SOURCES OF MY PAINTING

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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INTRODUCTION

I have set up a specific problem that is an outgrowth of a beginning painting exercise. I have worked within narrowly defined limits to achieve an illusionist representation. The subject I have chosen is still life but depicted within a shallow space, using a minimum of texture, a narrow range of value, yet enriched with a diverse range of color modulated and mixed to immerse itself within the larger planes. My intent hovers between portraying a total illusion of the objects and their space and reiterating the object qualities of the paint and canvas. I am developing a role for the subject also within the total aim of the paintings.

In this essay I will first state the original limits of my introductory painting assignment. Second I will compare this approach to that of other illusionistic painting — particularly Alberti's Renaissance theory. I have selected a contemporary (Renaissance) example to illustrate Alberti's theory which I will describe in detail in order to compare it with one of my own still lifes (#24).

My introductory painting exercise under Mr. Eric Cameron was summerized in a syllabus:

"Representational Painting

The purpose of the course is to enable students to attain a maximum evocation
of the visible world on the two dimensional surface of the picture plane. The sum is accuracy within the system of equivalences imposed by the medium.

"Each student is to supply two bottles and three books to serve as a model. They should be as varied as possible in size, shape and color. A sheet of white drawing paper will also be required to cover the table on which the still-life is to be set up and another sheet to pin to the studio wall as a background. The position of the objects can be marked on the paper and the position of the supporting table is to be indicated on the studio floor so that everything can be cleared away at the end of each session and re-assembled at the beginning of the next.

"Method of Working - (After construction and priming of canvas) the still-life will be drawn in using a fine brush. Then colors are to be introduced as flat patches which will obliterate the drawing. The process of alternate drawing and patch-coloring will be repeated until a stage is reached where drawing and coloring can be achieved simultaneously by modification of the last color-patch pattern."1

Verbal instructions demanded that the painting begin with the still life drawn completely in outline. The outlines were to be translated to the canvas utilizing a paintbrush handle held at arms length as a guide. Relative proportions and angles at which the edges appear in the still life could be judged in this way. The colors used for the color-patch pattern were to be derived from the still life model. Resemblance was to be based on the matching of color changes in the visual situation. Color was to be treated as a
comparative thing. The pattern of color patches was a series of color changes and all these changes were to add up to a perfect correspondence to the subject being represented. Ideally, the painting process would conclude with a final color decision, which would wed all parts.

Later I discovered that the instructor, Mr. Cameron, had published an article called "Depictional Semiotic and Alberti's 'On Painting'." I found that many of the parameters for his exercise he may have distilled from his analysis of Alberti's treatise. Certain aspects of the Alberti's treatise which I will now discuss are paradigm in the painting exercise. Aspects mentioned are only those which can be applied to the exercise and do not constitute all of Mr. Cameron's article or all of Alberti's treatise. Similarities begin with concerns about the possibilities of illusion through empirical and comparative means.

Alberti states that "all things are known by comparison" and this notion is present throughout his essay. He discusses painting language under three topics, "circumscription," "composition," and the "reception of light." He stresses a dialogue between "light and shade" and "outline."

The exercise creates a dialogue between outline and color within its procedure. Each is treated dis-
tinctly. The adaption of each to comparative methods is stressed.

Alberti desires illusion; "painting strives to represent things seen." But he requires that paintings depict subjects that are beyond what can be "encompassed within a static configuration of shapes and colors." His depictional system is a pairing of two different approaches. A strictly empirical approach proceeds from the direct observation of nature. This approach treats the picture plane as an open window, and devises methods for translating the surfaces of the world into shapes on the painting's surface. A synthetic-constructive approach demands the use of memory in an indirect investigation of the world. It seeks to depict the world through an understanding of structures which cause the surfaces being depicted.

The still life provides a subject that can be encompassed within a static configuration. The exercise illustrates the purely empirical approach to depiction. The paintbrush handle is held up before the still life to directly measure the relative angles as they appear. Colors in the still life are compared to each other just as the angles and proportions are relative to each other.

The next point of comparison concerns Mr. Cameron's organization of different types of "pictorial signi-
fication" in relation to the empirical situation. Three topics which will be discussed are color harmony, gestural handling, and narrative associations with the subject itself.

The very things which are beyond the illusionistic capacities of painting are the things Alberti ultimately seeks. He seeks with painting the "movements of bodies" as well as the "movements of the soul." Mr. Cameron suggests that the gestural use of line and figures to convey a sense of movement demonstrates the potential for auxiliary associations in this painting system incidental to the aim of visual resemblance. Mr. Cameron also suggests that color harmonies, which Alberti also comments on, are similarly incidental to the aim of visual resemblance.

