Fig. 1. Bart Forbes (b.1939), *The Hurler,* 1987, Oil.

The Art of Bart Forbes
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Bart Forbes' (b. 1939) recognizable style of painting began when he started painting in college, but his desire to be an artist started much earlier than that. "I can't remember when I didn't want to be an artist," he said. This desire, combined with a lifelong interest in sports, provided Forbes with inspiration that would last a lifetime.

Forbes' dad would take him to major league baseball games and the nostalgia of the sport became a favorite subject for Forbes. These baseball paintings would become some of his most recognizable works.

Forbes' cites impressionism as one of his major influences. "I'd have to say I was most influenced by the French Impressionists." Forbes said. "I don't paint like them but I was influenced. I try to create a feel. This feel is what makes a Forbes painting so unique. All his work has an air of nostalgia due to Forbes amazing editing capability and simplification process. Every image is stripped of any unnecessary detail and contains only what is important.

Fig. 2 Bart Forbes), *Center Court,* 1984, oil.

In Forbes' striking painting titled, "Center Court" (fig. 2), his technique is understated and shows his power of removing all unnecessary details. He uses a complimentary palette of red and green which could overpower an image, but he dulls each down to more muted shades of the colors.

One of Forbes' signature techniques is to clearly state the lit side of a figure and then let the shadows merge with the background. The red background moves in and out of the figure which adds almost a "mist" quality to the work. There is no distinction between the chin and the neck which typifies the "lost edge" quality of successful watercolor painting.

Forbes has eliminated distracting background elements and has the figure standing on an almost abstract background. Most of his edges are fairly sharp which gives the work a beautiful pattern quality.

He doesn't typically use gradients in his work, instead preferring to let all the local tones stay flat and graphic. The shirt is just a textured shade of grey with a few dark shapes to indicate the shadows. It is a simple and very effective approach that works perfectly.

In addition to using simple shapes, Forbes is essentially a value based painter. He designs a very clear value relationship that holds together in both grey scale as well as color. During a recent lecture in Ft. Worth he summed up the idea of value sketching by saying "If you get the values correct, you can use almost any color.

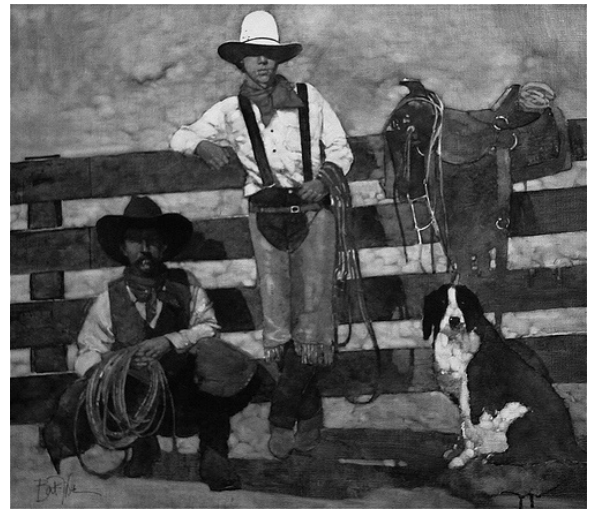Fig. 3 Bart Forbes, 1982, *Ranch Hands*, oil.

Fig. 4 Bart Forbes, 1982, *Ranch Hands*, oil.

By Comparing Fig. 3 and 4 it is easy to understand what Forbes was saying. The image on the right has been converted to grey scale and still reads perfectly. Forbes is very carefully selecting the values for each shape and maintains a "paper doll" relationship between the items in the composition. Essentially he is putting light shapes over dark shapes. By doing this he ensures that all the shapes separate and maintain their integrity. This can be demonstrated by reducing the image down to a very small thumbnail. Even at the small size (Fig. 5), the painting still looks great.

Fig. 5 Bart Forbes, 1982, *Ranch Hands*, oil.

An easier way to evaluate how strong Forbes is with value is to compare him with someone who doesn't use value as effectively as Forbes does. An example of this is Michael Hague's (b. 1948)

Fig. 6 Michael Hague (b.1948), *Elves of Rivendell,* 1986 Oil.

Fig. 7 Bart Forbes, Putter*,* 1992, Oil.

illustration titled "Elves of Rivendell" (fig. 6).

Hague's painting doesn't hold up at all in terms of value as each form is rendered independently in terms of light source and actual form. By contrast, Forbes' golfer (fig. 7) is striking in it's simplicity and each shape has an integrity to it. Forbes uses light simply and in a straightforward manner. Hague's forms don't seem to use any direct lighting or really any true light source at all. Thus his painting looks confused and uninformed.

