AN ART OF RELATIONSHIP

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree Master of Fine Arts

by
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Approved by

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# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folk Art</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funk and Humor</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relief and Freestanding Sculpture</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Use of Words</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhythm and Music</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duende</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrinsic Energy</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polarities</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscious – Unconscious</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mind – Body</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association – Dissociation</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Form – Content</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extension</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
"The earth never lies flat,
         but is always thinking..." 1

               Robert Bly

"This is the eternal origin of art that a human being confronts a
form that wants to become a work through him. Not a figment of his
soul but something that appears to the soul and demands the soul's
creative power. What is required is a deed that a man does with
his whole being: if he commits it and speaks with his being the
basic word in the form that appears, then the creative power is
released and the work comes into being." 2

               Martin Buber
INTRODUCTION

Other than the ordinary childhood experiences that we all have that are associated with growth and learning, being born and raised in Youngstown, Ohio, as a place with a cultural and social structure, has had a particular aesthetic impact on me. Youngstown was part of that great steel works stretching from Eastern Ohio and the Mahoning Valley, to Western Pennsylvania, and Pittsburgh.

It was two things for me: visible European ethnicity with corresponding work, personal and transpersonal values. People celebrated European traditions and made things with their hands there. The people were blue collar Italian, Slovak, Black, Greek, and Polish. The city was steel gritty. The mills in the Valley lie visually as open wounds — heat, red and black. If my work is crude, it has something to do with a work process in Youngstown, Ohio.

PLAY

As I see my three dimensional work now, the images and structures more often derive from early childhood experiences.

I have been using small moving car-like objects, tracks, tables, chairs, fences, gates, ramps, platforms, wheels, pulleys, cribs and rockers. The dowel rod's linearity goes back to sticks. There is also an anthropomorphic sense where animals and totems emerge.

The wider context for this is structure, space, position, pictoriality, by way of improvisation, spontaneity, stream of
consciousness, association, and layering of information. The outcome is a gestalt image-metaphor which is the finished piece itself, having an extension function in the world. This extension function is hoped to be bodily as well as mentally felt. This is reflected in structures that are portable, light weight, linear and made up of parts.

Formal concerns are there, but I try not to work from them directly. They should be as tools, as information comprising part of the gestural act.

At the same time, I take very seriously the idea of my place and function as an artist in a historical art context. I am working from certain modalities and pushing towards others.

I am influenced by the following artists for the following reasons:

Mark di Suvero: the play between potential and actual movement; linearity and use of space; materials (especially in his earlier pieces where wood and found objects were primary); direct construction techniques; sense of being physically inviting; gestural energy; openness in form and content.

David Smith: image generation; use of the unconscious; image strength — image content; successful use of painted sculpture; surface in relationship to structural form and image; playfulness; early moving pieces, "Wagons"; personal vision and intention; use of line; changeability of the pieces' view points; non-rational
knowledge of the work's content; use of metaphor; his surrealist
pieces; use of anthropomorphism; relation between abstraction
and the image.
Picasso: relationship between drawing and sculpture, also painting
and sculpture — the translation there; his guitar pieces; his
synthesis of Cubism at that particular time in history.
Brancusi: his love of form and material; animism; simplicity; how
his pieces have a clarity and quickness — their visual and
material presence; their timing or gestalt of arrival.
Joseph Beuys: directness; metaphor; ritual aspects; mythological
references.
Robert Irwin: exploration of 'presence'; thought process; extension
of pieces into/with the environment.
Robert Smithson: mythological, metaphorical, ecological overtones;
impermanence and entropic awareness.
William T. Willey: play between two and three dimensionality;
relationship between humor and drama; linearity; funk style.
Robert Rauschenberg: layering of information; color in relationship
to sculpture; use of found objects.

