the weight of unspoken stories, their environments meticulously constructed stages for dramas both epic and intimately personal.

A recurring and vital thread throughout Camblin's career, as evidenced in pieces like "Cuidado" (1981) and "Just Leave (Yes)" (c. 1979), is the profound and often paradoxical relationship between image and language. Titles are not mere labels but active components that "considerably deepen or modify the perception and understanding of the picture." At times, text itself enters the visual field, as in the disarmingly frank "This is a weird picture" inscribed on "St. Bartholomew" (1965), or the poignant confession in "The Painted Eye Sees." This interplay underscores Camblin's awareness of art as a complex communicative act, one where visual and verbal cues conspire to ensnare the viewer's attention and guide them toward deeper layers of meaning. His exploration of vanitas themes, often featuring skulls and other symbols of mortality, is rarely straightforward, instead opening onto "a universe that only reveals itself very slowly," urging us to look beyond the immediate and confront the profound.

The journey through Camblin's retrospective also reveals an artist unafraid to explore diverse materials and conceptual territories. The "sculptural awareness" noted in his drawings finds echoes in works like "Rubber Reliquary" (c. 1967), where the mundane is elevated to the status of the sacred, challenging our notions of value and veneration. His intellectual curiosity, evidenced by his engagement with thinkers like Michel Foucault while creating "St. Bartholomew," fueled a practice that was as much about philosophical inquiry as it was about aesthetic creation. This particular painting, with its unsettling, patched-eyed saint, pushes against conventional iconography, questioning societal norms and the nature of perception itself—a theme that finds its most direct expression in "The Painted Eye Sees," where the struggle for unbiased awareness is laid bare.

As Camblin's career progressed, his visual language continued to evolve, encompassing periods of abstraction, as seen in "Homage to Hugo," where narrative is deliberately eschewed in favor of "abstract color relations" that retain "poetic suggestions." Yet, even in abstraction, the underlying commitment to structure and emotive power remains. His later works, such as the atmospheric "Paris" (1986) and the mythically charged "Forever Twilight in Tir Na Nog" (1987), demonstrate a continued engagement with place, both real and imagined. "Paris" offers an intimate, textured gaze upon the city, while "Tir Na Nog" transports us to a liminal realm where Irish myth, personal symbolism (the artist's red-roofed studio as a vehicle for otherworldly travel), and the contemporary world collide under a perpetual, luminous twilight. These landscapes are not mere depictions but deeply felt experiences, imbued with a sense of history, memory, and the artist's own journey.

The period covered by this retrospective saw Camblin navigate various artistic communities, from Florida and Salt Lake City to Houston and even Paris, his work consistently garnering attention for its unique vision and technical skill. He was an artist who could move between intimate drawings and larger, more public statements, always retaining a distinctive voice. His willingness to collaborate, as noted in his work with groups like The Holding Firm and Anonymous Artists, speaks to a generous artistic spirit, yet his individual works maintain an undeniable and singular intensity.

What emerges from this comprehensive survey is a portrait of an artist as a perpetual seeker. Whether delving into ancient myths, confronting the nature of perception, or translating the essence of a cityscape, Camblin's art is an act of exploration. He does not shy away from the "weird," the unsettling, or the complex. Instead, he embraces these qualities, using them as tools to pry open new ways of seeing and understanding. His works are, as one text described, "intricate devices for simulation," designed to "trap us, and lead us into a poetic continent...hinting at the secret of their language but never really revealing it."

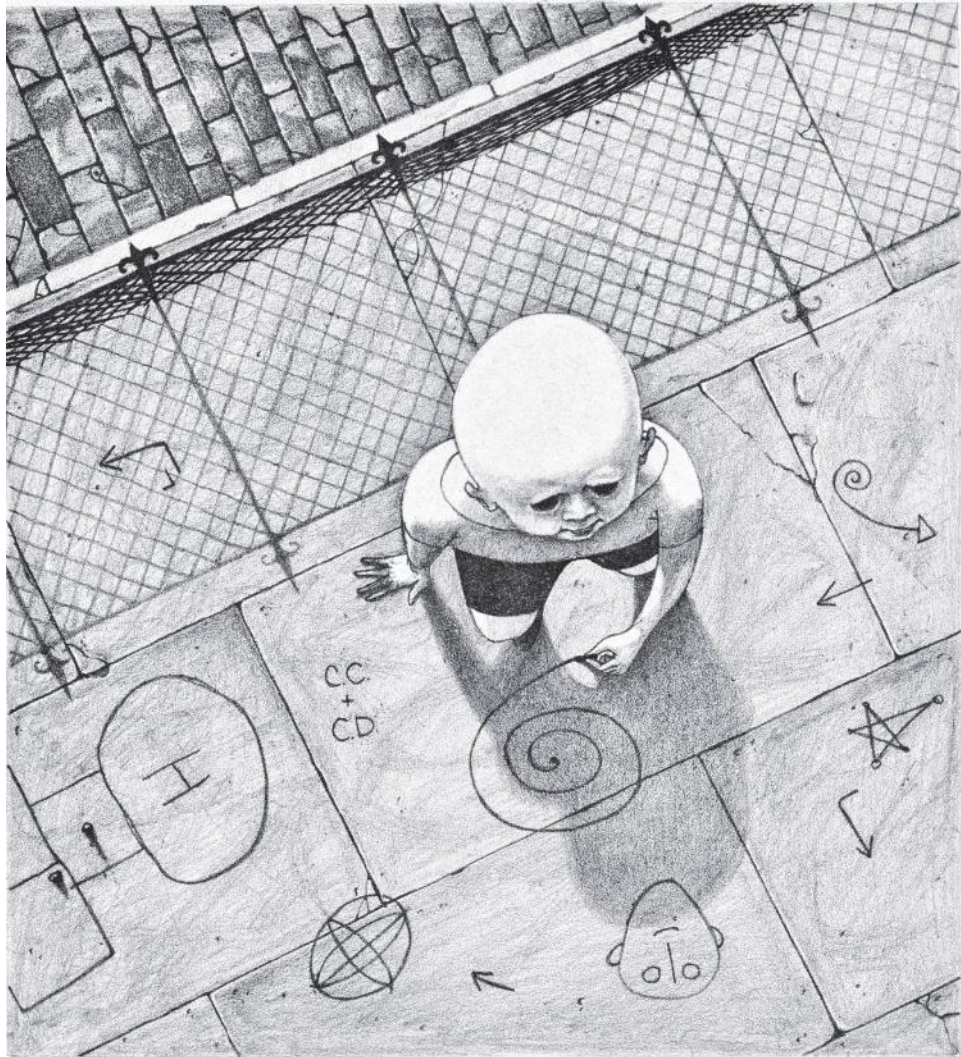
"Camblin Retrospective 1956 - 1993" is more than a collection of artworks; it is an invitation to engage with a rich and multifaceted artistic mind. It is a call to embrace the ambiguity, to question our own perceptions, and to find, in the intricate lines and evocative forms of Bob Camblin's world, reflections of our own deepest inquiries. The journey through these nearly four decades of creation is a testament to the enduring power of art to navigate the complex terrain of human experience, leaving us not with definitive maps, but with a heightened awareness of the vast and fascinating landscapes that lie both within and beyond our everyday sight. necessity of discernment, of feeling the difference between resonance and imitation, and of meeting fear not with aversion but with embodied awareness. The journey takes us into the "Artist's Workshop," reminding us that practice and dedicated effort are often essential, yet emphasizes the crucial counterpoint, whispered by the image itself: "Listen..." True work, it seems, must be infused with receptive awareness.

~ Louis Casey

Look into the atom,
and you get what you need.

Look into magic,
and you get what you need.

Philosophy and art are in both.



Deep Dive: 1956

1956

In May 1956, Bob Camblin, a 27-year-old artist from Kansas City, won an eighteen-month Fulbright Award to study art in Rome, as announced in *The Kansas City Times*. The Fulbright program, established by Senator J. William Fulbright, aimed to foster mutual understanding through international exchange. The award provided Camblin with travel expenses, living stipends, and health benefits. In September 1956, Camblin and his wife Bonnie moved to Italy for a year, spending time in Rome, Venice, and Florence, where Camblin was particularly interested in Hugo van der Goes's *Portinari Altarpiece*. During this year, Camblin also had three exhibitions, including the Sixth Mid-America Annual where he won a Purchase Prize for his *Still Life with Pomegranates, Duco*. He also won a Purchase Prize at the Joslyn Memorial Art Museum in Omaha and had a show at Cotey College in Nevada, Missouri.

The drawing “The Artist” presents a compelling scene viewed from an unusual, elevated perspective, immediately drawing the eye downward to a solitary, childlike figure. Standing on a meticulously tiled surface, the child’s gaze is directed upwards, a focal point that invites contemplation. The artist masterfully uses this high vantage point to create a sense of detachment, allowing the viewer to observe the scene with a bird’s-eye clarity, emphasizing the figure’s smallness within its environment.

Scattered across the tiles surrounding the child is a collection of seemingly spontaneous symbols and geometric shapes. These markings inject a layer of playful yet enigmatic energy into the composition. They feel like the ephemeral expressions of a young mind, hinting at nascent understanding and the inherent human drive to make sense of the world through mark-making. This deliberate juxtaposition of the figure’s stillness and the ground’s active surface creates a subtle tension, hinting at inner contemplation amidst the busyness of thought.

A stark fence acts as a distinct horizontal barrier, separating the child from the implied space beyond. This boundary introduces a narrative of confinement or perhaps a gentle demarcation between the known and the unknown. It could symbolize the limitations imposed by the external world or the self-imposed barriers that shape our perceptions.

The combined perspectives suggest a profound exploration of self-discovery. The artwork poignantly juxtaposes the untainted perspective of youth with the structured knowledge and boundaries that life imposes. The upward gaze signifies aspiration, the fence embodies limitation, and the ground symbols capture the unfolding journey of life – a delicate balance between freedom and constraint. The piece subtly proposes that true wisdom lies in harmonizing external understanding with our innate, intuitive nature.

Evoking the spirit of Surrealism and Symbolism, the drawing masterfully blends the familiar with the uncanny. The unusual perspective, the symbolic language inscribed on the ground, and the overall dreamlike atmosphere echo the works of artists like Paul Klee, with his exploration of childlike wonder, or even the metaphysical landscapes of Giorgio de Chirico. This artistic choice compels viewers to delve beyond the surface, encouraging a contemplation of deeper existential and playful themes that resonate with the fundamental human experience of looking up and seeking meaning in a world filled with both wonder and limitation.



Deep Dive: 1957

1957

In 1957, Camblin actively exhibited his art in numerous group shows across the US, starting with the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. A significant event was his participation in the 10th Fulbright Painters Exhibition at the Whitney Museum in New York, showcasing work inspired by his year in Italy, which he enthusiastically described in the catalogue. That year, Camblin also accepted a teaching position at the Ringling Museum of Art in Florida and was included in other exhibitions like American Art Of Our Time and the Collectors Market Exhibit, indicating a period of considerable artistic activity and recognition.

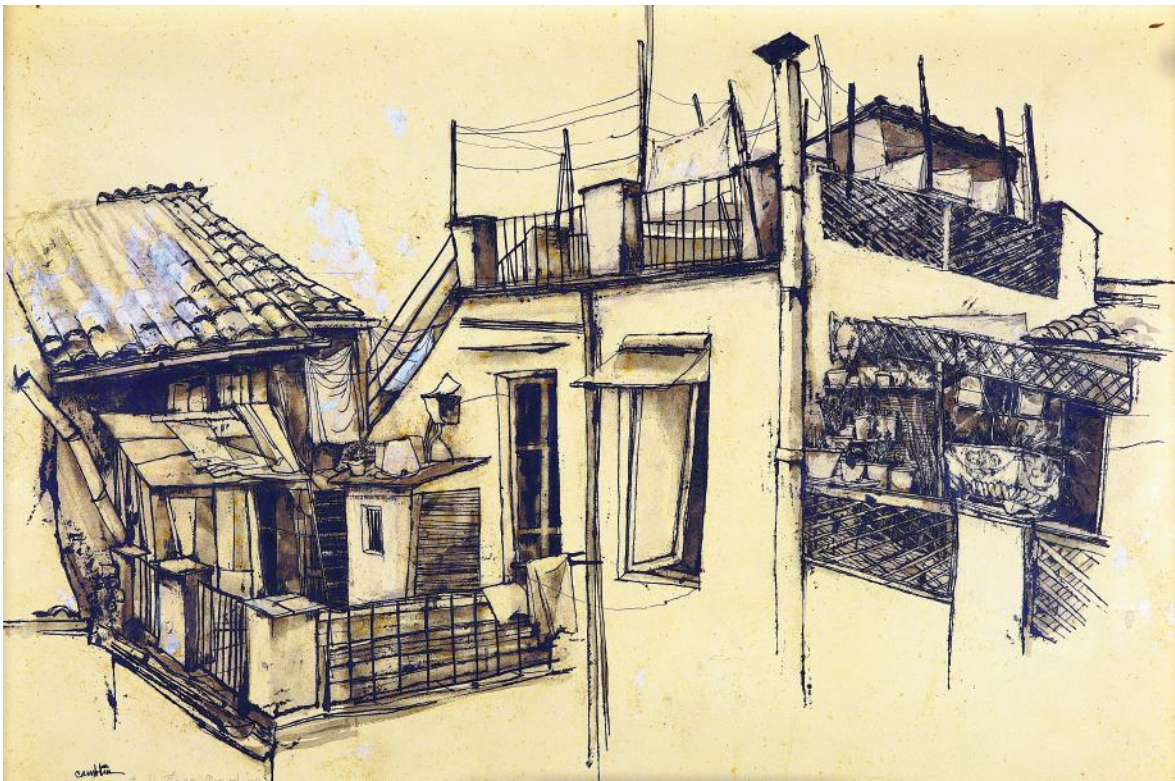
The drawing “Nun” presents a stark and arresting composition dominated by the figure of a nun shrouded in an expansive, dark habit. This voluminous garment immediately establishes a powerful visual contrast against the lighter background, creating a sense of both presence and concealment.

The nun's exaggerated headwear, featuring a wide-brimmed veil, further amplifies her imposing stature, lending her an almost architectural quality within the frame. In the foreground, a child looks upward towards the nun, their small figure emphasizing the nun's dominance. Another child is partially obscured behind the nun's robes, with only their upper body visible, suggesting a sense of being both near and hidden. This positioning of the children in relation to the nun hints at dynamics of observation, seeking, and perhaps even being overshadowed.

The inclusion of a wrought iron fence in the background introduces a layer of somber or institutional atmosphere to the scene. Its rigid structure and dark lines contribute to the overall graphic quality of the composition, where strong contrasts between black and white delineate the figures and their expressions with impactful clarity.

Integrating these perspectives, the drawing explores the complex relationship between authority and seeker in spiritual contexts. The nun's large, enveloping habit suggests that the path to enlightenment can often feel obscured, requiring a process of uncovering. The children embody different stages of this engagement—one stepping forward with curiosity, the other remaining in the shadows. The artwork captures the inherent duality of spiritual pursuit, oscillating between openness and concealment in the quest for knowledge.

The artwork's graphic style, with its stark contrasts and exaggerated forms, bears a notable resemblance to 20th-century graphic art, particularly the emotionally charged aesthetic of German Expressionism. The geometric treatment of the nun's habit might also allude to the structural explorations of Cubism. The combination of religious imagery with this emotionally evocative style recalls the powerful works of Käthe Kollwitz, who often grappled with themes of suffering and social commentary. The overall somber mood, juxtaposed with the depiction of childlike figures, could also suggest an influence from artists like Georges Rouault, who frequently explored religious subjects through a modern lens. The drawing, therefore, exists in a compelling space between graphic power, spiritual inquiry, and a distinctly modern sensibility.



Deep Dive: 1958

1958

In 1958, artist Camblin had a busy year, participating in numerous group exhibitions across the United States. Highlights included shows at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and the Whitney Museum of Art as part of the 10th Fulbright Painters Exhibition, where he showcased work inspired by his time in Italy and expressed his enriching experience in the exhibition catalogue. Additionally, Camblin accepted a teaching position at the Ringling Museum of Art in Florida and was featured in other exhibitions such as American Art Of Our Time and the Collectors Market Exhibit, indicating a significant level of artistic activity and recognition following his Fulbright scholarship.

The drawing “View From Studio Torre Argentina in Rome” offers an intimate glimpse into the dense fabric of interconnected buildings, a scene observed with an artist’s eye for the unassuming poetry of urban life. Tiled rooftops dominate the composition, their varied textures and patterns suggesting a history etched in clay and time. Interspersed amongst this architectural landscape are the delicate details of everyday existence: the casual drape of drying laundry catching the light, and the unexpected bursts of life from potted plants clinging to ledges and balconies.

The sketch possesses a distinct rough, gestural quality, its lines imbued with a sense of immediacy and spontaneity. This unrefined approach avoids idealization, instead capturing the raw essence and lived-in charm of old-world architecture. The composition feels less like a formal study and more like a personal observation, an intimate portrayal of an ordinary moment imbued with a quiet beauty. The textures of the buildings and the layering of rooftops hint at countless stories and the accumulation of years.

From a Zen perspective, the artwork beautifully embodies the principles of simplicity and the profound beauty found in the mundane. The rustic rooftops, the humble laundry, and the tenacious plants invite a contemplative gaze upon the nature of daily existence. The sketch encourages a mindfulness of the present moment, finding a quiet appreciation for the ordinary rhythms of life. Its unpolished lines and focus on the everyday resonate with the Japanese aesthetic of “wabisabi,” celebrating the inherent beauty in imperfection, transience, and the incomplete nature of things.

The sketch, in its unassuming portrayal of a commonplace scene, serves as a gentle reminder to seek and appreciate the quiet beauty that often goes unnoticed in our immediate surroundings. It encourages a shift in perspective, inviting the viewer to find grace and artistry in the seemingly mundane. The artwork captures the Zen ideal of presence, appreciating life’s simplicity, while simultaneously symbolizing the resilience and persistence echoed in the I Ching’s concept of Duration.

This style of sketching finds its roots in urban sketching and travel art traditions, where artists sought to document the authenticity of daily life and their personal experiences of place through quick, expressive lines. The scene and its gestural rendering might bring to mind the urban landscape sketches of artists like Giovanni Battista Piranesi, who captured the grandeur of Rome with a similarly loose and evocative hand. Such sketches, often serving as personal mementos or souvenirs, prioritized a direct and genuine connection to the environment over polished, idealized representations, a sensibility that this drawing admirably embodies.



Deep Dive: 1959

1959

In 1959, Camblin was active as both an artist and instructor in Florida, teaching at the Ringling Museum of Art and the Longboat Key Art Center. He participated in at least four art exhibitions in Sarasota and Palm Beach. Reviews highlighted his inclusion in national shows, his January drawing exhibition, and his award-winning oil painting "Icarus Descending" in December, which garnered critical attention. Newspaper articles documented his involvement in these artistic events, underscoring his presence in the Florida art scene that year.

The drawing, *Bonnie*, offers a study in quiet intensity, a close-up of a figure rendered with delicate yet purposeful lines. The subject, depicted in profile, occupies the upper portion of the frame, their gaze directed towards the right, beyond the confines of the paper. The artist's hand is visible in the varying weight of the lines, creating areas of shadow and light that sculpt the form with subtle nuance.

The sitter's features are softly defined, suggesting a contemplative or perhaps slightly melancholic air. The hair, voluminous and textured with short, curving strokes, frames the face, leading the eye to the gentle curve of the brow and the understated elegance of the nose and lips. The suggestion of the ear is minimal, almost an afterthought, keeping the focus on the overall form and expression.

