THE COLLECTIVE AND PERSONAL UNCONSCIOUS
AS PART OF AN INTUITIVE STYLE OF PAINTING

A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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by

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Approved by

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I. INTRODUCTION

Emotion created by memory is what I wish to express on canvas. I do not want to narrate specific events. I want to create atmospheres that communicate feelings.

The atmospheres are meant to confront and envelop the viewer. The color and markings are partially intuitive and partially dictated by formal concerns. My abstract compositions suggest shapes that move in and out of ambiguous spaces. To me, the relationship between the figure and the ground is symbolic of the relationship between man and his environment. Man, like the shapes I paint, is, at times, in harmony with his environment and, at times, in conflict with it.

I create atmospheres by layering the paint on the surface of the canvas. The surface is then scratched and scraped to reveal more intense colors and active markings that are below the surface, like nerves beneath the skin. The process is intuitive. Allowing the emergence of forms from my unconscious, has opened the way for me to express the emotions contained in my memories.

A quote from Siddhartha by Herman Hesse captures the essence of my approach to painting. "What can I say to you that would be of value, except that perhaps you seek too much, that as a result of your seeking you can not find. When someone is seeking, said Siddhartha, It happens quite easily that he only sees the thing that he is seeking; that
he is unable to find anything, unable to absorb anything, because he is only thinking of the thing he is seeking, because he has a goal, because he is obsessed with his goal. Seeking means: to be free, to be receptive, to have no goal."

My intuitive method of working links me to this philosophy. By being receptive to the emergence of forms from my unconscious and by being receptive to the paint and the surface qualities, I have come to terms with my method of painting. After working this way for a time, I am convinced that memories of moods and feelings have been synthesized and are revealing themselves in the forms and colors on my canvases. Each of my paintings is a representation of an integrated set of emotions and thoughts which are present within me at the time. My intention is to convey an atmosphere and have the viewer respond.

In this paper I will describe my evolution as an artist and discuss a transition which occurred when I became less concerned with the figures in the work and more concerned with the creation of atmospheres that represent the synthesis of emotion and thought. I will discuss the rationale of my current style of working and the intellectual influences that I have discovered which help me understand my style. I have described three examples of sources of imagery which served as stimuli for me while I
II. EVOLUTION

In the first quarters of graduate school, I painted female figures in environments. Both formally and conceptually these works represented an investigation of the relationship between figure and ground. These introspective works appeared to have flat decorative surfaces, and relied on intense color relationships.

At this time, I was very influenced by the paintings of Henri Matisse, Persian miniatures, Asian Indian art, and, to some extent, Mexican folk art. Contemporary artists such as Nathan Olivera, David Park, and Lester Johnson also influenced me.

I liked the way the figure in their paintings emerged from the ground, sometimes becoming one with the ground, sometimes dominating the ground, and sometimes being swallowed by the ground. I identified with the conflict between the figure and the ground and I still do.

When I realized the decorative surfaces were obscuring the content of my work, I began to search for a better way to express myself. My use of seductive surfaces like those found in the Indian paintings and Persian miniatures were actually a hinderance to me, so I chose to sacrifice the surfaces and to respond intuitively to my work.
III. TRANSITION

At this point I began to print. The intaglio technique forced me to temporarily abandon color and concentrate on black and white compositions. I noticed that the environments or atmospheres began to dominate. The tone of these prints was moody and somber. Rather than deny myself this introspective journey, I decided to allow these images to surface.

I was strongly influenced by the work of Goya. I had seen Goya's paintings in Spain, and I was very moved by them. I was particularly drawn to the Black Paintings from the "Quinta del Sorda" (Goya's home during the last years of his life). In these paintings, Goya purged his soul by painting on the walls of his home, and we are left with his visions and nightmares. He was painting only for himself at that time, nevertheless, these paintings are the strongest testimony of his career.

Andre Malraux, in his book on Goya, explained what the painter was doing. "Painting for Goya was a means of achieving mystery, but at the same time mystery was for him a means of achieving painting. This is what our contemporaries call Painting: A Painting which discovers its own individual law, a law which many great painters had suspected but which none had dared to proclaim the pre-existence of the resources peculiar to painting over those of representation: the right to draw and paint, not to
achieve an illusion or to express a spectacle in the strongest possible way, but so as to express painting itself.”