What I find of interest is art's power to communicate without
language — the directness inherent there. Our needs at the present
time are various, and in general our time is in great transition to
new paradigms of thinking and relating. We are extending ourselves
and our consciousness of ourselves.
What I find unique about American Art is the sense of freedom, innovation, experimentation, abstraction, universality, lack of European standardization, and sense of diversity.

I feel that art will be called upon to be more value based and content based in a world of disintegrating and changing institutions. There are those who feel that the role of the artist has already broadened to include the teaching of myths and the valued historical consciousness of ways and forms rooted in our past.

Art proposes a synthesizing context for cultural ideas and aspirations. It performs an integrative function for society grounded in the truth of experience.

FOLK ART

My first awareness of and appreciation for folk art comes from objects and associations made to illicite more than what you get from the ordinary; in places such as: gardens, garages, basements, backyards and their supporting structures, and cars. To my eye and mind this all said something about freedom, individuality, the energy of making things and the physical-spiritual relationship between things and people.

"The world is Twofold for man in accordance with his twofold attitude.

The attitude of man is twofold in accordance with the two basic words he can speak."
The basic words are not single words but word pairs.

One basic word is the word pair I-you.

The other basic word is the word pair I-it; but the basic word is not changed when he or she takes the place of it.

Thus the I of man is also twofold.

For the I of the basic word I-you is different from that in the basic word I-it. 3

Martin Buber

FUNK AND HUMOR

Another component that operates in my work is that of humor. This humor has references to funk and sometimes Dadaist forms. It is this component I think that shows itself most often initially in the final image of the work; as it is the component that more viewers pick up at first with their initial viewing.

In that streaming from the unconscious to the conscious this component of humor operates so naturally that I don't even think about it. It's associated with play and fun in the natural sense of the child that we all have within us from birth. 4 I very much enjoy having fun while I do my work. I like letting my process become fun as well as achieving the other levels it does achieve.
This aspect has been a dominant, unifying element for me. Within this state the flow of unconscious-conscious becomes more spontaneous and non-intellectualized. I believe it is a state closer to body awareness and body input as a way of information into the work. Or, put another way, it is the body feeling a joy.

The funk element involves a crude nature and a raw use of materials. Some of the work comes close to a Dadaist use of "nonsense" or punage.

The funk element seems to me to be very American and naturally rebellious.

I believe that I balance this aspect of my work with others so as not to fall into an infantilization in the art, which I do think we have to a large degree in are these days, and since World War II. I'm referring to that instant, gratuitous art as opposed to an art that is more present by nature of multi-levels of experience.

RELIEF AND FREE STANDING SCULPTURE

My relief sculpture has always been smaller in scale than the free standing pieces. I have been referring to them as unified singular gestalt images to distinguish them from the free standing pieces which contain more parts, subsystems, and associations.

My progress went from painting, to relief, to free standing work; and even in the free standing work the problem of pictoriality is there.
I see this relation to pictoriality as a preference for narrative into which the sculptural work functions. This narrative is not figurative but is associative in energy, dependent upon sculptural space and placement. It illumines, for me, the problem of image and structure to be a mutually unfolding process.

A use of linearity is derived in the reliefs and continues into the free standing sculpture.

The free standing work actually incorporates more of my ideas about the extensive possibilities of sculpture and the relational possibilities of which aesthetics is about. The areas of mind and aesthetics as being man's great untapped future.

The free standing work retains a feeling of portability that is in the reliefs as well. This notion of portability is related to my interest in functionalism in primitive art and architecture, as well as lending itself to a spontaneous fabrication; the return of which is that the work, I think, becomes more physically accessible and present to the viewer.

THE USE OF WORDS

Having a continued interest in poetry, my work often incorporates the use of words in what I feel is part of the contextual framing of the piece. The words or phrases become images that associate or dissociate with the structure. Using them is an act of drawing for me. They become part of a contextual surface.
RHYTHM AND MUSIC

A presentness by intention is something that I see in Folk and Primitive Art forms. There is a spontaneity and immediacy about the presentation or, the object – of the objectness. This made quality has an at-handness and an availability about the object, an accessibility by approach.