Below the head and shoulders, the drawing captures the upper torso and arms, draped in what appears to be a loosely fitting garment. The fabric is rendered with a series of flowing lines that suggest folds and contours, hinting at a three-dimensionality within the two-dimensional space. The hands are clasped or gently held together in the lower part of the composition, adding to the sense of stillness and inward focus.

Given the background information about Bob Camblin's artistic direction in 1959, this drawing could be interpreted as a study in form and structure, aligning with his interest in the underlying architecture of Renaissance masterpieces like the Portinari Altarpiece and Botticelli's "The Birth of Venus," even if the subject matter is a portrait. The artist's focus on the interplay of light and shadow, achieved through the density and direction of the lines, echoes the "balance of light and dark areas" that Camblin noted in the Portinari Altarpiece.

While not an abstraction, the drawing emphasizes the essential elements of the figure, perhaps moving towards an understanding of form that transcends mere representational accuracy. The subtle contour line around the figure, a technique Camblin noted in Botticelli's work, might be present here, defining the subject against the textured background created by the varying densities of the shading. The overall impression is one of introspection and a searching for the underlying structure and essence of the subject, a direction consistent with Camblin's artistic explorations at the time.



Deep Dive: 1960

1960

In 1960, Camblin began creating abstract paintings inspired by the structure of Hugo van der Goes's altarpiece, which he had seen in Florence. He actively exhibited his work in Florida and Missouri, showcasing an evolving artistic style that moved towards allegorical representation. Camblin also taught at the Ringling School of Art before accepting a position at the University of Illinois. His artistic and teaching activities were noted in the local press. Additionally, Camblin started exploring Greek myths in his drawings and focused his personal studies on Marcel Duchamp. This was also the year his son, Brian, was born.

The piece titled "Birth of Venus II" explodes onto the visual plane with a raw and visceral energy, a testament to the dynamic interplay of form and implied motion. Abstracted figures, or perhaps the suggestion of them, wrestle within the composition, appearing to both disintegrate and emerge from the surrounding space. Overlapping lines create a dense network, a visual chaos that evokes a sense of profound transformation, struggle, or perhaps even internal conflict made manifest.

The eye is drawn across different segments of the work, each containing its own unique cluster of lines and implied shapes. No single form rests statically; everything seems caught in a state of flux, hinting at a continuous process of metamorphosis. Areas of dense, almost frantic lines contrast with more open spaces, creating a visual rhythm that underscores the turbulent nature of the scene.

From a Zen perspective, the fragmented and disjointed appearance of these forms powerfully conveys the transient nature of physical existence. The sense of things falling apart aligns with the Zen understanding of impermanence, where attachment to fixed forms is seen as an illusion. The artwork seems to embody the concept of "mu," or emptiness, suggesting that beneath the surface of these shifting shapes, no inherent, unchanging essence resides.

The combination of these perspectives suggests a profound understanding of change as both destructive and generative. As forms dissolve and break apart, the energy released hints at the potential for new configurations, a visual paradox of becoming through unbecoming. The artwork exists on a threshold, a potent moment of tension and release that speaks to the inevitability of transformation and the potential freedom found in embracing life's inherent impermanence.

The abstract expressionist approach is palpable, immediately bringing to mind the emotionally charged works of artists like Jackson Pollock, in its energetic lines, or Francis Bacon, in its distorted figural suggestions. The use of abstraction to depict figures seemingly in motion conveys a sense of inner turmoil, perhaps echoing the subconscious explorations of Surrealism or the spontaneous mark-making of Automatism. The fragmented forms also hint at Cubist influences, where the subject is deconstructed to offer multiple perspectives simultaneously.

Upon closer viewing, embedded within the chaotic lines, one might discern hints of skeletal structures and perhaps even animalistic shapes. These subtle suggestions could symbolize primal forces of life and death, or the hidden struggles and subconscious fears that lie beneath the surface of human consciousness. The overlapping layers of lines create a sense of concealment and revelation, mirroring the slow and often turbulent unfolding of deeper truths through introspection and change.



Deep Dive: 1961

1961

In 1961, Camblin transitioned his academic career, leaving the University of Illinois to teach design and drawing at the newly independent architecture department of the University of Detroit Mercy, under the chairmanship of Bruno Leon, who also provided the Camblin family with a home. Simultaneously, Camblin remained active in the art world, exhibiting his work in three shows across Oklahoma, Florida, and Kansas, with his piece "Termigan Transfigured" receiving recognition for its modern style. This year represented a significant shift in Camblin's professional and artistic life.

Bob Camblin's "Homage to Hugo" stands as a compelling exploration of abstract expression, a work that, according to accompanying texts, deliberately eschews narrative to distill its essence from the colors and forms of an earlier piece or concept bearing the same title. This approach aligns closely with Camblin's broader artistic investigations during periods where he sought to transform representational sources, such as the Portinari Altarpiece, into "abstract color relations" that retain "poetic suggestions" while shedding literal subject matter.

Visually, "Homage to Hugo" is a dynamic composition of bold, gestural forms and a richly resonant color palette. Dominated by earthy browns, deep blacks, and vibrant bursts of yellow and ochre, the work evokes a sense of raw energy and primal force. The brushwork is expressive and confident, creating a textured surface where forms emerge and recede, suggesting depth and vigorous movement. There is a clear emphasis on the interplay of light and dark masses, a characteristic Camblin consciously adopted from classical compositions but translated here into a purely abstract language. The forms themselves are organic, resisting easy identification, thereby pushing the viewer to engage with the piece on a purely formal and emotional level.

The very title, "Homage to Hugo," when applied to such a non-representational work, prompts a fascinating inquiry. An homage typically involves a tribute or an imitation of an admired figure or work. In this abstract context, Camblin seems to be translating the spirit or sensation of his subject – the unspecified "Hugo" – into a visual symphony of color, texture, and form. By "completely ignoring narrative," he challenges the viewer to find the tribute not in recognizable symbols or stories, but in the emotive power of the abstract elements themselves. This aligns with his stated aim for his abstract works: "The greater the painting, the less the viewer will be aware, at casual glance, of the secrets of its greatness." "Homage to Hugo" demands more than a casual glance; it invites a deeper contemplation, allowing the "poetic suggestions" embedded in its abstract structure to unfold gradually.

Camblin's method, as described in relation to his Portinari studies, involved a "transformation of...figures...into abstract color relations." It is plausible that a similar process of deconstruction and reconstitution informed "Homage to Hugo." The "basic skills" he employed were not for replication, but for the distillation of fundamental artistic principles—diagonal structure, balance, color harmony—into a new, autonomous visual statement.

Ultimately, "Homage to Hugo" succeeds as a powerful abstract piece precisely because it refrains from easy definition. It is an invitation to experience the act of homage not as a literal depiction, but as an immersion in a carefully orchestrated field of visual energy. The work speaks to Camblin's confidence in the ability of abstract art to convey profound feeling and intellectual rigor, offering a space where color and form themselves become the carriers of tribute and meaning. It is a testament to an artist finding his "direction" in the evocative power of abstraction, creating a work that resonates with a quiet yet potent intensity.



Deep Dive: 1962

1962

In 1962, Camblin traveled to Italy with Bruno Leon, an experience that spurred his Greek myth drawing series. That same year, Robert Smithson created text-inclusive drawings. A key event for Camblin was his solo exhibition of drawings and collages in November at the University of Wisconsin. This show was lauded as powerful with religious undertones, and the accompanying press release emphasized Camblin's extensive artistic background, accolades, and teaching experience.

Bob Camblin's 1962 drawing, compellingly titled "Variation on Turner's The Parting of Hero and Leander. From the Greek of Musaeus by Joseph Mallord William Turner," is a potent example of the artist's burgeoning style, described by critics of the era as "representational yet surreal." Created during a year that included personal milestones and public exhibitions, this work demonstrates Camblin's "detailed drawing skills" and his penchant for "unusual subject matter," engaging in a direct dialogue with art history while forging his own distinct visual path.

The drawing takes as its departure point J.M.W. Turner's ambitious mythological painting, itself an interpretation of the ancient Greek poet Musaeus's tragic tale of the lovers Hero and Leander. The myth—Leander swimming the Hellespont nightly to meet Hero, guided by her lamp, until a storm extinguishes the light and he drowns, leading to Hero's suicidal despair—is inherently dramatic and laden with themes of love, fate, and the overwhelming power of nature.

Camblin's interpretation is a masterclass in atmospheric tension, rendered with intricate and energetic linework. A prominent, somewhat desolate walkway or pier juts diagonally into a turbulent body of water, leading the eye towards a tumultuous sea and a dramatically lit, cloud-strewn sky where a stark crescent moon hangs. The entire scene is imbued with a dark, foreboding mood, achieved through extensive cross-hatching that sculpts form and casts deep shadows, punctuated by the eerie glow of the moon on the water's surface.

The "surreal" aspect of Camblin's style, noted by reviewers in 1964, is evident in the way he renders and combines these elements. While the scene is recognizable as a seascape with architectural features, there's an unsettling, dreamlike quality to the exaggerated forms, the stark contrasts, and the almost anthropomorphic character of the natural elements. The waves churn with a life of their own, and the rocks seem to glower, reflecting the emotional turmoil of the myth. This is not a placid, classical rendering but a psychologically charged landscape that mirrors the lovers' impending doom.

As a "variation," Camblin's drawing honors the romantic spirit and dramatic intensity of Turner, particularly Turner's fascination with the sublime power of nature. However, Camblin's mark-making is distinctly his own – more graphic, perhaps more overtly psychological, and leaning into a stylization that prefigures some of the figurative explorations that would become more prominent in later 20th-century art (even if the noted similarities to *The Hairy Who* were yet to be a direct connection).

In 1962, while exhibiting in Florida and garnering attention for his unique approach, Camblin was clearly an artist honing a singular vision. "Variation on Turner's The Parting of Hero and Leander" is a significant piece from this period, showcasing his technical prowess in drawing and his ability to reinterpret classical themes through a contemporary, surreal filter. It is a work that is both an homage and a departure, capturing the tragic essence of the ancient story while firmly asserting Camblin's own emerging artistic voice – one capable of conjuring worlds that are at once recognizable and deeply strange.



The painted eye sees
more than mine and god damn it
I see nothing . . . yet.



Deep Dive: 1963

1963

In 1963, Camblin participated in two exhibitions. At the Krannert Art Museum in Urbana, Illinois, as part of a faculty collection show, Camblin displayed "The Fate of Miss Daphne Veneus," a pencil and color wash piece. Additionally, Camblin had an undated exhibition at the St. Armands Gallery in St. Armands Key, Florida.

"The Painted Eye Sees" is a compelling and deeply philosophical artwork that masterfully employs visual contrast and poignant text to explore the complex interplay between subjective human perception and a transcendent, pure awareness. The piece invites contemplation on the nature of enlightenment, contrasting the struggle of the individual mind with the serene clarity of an unbiased, all-seeing consciousness.

The artwork immediately establishes a powerful visual and conceptual dichotomy. On the left, a human figure is depicted, rendered with expressive, somewhat agitated lines. The figure, partially obscured and seemingly confined, perhaps behind bars or a structural element, gazes with an intensity that speaks of searching and an unmet longing. The earthy tones of the figure and its immediate surroundings, coupled with a vibrant, almost urgent red-orange shirt, suggest a being grounded in the passionate, often tumultuous, realm of personal experience. This figure embodies the "limited perspective," caught in the "illusion of separateness and striving for understanding," as described in the artwork's conceptual underpinning.

Dominating the right side of the composition is the "painted eye" itself—large, stylized, and arresting. Rendered in warm yellows and ochres, its surface richly textured with dense cross-hatching, this eye is not an organ of biological sight but a powerful symbol. Its vivid red iris, outlined in a calm blue, stares directly, not necessarily at the viewer, but with an unwavering, impersonal gaze. It is part of a larger, curved, almost totemic form, suggesting a presence that is both ancient and elemental. This is the visual representation of "unbiased, pure awareness," reflecting Zen principles of a mind unclouded by "distorting desires and fears." Its sheer scale and deliberate artistry set it apart from the human figure, emphasizing its symbolic role as a beacon of untainted perception.

Integral to the artwork's impact is the handwritten text inscribed below the central image: "The painted eye sees / More than mine and god damn it / I see nothing ... yet." This raw, confessional statement acts as the voice of the human figure, articulating the profound frustration and yearning inherent in the quest for deeper understanding. The colloquial "god damn it" injects a startling and relatable humanity into the philosophical inquiry, grounding the abstract concepts in palpable emotion. The final, crucial word, "...yet," infuses the piece with a poignant sense of hope and ongoing process, acknowledging that the journey towards clarity, though challenging, is not futile.

"The Painted Eye Sees" effectively translates its philosophical premise into a potent visual language. The artistic execution—the energetic linework defining the human form versus the more deliberate, iconic rendering of the painted eye, the contrast between the confined space of the figure and the expansive presence of the symbolic eye—all serve to heighten the central theme. The work posits that true insight, the kind embodied by the "painted eye," arises not from an aggressive seeking of external knowledge but from an internal quieting, a "relinquishing the need to grasp for meaning."

Ultimately, the artwork functions as a profound meditation on the nature of seeing. It suggests that the path to enlightenment involves a shift in perspective, a recognition of the "innate awareness within" by "letting go of the self's demands." "The Painted Eye Sees" does not offer simple answers but rather invites the viewer into a space of contemplation, urging a reflection on our own modes of perception and the possibility of accessing a more direct, untroubled vision of reality.





Deep Dive: 1964

1964

In 1964, Camblin had a daughter, Robyn, and participated in a group exhibition at the St. Armands Gallery in Florida during July and August. Reviews in The Sarasota Herald-Tribune described Camblin's style as representational yet surreal, noting his detailed drawing skills and unusual subject matter. Executed in 1964, hot on the heels of his "Variation on Turner's The Parting of Hero and Leander," Bob Camblin's drawing "The Return of the Archer" plunges the viewer into a densely populated, psychologically charged scene that further solidifies his reputation from that era for a style at once "representational yet surreal." This work, while perhaps not explicitly referencing a known myth like its predecessor, resonates with a similar dramatic intensity and showcases Camblin's exceptional "detailed drawing skills" applied to "unusual subject matter."

"The Return of the Archer" is a masterwork of intricate linework and atmospheric tension. The composition is crowded, almost claustrophobic, filled with a cast of enigmatic figures rendered with Camblin's characteristic cross-hatching that carves them out of the surrounding gloom. A prominent, weary-eyed bearded man with a distinctive pointed cap dominates the right foreground, his expression a mixture of exhaustion and profound experience. Around him, other figures—some hooded, some with similarly stylized headwear, some skeletal—populate a shallow, stage-like space. A strikingly dark, monumental, almost totemic figure commands the left side of the composition, its form heavily shadowed and imposing, contrasting with the more subtly rendered figures in the mid-ground.

The title itself, "The Return of the Archer," casts a narrative spell over the scene, though the archer's identity and the nature of his return are left deliberately ambiguous. Is the bearded man the eponymous archer, returning from some unseen battle or quest? If so, his bow and arrows are not immediately evident, suggesting the title might operate on a more metaphorical level. The figures around him could be greeters, mourners, or fellow travelers in a somber procession. The atmosphere is heavy with unspoken stories, a sense of portent, and the weight of experience.

Stylistically, the drawing shares much with the "Hero and Leander" piece: the dramatic use of chiaroscuro, the energetic and meticulous application of ink, and the ability to create a palpable mood. However, "The Return of the Archer" leans further into a personal, surreal iconography. The figures, while representational, are imbued with an otherworldly quality through their stylized features and attire. The scene feels like a fragment from a forgotten epic or a dream tableau, where classical or medieval archetypes are filtered through a distinctly mid-20th-century sensibility.

This work from 1964 is a strong example of Camblin solidifying his artistic voice. The "unusual subject matter" noted by critics of the time is on full display, as is his capacity to create compelling, if unsettling, narrative suggestions without resorting to straightforward storytelling. The drawing invites interpretation rather than offering simple answers, drawing the viewer into its intricate web of lines and shadows, to ponder the fate of the archer and the meaning of his return.

"The Return of the Archer" is a powerful and complex drawing that showcases Bob Camblin's technical virtuosity and his developing penchant for enigmatic, psychologically resonant imagery. It stands as a significant piece that bridges his engagement with art historical themes and the forging of a unique, surreal visual language that would continue to characterize his work. The drawing's somber intensity and intricate detail demand close attention, revealing an artist deeply engaged with the human condition, mortality, and the power of visual narrative.



Deep Dive: 1965

1965

In 1965, Camblin moved to Salt Lake City to become an Assistant Professor at the University of Utah. He was active in the local art scene, exhibiting in four shows, notably a solo exhibition "Windows" at the Plumtree Gallery featuring his ink, casein, wash, and collage works, which were praised in the Salt Lake Tribune. He also participated in faculty exhibitions at the University of Utah and The Movie Gallery. Beyond Utah, Camblin had an exhibition at the University of Windsor in Canada and expanded his intellectual horizons by reading Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilization*.

"St. Bartholomew," is a fascinating and disquieting exploration of sainthood, perception, and the very nature of representation. This work, likely part of the ink, casein, wash, and collage pieces praised in his solo exhibition "Windows," challenges traditional iconography and resonates with the intellectual currents Camblin was engaging with, notably Michel Foucault's "Madness and Civilization."

The painting immediately confronts the viewer with an unsettling, doll-like visage. A child-like face with wide, somewhat vacant features dominates the upper, circular portion of the composition. One eye is a striking, clear blue, gazing directly outwards, while the other is obscured by a dark, textured patch, suggesting injury, blindness, or a deliberate veiling. This asymmetry is jarring, subverting expectations of beatific sainthood. The figure's blonde, wavy hair and pallid complexion are rendered with a sensitivity that contrasts with the crudeness of the patched eye.

Below this portrait, a distinct horizontal band features the cursive inscription, "This is a weird picture," a strikingly self-aware commentary that seems to be an integral part of the artwork. This text acts as both a confession and a challenge, acknowledging the piece's departure from conventional aesthetics and inviting the viewer to confront its inherent strangeness.

The title, "St. Bartholomew," invites a complex interpretation. St. Bartholomew, traditionally identified with Nathanael, was an apostle and, most famously, a martyr said to have been flayed alive. While Camblin eschews overt depictions of this gruesome fate—no flaying knife or draped skin is immediately apparent—the patched eye, the exposed heart, and the overall sense of vulnerability and "weirdness" could be read as a highly internalized and psychological exploration of suffering, martyrdom, and the "otherness" of intense spiritual experience.

The influence of Foucault's "Madness and Civilization," which Camblin was reading at the time, seems particularly pertinent. Foucault's examination of how societies define and marginalize "madness" and "unreason" provides a powerful lens through which to view this unconventional saint. Camblin's St. Bartholomew is not a figure of serene holiness but one marked by difference, perhaps even by what society might deem aberrant. The painting, through its visual dissonance and self-proclaimed "weirdness," questions the boundaries of normalcy and the often-sanitized representations of religious figures.

"St. Bartholomew" is a powerful and provocative piece. It succeeds not by offering a comforting image of faith, but by disrupting expectations and prompting a deeper consideration of what it means to be a saint, an outsider, or simply "perceived." In 1965, as Camblin was establishing himself in a new academic and artistic environment, this painting demonstrates a bold willingness to confront challenging themes and to forge a deeply personal and intellectually resonant visual language.



Deep Dive: 1966

1966

In 1966, Camblin was a prolific exhibitor, participating in at least five shows, including a national exhibition where he won a Purchase Prize for his drawing "Cecelia's Song." He explored new artistic directions with his "St. Basilisk" series and the innovative "Chrysalis Series," using painted plaster in plastic bubbles. Press coverage highlighted his exhibitions and his philosophy on the artist's role in societal change, emphasizing the balance between intuition and rationality in art. The Plumtree Gallery in Salt Lake City hosted multiple exhibitions of his drawings and sculptures, including an open house featuring various Utah artists. Camblin's unique approach to drawing and sculptural awareness received critical attention, and by the end of the year, he had begun his "scarecrow series."