Malraux felt Goya was reviving shapes from the collective unconscious, "shapes lost in the darkness of Genesis." At this point in my work, my identification with Goya encouraged me to allow images and figures to emerge from my unconscious and to manifest themselves in my work.

As I experimented with intuitive themes and images, I began to read Karl Jung, the psychoanalyst. He discusses the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious in his analytic theory of personality.

The personal unconscious is the repository of one's experiences and the emotions associated with them. Since the content of the personal unconscious is based upon our own experiences and how we perceive and react to them, each individual's personal unconscious is unique.

Jung describes the collective unconscious in the following way. "The collective unconscious is the inherited, racial foundation of the whole structure of personality. The structural components of the collective unconscious are called by various names: archetypes, dominants, primordial images, imagos, mythological images, and behavior patterns. An archetype is a universal thought form (idea) which contains a large element of emotion. This thought form creates images or visions that correspond in
normal waking life to some aspect of the conscious situation."4

One can apply Jung's analysis of archetypes to Goya's Black Paintings. His grotesque monsters and veiled atmospheric landscapes represent primordial archetypes. My own work was becoming filled with vague figures which inhabited atmospheric landscapes. I believe archetypes from the collective unconscious can appear as similar forms in the works of artists using an intuitive approach to painting. The similarities between Goya's approach and my own seemed obvious.

Partly because I felt uncomfortable with these images and partly because I wanted to identify the sources of these images within me, I began to look to Jung's psychology for an explanation. His discussion of the shadow archetype seemed to help me understand what I was doing.

Jung states, "The shadow archetype consists of the animal instincts which man inherited in his evolution from lower forms of life. Consequently, the shadow to begin with typifies the animal side of man's nature. As an archetype the shadow is responsible for man's conception of original sin; when it is projected outward it becomes the devil or an enemy."5

According to Jung, the shadow archetype is a part of us all. Therefore, it must have universal appeal. Despite the
fact I was painting only for myself, I was, like Goya, appealing to feelings we all share.

I now consider this phase of my work to have been an important transitional period. A free flow of ideas or images from my unconscious coupled with a spontaneous reaction to the surface of the print or painting allowed me to express my most personal feelings. While my work continued to be somewhat gloomy and introspective, I was no longer afraid to face the shadow figure in myself.

I began to see the possibilities of the ground becoming a strong force in my work. Since I was discouraged with the sameness of my figures, I let the ground begin to dominate. My liberation had begun. The ground, itself, seemed to carry the emotional quality I was trying to convey. I realized color and abstract forms alone could create the impression I desired.

The painting included in Plate I is an example of my work which illustrates the beginning of the dominance of the ground. However, the figure is still present in the work.

IV. CURRENT WORK

My current paintings are completely abstract with no recognizable figures. The atmospheres are created by intuitively placing layers of paint on the canvas. The atmospheres are meant to confront and envelop the viewer. The color and markings are partially intuitive and partially
dictated by formal concerns. They suggest shapes which move in and out of ambiguous spaces.

Plate II is an example of my current work. As I began the painting, the choice of color was completely arbitrary. However, once the initial colors began to interact, they suggested each succeeding color used in the work. I layered one color over another. Having done this, I scratched through the top layer to reveal the color buried beneath the surface. At times the figures float above the ground, at times they sink beneath it, and at times they shift from one to the other. Plate III contains a good example of this.

V. INFLUENCES

The artists who currently are influencing my work are the abstract expressionists Mark Rothko, Adolf Gottlieb, Phillip Guston and Arshile Gorky. I am also drawing on the color field painters Larry Poons and Jules Olitski. Finally, I identify with more contemporary artists working in that style such as Stephen Greene, Ann Purcell, Jon Schuler, Jedd Garet, Herb Jackson and Susan Rothenberg.

