AN EXPLANATION OF MY ARTWORK
IN PAINTING AND DRAWING

A Thesis

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by

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I would like to thank Professor Gilbert Hall for providing the stimulus for this paper.
My name is Randolph Clark Warren. I was born in Ossining, New York on January 11, 1950. I apparently was born with an impulsive nature because as soon as I could move my limbs, I began tearing at my face with my fingers. To keep me from mutilating my face, mittens were placed on my hands. This impulsive nature is, I believe, a driving force behind my artwork. I need to be actively involved in something to avoid self destruction.

This need for involvement seemed to find an outlet in my artwork at grade school and was noticed by my instructor. She sent a letter to my parents stating that I was a talented child and that I should go to art school. I decided, however, that I would rather not be separated from my schoolmates into a special category. So, instead of forcing me into something I did not want to do, my parents bought me paints and let me experiment with them at my own discretion.

I soon developed a fascination for oil paint. I liked the feel of the paint and enjoyed applying it to materials with my fingers. This early response to the medium is perhaps why I am still working in oils today. My imagery at the time is also apparent in my current work. I enjoyed painting faces and still employ this subject in my work. I was intrigued by people's expressions. As a young boy I often got myself in trouble staring at people. This is a habit I still retain, but it is now a more visually trained observation.
As I became older I lost interest in my artwork. At fourteen I began drinking. Drinking did not mix well with painting. One night I came home intoxicated and decided to work on a painting. As I worked, the painting dissolved into an ugly brownish paste. I became irate at the result and smashed the painting along with part of my room. After several similar incidents I ceased painting altogether.

During this period I became extremely hostile to authority and the socio-political system in general. One reason for this hostility may have been because a friend of mine was shot and killed by police in a burglary attempt involving one dollar and nineteen cents. I believe this incident may partially explain why I still have a feeling of hostility against authority.

In spite of my high school lifestyle, I did manage to maintain a high enough grade average to graduate and my parents were able to send me to college.

I enrolled at Ohio State University in the fall of 1968. I had decided to major in Landscape Horticulture because I wanted to work with my hands and because I enjoyed being outside. I was also intrigued by plant forms and fascinated by the colors of flowers. I think my current artwork still reflects these interests. My painting palette is generally made up of bright colors with a preference for greens. I also continue to be more interested in organic shapes as opposed to geometric shapes.
In my second year at OSU I became interested in politics and social change. It was the year of the Kent State shootings. I had always been against the system and I decided to take part in changing it. I felt that a major in Education held the key to change so I transferred into the College of Education.

It was at this time that I began smoking marijuana. Marijuana is a very strong visual stimulus and I believe it was through this stimulus that my interest in art was renewed. I began painting again. I started where I had left off years earlier. My subject was faces and my medium was oil paint.

Meanwhile my ideas on social change were meeting with resistance in the College of Education. An instructor friend advised me to drop out of Education because he felt I would never get anywhere in the field. At the same time, I was taking a studio humanities course in art. My instructor liked my work and advised me to major in art. This idea appealed to me so I transferred into the College of the Arts taking a major in painting and drawing.

One of the primary influences in the beginning stages of my painting was the work of the artist Jackson Pollock. I was interested in his work because of the suggestive imagery I could see in his action painting. I began painting in a similar manner. I placed my canvas on the floor and proceeded to paint by the process of spilling, throw-
ing, and splattering the paint upon the canvas. I even walked on the canvas. I had seen Pollock paint this way in a film circulated by the OSU Art Department. When I felt a painting was completed, I let it dry and then hung it on a wall to view the results. I was intrigued with the images I achieved this way.

As I continued to paint in this manner, I began to think of these paintings as landscapes containing many strange creatures. The images I saw in my work reminded me of images I had seen in a painting by Hieronymus Bosch entitled "The Garden of Earthly Delights." In this painting the artist combines plant and animal forms to make some very provocative imagery such as the "tree" man.

Bosch's work has always held a fascination for me because of the strange imagery and the tremendous amount of activity packed into his paintings. For example, in the right-hand panel of "The Garden of Earthly Delights" there is a man being swallowed by a monster. The monster is wearing a kettle on its head and there are ceramic jugs on its feet. He sits upon a high chair while underneath men in bubbles are descending into a hole in the ground. Around this hole one man kneels vomiting while another is pictured defecating coins into the hole. Meanwhile the man being eaten by the monster has a flock of birds flying out of his anal orifice. Above this there
are figures on ice skates. One figure is a duck's head with legs wearing black socks and carrying on its shoulder an oddly shaped bow. Attached to its leg at sock level are four arrows. The creature appears to have no arms, however.

This attention to the smallest detail in a picture crowded with action is amazing to me. The logic behind the picture also amazes me. The activity seems to make sense on a level which is impossible to verbalize without contradiction. I believe these paintings appeal directly to one's subconscious and as a result have a tremendous impact. I believe one reason for this may be the exactitude of the facial expression. Bosch concentrates on the eyes to create intense expressions. In my paintings I also attempt to appeal directly to the subconscious and like Bosch I concentrate on eyes.