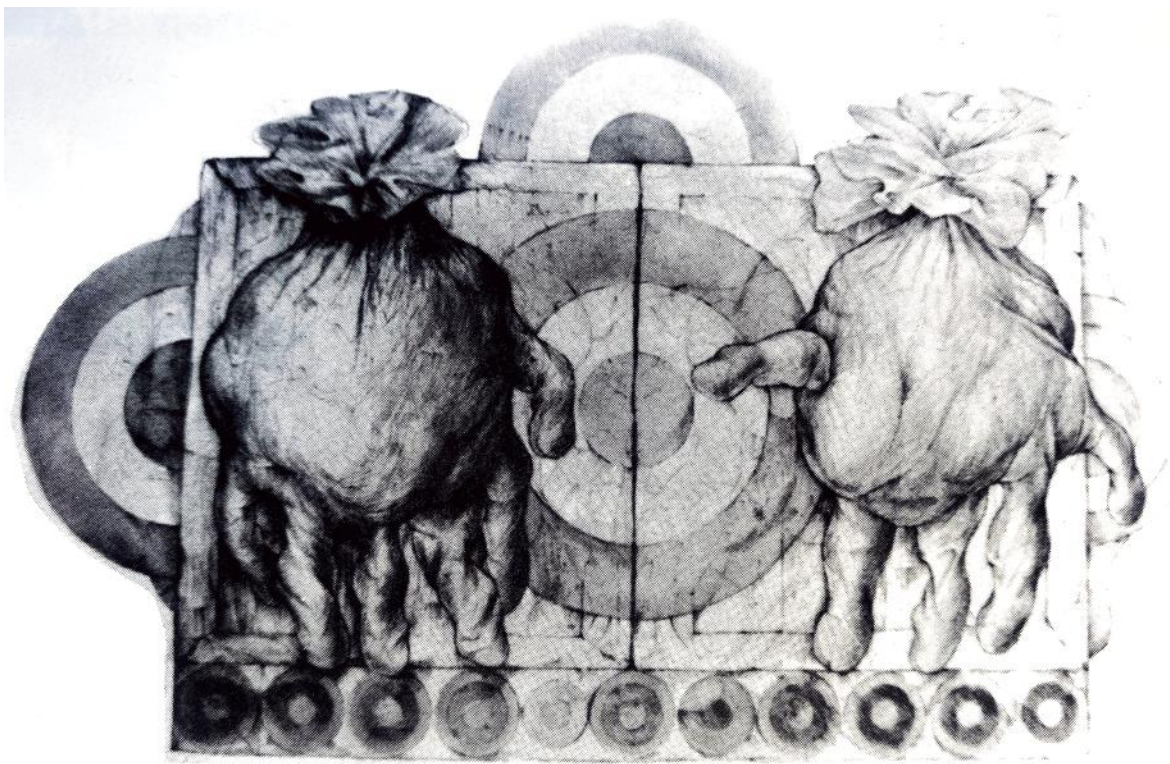
Bob Camblin's 1966 drawing, "Gloved Hand," immediately draws the viewer to its titular subject: a large, seemingly discarded or manipulated glove that dominates the composition. Rendered with meticulous detail, the glove's fabric crumples and folds with a tangible sense of weight and texture, showcasing Camblin's skill as a draftsman. It's more than a mere representation; it feels like a portrait of an object imbued with a history, its contortions suggesting a past action or a preserved gesture. This central element, in its almost hyper-realistic depiction, anchors the drawing.

Surrounding this focal point is a constellation of disparate, almost surreal elements that complicate a straightforward interpretation. A paper airplane, a classic symbol of childhood or fleeting messages, appears to pierce or interact with the upper part of the scene. Floral forms, some identifiable as roses, are scattered, perhaps offering a touch of organic beauty or a traditional vanitas reference amidst the more enigmatic components. The background is a complex interplay of stippled, cloud-like expanses and sharp, geometric intrusions, creating a dynamic and somewhat disorienting space. This juxtaposition of the recognizable (glove, roses, airplane) with abstract and symbolic elements aligns with Camblin's philosophical leanings towards balancing "intuition and rationality in art."

"Gloved Hand" is not merely an observational study; it's a constructed reality, a stage for symbolic interplay. The glove itself, a common object designed to cover and protect the human hand, becomes loaded with potential meaning. Is it a stand-in for the artist's own hand, the tool of creation, now disembodied or presented as an artifact? Or does it speak to themes of concealment, labor, or the barrier between touch and the world? The surrounding objects—delicate flowers, a fragile paper plane—create a narrative tension, suggesting themes of vulnerability, the ephemeral, and perhaps the artist's role in navigating and reinterpreting the world around him.

The drawing reflects the experimental spirit evident in Camblin's "Chrysalis Series," which involved encasing forms. Here, the glove itself is a kind of casing, and the entire composition seems to encase a collection of thoughts and observations. The critical attention Camblin received for his "unique approach to drawing" is well-founded in a piece like this, which pushes beyond simple representation into a more complex, almost allegorical realm.

The year 1966 was clearly a period where Camblin was not only producing a significant volume of work but also deeply considering the artist's societal role and the intellectual underpinnings of his practice. "Gloved Hand" feels like a visual manifestation of this internal dialogue, a rich tapestry of technical skill and conceptual depth. It invites the viewer to look beyond the familiar and to consider the layered meanings embedded within carefully chosen and meticulously rendered objects, presented in a way that is both arresting and thought-provoking. The drawing is a strong example of Camblin's capacity to transform the mundane into the meaningful, creating a work that resonates with the artistic ferment of its time.



Deep Dive: 1967

1967

In 1967, Camblin had several exhibitions of his drawings and sculptures across the United States, indicating continued recognition for his art. A significant career move occurred when he accepted an Assistant Professor position at Rice University in Houston, Texas, a change motivated by a desire for a more artistically open atmosphere. The text also touches on the establishment of the Rice University Art Department and Camblin's early involvement alongside artists like Earl Staley and John O'Neil.

Bob Camblin's drawing, intriguingly titled "rubber reliquary," likely dating from around 1967 or reflective of his artistic explorations during that period, presents a compelling paradox that challenges traditional notions of sacredness and material value. This was a year of significant professional movement for Camblin, including several exhibitions of his drawings and sculptures, and his pivotal decision to join Rice University, seeking a more "artistically open atmosphere." "rubber reliquary" can be seen as an embodiment of this spirit of inquiry and a departure into unconventional artistic territories.

The drawing immediately captivates with its central imagery: two prominent, pendulous sack-like forms. True to the "rubber" in its title, these shapes are rendered with a sense of pliable, weighty materiality. Their surfaces are textured, with highlights and shadows suggesting a yielding, organic substance. From the base of these pouches, multiple finger-like or root-like appendages droop downwards, adding to their visceral, almost unsettling quality. These forms are cinched at the top, like bags containing unseen contents, and are presented with a formal symmetry, flanking a central dividing line.

This organic, somewhat abject imagery is strikingly juxtaposed with a more rigid, geometric background. Concentric circles, reminiscent of targets or stylized halos, radiate behind the main forms, creating a visual tension between the biomorphic and the structured. This backdrop, combined with the work's title, elevates the rubbery objects to a status of significance. A "reliquary" traditionally houses sacred relics – items of veneration. By proposing a "rubber reliquary," Camblin stages a fascinating conceptual collision. Rubber, a utilitarian, modern, and somewhat mundane material, is an unorthodox choice for containing anything precious, forcing the viewer to question what is being enshrined and the nature of value itself.

The work's power lies in this conceptual dissonance. Are these "relics" bodily, hinting at the corporeal and the transient? Or are they symbolic of something more abstract, perhaps the containment of ideas or experiences within an unexpectedly humble vessel? The drawing doesn't offer easy answers, instead inviting contemplation on the act of veneration and the materials we deem worthy of it.

In the context of 1967, as Camblin was embedding himself in a new artistic and academic environment at Rice University alongside figures like Earl Staley and John O'Neil, "rubber reliquary" speaks to a desire to push boundaries. It reflects an artistic mind willing to explore unconventional materials (even in depiction) and to subvert established categories. The work can be read as a subtle commentary on artistic tradition, perhaps a playful prod at the preciousness often associated with art objects, or a more profound meditation on where significance truly lies.



Deep Dive: 1968

1968

In 1968, Camblin was active in the Houston art scene, holding exhibitions and leading a "Happening," influenced by Allan Kaprow. He also began collaborating with Earl Staley as B & E Productions. These activities occurred within the context of exhibitions at the Contemporary Arts Museum and Rice University, where Camblin was connected to the art department, which saw the significant addition of the Institute for the Arts. The text also mentions Camblin's personal responses to major societal events and marks the start of his fruitful artistic partnership with Staley.

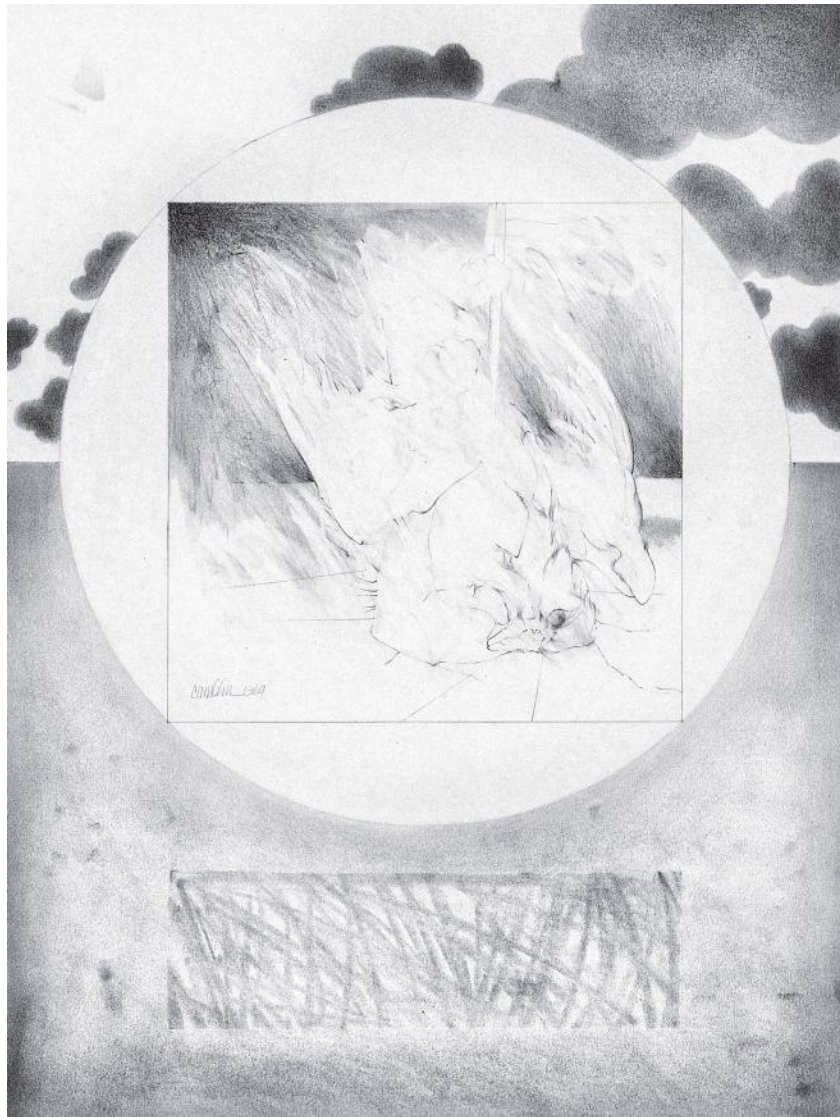
The lithograph "Altarpiece of St. Bambola" presents a bizarre and captivating central figure that immediately draws the viewer into its surreal world. Resembling a cross between a child or doll and something more primal, the figure is distinguished by a pair of prominent, branching antlers that sprout from its head, creating an immediate sense of the uncanny.

The central form is partially concealed and revealed by draped cloth that flows around it, adding a layer of mystery and perhaps vulnerability. This draping, combined with visible skeletal elements, introduces a stark juxtaposition of the soft and the hard, the living and the dead, contributing to the unsettling atmosphere of the piece. The figure appears to be positioned within or against a backdrop of architectural elements, suggesting a contained or perhaps even sacred space, like an altarpiece as the title suggests. Stark contrasts between areas of light and shadow heighten the dramatic and surreal quality of the scene, emphasizing the figure's form and the surrounding space.

From a Zen perspective, the artwork evokes a compelling duality. The childlike or doll-like features might represent innocence, while the antlers symbolize a connection to the wild and natural world. This pairing could suggest the interconnectedness of all things and the potential for transformation, blurring the boundaries between human and animal. The implied enclosure of the architectural frame might represent the limitations of the mind, hinting that true understanding lies in transcending these self-imposed constraints.

The artwork masterfully blends themes of life and death, purity and decay. The central figure, an amalgamation of child and beast, embodies the coexistence of innocence and the raw forces of nature. The antlers, often associated with growth and regeneration, stand in stark contrast to the skeletal hints, perhaps alluding to the cyclical nature of existence and the constant interplay between creation and destruction. The piece invites contemplation on the integration of our primal selves with human consciousness and the often-arbitrary boundaries that we construct between them.

The surreal and symbolic language employed in "Altarpiece of St. Bambola" is reminiscent of artists like Max Ernst and Leonora Carrington, who frequently explored dreamlike visions and themes of transformation and metamorphosis. The doll-like figure and organic, branching antlers echo the psychological explorations often found in Surrealism, questioning notions of identity and the human condition. The antlers themselves could also be interpreted through mythological lenses, where human-animal hybrids often represent transcendence, sacred power, or a connection to deeper, more ancient forces.



Deep Dive: 1969

1969

In 1969, Camblin was a prominent artist in the developing Houston art scene, represented by the Dianne David Gallery. He actively participated in lectures at Rice University, art auctions, and exhibitions in both Houston and Dallas. The opening of the Art Barn at Rice University provided a new creative space for faculty like Camblin, reflecting growing institutional support for modern art. Inspired by the counter-culture movement, Camblin adopted a new personal style while continuing to explore his artistic themes. However, the Houston art scene also saw changes, including Earl Staley's departure from Rice University.

The drawing "The Raven" immediately commands attention with its distinct circular composition, a self-contained world within the frame. At its heart lies an abstract form, vaguely suggestive of a bird, yet in a state of flux. Its edges seem to blur and dissolve into the surrounding space, creating a sense of ethereal movement or perhaps a transition from one state to another.

The central abstract element is cradled by a soft, almost atmospheric gradient, achieved through delicate pencil shading. This gradient lends a sense of depth and an otherworldly quality to the composition, as if the central form is emerging from or receding into a hazy realm. Hints of cloud-like shapes drift around the central circle and beyond its perimeter, further enhancing the dreamlike and intangible feel of the artwork.

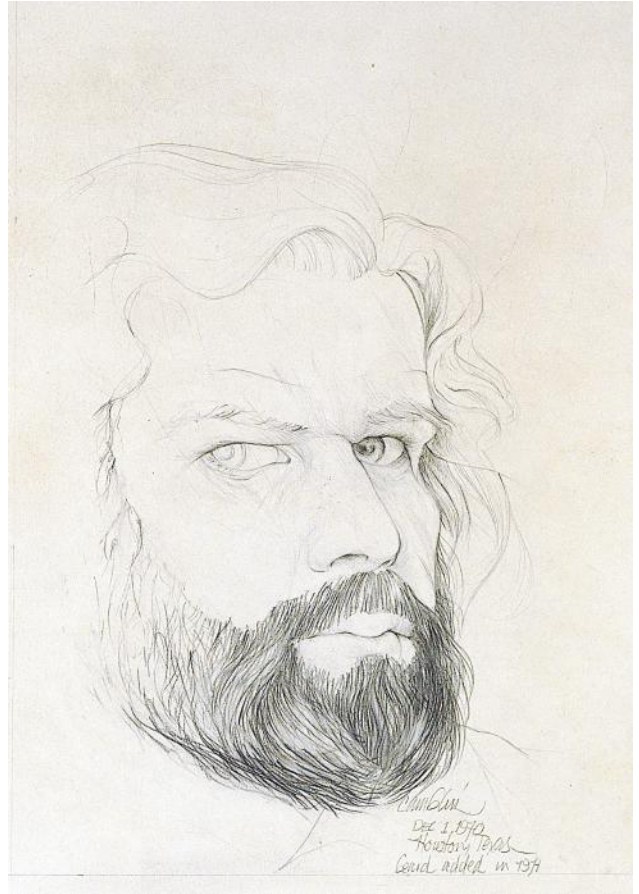
From a Zen perspective, the prominent circular form strongly evokes the "Enso," a sacred symbol representing enlightenment, the void, and the cyclical nature of life. The abstract shapes at the center, caught in a state of dissolution, can be seen as a visual metaphor for the transient nature of existence, where all forms arise and eventually fade away, reflecting the core Zen teaching of impermanence. The overall ethereal quality encourages a contemplative state, inviting the viewer to look beyond the tangible and ponder the deeper essence of reality.

The abstract forms within the circle, seemingly flowing and shifting, can be interpreted as representing the continuous flow of life's challenges, requiring adaptability and inner resilience, much like water navigating obstacles. The surrounding soft gradient and cloud-like forms might symbolize the unknown or the depths of the subconscious mind, reinforcing themes of both internal and external challenges that must be navigated.

The synthesis of these interpretations suggests a visual meditation on the interconnectedness of experience and the necessity of finding equanimity amidst life's inherent impermanence and challenges. The circular frame acts as a point of focus, emphasizing unity and the cyclical nature of existence. The central, transforming abstract shapes allude to the ever-changing nature of reality, encouraging a sense of peace and acceptance in the face of uncertainty.

The minimalist approach and abstract forms within a defined circular space echo the explorations of spirituality and existential themes found in the works of artists like Mark Rothko, with his contemplative color fields, or the symbolic abstractions of Wassily Kandinsky. The integration of minimalism and abstraction aligns with modernist traditions, while the circular composition evokes a sense of sacred geometry present in spiritual art across various cultures. The grayscale palette further contributes to a timeless and introspective mood, characteristic of art intended to induce contemplation.





Deep Dive: 1970

1970

In 1970, Houston artist and Rice University faculty member Camblin was active in the art scene, participating in eight exhibitions across Texas and other states, including his solo show "Boxscapes" at the David Gallery. He also designed the set for a Rice Players production. Camblin was concerned about political and social issues at Rice and nationally, particularly student protests and the Vietnam War. Additionally, Joe Tate joined Rice's Art Department, aligning with Camblin and Earl Staley, and Camblin was involved in a unique tattoo exhibition at the David Gallery.

The first drawing (on the left) presents a close-up portrait of a woman, presumably Bonnie, rendered with a delicate and somewhat sparse line. The artist focuses primarily on the subject's face, with only a suggestion of the shoulders and upper chest. The lines are light and quickly drawn, capturing an immediate impression rather than meticulous detail.

Bonnie's gaze is direct and engaging, looking slightly off-center towards the viewer's left. Her eyes are the most defined feature of the portrait, conveying a sense of alertness and perhaps a hint of questioning. The artist uses slightly heavier lines and shading around the eyes to create depth and focus.