Forbes is a firm believer in using reference appropriately and going through the sometimes time consuming process of good preparation. His process is fairly straightforward. He starts by getting together very good scrap material. He said he "doesn't like to make up the lighting" so everything needs to be available in the scrap photos or when drawing from life. He then does several studies

trying to nail down the all important value pattern. He starts to eliminate detail that doesn't contribute to the whole in the sketch phase. This makes painting much easier since there aren't so many small details to paint. He then tones his canvas with a watery wash mixture of turpentine just to knock back the white of the canvas. Then he starts laying in color using a watered down oil mixture. Lastly, he starts to build up his areas in the light with more opaque paint mixtures.

In an effort to truly dissect Forbes' style, I've picked an image that has his hallmark style and attemted to analyze it in terms of technique. By utilizing this breakdown I am hoping that I will be able to adapt some of Forbes' basic painting and design skills for my own use. In doing this, I tried to show specifics in terms of how he worked and made such striking images.
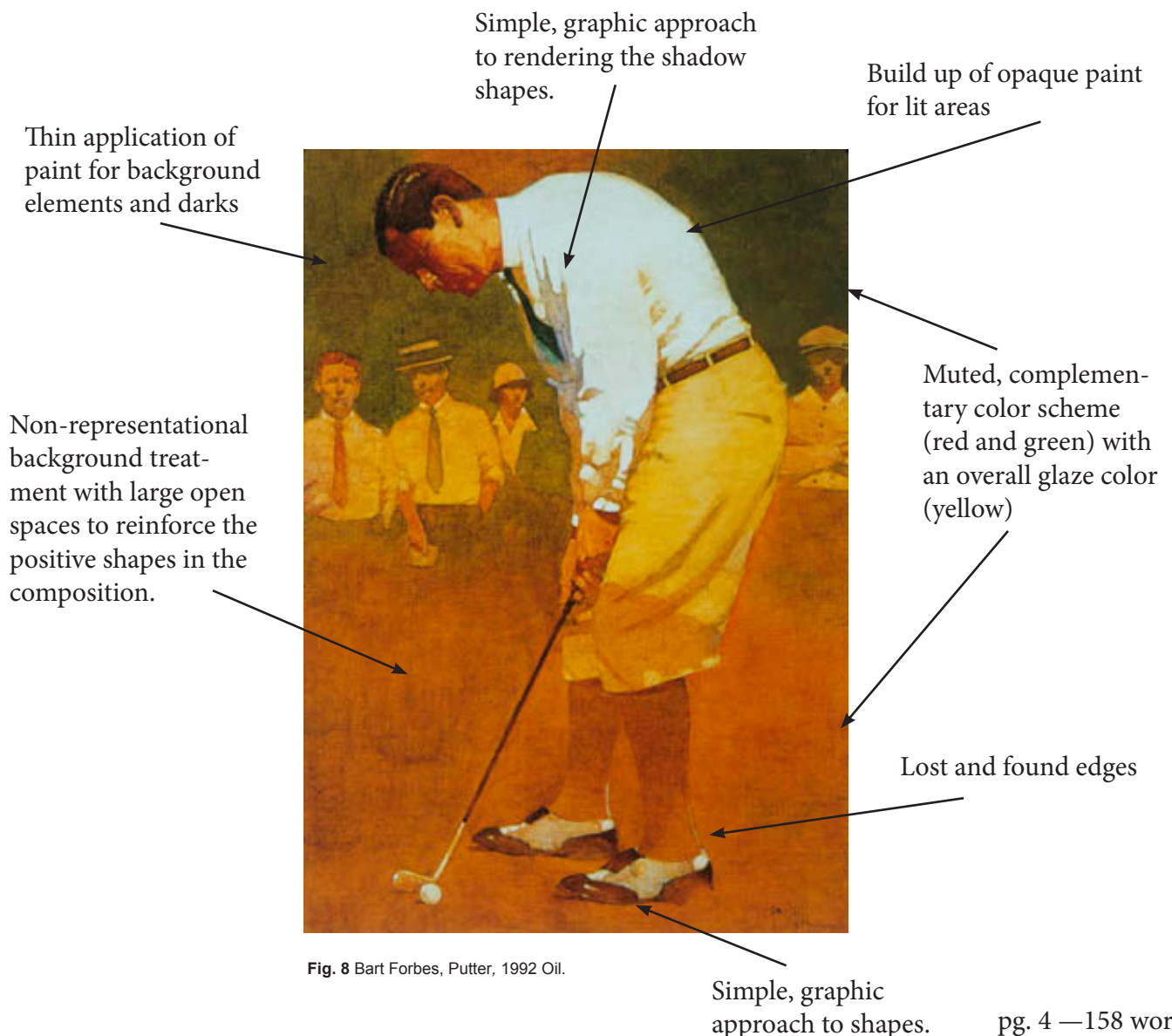
Simple, graphic approach to rendering the shadow shapes.

Build up of opaque paint for lit areas

Thin application of paint for background elements and darks

Non-representational background treatment with large open spaces to reinforce the positive shapes in the composition.

Muted, complementary color scheme (red and green) with an overall glaze color (yellow)

Lost and found edges

Fig. 8 Bart Forbes, Putter, 1992 Oil.

Simple, graphic approach to shapes.

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