The still life exercise shifts focus away from the record of hand gesture or from an active involvement with color harmony. Beyond the fact that there is no movement to need suggesting, the physical record of the touch of the painter is only the inevitable result of the steadiness of the person's hand, or the fluidity of the paint and size of paintbrush that the person finds most comfortable. A certain thickness of paint is necessary for opacity, but students were cautioned not to build up too great a thickness. The colors in the paint-
ing are dependent on the colors in the still life subject, so color harmony is established in its arrangement before the actual painting is begun.

In the introduction to his article, Mr. Cameron states "my own line of inquiry hinges on an intuition that the historical emergence of 'art' out of the art of painting proceeds on the basis of innate potentialities in pictorial signification." He concludes his investigation of Alberti with the statement "we might detect an approach to art in terms of conceptual understanding as opposed to the immediate experience of images." Just as depicting movement goes beyond the capacity of paint on canvas, evoking the "movements of the soul" goes beyond what is possible through depicting visual appearances. But again, as Mr. Cameron notices, this is just what Alberti expects of a painter, "someone painted Ulysses in such a way that you could tell he was not really mad but only pretending." The capacity to interpret a painting on these conceptual levels is also what Mr. Cameron considers an "auxiliary signification" or an "innate potentiality."

The still life exercise avoids this level of association but does not prevent it. Objects depicted can generate associations. In the exercise the objects were thought of in terms of "size, shape, and color." But
selecting them was left to the individual who might intro-
duce content on some other level if wished.

Mr. Cameron displays a bias in favor of a conceptual
approach to art. His exercise illustrates an approach to
art quite opposite his bias and he would likely view it as
a starting point and no more.

Mr. Cameron notices in Alberti a link between the aim
of illusion and an appreciation of art on the level of
"object-content." 15 Mr. Cameron states: "His (Alberti's)
advice to painters to think of the picture plane as
'transparent and like glass' or even 'an open window'
suggests the purest principle of visual equivalence coded
in a way that allows the concealment of cues to materials
and system alike." 16 Illusion, as an end, suggests the
"immediate experience of images," but as a means, suggests
an "appreciation of art in terms of conceptual understand-
ing." 17 Furthermore, Alberti undertakes a systematic
inquiry into the methods for creating illusion.

The exercise takes illusion as an end. I suspect
Mr. Cameron thought of his exercise as a means. It dis-
tinguishes different levels for appreciating painting in
the different components of the artist-model, depictional
situation. It introduces the notion of the relativity of
the material surface and the contingency of color. It is
based on the consideration of the painting as a "color-
patch pattern." It empahasizes color as a major consi-
deration of painting and demands the fusion of hue, value and intensity into a single color choice.

This exercise reflects an analysis of painting language written during the early Renaissance in Florence. Since my painting method is derived from this exercise I will compare one of my paintings with a painting dating from Alberti's time. I have selected the work of Carlo Crivelli, the *Madonna and Child*, dated c. 1481 (tempera on wood, Metropolitan Museum of Art, N.Y.) as a response for Alberti's theory, to compare with my painting, #24.

What follows are some general remarks about the comparison I am making and why, including reasons for selecting the Crivelli and the relation of #24 to the rest of my painting. I would like to emphasize the appearance, the "look" of my painting compared with that of the Renaissance painting. As a further exploration of the context of my paintings, my motivations as well as the results, I would like to proceed from the physical evidence. This is the main advantage this comparison offers. When painting I am first of all working with a physical thing. The result of my efforts is that physical thing. It is the evidence of me as a painter.

In making this comparison, I am removing myself slightly from an active involvement with the painting. An extreme detachment is probably impossible.

The choice of a Renaissance painting for the com-
parison is arbitrary. The intention of picturing is the basis for comparison. The paintings of the Renaissance demonstrate, for me, a renewed interest in the depiction of the world which has not been interrupted so far in the progression of our culture. If painting method were the basis for comparison, a painting by Edouard Manet, (a 19th Century French painter), might make a better example.

Carlo Crivelli was a Venetian artist active in the Marches region of Italy. I chose his Madonna and Child, because of its exceptional state of preservation. While to choose a painting from the exact time and place of Alberti's thesis would make the comparison more complete there may be some advantages to using the Crivelli. Since he was painting forty-four years after Alberti finished his treatise, it is likely that Crivelli was fully aware of Alberti's ideas.

Removed from the specific tradition which Alberti was working within, the Crivelli might be more typical of the general impact of radical ideas on the painting of the time as a whole. In general, the Crivelli demonstrates a persistence of Gothic painting practices as well as Renaissance innovations. Crivelli had a consistent and idiosyncratic style of painting.

