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# Crossroads *Current*



**H u g h M e r r i l l**  
*Winters Journey*

A free circulation for the Crossroads Arts District in Kansas City, Missouri



# Hugh Merrill

## “Winters Journey”

March 6th - March 28th 2015

Todd Weiner Gallery  
115 w. 18 st. Kansas City, MO. 64108  
ph. 816.984.8538 toddweinergallery.com

In his two most recent series of works shown at the Todd Weiner Gallery, entitled “Winters Journey” and “Common Sutras”, Hugh Merrill’s thought process evolves to encompass thematic content involving change and flux while providing a perspective for any audience.

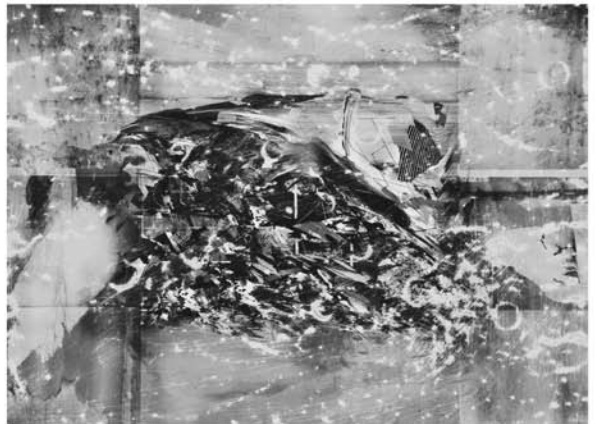
“Winters Journey” is based on music by Franz Schubert, which Merrill proclaims to be the saddest music he has ever listened to in his life. The music serves to illustrate the difficult times every person goes through during their lives. Merrill describes the times when parents or pets die as winter journeys. On a personal note, Merrill describes his depression as a journey he experiences in his own life.

He explains one is never totally alone during that time, “a winters journey always emanates that there will be a spirit, and a warmth.” The Schubert musical pieces are entitled with numbers next to the title “Winterreise.” Merrill specifically explains the last song of the album, “Gurdy.” “On a very cold winter evening, just as dusk turns the color of recent snowfall to blue, the traveler comes to an Inn. Warming by the fire, with food and drink, the visitor is happy but feeling the frustration known by all who travel. On the wind he hears what might be music. Dozing in the warmth and security of the Inn, the music drifts in broken waves of delicate but disconnected sound

alternating with the sound of the wind, wakening and listening intently. Yes, it is music, the music of the gurdy man, grinding out tunes somewhere in the frozen winter landscape. Grinding for whom in the cold blue night? Who is to be convinced by sounds of possible joy and warmer times to come? Some hear and others can’t, as they have become deaf to the possibility. The music is for some, but not for all, no not for all.”

Merrill does not pre-consider his color palette because he believes it to be of minor consideration. He just creates. The artist explains that his titles mimic the song titles by Schubert, but the artwork does not match the title purposefully. Although he has listened to all of the pieces in the suite numerous times, he doesn’t know which specific number is which, he just knows the music. Visually, a number of large pieces seem to be shifting or nearly sanded off the paper.

Many of Merrill’s influential teachers were interested in Zen Buddhism, including John Cage and Robert Motherwell. They believed strongly in the balance of the mind and body, through repetitive action that trains the body to respond in an automatic



“Untitled”

2015

Hugh Merrill

way, without a conscious thought process. A martial artist or a Samurai are good examples of this.