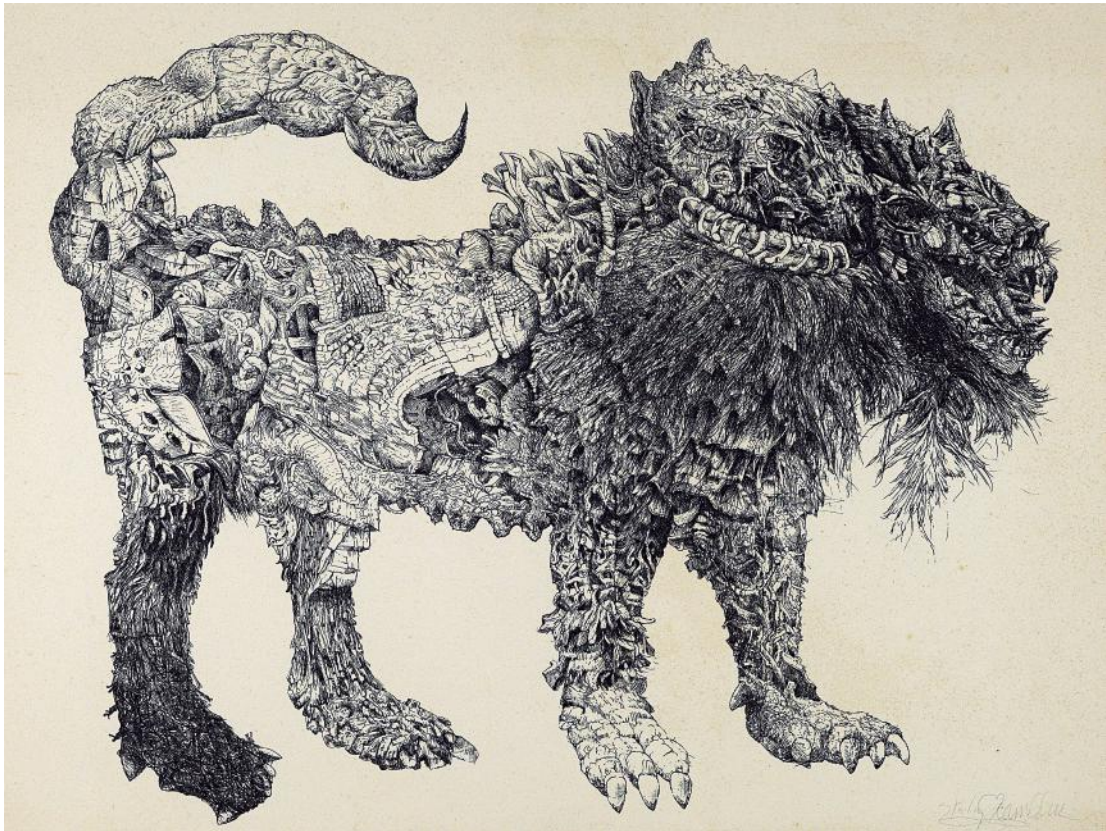
Her hair is depicted with loose, flowing lines that suggest volume and movement, framing her face softly. The features of her nose and mouth are rendered with minimal lines, yet they convey a distinct shape and expression. There's a naturalness to her expression, avoiding any idealization or strong emotion..

The sketch-like quality of the drawing suggests intimacy and familiarity. It's a portrait that feels personal, capturing a fleeting moment in time. The lack of elaborate detail emphasizes the connection between the artist and the subject, prioritizing the essence of Bonnie's presence and gaze. The drawing serves as a tender and direct portrayal, offering a glimpse into the artist's personal world during a significant period in his life and career.

In the second drawing, a self-portrait of Bob, his gaze is directed slightly to the right of the viewer, with one eye more clearly visible than the other. The eyebrows are somewhat furrowed, suggesting a serious or perhaps intense expression. The nose is defined with simple lines and shading. The mouth is obscured by a full, dark beard that is rendered with dense, textured lines, indicating thickness and volume.

The hair on the head is depicted with loose, wavy lines, suggesting a somewhat unkempt or flowing style. There are lines indicating wrinkles or creases on the forehead and around the visible eye, hinting at age or a life lived.

The overall style of the drawing is informal and immediate, characteristic of a sketch. The artist uses varying pressure and density of pencil lines to create areas of light and shadow, giving form to the face and beard. There isn't much detail in the background or clothing, keeping the focus entirely on the portrait of "bob." The date "DEC 1, 1970" and "Houston, Texas" are visible in the lower right corner, providing context for when and where the drawing was likely created. There are also some less legible markings and the addition "Beard added in 1971"



Deep Dive: 1971

1971

In 1971, Camblin was active in the art scene, participating in various exhibitions and individual artistic pursuits, including drawing specimen bottles. A major event was "Construction/Destruction Beach Event III," a collaborative happening on Galveston beach. Camblin also formed the B. E. & J. Productions group. The text details several exhibitions featuring his work across Texas and other regions. The year concluded with Camblin expressing his concerns about Rice University's art department policies in an open letter following Joe Tate's dismissal.

The lithograph "Lion" from the Bestiary series presents a remarkable and unsettling creature, a testament to the collaborative imaginations of Bob Camblin, Earl Staley, and Joe Tate. This is not a lion of the natural world but a chimera, a fantastical hybrid beast meticulously rendered with a drypoint technique that emphasizes its intricate and surreal form.

The creature's lionine aspect is evident in its powerful stance and the suggestion of a mane, yet this familiarity is immediately subverted by the addition of a distinctly scorpion-like tail, curving menacingly over its back. The body itself is a tapestry of varied animalistic textures: areas suggest fur, while others evoke scales or perhaps the rugged hide of another, unknown beast. Anatomical structures are hinted at beneath this textured surface, lending a strange sense of biological plausibility to the otherwise mythical being.

The artists' use of fine lines is crucial to the impact of the piece. These delicate marks create a dense network of detail, showcasing the textures and the seamless, yet jarring, integration of disparate animal features. Areas of deep shadow are achieved through intricate crosshatching, giving the creature volume and a palpable presence within the starkness of the lithographic space. The overall impression is of a being simultaneously lifelike and utterly grotesque, a product of a dream or a bestiary from another dimension.

From a Zen perspective, this composite creature can be seen as a potent symbol of the interconnectedness of all beings. The fusion of diverse animal traits serves as a visual reminder that life is a complex web of intertwined elements, each contributing to the whole. The beast's fluid identity, not confined to a single form, reflects the Zen concept of "emptiness" or "no-self" (Anatta), where identity is understood as a constantly shifting collection of aspects rather than a fixed entity. The artwork encourages a view of life as similarly fluid, with permeable boundaries between self and the environment.

The collaboration of Camblin, Staley, and Tate in creating this fantastical "Lion" becomes a visual meditation on identity and change. The creature transcends conventional biological categories, prompting viewers to consider the fluidity of existence. The convergence of Zen philosophy's emphasis on interconnectedness and the I Ching's focus on transformation suggests a universe where all beings are in a perpetual state of becoming, the "Lion" serving as a compelling metaphor for life's intricate dance of chaos and order.

The intricate detail and the amalgamation of animal forms echo the bizarre and symbolic creatures found in the works of Hieronymus Bosch, while the surreal fusion of disparate elements aligns with the subconscious explorations of Max Ernst. The meticulous linework also nods to the traditions of Renaissance anatomical studies, where organic forms were documented with scientific precision. In "Lion," these influences converge to create a work that is not only visually complex but also challenges fundamental assumptions about nature, identity, and the ever-present force of metamorphosis.



1972

In 1972, Camblin gained representation with the Brooke Alexander Gallery and co-founded The Holding Firm artist collective. He exhibited his work in several shows across Texas and in Canada. Camblin also had a temporary reappointment at Rice University and experimented with integrating titles into his art. A notable event was a barter exhibition he staged at the David Gallery. Reviews of his work during this period acknowledged his distinctive style and the vibrant Houston art scene.

The watercolor and pencil piece titled “When We First Moved To Houston” presents a softly rendered still life, featuring a horizontal arrangement of what appear to be five jars situated on a shelf. The shelf is suggested by a horizontal stroke with downward angled lines implying supporting brackets against a pale background, creating a sense of these objects existing within a spare, imagined space.

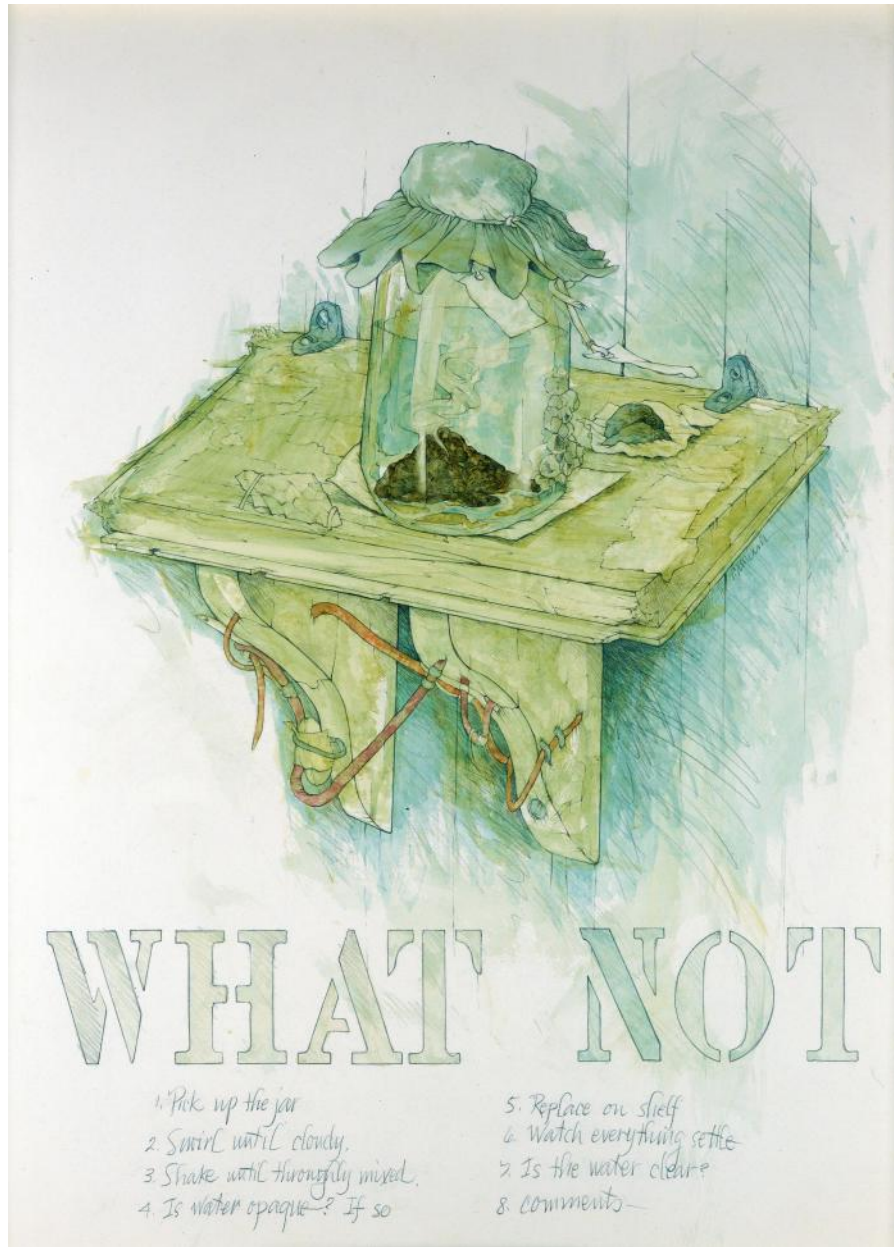
The jars themselves are depicted with fluid washes of watercolor in muted tones of blues, greens, and yellows, lending the scene a dreamy and somewhat indistinct quality. The colors blend gently, creating soft edges and a sense of light and atmosphere that is almost impressionistic, as noted in the background information. The forms of the jars are not sharply defined, contributing to the overall ethereal feel.

At the top of each jar, there are indications of coverings, rendered with slightly darker washes and pencil lines, suggesting lids made of cloth or some other organic material. These add a tactile element to the otherwise fluid depiction.

Significantly, each jar is accompanied by what appears to be handwritten text. These notes are small and somewhat illegible in this reproduced image, but their presence is a key element described in the background. They are positioned near or above each jar, suggesting a direct relationship between the text and the depicted object. These notes imply a narrative or personal context for each jar, hinting at stories, memories, or snippets of information tied to them, as suggested in the provided background. One passage reads, "Staley's home has a ghost in the attic that sounds exactly like a squirrel."

The style of the work aligns with the description of Camblin’s distinctive style during this period, with the fluid watercolor handling and the integration of text into the imagery. The focus on seemingly ordinary objects—jars—connects to the idea of finding beauty in the mundane, a theme linked to Zen philosophy in his writings. The soft, blending colors could also be seen to mirror the Buddhist concept of impermanence, where forms are transient.

The presence of the jars on a shelf can be interpreted as a form of preservation or display, aligning with the I Ching’s Hexagram "Jing" (The Well) symbolizing nourishment and a source of sustenance, where the jars hold fragments of the past. The handwritten notes further emphasize the theme of memory and personal history, acting as direct links to the stories associated with each object, much like the blending of text and imagery found in the work of Cy Twombly, as mentioned in the background. The artwork invites a contemplation of the viewer’s own relationship with everyday objects and the personal narratives they often hold.



Deep Dive: 1973

1973

In 1973, Camblin actively exhibited his artwork in Houston and New York, including the Whitney Museum. His unique artistic style was noted, influenced by his intriguing collections of unusual objects. He was involved in the collaborative B E & J Holding Firm. Camblin held teaching positions at Rice University but decided to pursue art full-time and established a private studio with other artists. His work and the collaborative group's projects received critical attention within the Houston art scene. Earl Staley described Camblin's studio as a "wizard's den," filled with curious and outrageous objects that often imbued his art with a magical quality.

The artwork titled "What Not" presents a tangible manifestation of a conceptual interaction. A clear glass jar, its form gently rounded, rests on a simple wooden shelf supported by subtly ornate brackets rendered in muted tones. The jar is covered with a piece of light-colored fabric, gathered at the top and tied, obscuring its contents from a direct view while hinting at their presence within. Through the translucent glass, one can discern ambiguous dark and light forms, suggesting a mixture of elements, perhaps natural or collected, their exact nature intentionally undefined.

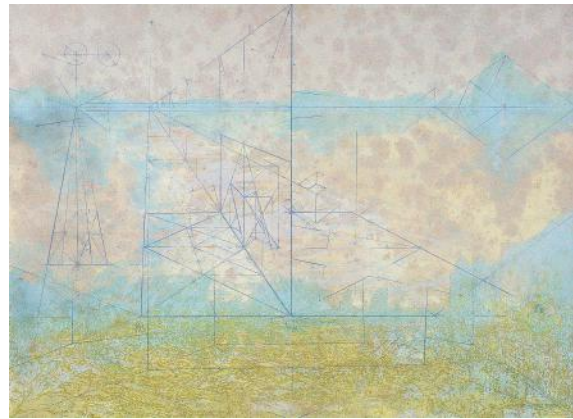
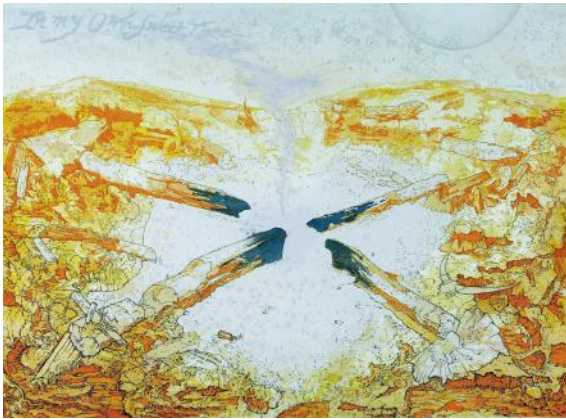
Below this depicted scene, handwritten instructions are clearly visible: "1. Pick up the jar," "2. Swirl until cloudy," "3. Shake until thoroughly mixed," "4. Is water opaque? If so," "5. Replace on shelf," "6. Watch everything settle," "7. Is the water clear?" and "8. comments ____". These instructions, numbered sequentially, transform the image into a directive, inviting a mental or imaginative engagement with the depicted object. The final line, "8. comments," further emphasizes this invitation to interact and interpret.

From a Zen perspective, the artwork embodies mindfulness in the act of engaging with the ordinary. The simple, sequential instructions guide a focused attention towards a mundane object, encouraging a meditative awareness of the actions of picking up, swirling, and observing. Even as a "mind play," the piece draws attention to the potential for presence in everyday tasks, aligning with Zen's emphasis on finding enlightenment in the routine.

The artwork operates on the threshold between observation and imagined interaction. The visual depiction of the jar and shelf is static, yet the accompanying text propels the viewer into a potential sequence of actions. By following these instructions in their mind, the viewer symbolically engages with the jar's ambiguous contents, stirring up the metaphorical sediment of thought or perception, only to then anticipate the clarity that may emerge upon settling.

Created in 1973, during a period of artistic exploration for Camblin, "What Not" aligns with the spirit of conceptual and participatory art. The blending of a depicted object with direct, instructional text recalls the work of artists like Joseph Beuys and Yoko Ono, who sought to dissolve the traditional boundaries between art object and action. The use of simple materials and a focus on an everyday object also echoes the tenets of Arte Povera.

Ultimately, "What Not" functions as a visual poem or a conceptual score, blending the tangible depiction of a jar with the intangible realm of instruction and imagination. It invites a multi-layered engagement, prompting contemplation on the nature of interaction, the pursuit of clarity from chaos, and the inherent stories and potential for mindfulness found within the seemingly ordinary objects that surround us.



Deep Dive: 1974

1974

In 1974, Camblin's intellectual interests in Montaigne and Emerson, particularly Montaigne's motto "Que scais-je?" which became his own, significantly influenced his artistic perspective. He exhibited his drawings and prints extensively across Texas and in New York, with one work being acquired by a museum. Camblin moved to a new studio, and his artist collective, the Holding Firm, engaged in collaborative art instruction. Following his departure from his teaching position at Rice University, Camblin began to transition towards landscape painting.

The lithograph "Fire" presents a dynamic and turbulent landscape dominated by warm earth tones transitioning into deep blacks. The central area features rough, gestural shapes that evoke the movement of flames or deep fissures in the earth. These forms rise and converge towards a darker central point, conveying the chaotic energy associated with fire. The background is rendered in pale, ashy tones, creating a sense of dryness and the aftermath of burning. Dark, irregular shapes reach into the lighter areas, appearing as charred remnants or lingering embers.

"Air" offers a contrasting dreamlike vista, where delicate hues of a fading sky blend with a swirling mass of fragmented text. The ground below is depicted as more solid, with rocky formations providing a sense of stability. The text drifts through the air like a passing cloud, emphasizing the transient and intangible nature of thoughts and language. The inscriptions, though illegible in detail, suggest a form of inner dialogue or a conversation with an unseen presence, evoking the fleeting echoes of memory.

The lithograph "Earth" presents a more grounded and textured landscape, dominated by a range of earth tones, from ochre and sienna to darker browns and blacks. The composition appears stratified, suggesting layers of soil, rock, and geological formations. Rough, organic textures dominate the surface, creating a tactile sense of the earth's materiality. Lines and shading emphasize the unevenness and solidity of the terrain. There is a sense of weight and permanence in this depiction, contrasting with the fluidity of "Water" and "Air," and the dynamism of "Fire."

"Water" features a landscape rendered in soft pastel hues, ranging from blues and purples to subtle earth tones, creating a gentle and fluid atmosphere. Overlaid upon this backdrop is a complex network of geometric lines and shapes, including triangles, squares, and interconnected grid patterns. This juxtaposition of organic washes and structured geometry creates a sense of layered depth. Faint organic textures in the lower part of the composition hint at an abstracted terrain beneath the water's surface.