This parallels rhythm in music, and more specifically, the time element going from inside (artist) to outside (image-object-event).

"Rhythmic dialogues are reciprocal, and in a way that might seem paradoxical to a Westerner, a good drummer restrains himself from emphasizing his rhythm in order that he may be heard better. Just as the beat of an ensemble is made interesting in terms of its potential to be affected by other rhythms." 8

Modern jazz parallels modern art in its rhythmical concerns and statements.

Jazz improvisation (the Black Afro-American ethnic creative process) is an analogous energy equivalent for my process.

Jazz, being an American folk art, of a black ethnic consciousness, speaks of an urban relationship and a spiritual equivalent through the spontaneity of the Jazz modality. Jazz picks-it-up where it is — in
the everyday soul manifest in the rhythms of man that create musical sound imagery, through music's unique vibrational sources.

"This music, jazz, is guts. You're supposed to sweat in your balls in this music...The depth."

Dizzy Gillespie

There is the sense of Jazz improvisation in Jackson Pollack. His immediacy: "I loose myself when I am painting."

Jazz improvisation is a unique American tradition paralleling the development of European and South American Surrealism with its depth imagery. Parallel with this is also the psychology of Jung. And one of the earlier great European artists being sensitive to these synesthetic/kinesthetic, sound and visual interrelationships is Kandinsky, in his Concerning The Spiritual In Art.

Improvisation is also as the streaming of the conscious with the unconscious:

"In improvisation, the first thing you must have is the sight of a gifted painter. You've got to see colors and lines in music, and then you've got to be able to mix the colors and draw the lines. The better you mix colors and draw lines, the better the painting is going to be. I don't know, the way I play from fundamentals,
I have set progressions in a specific number.
But I don't know how I'm gonna emunciate on them
until it comes out.
Sometimes, it's surprise, surprise." 11

Dizzy Gillespie

I see myself coming from this tradition which is also from the
Abstract Expressionist tradition. These are my aesthetic spiritual
fathers as I determine my place in time and artistic progression.

Other factors can now come into the offering in what I consider
to be my aesthetic synthesis up to this point in my life.

DUENDE

Another parallel to these traditions which is of direct interest
to me in regards to process and image is that of the concept of Duende
in the Spanish tradition of poetry, music and literature. It is
interesting to note that the early 20th century Spanish Renaissance
in literature coincides with these other traditions.

The Spanish use of what might be called the deep or unconscious
image exists within the awareness of life and death:

"The duende must know beforehand that he
can serenade death's house and rock those
branches we all wear, branches that do not
have, will never have, any consolation." 12
or:

"These black sounds are the mystery, the roots fastened in the mire that we all know and all ignore, the mire that gives us the very substance of art... the duende, then is a power, not a work; it is a struggle, not a thought." 13

Over all this is a deep celebration of life lived in the present:

"The duende's arrival means a radical change in forms. It brings to old planes unknown feelings of freshness, with the quality of something newly created, like a miracle, and it produces an almost religious enthusiasm." 14

... ... ... .

This sense of a constant creation (improvisation) within a context of polarities of contrast (energy), is closer to what the dynamics of life is about — living with change and degrees of randomness.

And this energy exchange, or breath, breathing, from the body in presentness and awareness...

"The Head, by way of the Ear,
to the Syllable,
The Heart, by way of the Breath,
to the Line." 15
to the resultant image or association of images...

"One perception must immediately and
Directly Lead to a Further Perception." 16
relates to how and why I make things...

"For any of us, at any instant,
are juxtaposed to any experience,
even an overwhelming single one, on
several more planes than the arbitrary
and discursive which we inherit can
declare." 17

I believe my process to be essentially non-reductive and
essentially a holistic, gestalt based process of exploration; the
relationships being in many instances non-linear and non-quantifiable.