Of the abstract expressionists mentioned above, Mark Rothko is my personal favorite. I owe part of my philosophy and working method to him. I enjoy the contemplative and spiritual nature of his work. The color in his work evokes spiritual responses from viewers. When I look at a painting by Rothko, I realize the power of color. I also see the emergence of the unconscious. Like other
abstract expressionists, he reacted to the paint as well as to his own inner voices. This strengthens my kinship to him.

Rothko used a quote from Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* to communicate the philosophy of his painting. "In the Dionysias dithyramb man is incited to strain his symbolic faculties to the utmost. Something quite unheard of is now clamoring to be heard: the desire to tear asunder the veil of Maya, to sink back into the original oneness of nature, the desire to express the very essence of nature symbolically."6 I find a parallel to my own feelings concerning the underlying archetype.

This quote seems to relate to the abstract expressionists' philosophy. Although it is many years since the prime of abstract expressionism, I believe the drive to express the essence of nature symbolically still exists for many artists. Expressionism from Goya to Rothko heralds this call. Expressing the essence of nature in symbolic form is what links my work to these painters. I, too, am trying to express the relationship to my environment. I, too, am trying to find the forms (symbols) which will communicate my feelings and memories. The use of symbols or markings combined with color constitute my method for achieving this end.

The way I use color also resembles the way color is used in paintings by the color field painters and minimalists like Olitski and Poons. I have always enjoyed
dealing with color relationships and surface qualities. I enjoy the thick layers of a Poons' painting and the muted color fields of an Olitski. Theirs are invented worlds into which all of us can enter visually and enjoy. "No statement in the critical literature on Olitski is as profound as the artist's own statement that "painting is keeping a surface alive.""7 Color and surface are the life of every painting regardless of what else they contain.

Surface qualities in my current work are assuming an increasingly significant role in my painting. For me the act of physically applying the paint across the canvas produces a personal exhilaration which I believe to be similar to that experienced by dancers and musicians when they perform. The visual and physical enjoyment is part of my work but not the totality of it.

The paintings and philosophies of others have also attracted my attention. The following quote about Herb Jackson provides insight into his feelings about painting which I find similar to mine. "In his work he talks about a play of forces which are endlessly woven into harmony and conflict. He describes abstract art as an animist's world; its elements are energies. In it there is a dualism/clash of opposing forces such as heat and cold, I and thou, mind and body, creation and destruction."8

In my paintings I see this conflict existing on two levels. On the visual level, the conflict is shown by the
ambivalent spatial relationships, by the somewhat turbulent brush strokes (also a characteristic of expressionist work), and by color in conflict. In my work, muted and grey colors are a contrast to the intense strokes of color. I use this technique to create visual tension. On a conceptual level, I see the visual relationships as metaphors for the conflict between man and his environment. An example can be found in Plate IV.

Stephen Greene is another contemporary artist with whom I identify. Comments on his work address the conflicts in his painting. "... this early conflict between pessimism and humanism, despair and desire is still central to Greene's approach. What have dropped away are the concrete images of suffering. In fact, it can be said of Greene that he has evolved slowly and steadily from a confrontational and insistent mode to a speculative and allusive one."9

I feel a strong affinity to Greene's concerns with the conflict between pessimism and humanism. Goya also represents this conflict. Each of us share an optimism in humanity and, yet, gloom and despair are evident in the work. It is as if the presence of evil in the world casts a shadow on what is good. It is not with any premeditated plan that I paint this way. It simply emerges from my unconscious.

My evolution seems similar to Greene's. "At first Greene's figures lost their imprisoning outlines.
Eventually they were submerged into the increasingly atmospheric grounds. By the early '60s they were presences rather than facts. Over the last decade these presences have become increasingly fragmented and far less referential. At the same time, Greene has continually developed his expressive use of color."10

More than any of the elements, color has powerful expressive qualities. I never begin a painting with the idea of creating a particular mood. What happens is, I simply choose a color and apply it, then choose another and apply it until I become so absorbed in the painting that the colors themselves begin to suggest the next move. The colors like the shape relationships are a result of working intuitively. Of course, I am aware of formal properties of color and can actually manipulate them after my initial confrontation with the canvas, but I have found I work best when I allow my intuition to prevail rather than relying on formal solutions.