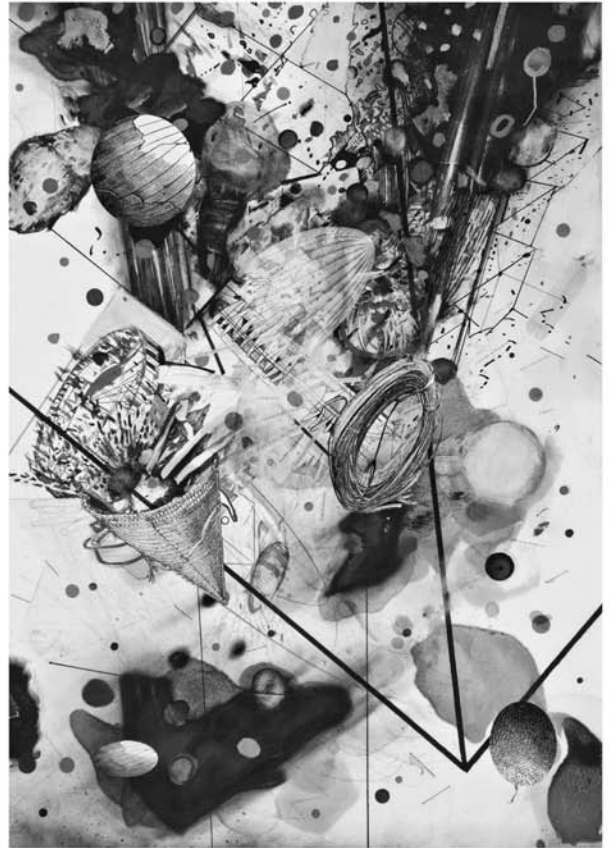
These influences shine through on “Winters Journey.” He explains, “Buddhism doesn’t have a set of principals that are unchanging, like ‘Jesus is the Son of God,’ seen in Christianity. Those are kind of big constructions. In Buddhism, everything is in constant flux and change.” Merrill plays with spatial relations that have to do with geometry and physics with physical landscape structures like the mountains he created in “Winter’s Journey.” Merrill did not orient the mountains in the same way that historically great landscapes were developed, to capture the coast of New England or like Monet’s “Haystacks” for example. Merrill’s “Winters Journey” embodies an Abstract Expressionist influenced Buddhist flux, through spatial shifting. The pieces keep changing; yet staying the same.

The second series, “Common Sutras” presents more abstract paintings than “Winters Journey.” Sutras, such as the Lotus Sutra and Heart Sutra, are Buddhist Nichirin short mantras that keep your mind from wandering while meditating. As Franz Kline’s studio mate, Emmanuel Navaretta, one of Merrill’s teachers, explained to him that Kline’s black and white paintings tried to become an absolute balance between mind and body, which Merrill equates to meditation’s intentions.

“Common Sutras” contains a grouping of works that are a modified and abstracted grid made up of photographs of buildings from various perspectives, with Merrill working back into them. Another grouping is present in the series containing charts that are based on the combination of paintings, their connection to the sutras can be found through the information behind the layers, such as the photographs.

Merrill explains, “The beauty of the sutra is that it comes from life, the real wear and tear of nature as

buildings begin to rot.” The two series relate through thematic content involving Buddhist elements while encompassing separate stylistic representations evolving from abstract expressionism, color field painting, minimalism and post-structuralism.



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Hugh Merrill 2015



# AFI

Artist File Initiative

## Documenting Kansas City's Creative Community One Artist at a Time

Learn about the Artist File Initiative, a project of the Spencer Art Reference Library, which documents the careers of the artists practicing in the Kansas City community. This important record ensures that information about Kansas City's artists and creative community is available now and for the future to art enthusiasts, collectors, scholars and anyone interested in learning more about visual arts in Kansas City. Learn about this initiative and how you can start your own file.

### **Spencer Art Reference Library and Artist File upcoming Events:**

Thursday, March 12, 2015 | Artist File Initiative Drop-In | 4:00 – 6:00 pm  
@ Spencer Art Reference Library at The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

Thursday, March 26, 2015 | Celebrate Kansas City's Creative Legacy:  
The Nelson-Atkins Library's Artist File Initiative Turns 1! | 6:00 – 8:30 pm  
@ Kansas City Artists Coalition

Friday, April 24, 2015 | Artist File Initiative Drop-In | 4:00 – 6:00 pm  
@ Spencer Art Reference Library at The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

The  
Nelson-Atkins  
Museum  
of Art

[toddweinergallery.com](http://toddweinergallery.com)