Body rhythm and timing all seem very important for me in the
creation of my art. I usually enjoy a swift progression and
simultaneous activity. Also a growth of the image through association,
dissociation, play, improvisation, directness, layering of information,
and metaphor.

A constructivist approach facilitates all these actions.

I am after an art of relationship: through myself, with myself
and others, and with the world.

... ... ...
INTRINSIC ENERGY

These actions all refer to a notion of intrinsic energy, which is a first phase in a spherical progression of events as follows:

What happens between things?

How does something aesthetic come into being through the perception of the varied multiplicities of extension (relationship) in the world?
POLARITIES

A major exploration of mine is in the realm of polarity or 'opposites'.

"At present, there is no existing science whose special interest is the combining of pieces of information. But I shall argue that the evolutionary process must depend upon such double increments of information. Every evolutionary step is an addition of information to an already existing system. Because this is so, the combination, harmonies, and discords between successive pieces and layers of information will present many problems of survival and determine many directions of change." 18

Gregory Bateson

"You notice that the psyche is in a state of great energy. Moving with its own immense energy, it becomes equal to the world. Instead of depending on the outer world for support, it begins somehow to create a third world, neither 'physical' nor 'inner'.

It's as if a human being and a badger together would
give birth to an angel. Or as if an angel and a tree
gave birth to a bridge. It's as if a bull woke up
one day with so much energy, he ignored the fence
posts and barn door of his pasture and created
Assyria instead." 19

Robert Ely

Polarities that I am concerned with would include the following
actions:

conscious - unconscious
life - death
left - right
aggressive - playful
yin - yang
sculpture - painting
particle - wave
mind - body
positive - negative
push - pull
form - content
sound - silent
internal - external
space - structure
gesture - image
structure - image
An awareness of polarity follows an awareness of relationship and systemic reality. Polarity, itself, is an active image reality context. This is a constant flux situation. Do the poles exist? Yes. Can we sufficiently describe them? No, because of flux in nature, and the reality of simultaneity (R.B. Fuller). Change is the other reality (Wu Wei). Tan Tien is a source.

The first law then, is of change and becoming. The second is of relationship, contact. The third is of a contextual nature. The fourth, is of Being: Unique. Then back to energy/exchange: \( E = mc^2 \). Or, there are no four stages. The one is in the many/the many are in the one. (Bohn). Life is open, endless creation.

CONSCIOUS - UNCONSCIOUS

The life of the conscious mind and the life of the unconscious mind. There are levels here. Levels of consciousness. Levels of energy: animal, mammal, and new brain; and awareness that encompasses the personal, interpersonal, and the transpersonal.

"The function of art is the union of the conscious with the unconscious." 23

Robert Bly

There is a drawing out from the unconscious to the conscious, making the following actions possible:
Surrealism (dream, association)
Stream of consciousness
Open, projective form
Deep image
Improvisation
Automatic writing
Gestural abstraction
Abstract Expressionism
Universal archetypes

So that, within the unconscious stream are the mythological histories, individual and universal, such that mankind is a composite of evolutionary histories (with individual men/women in relationship to each other).

The streaming of the unconscious is context for the conscious awareness of presence in the here-and-now. If the basic stance is one of openness, then deeper images can flow through and relate with conscious decision making in the present.

Artists that I look to for substance of this kind include: Pollack, Smith, Miro, Kandinsky, Raushenberg, di Saverio, Hofmann.

The act of gesture in abstract Expressionism is a follow through from Surrealism in explicating more of this unconscious - conscious.

Direct energy, pure energy, permeating life energy, all have transcultural equivalents; scientific as well as mythical variants.
MIND - BODY

Recognition of the body sensations (kinesesthetic, proprioceptive, muscular, and body rhythms) and their inclusion in the work of art is also part of the phase which I've called Intrinsc Energy.

The body is the art work's performance.

One's body is the true signature of art.

Both the body and the mind think.

The body's thinking is closer to pure gesture.

