

one of De Chirico's statues. *Princess* depicts a sumptuously outfitted figure out of 17th Century Spain who seems as astonished as we are to find herself in leafless nocturnal woods.

There are literary sources as well, for example in *Scene from a Joseph Conrad Story*, with its derelict bark drifting in toward a menacingly dark shore. Here the absence of the figure is, in itself, poignant, accentuating the emptiness of the little boat and, the possibly unseen inhabitants of the dark forest.

Almost always some narrative is in progress. *Prince Valley Road* depicts a running man clad only in tattered pants anxiously looking behind him as he flees across a dark path. Painted in grisaille, he is illogically illuminated by more than the moon that hovers overhead in the gap between bare branches. The awkwardness of his anatomy and the bright, spectral light that models his body give him the feel of a character

from a local folk tale or a Washington Irving story.

Certain of Cicero's images are more enigmatic still. *Castle of Otronto* focuses on an exotic red-breasted bird perched upon a white rock projecting from a pond with the castle far in the distance. *The Barn* features a brightly colored bird and moth, both exquisite and strange, against a dark site with the barn of the title a dark presence to the left. In *Night Music*, a comical large bird standing on the ground listens attentively to Rousseau's silhouetted flute player. The combination of the inky dark of the figure and the woods, the clear colors of the bird, and the bright snow covered ground and pale sky recall Magritte's *Empire of Light* with its paradoxical vision of conjoined night and day. Such incongruities may elicit quiet wonder, often after a surprised laugh at being taken unawares. Intimations of mortality, the sort that filter through dreams and

lurk within all of the arts, are the ghosts in these pictorial machines.

Cicero has traveled a great distance since making his stark black and white abstractions (or near-abstractions) of the 50's and the expressionist figurative paintings that he produced through the 80's. These rough images link him with other contrarians as George McNeil, Leon Golub, Robert Colescott, and late Philip Guston, all of whom contested the cool posture of various mainstreams through the late 20th Century. Two large acrylic on canvas paintings entitled *Battle of the Sexes*, 1972 and *Battle of the Sexes II*, done twenty years later, evince a no-holds-barred improvisatory process that propels their obstreperous images.

With the advent of the 90's the paintings become less expressionist (not to say any less expressive) and more visionary. Cicero's world is now brought forth not so much through a hard-fought agon of picture making (that legacy of