In graduate school I continued with the idea of painting landscapes. I began leaving the top area of my paintings flat and free of brush strokes to represent a sky. In the bottom area I manipulated the brush marks until they formed a solid-appearing mass which became the landscape. The landscape I would then manipulate to overlap the sky to suggest hills. The part of New York where I grew up is hilly so I believe this may be the reason why the landscapes I did were hilly.
The facial imagery that often emerged from my landscapes seemed to be apparent only to myself. Other persons did not respond to the paintings in this way. This kind of persistent imagery bothered me. I tried to get rid of the faces by painting over their distinguishing features, usually what I visualized to be their eyes. However, the more I tried to get rid of these emerging images the more obsessed I became with them. I began seeing faces not only in my paintings but everywhere. They appeared to be grinning at me. Finally I accepted these images in my work.

In the spring of 1975 I began painting the faces I was seeing. This led to their bodies. Then I began dealing with their environments. In dealing with their environments I became more involved with the formal problems of painting: space, movement, color, and value. To create the illusion of space I often contrasted an interior space with an exterior space in terms of value. In the painting, "Truck In with Osley", I attempted to create space by painting the interior of the truck in bright hues while toning down the exterior landscape to a lower value. I also attempted to suggest movement in this painting by repeating shapes in the truck interior and by using the convergence of the road to take the viewer from the truck into the landscape. In this painting as in others I also seek to balance the interior against the exterior in terms
of color and value to create a tension between the two which will keep the viewer's eye moving.

My primary concern, however, remains the imagery itself. I understand the importance of the formal elements in terms of making my paintings more visually effective, more dynamic. I believe the formal elements of painting are like grammar in writing. They help us to communicate but they are not communicative in themselves. The communication, I believe, remains in the imagery.

My imagery comes from the suggestive nature of shapes which I then hallucinate upon. When I can clearly see a hallucination I paint it. I usually hallucinate directly upon the canvas. To provide stimulus for this process of visualization I use several techniques. Sometimes I make random stains and lines on the canvas using watercolor, chalk, and whatever other material is handy. At other times I use the oil paint itself, dripping and splattering it on the surface of the painting. With the surface activated by markings, I respond to the images that emerge from the splatters and develop them further.

Another method I use for initial stimulation is setting up an environment on the canvas which reflects a dream environment from my head. I create an illusion of space both in my mind and on the canvas. For example, I often use a room as a device. As I look at the room and think about it my imagination becomes activated. As my imagina-
tion becomes activated. As my imagination works upon the room, the resulting images are transposed onto the canvas. These visualizations sometimes become clear hallucinations. When this happens I paint in a fervor to capture what I see while it lasts.

I have always had an active imagination. When I was a child I saw images in the foliage outside my window. As I became older drinking dulled my visualizations. Marijuana intensified them. During a period when I used the drug LSD my visualizations became full-blown hallucinations over which I had no control. While under the influence of LSD, clouds and foliage not only looked suggestive of imagery but became the imagery suggested. This imagery for me bears striking resemblance to the imagery in my paintings. I also saw patterns everywhere. When I focused upon one pattern I would see another pattern within that pattern until eventually I saw a white brilliance too intense for me to focus upon. This experience is why in most of my paintings I consistently use patterns. It is also why I have placed a brilliant white at the end of the tracks in the painting entitled "On the Road Again."

In my work the intended communication is to have the viewer experience my hallucinations as fully as possible. Since my hallucinations appeared most real and most intense under the influence of LSD, I attempt to communicate this experience. It has been my experience that when using LSD,
one sees basically in terms of red, blue, and green. These colors have been most attractive to me when under the influence of LSD.

Through my concern for color and how we see I have been reading in the subject of Optometry. I discovered that the eye has receptors for only three colors: red, blue, and green. All other colors are made from combinations of these three. I have also discovered that stimulation of the primary visual cortex results in a flash of light. Stimulation of surrounding associative areas of the brain in which visual information is processed results in brilliant patterns. Stimulation of areas still further from the visual cortex leads to reenactment of visual memories. All of these occurrences have been known to happen to persons having taken LSD. This leads me to believe that what one sees under the influence of LSD is a reflection of one's own mind. Therefore the creatures of my hallucinations I believe to be aspects of my mind.

I believe that each creature represents a different voice in my head. When painting, I try in a sense to follow the voice which speaks first. Following the same logic, I try to paint the image I see first. Therefore, my paintings grow spontaneously. One thought leads to another. In the process I eventually get visually tired and my thoughts drift away to other matters such as food or what kind of day it is. At this point I follow my thoughts and leave the
painting. When I return to the painting I attempt to re-work it according to whatever new stimulus enters my head. If none does then I stop work on that piece.

I find that the greatest test for my paintings is to put them in my living room. There I can reflect upon them in a relaxed manner. In the studio I often find this difficult. I feel that I have an obligation to paint there.

I do not believe art should be done out of obligation. I believe art should be done to fulfill a need. This need, I believe, has been inherent in me since birth and shall continue to direct me in my future artwork. For the future I see no immediate change in my approach to painting, nor in the imagery I use. Whatever change occurs will be a gradual evolution no doubt related to my maturity as a painter and as a person.
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( PLATE I )

"AN EARLY HEAD"

( 12 )
( PLATE II )

"COME ON"

( 13 )
( PLATE III )

"TRUCK IN WITH OSLEY"

( 14 )
( PLATE IV )

"ON THE ROAD AGAIN"

( 15 )