The body brings more sensate information than does the mind.

Everything comes through the senses. (Olson: Proprioception 24).

All life is movement. (Feldenkrais 27).

My philosophy is of a holism towards mind/body rather than a Cartesian split between them. Through Descartes "I think, therefore I exist", Western civilization has progressively lead a reductionist mode of rationality — leaving the body and interrelationships between things in preference to a specialized, mechanistic point of view. The effect of which we lose a larger focus and situation of interrelatedness. Newton's assertion of absolute Time and Absolute Space further extended the views of causality, determinism, and rationality.

An alternative to this Cartesian thinking would incorporate a systems theory approach:
"Systems theory looks at the world in terms of the interrelatedness and interdependence of all phenomena, and in this framework an integrated whole whose properties cannot be reduced to those of its parts is called a system." 28

Fritjof Capra

In reference to how I go about working at relatedness would be the analogy of Arthur Koestler's idea of holon.

"Arthur Koestler has coined the word 'holons' for these subsystems which are both wholes and parts, and he has emphasized that each holon has two opposite tendencies: an integrated tendency to function as part of the larger whole, and a self-assertive tendency to preserve its individual autonomy." 29

Which helps to define the third area of polarity:

ASSOCIATION - DISSOCIATION

A different image - context arises through this type of juxtaposition.

What happens between things is the flux between uniqueness and relationship. Structurally this can be translated into association
and dissociation. This necessarily means a degree of structural randomness, that will also say something unique about the relationship between structure and image. The process of image formation tends more towards gestalt integrity.

I sense structure to be related more to energy and rhythm in a purer sense.

This all refers to an image - context, functional phase of a larger process. There is an implicate order (Bohm) 30 in all this. Somehow the whole is contained in each part.

Sculpturally: placement, proximity, gesture, and conception all go hand-in-hand in making the aesthetic of the art object.

"Bohm's starting point is the notion of 'unbroken wholeness', and his aim is to explore the order he believes to be inherent in the cosmic web of relations at a deeper, 'nonmanifest' level. He calls this order 'implicate', or 'enfolded', and describes it with the analogy of a hologram, in which each part, in some sense, contains the whole." 31

Hopefully the art object can then extend itself into the world with aesthetic implications, or aesthetic success.

Heisenberg's "uncertainty principle" and wave particle duality extend themselves to field theory and systems theory. The art
parallel to field theory is field painting.

On a sub-atomic level wave can become particle and particle, wave, in relationship to the experimenter's point of view (Einstein: Relativity). So that matter and non-matter are interchangeable and simultaneous. This flow is analogous to an aesthetic – perceptual flow.

(This sub-atomic theory is akin to primitive religious sources and to animism).

This transformation of energy is a function of energy, itself, continuous and unmeasurable.

As Gregory Bateson goes on to explain:

"All receipt of information is necessarily the receipt of news of difference, and all perception of difference is limited by threshold. Differences that are too slight or too slowly presented are not perceivable. They are not food for perception." 32

In art, form comes into being through this type of contextualization.

**FORM – CONTENT**

Form becomes much more than just the extension of content. A deeper mystery of content and form lies in their being of a polarity
"I have a feeling that I sense Bach's mathematical form with one part of myself, and his ecstatic freedom with another part. That implies there are two separate forces meeting in a third body." 33

Or Basho:

"The temple bell stops, but the sound keeps coming Out of the flowers." 34

The play between energy, matter, body, and mind, is an exchange of information between entities which are not split or diverse to begin with, but are unified, as a personality is unified. This is basically an ecological point of view.

So at the root is a communication of information — integrity (integrity = differentiation) and the creation of context, and the formation of image, such that: Intrinsic energy — form/content — image/context — extension — energy communication.

"Go in to go out. " 35

Charles Olson

Energy is feed by the universal and universally sustained.