As a set, these four lithographs – "Fire," "Air," "Earth," and "Water" – offer a compelling visual meditation on the impermanence of thought and language through the lens of the classical elements. Each lithograph uses distinct visual language and color palettes to evoke the characteristics and associated concepts of its element:

The use of abstract landscapes and overlaid elements encourages a contemplative approach, inviting viewers to consider the transient nature of both the physical world and the internal landscape of the mind and language. The series, printed at Little Egypt Studios, reflects the collaborative spirit and artistic explorations of the artists involved, likely including Camblin, Staley, and Tate, during a period where they were experimenting with printmaking and conceptual themes. The "Bestiary" series context further suggests an exploration of fundamental forces and symbolic representations.



Deep Dive: 1975

1975

In 1975, Camblin gained representation with the Delahunty Gallery in Dallas and had nine exhibitions, including a commission for the Houston Grand Opera. His activities ranged from printmaking collaborations to a visiting artist position at Louisiana State University, where he used performative personas to engage students. The text includes Camblin's personal reflections and announcements of his shows, providing insight into his artistic endeavors and connections. By the end of the year, Camblin was planning a trip to Venice, Italy, seeking new artistic inspiration.

The partially colored lithograph, "Round Up: See King the Longhorn," presents a sprawling, partially surreal landscape. Dominating the upper corners are large, curved horns, evoking the silhouette of a longhorn skull. In the center, a radiant, sun-like ensō serves as a focal point, surrounded by a detailed, uneven terrain. A winding ribbon of light blue water snakes through the lower portion, amidst scattered elements of debris or vegetation.

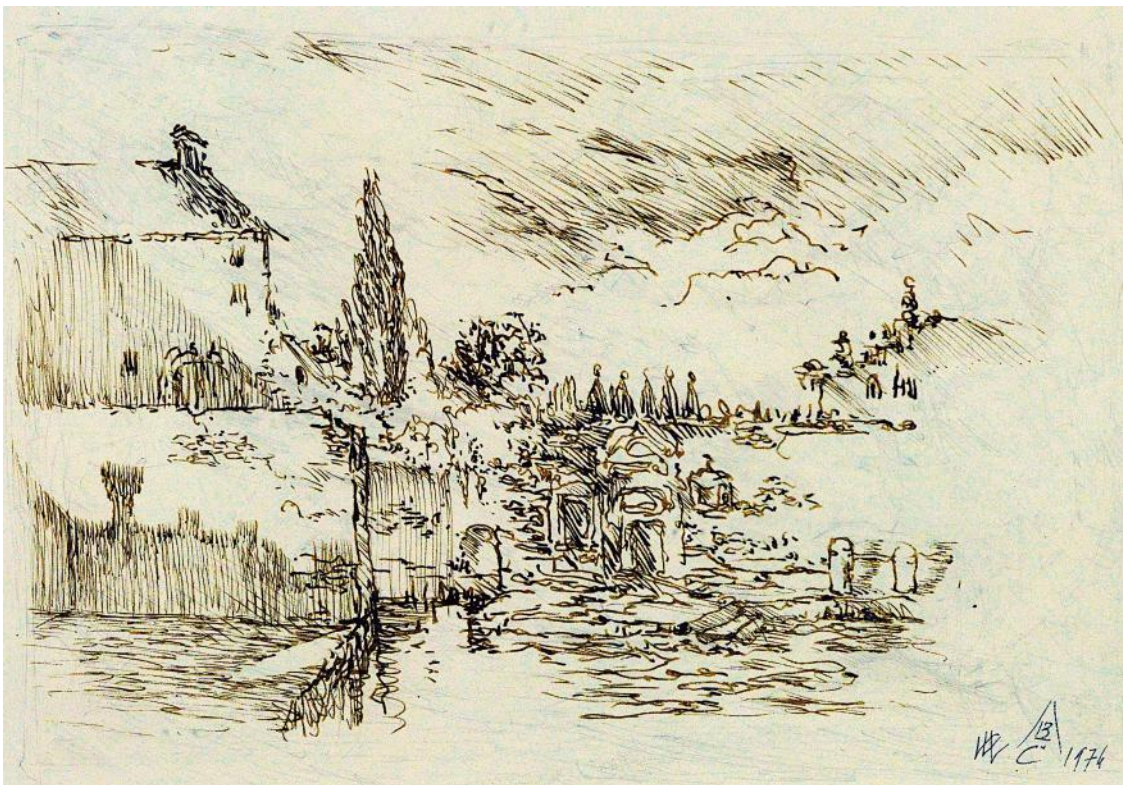
Toward the left, two signs stand attached to what appear to be tree stumps or posts. The upper sign reads "SEE KING," and the sign below it reads "LONGHORN." Interspersed throughout the landscape are small vignettes of text, including phrases such as "you get what you deserve," "the path of least resistance," "GAIN LOSS," and "patience is a virtue," each accompanied by a small, emblematic figure.

The majority of the piece is rendered with fine lines, reminiscent of pencil or pen, with selective washes of watercolor adding color to certain elements. Brownish hues define the horns and trees, pale blues color the water, and subtle greens appear in patches of foliage.

In the surrealist/symbolist tradition, the artwork layers signs, textual fragments, and symbolic shapes, echoing Surrealist techniques of juxtaposing disparate imagery to create a dreamlike tableau. The textual inserts function similarly to elements in modern collage or assemblage, serving both as narrative clues and visual components within the composition. While not as bizarrely figurative as the work of Hieronymus Bosch, the piece shares a kinship with allegorical landscapes through its cryptic messages and symbolic objects, hinting at a deeper, perhaps moral or existential journey. The detailed yet alternate reality, complete with text and hidden objects, also evokes a sense reminiscent of Leonora Carrington's surreal scenes. The layered text, signs, and somewhat unconventional approach to line and color might also subtly recall the aesthetic of 1970s concert poster art or underground comix.

The title, "See King the Longhorn," initially suggests a quest to find or appreciate the powerful and iconic Texas longhorn. The horns framing the top of the composition lend a venerable presence, as if marking the entrance to a domain overseen by the spirit of this creature. The labyrinthine landscape, populated with phrases acting as signposts, further implies a moral or existential journey.

In "See King the Longhorn," the artist orchestrates an intricate, symbolic environment presided over by the sweeping horns, ephemeral structures, and scattered text that function as cryptic guides on a spiritual or existential map. The resulting dynamic allegory merges Western iconography with universal moral prompts, creating a scene that feels both rooted in a specific place and charged with metaphoric depth.



Deep Dive: 1976

1976

In 1976, Camblin exhibited extensively across the US and in Kuwait. Reviews noted a shift in his style towards darker, more medieval aesthetics in his intricate drawings. Personally, Camblin experienced a divorce and a significant five-month trip to Venice, which influenced his art. The text also mentions his engagement with the art market, use of pseudonyms, and thoughts on other artists.

This sketch a pen-and-ink sketch of a landscape. The scene depicts a rural setting with buildings, possibly a village or estate, surrounded by trees and a body of water in the foreground. The sky is detailed with cross-hatching, suggesting a dramatic or cloudy atmosphere.

The style is similar to the work of William Callow (W.C.), a British landscape artist known for his detailed sketches and watercolors. The architecture and natural elements are rendered with fine lines, typical of topographical sketches of the time. Its composition subtly framed by suggestions of natural elements and the remnants of architectural structures. Delicate lines trace the outlines of these forms and the surrounding environment, evoking a sense of peace and a stillness that borders on the meditative. The scene feels suspended in time, inviting contemplation on both the inherent beauty and the transient nature of what is depicted.

The artwork seems to embody the Zen philosophy of embracing simplicity and mindfulness. The quietude of the scene encourages a letting go of attachments, offering a visual koan where the interplay of emptiness and form is central. The sketch subtly illustrates the concept of "mu," the Zen state of nothingness or non-duality, where each delicate line brings form out of emptiness, creating a harmonious balance between the material and the immaterial.

In the context of the I Ching, this piece resonates with Hexagram 20, "Kuan," signifying "contemplation" or "viewing." The hexagram emphasizes observing without judgment and adopting a broader perspective. The sketch invites the viewer to step back and perceive the entire landscape as a unified whole, echoing the themes of insight and introspection associated with Kuan.

Bridging these Eastern philosophies, the sketch can be interpreted as a meditation on the quiet resilience of nature and the presence of human-made ruins within it. It connects the inner journey of contemplation with the outward beauty of the landscape, suggesting that true understanding arises from the integration of personal experience and introspection. The fluid quality of the lines mirrors nature's cyclical processes, where creation and decay coexist in a continuous flow, akin to the Tao itself.

Stylistically, the piece aligns with traditional landscape sketches, reminiscent of the Romantic period's view of nature as a source of spiritual insight. The delicate linework and the strategic use of negative space echo the techniques of artists such as Caspar David Friedrich, who similarly employed landscapes to evoke feelings of transcendence and introspection. The work's minimalist yet expressive style appears to bridge Eastern aesthetics with Western landscape traditions, drawing upon both to create a universal sense of place and invite reflection on the relationships between form and emptiness, materiality and spirituality, and the timeless beauty found in stillness amidst the world's transient nature.



Deep Dive: 1977

1977

In 1977, Moody Gallery began representing Camblin, leading to plans for a solo exhibition in November. Camblin participated in seven group shows in Houston and Waco, received an oil painting commission from Kuwait, and briefly taught at the University of Houston. He also engaged in collaborative printmaking with Little Egypt Enterprises and The Holding Firm, experimented with his artistic style, and even bartered art for meals.

This piece is the invitation or poster for Bob Camblin's 1977 exhibition "N'Compleat Workes" at the Moody Gallery. In the original painting, a watery world rendered in washes of ochre, sepia, and muted green unfolds under a hazy, pale blue suggestion of sky. The scene feels damp, steeped in the humidity of a bayou or marshland, suggested perhaps by the dense, weeping foliage that crowds the right side, its fronds rendered in quick, downward strokes that blur into the reflective surface below.

A path, or maybe a sluggish channel of water, cuts through the center, leading the eye into the indistinct distance. Tall, skeletal poles or the remains of trees stand sentinel on the left, sparse and stark against the slightly brighter background. Structures, hinted at rather than defined, emerge like ghosts from the middle ground, their forms dissolving in the hazy atmosphere.

The landscape is not empty, but populated by curious figures that disrupt any sense of pure naturalism. Centered on the path sits an object resembling an old boot or perhaps a rustic vase, a single stick protruding from its opening like a solitary, misplaced flower. Near the foreground on the left, a low creature, maybe an armadillo or a patient turtle, rests its ancient form on the muddy bank. Just above it, startlingly, a pair of cartoonish eyes, simple black circles with white pupils, stare directly out at the viewer from the shadowed undergrowth or perhaps an unseen structure, adding a touch of the surreal or whimsical.

The overall effect is one of incompleteness, as the title "N'Compleat Workes" suggests – a dreamlike space rendered with loose, fluid lines where the familiar landscape blends with cryptic symbols and half-formed thoughts. It evokes a sense of quiet mystery, a place both recognizable and strangely altered, inviting the viewer to decipher its secrets hidden within the sketchy lines and earthy tones.



Deep Dive: 1978

1978

In 1978, Camblin began a significant commission for the Al-Naqeeb family in Kuwait, featuring a memento-mori skull composition using a unique dot and dash technique. He participated in several exhibitions across Texas, Chicago, and Wisconsin. Feeling artistically restless in Houston, Camblin traveled to California, Michigan, and spent two months in Oaxaca, Mexico, where his fascination with skulls began to influence his art. Throughout the year, he also took part in benefit auctions and continued his printmaking work with Little Egypt Enterprises.

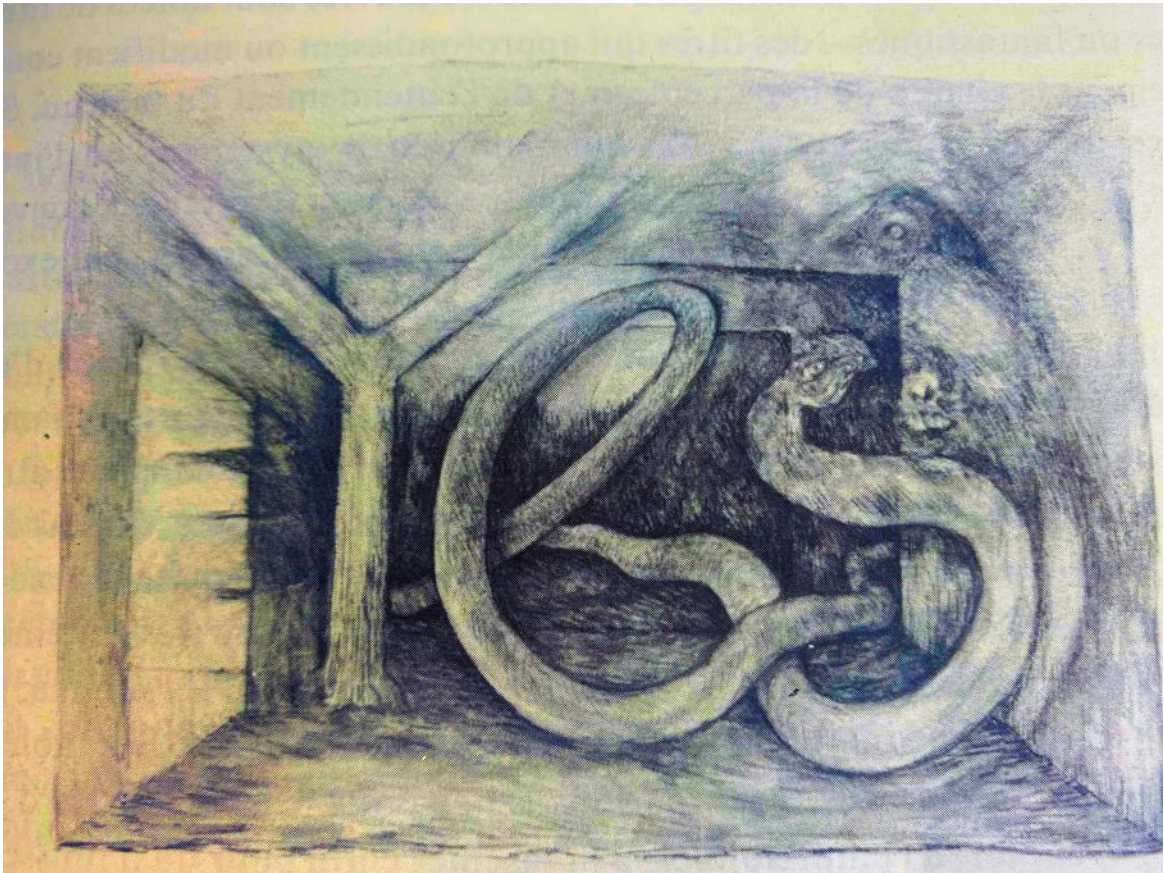
Gallery owner Betty Moody proposed that Camblin participate in upcoming group shows before mounting a solo exhibition scheduled for November 1977. She also suggested another potential solo show for 1979. Camblin welcomed the opportunity to create new work for Moody.

Camblin's first solo exhibition at Moody Gallery was titled "N'Compleat Workes." The invitation featured a drawing composed of autobiographical postcards layered over his open Texas Scrapbook, including references like "The Holding Firm," Mr. Peanut, the Texas Longhorn, and Kay Sage (K.S.). The show itself displayed numerous watercolor landscapes and drawings from his postcard series. Camblin noted that these watercolors established the 'ground' for him to 'play his games,' serving as foundational work.

He continued developing his signature style, embedding visual games, hidden codes, personal references, and ciphers within his art, inviting viewers to engage actively and uncover masked messages. Art remained his primary focus. Part of a series including a "Red Skull" and "White Skull," the lithograph titled "Blue Skull" presents a stark, high-contrast monochromatic image of a skull. Its purpose is to provoke contemplation on mortality and the cycle of life and death, acting specifically as a Zen koan intended to aid in the self-discovery of one's spirit guide.

The artwork uses the skull's rough texture to suggest decay. Surrounding shadowy forms and scattered objects, along with cryptic symbols or talismans near the bottom, add layers of mystery. Within Zen philosophy, the skull signifies impermanence (*mujō*) and the dissolution of the ego, urging a return to emptiness and freedom from attachment through acceptance of mortality.

Historically, the artwork aligns with the memento mori tradition ("remember you must die"), encouraging spiritual focus over materialism. Its expressive, rough rendering also echoes Symbolist and Surrealist uses of death imagery to explore the subconscious, potentially drawing influence from artists like Goya or Odilon Redon. Faint, hidden symbols or ghostly forms might be integrated, prompting deeper reflection on the unknown beyond death and the artwork's layered meanings.



Deep Dive: 1979

1979

In 1979, Camblin was actively involved in the art world, participating in seven exhibitions. A significant event was his solo show "Vanitas" at Moody Gallery, featuring skull altars and works inspired by his Kuwaiti commission. He also took part in group exhibitions like "Fire! An Exhibition of 100 Texas Artists" and "Doors: Houston Artists," receiving critical attention for his pieces. Additionally, Camblin continued his collaborations with Little Egypt Enterprises and Undermain Studio, and the Smithsonian acquired slides of his artwork, highlighting a prolific year exploring themes of vanitas, Mexican folk art, and cultural experiences through various artistic media.

Bob Camblin's drawing, enigmatically titled "Just Leave (Yes)," is a quintessential example of the artist's deep engagement with the symbiotic and often perplexing relationship between visual imagery and language. Created during a notably prolific period for Camblin, around 1979—a year marked by his solo "Vanitas" show and exploration of themes like skull altars and Mexican folk art—this work invites the viewer into a characteristic "terra incognita of speculative experience."

The drawing immediately confronts us with a bold, sculptural "YES" that dominates the composition. These letters, rendered with a flowing, organic quality reminiscent of "ornamental lettering" or even sinuous, living forms, are confined within a shallow, stage-like space. This sense of a contained, almost theatrical setting is a recurring motif in Camblin's oeuvre, transforming the picture plane into a site of unfolding drama or revelation. To the left, a stark, almost architectural 'Y' form anchors the scene, while in the upper right, a small, spectral figure with skull-like features watches or presides over the scene, a direct nod to the vanitas themes prevalent in his work at the time.

The title itself, "Just Leave (Yes)," is a masterstroke of Camblin's ability to "considerably deepen or modify the perception and understanding of the picture." The imperative "Just Leave" suggests departure, an ending, or perhaps an escape, while the parenthetical "(Yes)" offers an affirmation, an acceptance, or even a joyous embrace. This inherent contradiction charges the artwork with a dynamic tension, forcing the viewer to grapple with multiple potential meanings. Is it an acceptance of the inevitable (leave-taking, mortality), or a more cryptic commentary on choice and consequence?

As with his other works, Camblin "does not like to give everything away immediately." The drawing functions as one of his "intricate devices for simulation," using "illusion and deception" not to mislead, but to engage. The viewer is drawn into deciphering the scene: Are the letters of "YES" solid, or are they phantoms? Is the space an interior, a dreamscape, or a psychological landscape? The "oneiric figures" described in relation to his work "Leave" seem to find an echo here, not just in the spectral observer, but in the very atmosphere of the piece – a "totally unreal atmosphere" that hints at a deeper, symbolic narrative.

The energy of the drawing, its somewhat raw, immediate quality, aligns with an artist actively participating in numerous exhibitions and collaborations during this period. It feels like a direct transmission from his "poetic continent," where "words and figures unite to set up stratagems from the other side of the pictorial mirror." "Just Leave (Yes)" doesn't offer easy answers; instead, it reflects our own interpretations back at us, hinting at the secret of its language. It is a captivating piece that ensnares the attention, compelling us to look longer, think deeper, and ultimately, to embrace the rich ambiguity that is a hallmark of Bob Camblin's vision.



