

Appropriations of material from earlier art generally introduce intriguing messages. Each instance can be a homage of sorts, but more importantly, it is a conscious statement about the fluidity of history. For a former abstractionist like Cicero, appropriations also become a rich and complex way to work with human content. Hints of his abstract sensibility appear in the way he selects, places, and interweaves his motifs.

As an artist who has always emphasized the expressive thrust of his paintings, Cicero is undoubtedly keenly interested in testing the emotional potential of his appropriations. This would be a key factor in his combining Winslow Homer's renowned fox with a Botticelli saint and a wintery New England landscape in *The Fox*. It would apply as well to his annexation of the threatening atmospheric mood in Ruisdael's sky.

Meanings are never precise. Inventions that encourage uncertainty, ambiguity, and wide-ranging interpretations seem to please the artist.

He is equally far-reaching when considering valid sources to mine for his art. Dreams are fine. Fertile and energizing, their role can be seen in *Tintoretto's Sleigh*, with its incongruous early American transportation artifact, and in *Engine 611*, in which a black locomotive appears as an iconic presence in a remote, snow-covered forest. In both instances, the object's lonely isolation seems characteristic of the dream psyche.

Cicero values the way dreams allow a feeling of displacement, and he enjoys working with their unpredictability and their enigmatic characteristics. Like the Surrealists, he is also excited by the ability of dreams to unlock hidden, yet authentic realities.

Life experience and the irregular

quirkiness of memory fuel ideas for Cicero too. An old urban New Jersey power plant, where his father was once an engineer, is recast as a mysterious, abandoned and lonely structure in a vast open plain in *The Wheat Field*, where it provokes questions about physical and mental dislocation and distance, and about the relationship between industrial development and nature. When filtered through the imagination, even a large New York City building that the artist sees daily from his studio becomes transformed into a pseudo-Hollywood setting with a visually striking geometric scheme in *Penthouse*. This filtering process is clearly a contributing factor, too, as elements from old master paintings pass from stored memories of museum visits to new roles.

Cicero's probing mind also regards voyeurism and the spirit of discovery as valid areas to explore for resonant motifs. Viewers become uninvited