Compare this to Robert Irwin's Process of a Compounding Abstrac—
1. Perception/Sense
2. Conception/Mind
3. Form/Physical Compound
4. Formful/Objective Compound
5. Formal/Boundaries and Axioms
6. Formalization

Stages 4, 5, and 6 show the effect of history, socialization, and the enculturationalization of this process. Irwin is pointing to staticness and entropy here, as well as the positive, communicative value of socialization - culturalization.

Another polarity issue can be found in the Chinese Taoist philosophy of Yin/Yang. From the following list one could go on to Jungian archetypes and the contents of images and their formulations:

<table>
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<th>Yin</th>
<th>Yang</th>
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<tr>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td>Masculine</td>
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<tr>
<td>contractive</td>
<td>expensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>responsive</td>
<td>aggressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cooperative</td>
<td>competitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intuitive</td>
<td>rational</td>
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<tr>
<td>synthesizing</td>
<td>analytical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conservative</td>
<td>demanding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
earth  heaven
moon   sun
night  day
winter summer
moisture dryness
coolness warmth
interior surface

Dynamic balance is the overriding issue for Taoism. (Wu Wei).

So that: form is played-off against non-form in a knowledgeable exchange of energy, (the elements of randomness and dissociation).

What I find of interest is how form comes into being, and its aesthetic implications. The process of figure/ground adjustment (Gestalt). The real issue that randomness plays in order (Bateson). How emerging images come from a certain depth level or play between the conscious and unconscious (Bly).

Things coming together.
What happens between things?
What is the context of aesthetics?

EXTENSION

So that there is a working toward and a working away from.

Dissociation is affected by randomness which is a process of living in the presence of events within a conscious – unconscious
stream. Association arises from this.

Living in the realm of possibilities is extension; is the art work functioning in the world as an effective image/context; is back to energy.

Extension is Relation as Feedback (systems), is Going Out to, is Meeting, is in the world. The world exists is structure, rhythm, and pattern. The world exists uniquely in terms of image. Imago Mundi.

The art object exists in the world as I exist in the world, both IN existence, being in the world. The art object becomes a tool for human consciousness, becomes an instance of a mind/feeling event. Mind becomes an energetic, active event.

From Bateson:

"Homology: a formal resemblance between two organisms such that the relations between parts of A are similar to the relations between corresponding parts of B. Such formal resemblance is considered to be evidence of evolutionary relatedness." 38

From Buber:

"This is the eternal origin of art, that a human being confronts a form that wants to become a work through him. Not a figment of
his soul but something that appears to the soul and demands the soul's creative power. What is required is a deed that a man does with his whole being: if he commits and speaks it with his being the basic word in the form that appears, then the creative power is released and the work comes into being."

The philosophical problem of extension into the world by the art object is predicated by the aesthetic level of perception. "Art is perception." (Irwin). 40

Does aesthetic perception reflect patterns of thinking? What is the relationship between 'art' and 'becoming art'? An analogy might be made to the cybernetic concept of interface, and the biological concept of life threshold. 40 There is a boundary between things in relationship that is composed by the information they are sharing as well as not sharing. Entropy is always reduced where this flow (life) is happening.

"It also suggests that life-like processes require flux of energy above some minimal value in order to get going and keep going." 41

I believe that this has to do with how the art object takes its place in the world and becomes of aesthetic importance.
NOTES

3. ibid, p. 53.
4. see Berne: Transactional Analysis.
6. see Capra (1983), on systems philosophy.
13. ibid, p. 43.
14. ibid, p. 46.
16. ibid, p. 17.
17. see Olson (1966), "Human Universe".
20. see Fuller, on "Synergetics", (1981).
NOTES

24. see Olson, "Proprioception".
29. ibid, p. 43.
30. ibid, pp. 95-96.
31. ibid, pp. 95-96.
34. ibid, p. 262.
35. see Olson, "Projective Verse".
36. see Irwin (1977), "Process of a Compounding Abstraction".
41. ibid, p. 5.
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