Deep Dive: 1980

1980

In 1980, Camblin participated in five art exhibitions across Texas and Utah, including an installation at the Salt Lake Art Center. He began a collaborative project with Nancy Giordano-Echegoyen titled "Touching Palms." Camblin also traveled to Ireland during this year. The text references publications and archives that document his artistic activities and his earlier connection to the University of Utah.

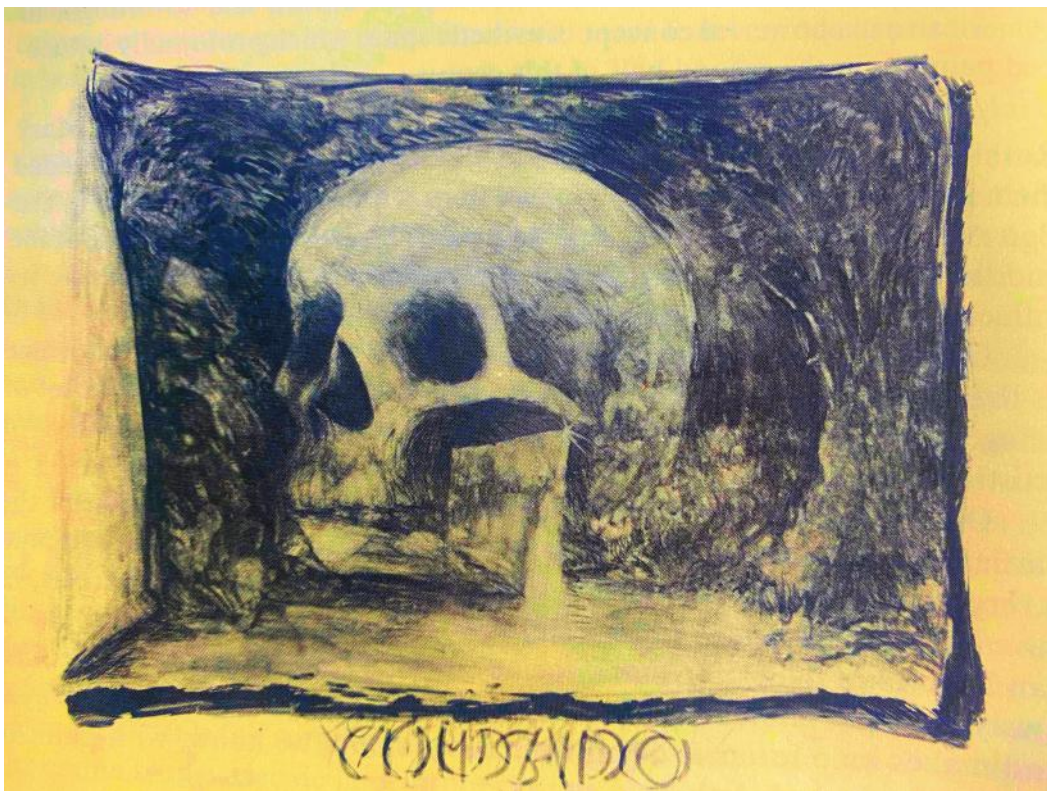
A single page from "The Scrapbook" shows two etchings side by side, titled "Fish" (left) and "Anonymous" (right). The Left Etching ("Fish") depicts an underwater scene with a fish at the center, surrounded by delicate, detailed line work representing aquatic plants or currents. Above the water, birds are perched, possibly on branches or rocks, creating a layered composition that separates the realms of water and air. The line work is fine and intricate, emphasizing natural elements with a sense of harmony and balance between the two ecosystems. The monochromatic palette, relying on shading and cross-hatching, gives the scene depth and a sense of fluidity.

The Right Etching ("Anonymous") contrasts sharply with the left. A dark, monolithic form dominates the center, rising against a textured background of swirling lines that suggest a chaotic or dreamlike atmosphere. Above, a large full moon glows, casting a mystical light over the scene. The use of heavier shading and denser lines creates a stark, almost foreboding contrast to the lighter, more naturalistic left etching. The monolith and moon evoke a sense of the unknown, aligning with the theme of emptiness or the void.

The etchings reflect Zen's contemplation of existence and nonexistence. The left image, with its fish and birds, symbolizes the tangible world—life's flow (fish in water) and the aspiration for freedom or enlightenment (birds in air). The right image, with its monolith and moon, represents the void or the unknown, encouraging meditation on emptiness. Together, they balance the ordinary and the profound, suggesting that enlightenment comes from embracing both the visible world and the unseen truths beyond it.

The etchings use traditional printmaking techniques, evident in the fine line work and monochromatic shading, reminiscent of 19th-century Symbolist art. The Symbolist movement, with artists like Odilon Redon, often explored mystical and existential themes, blending natural motifs with dreamlike atmospheres. The left etching's naturalistic detail contrasts with the right's surreal, abstract elements, reflecting a Surrealist influence where reality (fish, birds) meets imagination (monolith, swirling textures). This interplay mirrors Redon's work, which often combined the organic with the fantastical to explore the subconscious.

The two etchings together create a meditation on life's dualities: the dynamic, thriving ecosystem versus the still, mysterious void; movement versus stillness; the tangible versus the abstract. They encourage the viewer to find balance—engaging with the world while reflecting on deeper, unseen truths, a concept central to both Zen and the I Ching.



Deep Dive: 1981

1981

In 1981, Camblin exhibited his artwork in four shows in Houston and Santa Fe. He traveled to Ireland and California and began using pseudonyms for his art. Reviews of his exhibitions highlighted his Irish landscape paintings and his participation in a show centered on the image of the house. A watercolor piece by Camblin was also featured in an arts calendar.

Bob Camblin's 1981 drawing, "Cuidado," serves as a potent example of his career-long fascination with the intricate dance between visual representation and the evocative power of language. The work, whose title translates from Spanish to "Careful" or "Warning," immediately sets a contemplative, slightly ominous tone, a hallmark of an artist known for titles that "considerably deepen or modify the perception and understanding of the picture."

At the heart of "Cuidado" lies a starkly rendered skull, a timeless emblem of mortality and a recurring motif in the vanitas tradition. This central image, as described in the provided text regarding Camblin's vanitas pieces, initially presents a "death's head." However, true to Camblin's style, the viewer is invited to look beyond this immediate recognition. The somewhat obscured, textured background and the subtle interplay of light and shadow around the skull suggest a "universe that only reveals itself very slowly." The artist, it is clear, "does not like to give everything away immediately."

The title itself, "Cuidado," acts as an essential linguistic key. It's not merely a label but an active component of the artwork, prompting a sense of caution or heightened awareness in the observer. This aligns perfectly with Camblin's described methodology, where his "pictures are constructed like devices for ensnaring the viewer's attention...his aim is to fascinate the viewer and persuade him to adventure further and further into the terra incognita of speculative experience." The word "Cuidado" beckons us to tread carefully as we explore the layers of meaning within the stark imagery.

While the provided image of "Cuidado" is a drawing, Camblin's noted "delicate chromatic treatment" and "sophistication of his optical pitfalls" in his broader body of work likely find a parallel here in the nuances of line, shading, and composition. The way the skull emerges from or recedes into its shadowy confines can be seen as a form of "illusion and deception," a visual trap that encourages prolonged engagement. The drawing seems to embody his effort to lead "us into a poetic continent in which words and figures unite to set up stratagems from the other side of the pictorial mirror."

Created in 1981, a period of significant activity for Camblin with exhibitions in Houston and Santa Fe, travels, and experimentation with pseudonyms, "Cuidado" reflects an artist deeply engaged with his thematic concerns. The drawing doesn't just present an image; it poses a quiet challenge, hinting at "the secret of their language but never really revealing it." It asks us to be "careful" in our looking, to understand that the surface is but a starting point for a deeper, more personal reflection on the profound themes it so economically evokes. "Cuidado" is a compelling testament to Camblin's ability to weave image and word into a rich, slowly unfurling tapestry of meaning.



Deep Dive: 1982

1982

In 1982, while living in Galveston for a significant portion of the year, Camblin actively exhibited his artwork in at least five shows across Texas and internationally in Norway. These exhibitions included a range of events from anniversary celebrations to focused presentations of landscapes and prints. Reviews, catalogs, and publications documented Camblin's diverse styles and collaborative nature. Additionally, museums acquired Camblin's pieces, indicating his continued recognition within the Texas art scene.

he painting "Cuidado Bayou" is a vibrant, energetic piece that blends natural elements with symbolic undertones. The painting is dominated by vivid yellows and greens, creating a luminous, almost glowing effect that radiates energy. The central tree, with its twisting, spiraling form, stretches toward the top right, its branches curving like a vortex, drawing the viewer's eye upward. The ground and surrounding area, possibly a swamp or bayou, are rendered with dynamic, swirling brushstrokes in greens and yellows, suggesting water and foliage. On the left, a group of loosely painted figures, depicted with impressionistic strokes, stand near the edge, their forms blending into the background.

The words "CUIDADO" and "BAYOU" are inscribed along the bottom in red. "Cuidado" (Spanish for "caution") and "Bayou" (a term for a swampy waterway, common in Louisiana) suggest a specific geographical or cultural context, possibly a warning about the environment or a metaphorical "skull sighting," adding an element of mystery. In Zen, nature often mirrors the mind and life's flow. The spiraling tree could symbolize the cycle of birth, decay, and renewal, much like a river's continuous movement. Its radiant, swirling form evokes a moment of enlightenment or awakening, a realization of unity with nature. The figures on the left, painted loosely and somewhat detached, might represent human attachments or distractions, not fully immersed in the vibrant energy at the center. The painting encourages letting go of ego and merging with life's ongoing flux, a key Zen principle.

The painting aligns with Hexagram 59, "Wind over Water" (Dispersion), which signifies dissolving boundaries and releasing tension to reconnect with nature's flow. The tree's dispersing, spiraling motion and the painting's radiant energy suggest a breaking down of rigidity, encouraging a return to fundamental harmony. The figures on the left may represent lingering worldly attachments, gently being absorbed into the greater natural flow, as the hexagram advises removing blockages to find unity.

The painting's style aligns with Post-Impressionism and Expressionism, evident in its vivid colors, energetic brushwork, and emotional intensity. The swirling tree and luminous light are reminiscent of Vincent van Gogh's landscapes, such as *The Starry Night*, where swirling motions convey energy and emotion. The reference to "Bayou" ties the piece to Louisiana's swampy environment, a region rich in cultural heritage, while "Cuidado" adds a cautionary note, possibly about the dangers of the bayou or a deeper metaphorical warning about confronting the unknown.

"Cuidado Bayou" captures the tension between human detachment and the vibrant flow of nature, using light and color to symbolize enlightenment and unity. It invites the viewer to release ego, embrace the natural world, and find harmony in life's continuous movement, while the cultural reference to a bayou adds a layer of geographical and symbolic depth.





Deep Dive: 1983

1983

In 1983, Camblin had his mixed-media piece, "Big Bend (Homage to Earl Staley)," featured in the traveling exhibition "Texas Images and Visions," which was shown at three Texas museums: the Archer M. Huntington Gallery in Austin, the Art Museum of South Texas in Corpus Christi, and the Amarillo Art Center. The document also mentions lithographs by Camblin at the Archer M. Huntington Gallery.

The artwork "A Most Interesting Year" consists of nine boxed illustrations, each presenting a distinct scene or abstract form, arranged in a 3x3 grid. The nine panels vary in style, color, and subject matter, creating a fragmented yet cohesive narrative. The colors range from vibrant blues, yellows, and greens in the naturalistic scenes to darker, muted tones in the fish panel, and chaotic pinks and yellows in the abstract panels. This variety evokes a spectrum of moods—from serene and harmonious to chaotic and introspective—mirroring life's complexity.

In Zen, the boxed format can symbolize the mind's tendency to compartmentalize experiences, creating divisions between thoughts and perceptions. The concept of "emptiness" (Shunyata) suggests that these forms arise and dissolve within a unified awareness. The varied depictions—landscapes, abstracts, and symbols like the fish—illustrate that truth manifests in many forms, yet all are rooted in the same essence.

The panels could correspond to different hexagrams or stages in the I Ching, reflecting the balance of Yin and Yang. The top left (radiant circle) and top right (complex line work) panels contrast clarity and confusion, possibly symbolizing moments of insight versus turmoil. The middle and bottom rows, with landscapes and symbolic imagery like the fish and the number "4," suggest states of harmony, transformation, or grounding. The overall sequence might represent a cyclical journey through life's changes, aligning with the I Ching's emphasis on balance and flow between opposing forces.

Together, the Zen and I Ching perspectives frame "A Most Interesting Year" as a visual journey through stages of self-awareness or enlightenment. The shift from abstract, chaotic panels to more naturalistic, serene ones mirrors a progression from confusion to clarity, or from fragmented thoughts to direct perception of reality. The work also reflects cyclical time, with each panel as a moment in the flow of existence, inviting the viewer to find stillness amidst change. The fish, a symbol of life and intuition, and the number "4," often associated with stability, add layers of meaning about grounding and inner wisdom within life's unfolding.

The style draws from Symbolism and Surrealism, using dreamlike scenes and symbolic imagery to explore subconscious themes. The fish and abstract patterns evoke Surrealist elements, while the landscapes and sequential format recall Symbolist storytelling, often seen in medieval panel art where moral or spiritual lessons are conveyed. The loose brushwork and varying abstraction levels reflect a modernist, early 20th-century avant-garde approach, breaking from conventional forms to express fragmented perspectives and emotional depth, akin to artists like Paul Klee or Max Ernst.

"A Most Interesting Year" captures the diversity and complexity of life through its varied panels, blending naturalistic and abstract elements to reflect a journey from chaos to clarity. It invites contemplation on unity, encouraging the viewer to see beyond the mind's divisions and embrace the interconnected flow of existence, while its cyclical structure highlights the ever-changing nature of reality.





Deep Dive: 1984

1984

In March 1984, Camblin was included in the Houston Women's Caucus for Art exhibition catalogue, although he did not exhibit work. Simultaneously, a retrospective exhibition of his art from 1968 to 1984 opened at the Midtown Art Center. A Houston Chronicle review of this retrospective highlighted Camblin's diverse artistic styles and his underlying philosophy about art as a gift and the inherent truth in everything. Historians also note the beginning of Camblin's series on Albert Einstein.

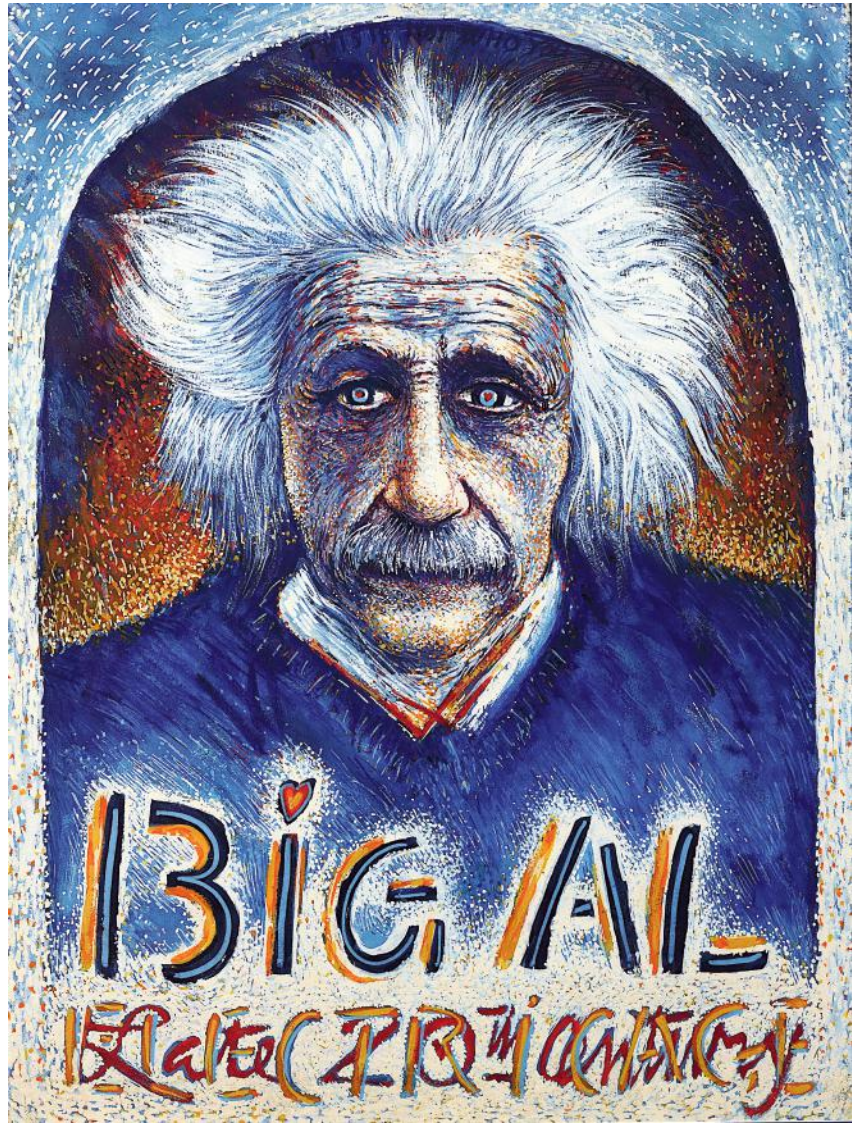
The watercolor "October Moon" is a tranquil landscape that invites contemplation through its natural elements and subtle symbolism. The scene depicts a serene body of water surrounded by dense, lush green foliage, painted in vibrant greens that suggest a thriving, natural environment. The water reflects the trees and sky, capturing light and shadows that add movement and depth. In the foreground, a rustic wooden fence with visible knots and texture stretches across the bottom, grounding the scene with a man made element. A lone figure on the left, partially hidden among the vegetation, adds a sense of mystery. A small, unusual sculpture—possibly a bundle of sticks or branches—emerges from the water in the center, creating an intriguing focal point. The sky above is a soft blue with hints of white, suggesting a calm day, though the title "October Moon" implies a nighttime or symbolic lunar presence not directly visible.

The brushwork is loose and impressionistic, focusing on atmosphere over fine detail, which gives the painting a dreamlike quality. The reflections in the water and the play of light through the foliage create a sense of tranquility and interconnectedness, while the sculpture in the water introduces an element of curiosity or otherworldliness.

From a Zen perspective, "October Moon" becomes a meditation on unity and the dissolution of boundaries between self and nature. The figure's integration into the landscape and the harmonious interplay of water, foliage, and sky suggest peace found through quiet observation and connection with the natural world. The fence, while manmade, complements rather than disrupts this harmony, reinforcing the idea that true peace comes from integration, not domination, of nature. The sculpture in the water adds a layer of mystery, possibly hinting at the unseen or subconscious elements of nature that invite further contemplation.

The painting's focus on light, atmosphere, and natural scenery aligns with Impressionism, particularly in the style of Claude Monet, who often captured the effects of light on water and foliage in works like his Water Lilies series. The loose brushwork and emphasis on mood over detail create a dreamlike quality typical of Impressionist landscapes. However, the inclusion of the hidden figure and the unusual sculpture introduces a narrative layer that echoes the Symbolist movement's interest in the mysterious and subconscious, blending the real with the ethereal in a way that invites introspection.

"October Moon" is a serene yet thought-provoking piece that explores the relationship between humanity and nature. It encourages mindfulness and unity, using the natural world as a metaphor for inner peace and interconnectedness, while the subtle mysteries—like the sculpture and hidden figure—deepen the invitation to reflect on the unseen aspects of existence.