Because the two paintings are distinctly separated in time, it might be possible to view the comparison in
terms of the relationship between visible evidence and supporting theory rather than in terms of the history of painting style.

My painting that I chose to use in the comparison, titled #24, is typical of the still life paintings I have worked on while at graduate school. It illustrates the adoption of Cameron's exercise as a method for painting and the application of that method toward several objectives. In this painting, the main problem was the rendering of soft as well as hard surfaces.

COMPARISON OF MY PAINTING, #24, WITH CRIVELLI'S MADONNA AND CHILD

I will make a detailed description of each painting set in comparison in a tandem fashion under topics. The general topics include an inventory of things depicted in each painting, the treatment of detail, the handling of materials, the painting method, particularly in reference to the treatment of light and space, and a brief comment on intent in response to subject. A summary of what each comparison reveals is treated under a separate heading, "Summary and Conclusions" which follows all three comparisons among my painting, Crivelli's painting, and Alberti's treatise.

Crivelli's painting is small, only 9 by 15 inches and is displayed in an elaborate, gilded architectural frame of
Gothic design and ornamentation. The Madonna supports the Child, who is sitting in front of her on a balcony wall which has been partially draped with a cloth. The Child is sitting on a cushion and is holding a goldfinch. A fly also sits on the wall. To the left of the Madonna's head is suspended a cucumber on its vine and a peach attached to its branch; the branch and vine are tied in a bouquet. Suspended to the right of the Madonna's head are two peaches on a branch also tied with lace. Behind the Madonna is a screen of fabric suspended from laces which reach beyond the limits of the picture. Behind the screen is a landscape extending to a distant horizon. Foremost is a road, flanked by trees and with figures walking on it. In the sky are shown some hazy clouds.

The museum's introduction reads:

"Painted about 1480 this panel is one of the artist's most important pictures and is almost perfectly preserved. It illustrates the remarkable precision of detail and enamelled jewel-like surfaces which account for Crivelli's success and influence throughout the Marches.

The apples, the cucumbers, the fly and the goldfinch are symbols of sin and redemption."

My painting measures 26 by 42 inches and was made with oil paint on canvas. It was completed during the winter of 1982. It is a depiction of a table covered with a cloth. Behind the table two different draperies provide a background. One is the color of raw linen; the other is the color of yellow ochre. On the center of the table,
side by side, are a folded black cloth and a stack of five white plates.

The museum's introduction mentions the "precision of detail" and the "jewel-like surfaces" of Crivelli's paintings. These two considerations provide an initial basis for making a comparison of the two paintings.

Crivelli paints the transparency of the fly's wings, the hair on its body, and the pattern of color changes on its abdomen. Buildings are shown on the horizon, painted in delicate tones of blue. The facial features are delicately modeled. The anatomy of eyelids and lashes is shown with care. Figures, which are reduced in scale to one half the size of the fly, are included in the distant landscape.

There is a general interest in embellishment. The screen behind the Madonna is suspended from scarlet laces which have metal tips. The signature is painted on a separate piece of cloth which is pinned in front of the balcony. The haloes are done with gold and are shown decorated with jewels. The Madonna wears jewels and beads on her brow and neck.

There is an embellishment of depicted surfaces. The Madonna's cloak is decorated with a complicated pattern painted in gold. The pattern is composed of large units composed of smaller units, which are composed of smaller
units still. A border design trims the hems of the garment. A design is shown carved in relief on the front of the balcony wall. The cushion is decorated with a pattern of gold dots. A pattern appears on the cloth draped over the balcony and the same pattern appears on the screen behind the Madonna.

The vagaries and details of surface are also depicted. The balcony wall has a crack in it. The leaves accompanying the fruit have veins. Every bump and blemish on the cucumber is included. Even very slight undulations in the fabric are shown. The horizontal fold in the fabric of the screen is protruding on the left side and recessed on the right. Stones dot the ground in the landscape areas. The tendons stand out as they extend the fingers. Crivelli has challenged himself with the textures of hair, flesh, fabric, leaves, peachskin, distant vegetation, and sharply carved stone.

This attention to detail reveals a desire to demonstrate each surface thoroughly, evoking its coherence with a minute handling of detail. But further, the elaboration of detail, especially the decoration of depicted surfaces, becomes the elaboration of the surface of the painting itself. This is most evident with the design on the Madonna's cloak. It is not always drawn so that it coincides with the undulations of the fabric. It is gilded, which causes it to become
independent of the illusion of the painting. Gold changes color according to the angle at which it is viewed. Gold itself becomes an embellishment of whatever it is put on just because of its lustre and value.

