BRUNO SURDO
Paintings and Drawings

My Twin, 1995; oil on linen, 45" x 30"

August 25 - September 24, 1995
Community Gallery of Art
College of Lake County
Bruno Surdo fervently believes that art should present powerful images that reflect the ideas, aspirations, and attitudes of its time. His works address issues of our day and age the way great artists of the past centuries captured their time. Surdo employs the human figure with the same drama and pathos as seen in the works of the Renaissance. Like these past masters, Surdo’s realist approach is grounded in the sound painting methods and practices of that period.

Born in Chicago, Surdo began his formal art instruction in 1979 when his family moved back to his parents’ hometown of Mola di Bari, Italy. There, at the age of fifteen, he studied drawing and art history at the Liceo Artistico. Returning to Chicago, he studied at the American Academy of Art. He later attended the Atelier Lack in Minneapolis, a school where studio training is modeled after Renaissance workshops. There he learned traditional methods of drawing and painting. Surdo continued to build upon his foundation of historical painting techniques by enrolling in the Studio Cecil-Graves in Florence, Italy. At the studio Surdo learned the traditional methods of grinding pigments, making varnishes and oil mediums. He also perfected his knowledge of anatomy and of landscape and still-life painting.

Surdo is chairperson of the Art Department at Ray College of Design. In 1993 he founded the School of Representational Art in Evanston. Its success has just necessitated a move to a larger site in Chicago.

The twenty-one works in this exhibition testify to Surdo’s mastery of his craft, his versatility, and his social concerns. The three largest pieces in the show are also the

*Aids Triptych*, 1994; oil on linen, 75” x 63” (each panel)
ones that best exemplify Surdo’s involvement with contemporary issues. *Aids Triptych* symbolically depicts the progression of the disease. From left to right the panels convey first a carefree attitude, then the victim’s isolation followed by the illness’s devastating effect. Surdo’s masterfully composed figures are united by the red cloth motif which symbolizes the malady. *The Right to Bear Arms* depicts a diverse population terrorized by a crazed gunman. This painting illustrates how individual rights taken to an extreme can devastate society. *Swords into Plowshares* conveys humanity’s yearning for world peace amongst the turmoil of Bosnia, the Gulf War, and the former Soviet Union.

The artist’s versatility extends to portrait painting. These works are insightful looks beyond the sitter’s appearance. *My Twin* depicts Surdo’s sister surrounded by objects that symbolize her personality and past. An Egyptian image alludes to her mystical bent while the lighting shrouds her in mystery. *My Studio* is a self-portrait based on 19th century French realist Gustave Courbet’s *The Artist’s Studio*. Like Courbet, Surdo is painting at his easel surrounded by a nude model and an entourage.

After Surdo conceives an idea for a painting, he produces numerous compositional sketches until the design is resolved. Then he makes precise preliminary drawings from models; several of these are represented in the exhibition. As in *The Right to Bear Arms* these studies are used to create a small clay model of the composition to resolve problems of spatial relationships, perspective, and lighting. Next a cartoon
of the design is made to scale or full size, then the image is transferred to canvas. Surdo employs a fifteenth century Venetian painting technique. A monochromatic underpainting is followed by layers of glazes and scumbled color. The Venetian method’s flexibility allows for creative changes while providing a harmonious tone throughout the composition.

Surdo’s work as a painter stands upon the shoulders of art’s predecessors. His painting methods, subjects and compositional arrangements demonstrate an intimate knowledge of art history and historical studio practices. All of this is brought to bear on contemporary issues in a language that is accessible to all, yet full of poetry and mystery.

References:
Bruno Surdo “Visions of the Present, Techniques of the Past” American Artist October, 1994 pp 36-41,74
Exhibition Checklist

The Right to Bear Arms, 1993; oil on linen, 84" x 117" — $20,000
Aids Triptych, 1994; oil on linen, 75" x 63" (each panel) — $25,000
Swords into Plowshares, 1991; oil on linen, 60" x 50" — NFS
My Twin, 1995; oil on linen, 45" x 30" — NFS
Staxys, 1989; oil on linen, 36"x 30" — $3,000
Carol, 1992; oil on linen, 42" x 30" — $3,000
My Studio, 1989; oil on linen, 24" x 36" — $5,000
Christine, 1990; oil on linen, 30" x 30" — $2,500
Still Life (Greek Vase), 1993; oil on linen, 12" x 18" — $750
Therese, 1990; oil on linen, 22" x 20" — $1,000
Natura Morta, 1988; oil on linen, 35"x 31" — NFS
Morning Light, 1992; oil on linen, 30" x 36" — $2,000
Odolisque, 1992; oil on linen, 20" x 30" — $1,500
Preliminary Study, 1993; pencil, 14" x 11" — $200
Preliminary Study, 1993; pencil, 14" x 11" — $200
Preliminary Study, 1993; pencil, 14" x 11" — $200
Preliminary Study, 1993; pencil, 14" x 11" — $200
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Preliminary Study, 1993; pencil, 14" x 11" — $200
Preliminary Study, 1993; pencil, 14" x 11" — $200
Preliminary Study, 1993; pencil, 14" x 11" — $200
Preliminary Study, 1993; modeling clay — NFS

Preliminary Study, 1993; pencil, 14" x 11"
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