Deep Dive: 1985

1985

In 1985, Camblin was actively involved in the Houston art scene, participating in seven exhibitions, notably the traveling "Fresh Paint: The Houston School." He received a grant from the Cultural Arts Council of Houston under his pseudonym "Anonymous Artists." His exhibited works included "The Studio" and "Texas Springtime." Camblin also created prints featuring Albert Einstein, which led to a legal notice. Reviews and articles discussed his contributions to the Houston art scene and characterized his artistic style and themes.

The painting "Big Al" is a vibrant, expressive portrait of Albert Einstein, characterized by bold colors and dynamic brushwork. The portrait captures Einstein with his iconic wild, white hair and intense gaze, rendered in a vivid, energetic style. The hair is depicted with swirling, almost electric brushstrokes in whites and blues, giving it a flowing, wave-like appearance that dominates the composition. The background is a textured mix of blues and whites with specks of color, adding to the chaotic, dynamic energy of the piece. Einstein's sweater is a deep blue, with the text "BIG AL" in large, colorful letters (yellow, red, and blue) at the bottom, adding a playful, informal touch. Additional notations like "LATE 20TH CENTURY" and "ELECTRICAGE" are scrawled around, enhancing the contemporary, casual tone.

In Zen, the concept of "beginner's mind" (shoshin) encourages approaching the world with childlike wonder, even with great knowledge. Einstein's intense gaze and the chaotic energy of his hair reflect this openness and curiosity, embracing the universe's mysteries without rigid logic. The untamed hair aligns with Zen's appreciation for natural, unrefined forms, symbolizing the flow of nature and the interconnectedness of all things. The playful nickname "Big Al" further humanizes him, emphasizing a Zen-like humility and accessibility despite his immense intellect.

The painting resonates with Hexagram 51, "Thunder" (Zhen), which symbolizes movement, shock, and awakening. Einstein's groundbreaking theories, like thunder, disrupted conventional understanding, bringing clarity and new insights to science. His piercing gaze represents the foresight that emerges from such disturbances, while the energetic brushstrokes reflect the transformative power of inspired thought. The electric quality of his hair further ties to the thunder motif, suggesting a jolt of brilliance that reshapes the world.

Together, the Zen and I Ching perspectives frame "Big Al" as a multidimensional portrayal of Einstein, transcending traditional portraiture. The painting captures him as a symbol of awakening and transformation, with his vibrant, chaotic hair embodying the untamed nature of his intellect and the electrifying impact of his theories.

The painting's style aligns with Expressionism, prioritizing emotional experience over realistic representation. The vivid colors and dynamic composition echo Post-Impressionist and Modernist movements, such as the works of Vincent van Gogh or Edvard Munch, who used bold brushwork to convey subjective intensity. The informal references to "Big Al," "Late 20th Century," and "Electricage" add a contemporary, almost pop-art twist, making Einstein accessible as a cultural figure beyond academia. This blend of styles reflects a tribute to both Einstein's scientific legacy and the shared creative drive in art and science to push boundaries and explore the unknown.

"Big Al" portrays Einstein as a symbol of intellectual awakening, using vibrant colors and expressive brushwork to capture the chaotic, transformative energy of his genius. It invites the viewer to embrace curiosity and wonder, blending the human and transcendent aspects of his legacy, while its playful tone bridges the gap between scientific icon and cultural figure.





Deep Dive: 1986

1986

In 1986, Camblin participated in four art exhibitions, including one in Paris, France. He was featured in publications discussing Texas artists and his collaborative work with groups like The Holding Firm and Anonymous Artists. His artwork, such as "Year of the Buffalo" and mixed media collaborations, was displayed in significant exhibitions, including at The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Catalogues and reviews documented his contributions to the Texas art scene.

Bob Camblin's 1986 painting, aptly titled "Paris," offers an intimate and richly textured glimpse into the iconic cityscape, created during a year when the artist himself exhibited in the French capital. This work captures not a grand, sweeping vista, but a more personal, almost voyeuristic perspective of the city's distinctive architectural fabric, inviting the viewer to peer into the layers of urban life.

At first glance, the painting draws the eye with its depiction of a charmingly condensed arrangement of rooftops, a hallmark of Parisian architecture. The composition is densely packed, emphasizing the verticality and close proximity of the buildings. The perspective seems to be from an elevated viewpoint, perhaps an apartment window, looking across a sea of pitched roofs, dormer windows, and slender chimneys that punctuate the skyline.

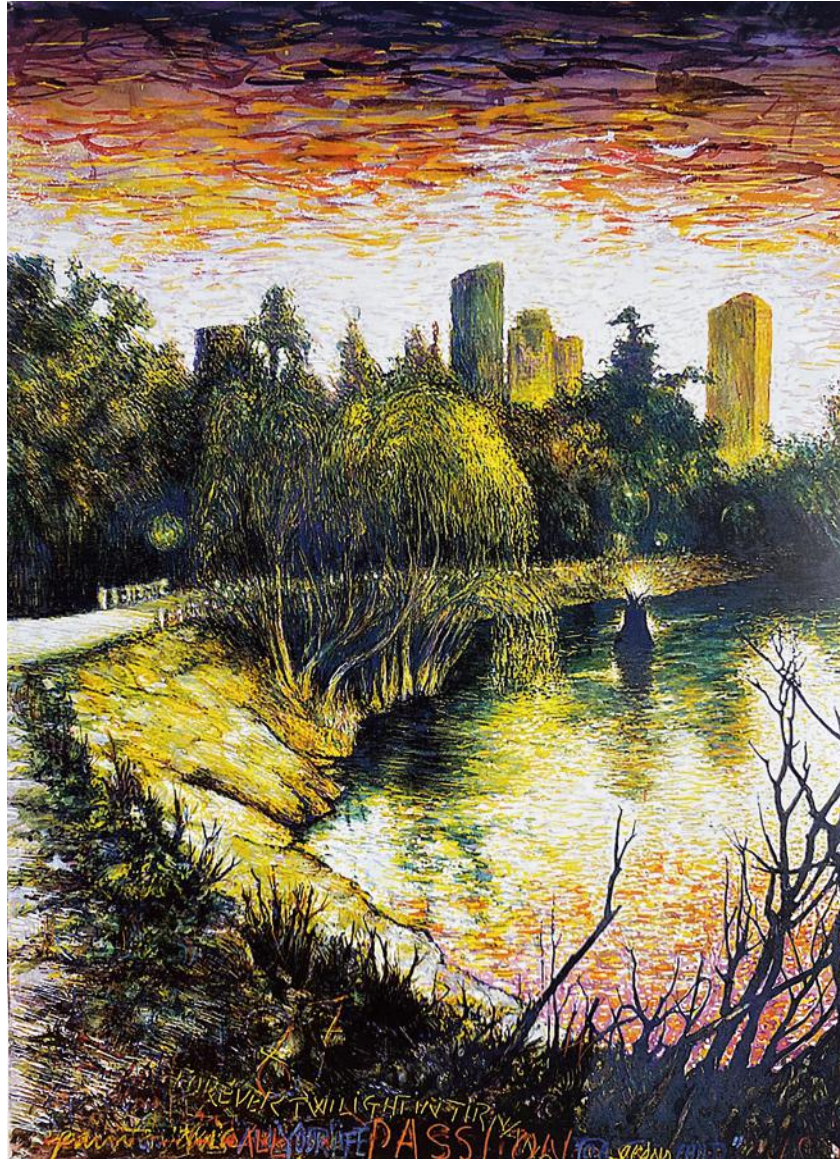
The middle ground is dominated by a striking expanse of blue-hued metal rooftops, their cool tones rendered with a painterly application that suggests the play of light on weathered surfaces. These are dotted with small attic windows, some appearing almost like eyes gazing out from the structures. Above this band of blue, taller buildings in warmer, more muted ochres and browns ascend towards a hazy, subtly rendered sky, hinting at the broader urban expanse without distracting from the detailed foreground.

Camblin's brushwork appears expressive and tactile, giving life and texture to the architectural forms. There isn't a hyper-realistic precision; instead, the painting conveys the feeling of the city—its age, its lived-in quality. The lower portion of the composition, suggesting a row of windows with shutters, some ajar, offers tantalizing, albeit obscured, glimpses into interior spaces. These partially opened shutters add a layer of narrative intrigue, hinting at the countless private lives unfolding within the public facade of the city.

Given that Camblin exhibited in Paris in 1986, this painting can be seen as a direct engagement with his experience of the city. It's less a tourist's snapshot and more an artist's observation, focused on the character and rhythm of the urban environment. The "charming yet somewhat crowded" quality speaks to the reality of Parisian life—a city of immense beauty and history, but also one of dense urban living. The work doesn't shy away from this density; rather, it finds a kind of beauty and visual interest within it.

While the provided context mentions Camblin's involvement with the Texas art scene and collaborative projects, "Paris" stands as a more personal, observational piece. It reflects an artist immersing himself in a new environment and translating that experience through his distinct visual language. The painting captures a sense of place that is both specific and timeless, a testament to Paris's enduring allure and Camblin's ability to convey its essence with sensitivity and skill. It feels like a moment captured, a quiet contemplation of the city's enduring architectural personality.





Deep Dive: 1987

1987

In 1987, Camblin exhibited in at least two shows, including "Found" at DiverseWorks, where his use of found objects was noted. He also designed materials for a DiverseWorks fundraiser and participated in "The Toy Show" at The Nave Museum. Additionally, the Graham Gallery began representing Camblin, and he was mentioned in a Houston Chronicle article for attending an event in Paris.

Bob Camblin's 1987 painting, "Forever Twilight in Tir Na Nog," is a rich and evocative landscape that transports the viewer to a realm where Irish myth, personal symbolism, and the contemporary world converge. The title itself, referencing the legendary Irish paradise where time stands still and youth is eternal, sets a stage for a scene imbued with an otherworldly atmosphere. This work, created during a period when Camblin was exploring found objects and actively participating in the Houston art scene.

The painting immediately draws the viewer in with its dramatic depiction of light and landscape. A luminous body of water occupies the foreground, its surface reflecting the fiery oranges, yellows, and somber purples of a perpetual twilight sky. This isn't the gentle gloaming of an everyday dusk, but a more intense, almost supernaturally charged illumination that befits the land of eternal youth. Lush, somewhat wild vegetation, including prominent weeping willows, frames the water, rendered with expressive brushstrokes that convey a sense of untamed, timeless nature.

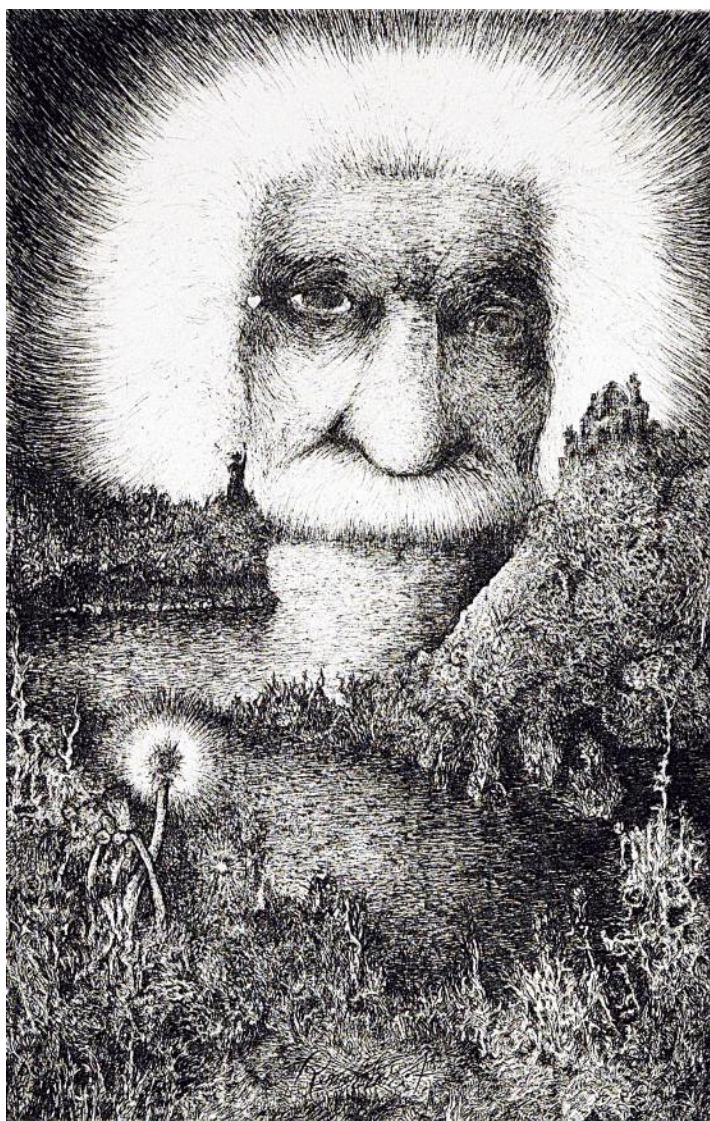
Intriguingly, rising beyond this idyllic, mythic foreground is the unmistakable silhouette of the Houston skyline. These angular, man-made structures, bathed in the same ethereal twilight, create a striking juxtaposition. This is not a pristine, untouched Tir Na Nog isolated from the mortal world; rather, Camblin seems to suggest a porous boundary, a space where the ancient paradise and the contemporary urban landscape can, or perhaps must, coexist. This blending of worlds raises questions: Is this an intrusion, a lament for lost innocence, or a more complex vision of myth adapting to or being perceived through a modern lens?

Adding a deeply personal layer to the work is the detail, as noted in the background information, of the artist's red-roofed studio being visible within the "rain troughs" (perhaps the shimmering reflections or rivulets of light on the water or land). This studio serves as Camblin's symbolic vehicle for his "travels to Tir Na Nog," transforming the act of painting into a shamanic journey or a portal to other realities. The painting thus becomes not just a depiction of a mythical place, but evidence from it, a landscape viewed through the artist's own transcendent passage.

Stylistically, the painting's expressive application of paint and its focus on capturing an emotional atmosphere rather than precise topographical detail align with a romantic sensibility, yet the inclusion of the modern skyline anchors it firmly in the 20th century. While created in a year where Camblin's use of "found objects" was noted, "Forever Twilight in Tir Na Nog" demonstrates his continued mastery of painterly concerns, using color and light as his primary tools to construct this liminal space.

"Forever Twilight in Tir Na Nog" is a captivating work that operates on multiple levels. It is a landscape imbued with the magic of Celtic mythology, a personal allegory of artistic creation as a journey to otherworldly realms, and a subtle commentary on the relationship between the timeless narratives of the past and the pressing realities of the present. Camblin invites the viewer to step into this luminous, ageless twilight, to ponder the nature of paradise, and to consider the enduring power of myth in a rapidly changing world.





Deep Dive: 1988

1988

In 1988, his final year in Houston, Camblin participated in five art exhibitions. Notably, he had a two-person show with Robert Morris in Victoria, Texas, where his artwork was described as ironic, satirical, and mystical, often blending humor with darker themes. He also participated in a handmade paper exhibition and a toy show in Houston. Before leaving Houston, Camblin held a silent auction at his studio. Historians also mention his ongoing work on a specific piece and other undated exhibitions in the city.

The lithograph "Big Al April Proof" is a striking, surreal depiction of Albert Einstein, blending his portrait with a dreamlike landscape through intricate drypoint work. Einstein's face dominates the composition, rendered with fine, detailed drypoint lines that capture his iconic features—wild hair, deep-set eyes, and mustache. Wispy lines radiate from his head, creating a glowing aura that gives him an otherworldly presence, as if his mind is emitting light or energy. Below his face, a surreal landscape unfolds: a body of water reflects the scene, surrounded by rocky formations and dense vegetation. A small, glowing form—possibly a dandelion or a spark—floats on the left, adding to the mystical atmosphere. In the background, a castle-like structure perches atop a cliff, enhancing the dreamlike quality. The monochromatic palette, with intricate cross-hatching and shading, creates depth and a sense of ethereal unity between Einstein and the landscape.

The intricate line work and surreal blending of Einstein's face with the natural scenery evoke a contemplative, otherworldly mood. His gentle yet penetrating gaze, combined with the radiating lines, suggests a figure of profound insight, bridging the rational and the mystical. In Zen, the artwork reflects the illusion of separateness, as Einstein's visage merges seamlessly with the landscape, symbolizing the interconnectedness of all things. The radiating lines around his head evoke "satori" (enlightenment), where the boundaries between self and universe dissolve. The serene waters below represent the mind's natural, reflective state, while the rocky formations and vegetation hint at life's challenges that shape the journey toward awakening.

Einstein, positioned above the landscape as if surveying it, embodies this contemplative stance. His penetrating gaze suggests insight that transcends ordinary perception, reaching into the mysteries of existence. The landscape below, with its natural and surreal elements, reflects the world he contemplates—a blend of the tangible and the abstract, encouraging a deeper understanding of unity.

The lithograph employs traditional etching techniques, evident in the intricate drypoint work, which harks back to classical portraiture. However, its surreal elements—Einstein's face merging with the landscape, the radiating aura—draw from 20th-century Symbolism and Surrealism, movements that explored dreamlike imagery and the subconscious. This aligns with artists like Max Ernst, who used collage and surreal compositions to question reality. The radiating lines around Einstein's head evoke the halo motif in religious art, casting him as a modern "saint" of science, a trend in modern art where scientific figures are given quasi-spiritual status. The glowing form and castle-like structure add to the mystical, dreamlike quality, blending precision with imagination.

"Big Al April Proof" transcends traditional portraiture by depicting Einstein as a symbol of enlightenment and unity. The intricate drypoint work and surreal landscape merge the rational and the mystical, portraying him as a figure whose insights illuminate the interconnectedness of the universe. The artwork bridges science and spirituality, inviting the viewer to contemplate the deeper unity between humanity and the cosmos.



Deep Dive: 1989

1989

In 1989, Camblin relocated from Houston to the Oregon coast with his wife Nancy, settling in Yachats and later Waldport. Despite the move, Camblin maintained his presence in the Houston art scene, participating in the Little Egypt Silent Auction, the DiverseWorks exhibition, and the "Messages from the South" show at Rice University. He also contributed to a collaborative outsider art nativity scene at the Art Car Museum in Houston. Furthermore, Camblin was recognized in the broader art world, being listed in the Annual Exhibition Record of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts for 1989.

The painting "Sunset" is a monochromatic depiction of a waterfall in a rugged landscape, accompanied by a sage and an "X" marking a significant spot. The image is a detailed pen-and-ink drawing, using a monochromatic palette of black and white with intricate cross-hatching and line work to create depth and contrast. A waterfall cascades down a rocky cliff at the center, its flow dominating the composition and creating a sense of dynamic movement. The surrounding landscape features dense forest and rugged terrain, framing the waterfall and enhancing its dramatic effect. To the left, a sage-like figure with wild hair sits near an "X" marked on the ground, adding a focal point of human presence and mystery. The dark tones and high contrast emphasize the raw power of the water and the starkness of the natural setting.

The monochromatic scheme and intricate line work evoke a sense of awe and intensity, capturing the sublime power of nature. The waterfall's energy contrasts with the stillness of the sage, creating a tension between movement and contemplation.

In Zen, nature reflects life's essence and the flow of time. The waterfall symbolizes mindfulness and the transient nature of existence, as its continuous flow mirrors the impermanence of all things. The sage sitting beside the "X" suggests a meditative presence, embodying Zen's call to embrace the present moment amidst life's turbulent currents. The artwork invites the viewer to find serenity by accepting change, much like water reshapes itself without resistance.

