



SLOWINSKI The Barricade (AKA 33 Men) Oil on canvas 78" x 132" 1978

33 Men in 1978

by Tim Slowinski

The year was 1978. The cold war was in full swing and everyone was 15 minutes from total nuclear annihilation. I had just emerged from a yearlong bout of despair that had almost transformed my brain into a lump of headcheese and was painting myself out of a psychic black hole. Painting was like an extension ladder, each canvas brought me closer to the light at the top of the tunnel.

Prior to my descent into darkness, I had been working in a style that gradually, like my mind, had been deconstructing itself. The imagery was based on groupings of faces but had over time become less recognizable. The technique I had employed was to paint directly with oil on unprimed canvas, a destructive act in itself.

I applied the paint thickly from jars using palette knives. My colors were limited to earth tones, white, black and cadmium red. I had an aversion to blues and greens at the time. Once the colors were arranged to my satisfaction, I would scrape the whole painting off with wide metal spackle knives. I scraped the paint downward, relishing in the effect of the colors smearing down like waterfalls.

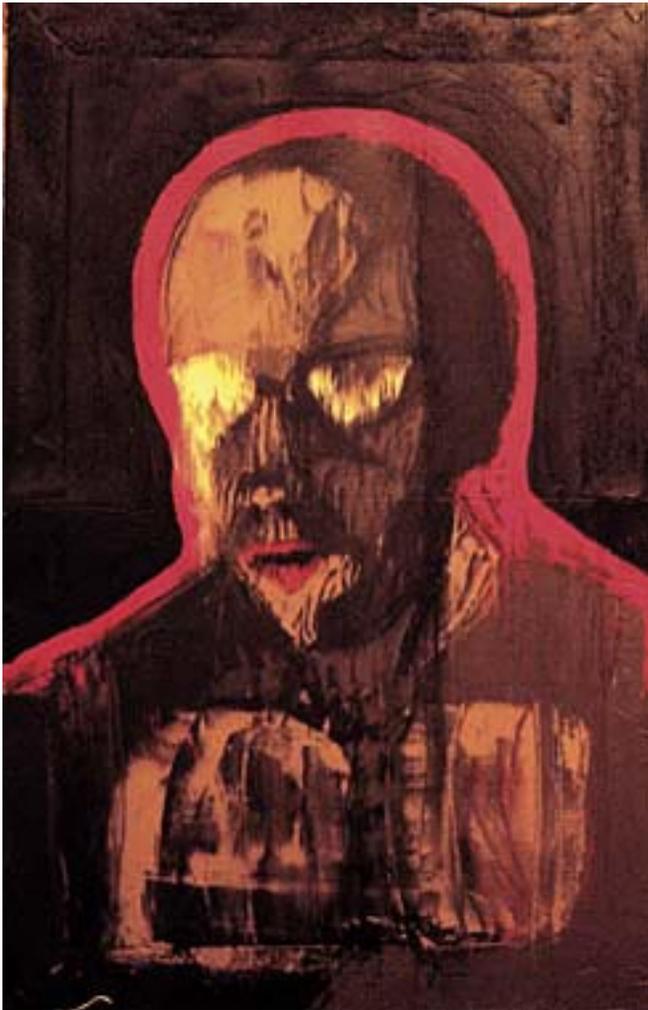
Interesting patterns were created that could be accentuated depending on the thickness of the application. Occasionally, for additional effect, I would tear the whole painting off the bars and fold it up, then step on it and pull it apart.

As I drew myself out of the darkness, I continued employing the same method, but refining the application and reigning in the self-destructive compulsions which had rendered my work into an unrecognizable mess. After a number of smaller preliminary works, I created the final painting of this series, *The Barricade*, (AKA 33 Men.)

The idea of *The Barricade* was to create a painting symbolic of mankind at the moment of nuclear annihilation. The downward pull of the paint represents the melting of the bodies, the white eyes draining down is the melting of the eyeballs at the moment of impact. The earth colors used in the human bodies represents the earth, like the bodies of the men, melting and destroyed.

I was early in my career as a painter, only twenty one and inspired—or delusional as the case may be. The method employed required completing one figure or area of the painting in one day, as I had to scrape it down before the paint began to dry. Although it was oil, the absorbency of the raw canvas accelerated the drying time. I remember painting twelve to fifteen hours in a session, arranging each figure before scrape down. The painting was quite large, almost seven feet high and eleven long.

I painted the thing in a garage behind my parent's house. I had renovated it into a studio a few years before and had installed a small wood stove. Suburban New Jersey was not the



SLOWINSKI Portrait Oil on canvas 37" x 24" 1978

most abundant location for firewood, so *The Barricade*, painted in late fall and winter, was created in the freezing cold, at times wearing gloves with the finger tips removed.

The spring after the painting was finished there was a large anti nuclear rally in Washington DC. I had a plan to bring the painting to the rally and mount it on the stage behind the speakers. To raise the money for the effort, with the help of my cousins, I took the painting to the Metropolitan Museum in Manhattan and tied it to the flagpole in front of the museum. We planned to sit there all day and collect donations to pay for the transportation to the rally. As the museum opened for business some people arriving to the museum saw the painting and ran up the stairs. Shortly thereafter a group of security men came out and removed us from the flagpole. A curator who came with them was actually apologetic and suggested we move off to the side of the Museum, nearer the corner. So we managed to stay there all day and collect fifty dollars of quarters to buy the gas for our trip. Gas was much cheaper then, so fifty would cover it.

Somehow in Washington we managed to contact some of the organizers of the rally. After leading us on a bit and using us to make harassing phone calls to some senators, they told us we could not put the painting on the stage, but should carry it like a banner in the march. It was pretty hard to do since the painting was so big, but we were going to do it anyway. Unfortunately it rained quite hard and rather than ruin the painting we decided to forego the march. In retrospect I think it was a mistake, it would have been better to march with it in the rain, any damage would only have added to the effect.

After *The Barricade* I refined the technique incorporating

SLOWINSKI Pentacost Oil on canvas 50" x 96" 1978





SLOWINSKI The Visitor Oil on canvas 84" x 96" 1979

new subject matter. I used a family photograph taken by my father in 1958. My Dad, who had 13 kids and loved them to death, was a great documentarian. He took hundreds of photos and made scores of short family films. I'm actually in the painting, a one year old baby boy in my mothers arms. The idea was to add to the horror of the nuclear annihilation by using a real family. Of course choosing my own family for the subject of this obliteration must have had implications, what those are I can not say. It is a large painting also, seven by eight feet. The title of the piece is "The Visitor." The visitor of course is the atomic bomb.

The Visitor is the last painting I did using the palette knife and scraping method. It was a nice effect and the scraped off paint left a soft surface that resembled a dyed fabric, like a batik. Unfortunately, the oil will one day decay the fabric, so the

method is somewhat impermanent.

I still have some of the paintings and they seem fairly stable, so I don't know how long they will last—perhaps a hundred years. By that time everyone who was alive in 1978 and would have been vaporized by a nuclear war will be dead anyway...it makes me wonder if any of this matters. They say eventually the sun will expand into a red giant and the earth will be rendered down into a piece of charcoal. By that time, human civilization may only exist as a stream of data flowing through interstellar space. If only our love could flow with it.

Tim Slowinski is an American artist, gallerist and publisher who was born in Orange, NJ in 1957. A self taught artist and entrepreneur, Slowinski established the Limner Gallery in New York City in 1987 and Direct Art Magazine in 1997.