The symbols I use in my paintings are loosely defined as squares, rectangles, triangles or lines scratched across the canvas. They are caught in ambiguous spaces. They are meant to suggest a contemplation of time and space. The similarities to Greene's work are both visual and conceptual. As with Goya's work, only in retrospect did I see these similarities.
VI. PERSONAL SOURCES

My sources are unique to me. My "personal unconscious" along with the "collective unconscious" fuel my work. In combination they work to enrich my painting. While my paintings do not narrate specific events they do represent emotions and feelings that have become part of my "personal unconscious". As an example of how past experiences influences my work, I would like to describe memories which have resulted in three separate works.

It was brown and ugly. The sky was murky. The sand was coarse. The road was red brick. The wind was blowing. The sound of the waves breaking drowned out all other sounds. No one walked the beach. The canvas lounge chairs were lined up in neat rows inside a shelter. The beach houses were locked and the windows were boarded. Yet, there was no real threat of winter.

That was Svengingen Beach in Holland. It faces the North Sea. That is a difficult position. I sympathized with the beach, and I loved it despite its ugliness and gritty, brown sand.

Once again canvas caught my eye. This time, it was the awnings on a house just down the street from my house. I looked at that house all summer on my way to work. It was white, the awnings were green. The shadows were gray. I saw the shadows change angles as I passed by. I never saw the people who lived there. I am not sure anyone does live
there. When the crickets began to sing and the sun light changed at the end of the summer, the awnings disappeared. The house looked naked and sterile. Yet, there was no real threat of winter.

My mind's eye leads me to another visual memory less connected than the previous two, but important to my work. The location was Munich, Germany. This is not an account of my travels through a foreign country; but rather, an account of visual memories which stimulate and inspire me.

Munich is a very sophisticated city, like New York. There is a mingling of various classes of people, and there are variety of visual stimuli. Having eaten dinner and having had a little wine, I began to stroll down the avenue. The night was warm. I could smell fried foods and expensive perfumes. I passed a sidewalk sale which was a strange mix of mass produced objects and hand-made crafts. I stopped to look at some hand made jewelry that caught my eye. It must have been the shiny surface reflecting the street lights or perhaps the simplicity of the shape. The artist approached me. I wondered if he was a serious artist. He wanted me to buy it. He fit it to my neck since it was somewhat flexible. He joked about the substance from which it was made. He called it Munich silver (Munich silver is not to be confused with real silver). I bought it. It wasn't expensive after all, and, for just a moment, I had communicated with an artist.
I wore the necklace right away and somehow felt more a part of the flow of people passing by. Everyone seemed in a hurry to me. I suppose I would have been too if I had been one of them, but I was an outsider, a vacationer. They walked right on by all the shops and store windows without noticing. My pace was slower, and I looked at everything.

I saw a women through the glass and I was startled. She was smiling, but she seemed evil. She was somehow aggressive in her red dress and white cap. Her square jaw jutted out over a polkadot, ruffled collar. A strange juxtaposition, I thought. I stopped and stared at her. She seemed to personify evil. I got my camera out. It was difficult to shoot the picture through the glass since my own reflection kept interfering. It seemed like there was some of me in her, but she was a store mannequin, not a real person. I was able to photograph her despite all my awkward maneuvers.

VII. CONCLUSION

These memories and others like them become part of my personal repository. They sink into the soul and reappear as I work. Since the form of my painting is abstract, it is the mood and not the story which is revived from my unconscious. "Even the most reductive abstraction is a fantasy, a play of tropes whose authority emanates from deep inside the figure of the artist."11
The abstract form of my paintings which has resulted from an intuitive approach to the work, is meant to express an emotional content. The content is a synthesis of my moods and memories which appear on the surfaces of my canvases as colors and shapes, sometimes in harmony and sometimes in conflict.

One source for my work is the expressionists, the abstract expressionists and the color field painters. The other source is a combination of the collective and personal unconscious which reside within me.

The process of painting is a reflection of the pain and pleasure of life itself. To predict the direction of my painting is like predicting my own future. I must reject any such attempts, since I feel my painting must unfold as life itself unfolds.
Plate I
POOTNOTES


5. Ibid, p. 82.


10. Ibid, p. 84.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