The monochromatic palette and focus on form and movement echo traditional Chinese landscape paintings, where waterfalls often symbolize nature's dynamic forces. The high-contrast, detailed line work also recalls the Romantic era, where artists like Caspar David Friedrich depicted nature as a sublime, awe-inspiring force that evokes both wonder and fear. The sage and the "X" add a narrative layer, blending human contemplation with the overwhelming power of the natural world, a theme common in both Eastern and Western traditions that explore the relationship between humanity and nature.

"Sunset" captures the sublime power of a waterfall, using monochromatic tones to emphasize movement and contrast. It serves as a meditation on life's flow, blending Zen mindfulness with the I Ching's cautionary wisdom, and invites the viewer to navigate challenges with grace while finding peace in the present moment. The sage and the "X" add a layer of mystery, grounding the scene in a moment of human reflection amidst nature's raw energy.



Deep Dive: 1990

1990

In 1990, Camblin was featured in a traveling printmaking exhibition and in the book *Forty Texas Printmakers*, which illustrated one of his etchings. Despite being identified as primarily a painter, Camblin traveled to the Marshall Islands for a month-long painting commission, where he created and sold numerous artworks. Additionally, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, received a significant donation of 131 of Camblin's prints.

The painting "Backyard 101" presents a mystical, nighttime forest scene with a semi-transparent cloth and glowing orbs, creating an otherworldly atmosphere. The scene is set in a dense forest at night, with tall, slender trees stretching into a dark, blue-purple sky. A large, semi-transparent cloth is draped among the trees, illuminated by numerous glowing orbs that float like fireflies, casting a soft, ethereal light. The cloth, with its delicate, flowing texture, dominates the center of the composition, creating a veil-like barrier that glows with the orbs' light. The surrounding foliage, painted in deep greens and browns, frames the scene, while wooden structures in the foreground—possibly a fence or platform—add a grounding element.

The glowing orbs and the illuminated cloth create a magical, dreamlike atmosphere, evoking a feeling of secrecy or hidden enchantment. The dark, dense forest contrasts with the soft light, suggesting a boundary between the known and the unknown, the ordinary and the mystical.

In Zen, the veil between the known and the unknown often symbolizes barriers to enlightenment. The semi-transparent cloth in the scene represents this thin separation between ordinary perception and deeper reality. The glowing orbs, like fleeting fireflies, symbolize moments of "satori" (enlightenment)—brief, profound glimpses of clarity that disappear quickly. The scene invites the viewer to look beyond the veil, embracing the interplay between mystery and revelation, and encourages mindfulness in perceiving the subtle truths that lie beneath surface appearances.

The painting aligns with Hexagram 57, "Xun" (The Gentle, Wind), which represents subtle influence, penetration, and the hidden power of stillness. The glowing orbs can be seen as gentle, guiding influences, much like the wind shaping a landscape over time. The cloth, not fully opaque, suggests a gradual unveiling of truth through persistence and patience. The scene embodies the hexagram's call for subtle progress, urging the viewer to remain aware of the quiet, persistent forces that guide life's journey through hidden paths.

The cloth acts as a threshold, symbolizing the separation between ordinary perception and deeper understanding, while the glowing orbs represent fleeting moments of insight that guide the viewer toward enlightenment. The scene encourages patience and awareness, inviting the viewer to listen to subtle signals—whether the glow of clarity or the gentle influence of unseen forces—and to explore what lies beyond the veil with a sense of wonder and stillness.

The use of chiaroscuro to create depth and mystery recalls Renaissance art, where drapery often signified divine presence or a boundary between realms. Here, the cloth serves as a modern reinterpretation, acting as a threshold to another world, a motif that aligns with Surrealist influences. The dreamlike quality, glowing orbs, and mystical forest evoke the works of Surrealist artists like Max Ernst or Leonora Carrington, who often explored the metaphysical and the unconscious through otherworldly imagery.



Deep Dive: 1991

1991

In 1991, Camblin participated in two art exhibitions. One was "Texas Selections from the Menil Collection" in Galveston, where his 1971 piece "Trotline Memorial" was shown. He also donated artwork to a benefit auction for the Austin public television station, KLRU-TV, joining other artists in supporting the station's fundraising efforts.

The painting "Fall Electricage" features a sunflower in an oval frame, capturing both vitality and decay in a symbolic representation of life's cycles. The sunflower is centrally placed within an oval frame, its large, vibrant yellow flower head dominating the composition. The petals are bright and lively, while the center of the flower is a textured mix of browns and yellows, showing detailed realism. The green leaves extend outward, some lush and healthy, others wilted and browning, particularly toward the bottom, where the plant appears darker and more decayed. This contrast highlights the passage of time and seasonal transition. The background is a soft, textured white, framed by a dark brown border, giving the sunflower a focal prominence. At the bottom, a yellow ribbon with red text reads "FALL ELECTRICAGE 1991," adding a temporal and conceptual layer to the piece.

The juxtaposition of the sunflower's vibrant head with its decaying leaves creates a bittersweet mood, blending beauty with impermanence. The oval frame and ribbon give the painting a classical, almost emblematic feel, while the word "Electricage" introduces a modern, enigmatic element.

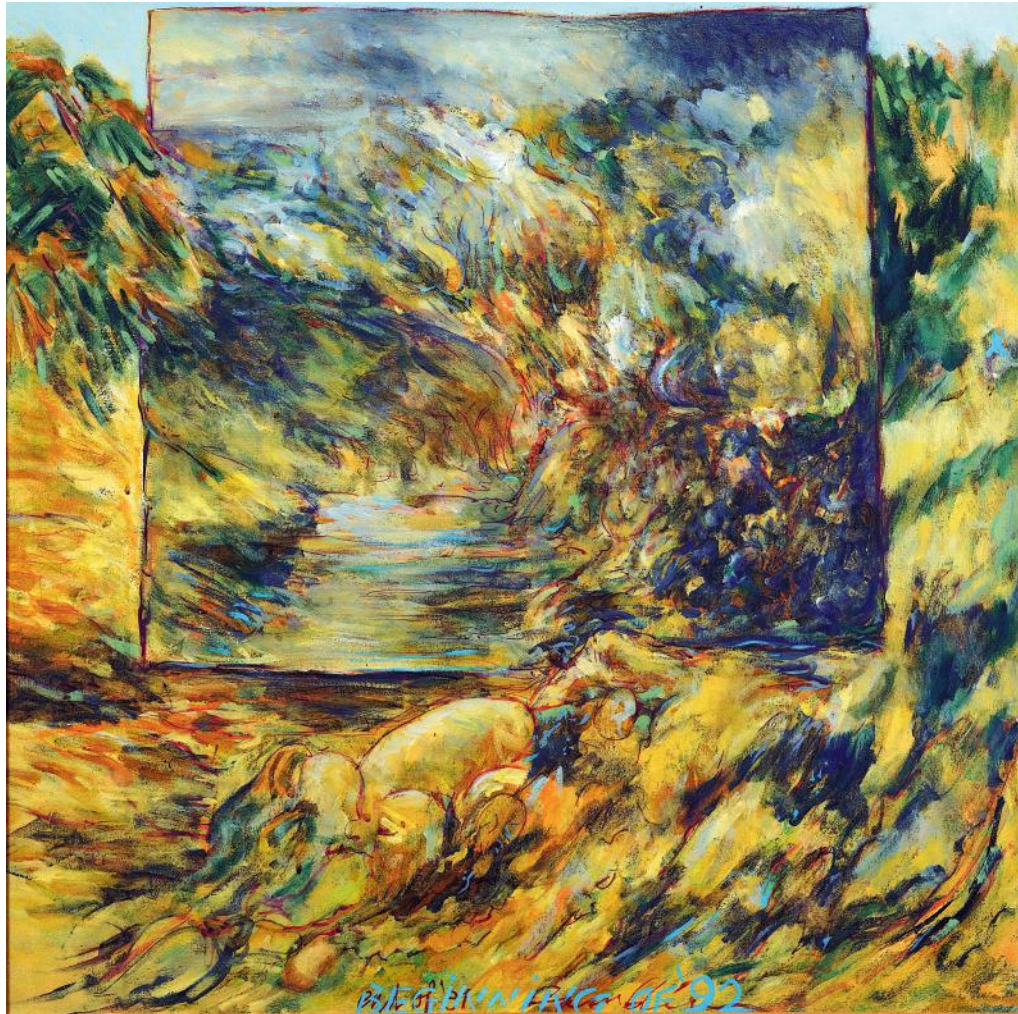
In Zen, the cycle of life is an unbroken flow, with growth, decay, and rebirth as interconnected stages. The sunflower embodies this flow: its bright head represents life's beauty, while the wilted leaves signify inevitable decay. This duality invites contemplation of impermanence, a core Zen teaching, encouraging acceptance of all life stages as part of the same journey. The painting fosters a sense of harmony in embracing change, finding beauty in both vitality and decline.

"Fall Electricage" becomes a meditation on change and resilience. The sunflower, with its vibrant head and aging leaves, symbolizes the beauty and impermanence of life, encouraging the viewer to embrace all phases—growth, decay, and eventual rebirth. The painting challenges resistance to change, promoting a balance between vitality and surrender, and reflects the natural cycles of existence. The term "Electricage" adds a layer of modernity, possibly hinting at the energy or spark of life that persists through these cycles, or a commentary on the era's rapid changes.

Sunflowers have a rich history in art, notably in Vincent van Gogh's works, where they symbolize joy, warmth, and vitality. However, "Fall Electricage" diverges by introducing decay, aligning with modern and postmodern movements that depict the real and imperfect rather than the idealized. The detailed rendering of the sunflower, combined with the aging leaves, bridges traditional still life with conceptual art, while the text "Electricage" and the date "1991" add a contemporary twist. This blend invites introspection on nature's cycles and humanity's perception of time, reflecting a dialogue between classical symbolism and modern conceptualism.

"Fall Electricage" uses the sunflower to explore life's impermanence, blending Zen's focus on accepting change with the I Ching's reflections on stillness and transformation. The vibrant flower head and decaying leaves create a metaphor for resilience amidst decline, encouraging the viewer to find beauty in every phase of existence. The painting's style and symbolism bridge traditional and modern art, offering a contemplative take on nature, time, and the enduring cycles of life.





Deep Dive: 1992

1992

In 1992, Camblin further developed his Old Santa character. He participated in two art exhibitions in Texas. Camblin also relocated to Algiers Point, Louisiana. Later mentions indicate his continued significance as a Houston artist, even after moving.

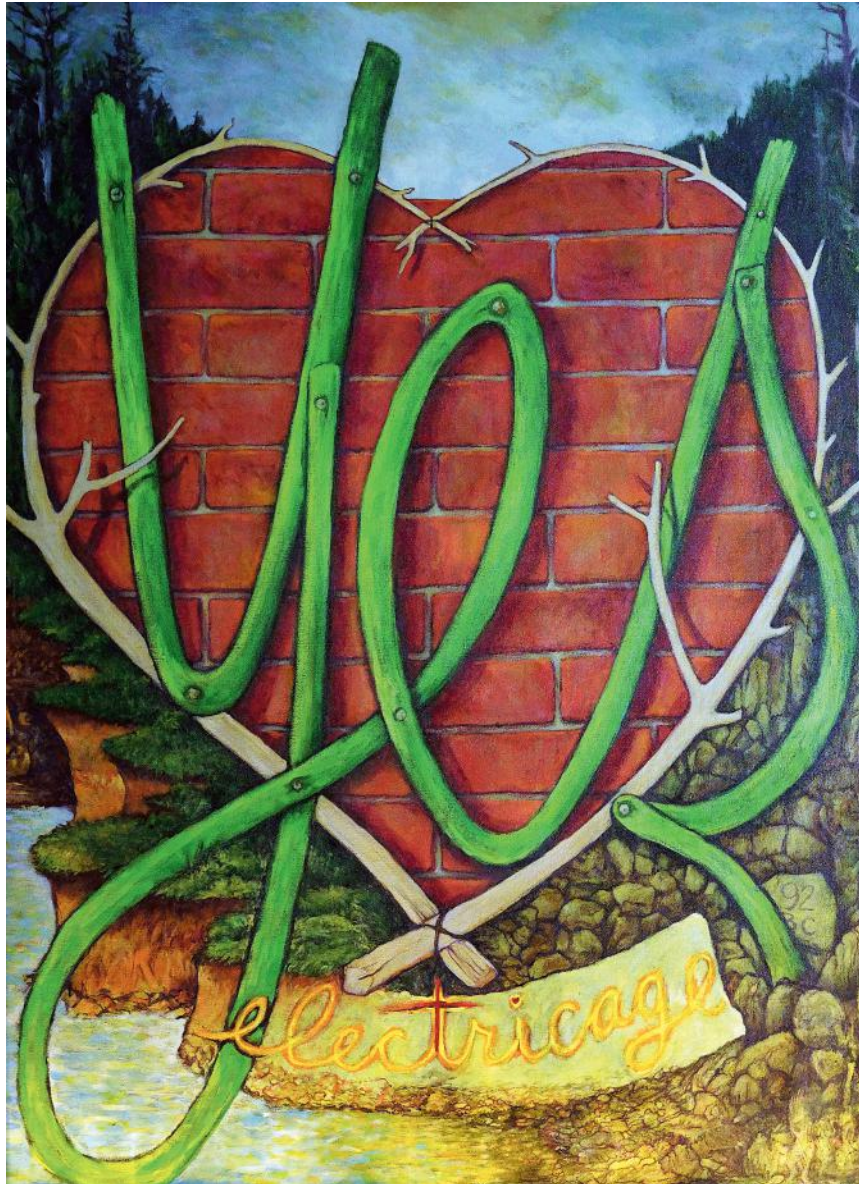
The painting “Beginning of ‘92” is a vibrant, layered landscape that explores the interplay between structure and fluidity, reality and perception. The painting features a "painting within a painting" effect, with a central, framed landscape surrounded by more abstract, fluid outer areas. The inner frame depicts a clearer representation of a natural scene—a river or path winding through lush greenery, with trees and foliage rendered in slightly more defined forms. The outer areas are more chaotic, with swirling brushstrokes in warm yellows, oranges, and greens, accented by blues, creating a sense of motion and energy. The sky above is a mix of blues and grays, suggesting a turbulent atmosphere. In the foreground, abstract forms—possibly figures or rocks—blend into the vibrant, textured landscape, adding to the layered complexity. The brushwork is dynamic and expressive, with colors flowing into each other, creating a sense of constant flux.

The warm tones of yellow and orange, contrasted with cooler greens and blues, evoke energy and movement, while the framed inner scene provides a moment of clarity amidst the surrounding chaos. The painting feels both harmonious and turbulent, reflecting a balance between structure and freedom.

Zen emphasizes the "present moment" as the true reality, and this painting reflects that principle. The boundary between the framed inner scene and the fluid outer areas symbolizes the illusionary separation between perceived reality and the boundless nature of existence. The swirling colors outside the frame represent the impermanence of form and life's constant flux, inviting the viewer to transcend rigid distinctions and experience the world as an interconnected whole. The inner frame, with its clearer landscape, might represent a fleeting moment of clarity or mindfulness within the broader flow of existence.

The painting carries echoes of Romanticism in its focus on nature and emotional expression, with the vibrant interplay of light and movement reminiscent of artists like J.M.W. Turner, who captured the sublime energy of landscapes. The textured brushwork and vivid colors also recall Vincent van Gogh's expressive landscapes, where nature is imbued with emotional intensity. The "painting within a painting" technique suggests modernist influences, such as Cubism, which integrates multiple perspectives to challenge perception—here, the inner frame and outer fluidity create a dialogue between structure and abstraction. The layered brushstrokes may also hide forms or imagery, encouraging deeper introspection, a trait common in Symbolist art that seeks to evoke deeper meanings through layered representation.

“Beginning of ‘92” uses a vibrant, layered composition to explore the boundaries between perception and reality, structure and flux. It reflects Zen's focus on impermanence and interconnectedness, as well as the I Ching's wisdom of harmony and transformation, inviting the viewer to transcend rigid distinctions and embrace the dynamic flow of existence. The painting's style blends Romanticism, Symbolism, and modernist techniques, creating a rich, introspective dialogue about the nature of experience and the interplay between clarity and chaos.



Deep Dive: 1993

1993

Around 1993, Camblin was recognized in a Houston Chronicle article as a significant but perhaps underestimated figure in Houston's art history, in connection with a DiverseWorks exhibition. A DiverseWorks publication from that year also referenced a 1987 exhibition called "Found." Personally, Camblin relocated to New Orleans with Giordano, and they were involved in real estate transactions with their families. Historians also mention visits from friends and family and some of Camblin and Giordano's travels during this period.

The painting "Yes" is a symbolic and visually striking piece that combines natural and manmade elements to explore themes of acceptance and emotional openness. The central focus of the painting is a large heart constructed from red bricks, set against a natural background of a forest and a stream. Green branches and twigs are woven into the heart, forming the word "YES" in a flowing, script-like style. The "Y" and "S" extend upward, creating loops that add a sense of movement and whimsy. Below the heart, a banner in golden yellow script reads "electricage," introducing a playful, modern element. The background features a lush forest with tall trees and a winding stream, painted in vibrant greens, blues, and earth tones, creating a contrast between the organic landscape and the structured brick heart. The brushwork is expressive, blending natural forms with geometric precision.

The painting exudes a sense of positivity and openness, with the vibrant colors and flowing branches suggesting energy and life. The brick heart, while solid and structured, is softened by the green branches, creating a balance between resilience and vulnerability, while the word "YES" evokes a joyful affirmation.

Zen emphasizes mindfulness and openness to the present moment, and "Yes" reflects this through its interplay of natural and manmade elements. The brick heart symbolizes the barriers we build around ourselves—emotional walls or guardedness—while the branches forming "YES" suggest acceptance and a willingness to embrace life fully. This aligns with Zen's teaching of breaking down resistance to experience each moment as it is. The natural setting reinforces the idea of harmonizing with the flow of life, balancing the constructed (bricks) with the organic (branches and forest).

From a Zen and I Ching perspective, "Yes" serves as a visual metaphor for acceptance, growth, and emotional transformation. The brick heart represents resilience or emotional guardedness, yet the branches spelling "YES" signify a breakthrough—an openness to life's experiences and a willingness to dismantle self-imposed barriers. The term "electricage" adds a layer of charged energy, suggesting that this act of embracing life can be electrifying and transformative. The painting encourages a balance between the hardness of structure (bricks) and the softness of nature (branches), advocating for harmony and joy in navigating life's dynamic flow. It invites the viewer to say "yes" to life, finding fulfillment through openness and connection with the natural world.

The painting's use of contrasting materials—organic branches and geometric bricks—along with the integration of text, aligns with modernist and postmodernist traditions, where text and image combine to convey layered meanings. The surreal juxtaposition of a brick heart recalls René Magritte's surrealist imagery, such as his use of everyday objects in unexpected ways to provoke thought, like in *The Treachery of Images*. The script-like "YES" and the playful "electricage" banner evoke pop art influences, reminiscent of artists like Roy Lichtenstein, who merged text and visual art to create bold, accessible messages. The vibrant colors and symbolic elements draw parallels to Symbolism, encouraging deeper introspection about human emotion, while the overall composition blends surrealism and naturalism to explore the tension between structure and freedom.





Bob Camblin in his Tír na nÓg studio

A NOTE ABOUT THE ARTIST

Bob Bilyeu Camblin (August 1, 1928 – December 4, 2010) was an American artist who emerged as a defining figure in the vibrant 1970s Houston art scene. Equal parts mystic, provocateur, and virtuoso, Camblin infused his watercolors, paintings, drawings, and prints with layers of hidden meaning, intricate detail, and a sly sense of humor that captivated audiences and puzzled critics alike.



