

the Abstract Expressionist mythos) as it is fully envisioned and, it would seem, innocently transcribed. If these paintings bear a resemblance to illustrations in children's books, this is because their fanciful imagery precedes the process of painting more than growing out of it. Their character does indeed derive from how they are painted—their palette, their spatial construction, their particular attention to detail—but one now feels that their facture is in the service of an otherworldly reality. In this Cicero's visionary paintings are also like much so-called outsider art: humble transcriptions in which the artist's first obligation is fidelity to the received image.

Contrary to the common notion that watercolor depends either upon panache of execution or the timid modesty of a genteel hobby, Cicero builds his paintings deliberately, step by step, layering dense textures, and even repainting networks of tiny marks where

he feels the need to accentuate or modify a particular passage. Each stroke is a focused move within what comes to seem a devotional process, as though to assure the enduring stability of a fleetingly glimpsed apparition. Using opaque watercolors (gouache) he is able to lay light marks on top of dark ones and to make whatever corrections he chooses. He deftly and unpredictably plays this technique off against atmospheric transparencies as in the fluidly painted sky of *Castle Hill Road*. Here the moon is rendered by the white paper, while in other paintings such as *Venezia* (into which the clown out of an early Hopper has been unaccountably transported) the moon and its aura are rendered with opaque white against the dark sky. What counts is the darkly luminous, oneiric image to which these techniques contribute.

Jasper Johns famously characterized his subject matter as “things the mind

already knows,” Cicero might say the same, although he would be referring to another part of the mind: not that mental file furnished with its catalog of received, habitual formations (a target, a map, stenciled numbers) but a realm where deeper, archetypal narratives are in play. For all their surreal quirkiness we encounter Cicero's mysterious pictures as if returning to some site in a dream we have dreamt countless times before.

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*Robert Berling*