My painting shows a narrow selection of detail. The greatest precision of detail occurs in the stack of plates. The very regular curved edges of the plates occur foreshortened, parallel, and close together. The difficulty occurs at the extremes where the receding edges provide the most information in the smallest area. This foreshortening is handled with concern in the painting. An interest in the coherence of the surfaces depicted is demonstrated by the delicacy with which the receding curves are painted. But this is not a demonstration of an infinite elaboration of detail. The depiction has been simplified as much as possible.

Vagaries of surface are largely eliminated from the painting. There is in the linen drapery a small tangle of wrinkles and in the tablecloth as it hangs over the front of the table there is a complexity of broad, soft undulations. But they do not seem specific and are not treated with individual detail.

None of the surfaces in the painting is decorated. There are no large scale changes in the objects in my painting. The only large scale change in my painting is in the
breadth of paint handling. The paint strokes used to render the plates are many times smaller than the strokes in the broad areas in the drapery behind. Otherwise, the plates and the folded cloth are similar in size and the table comfortably displays them with little excess table top. The draperies behind are in the general range of scale of the table. The depth of space is determined by the size of the table. Even the three major areas of hue that the painting has been divided into are similar in size. In my painting there is little evocation of texture. The textures depicted would be a subtle differentiation between different materials. There is more interest displayed in differentiating between the structures of surfaces; that is, their hardness or softness.

In the upper left corner of the painting, the large folds of the linen drapery are treated in a very general manner. The clarity of depiction becomes dubious when one considers this area apart from the context of the whole painting. The complexity of modulation in the forward vertical surface of the table cloth is sometimes elusive. The general impression is of a coherent but fluctuating surface.

There is an evident coherence of subject; however, this is not achieved through Crivelli's thorough inventory of surfaces with all their vagaries. There is an elimination of detail, a lack of elaboration, and a relativity of
precision.

Crivelli's painting is far richer in detail than my painting though it is not necessarily richer in subtleties. This elaboration begins with the multitude of subjects he includes in the painting. In general there is taste for embellishment, with the subject depicted as well as with the surface of the painting itself. My painting reflects a tendency to reduce the number of things depicted. Elaboration is restricted to color modulations across the surfaces depicted. There is little taste for embellishment either in the construction of the subject or in the construction of the painting. But, similar to the Crivelli, there is a certain fastidiousness about the painting. There is no random debris, little sense of dust. This is echoed in the handling of the paint.

The museum's introduction points out the "jewel-like surfaces" in Crivelli's painting. This is because of his manipulation of the color, but it is also because of his manipulation of the paint as material. Crivelli uses a personal version of an elaborate Gothic tempera method.

The whole painting has been laid over a light pink colored ground. The blue and white of the sky, the green of the grass, and leaves, the white and grey and orange of the balcony have been applied in a broad, translucent manner. The fluidity of the paint has caused inconsistencies
to even out and remain only as soft changes in the thickness of the paint. Where the paint is thin, the pink color underneath shows through. Allowing the paint to remain translucent creates a slight glowing color. It is impossible to discern whether the color is caused by the light reflecting directly off of the paint or off of the surface beneath the paint. The peach color of the flesh, the blue of the cloak, and the yellow of the child's garment have also been applied in a broad manner and maintain the soft glow of translucence but the underlying pink that appears everywhere else in the painting does not show through.

Over these general areas of color, light and dark areas are indicated with paint applied in narrow strokes or lines precisely parallel to one another. This is a traditional method for painting in tempera, called "hatching," prevalent in Crivelli's time. The succession of narrow lines creates an area or screen of color which appears coherent and as a modification of the color underneath. By changing the direction of the brushstrokes each time, a number of layers of color can be overlapped. All contribute to the final appearance of the color. This interweaving of colors by hatching can be used to create gradual color changes across a surface, and will give lustre to the surface.

In Crivelli's painting there are not any complicated layerings of color. The light and dark areas are indicated
with one or two layers of the same color applied very precisely. This creates a simple, clear modification of the color. The dark areas are painted with a sepia color which varies from dark brown to nearly black. The light areas are indicated with a near white tone of the color underneath. In the blue cloak the dark areas are put in with black, but the light areas are left unaltered. The thickness of the sepia paint is often varied to give translucent or opaque lines. The sepia color is also applied in hatchings to indicate cast shadows and is applied last over the surface involved, even over the gold of the haloes. The sepia is used consistently throughout most of the painting and the contrast between it and the colors underneath is usually great. This gives the painting a visual sonority.

The local color of some areas is treated differently. The upward surface of the fabric draped over the balcony wall has been painted broadly in a tint of yellow then a very thin glaze of yellow has been added over top. The part of the fabric hanging in front is many transparent layers of yellow hatchings built up until the lines have become densely packed together. This area has a pronounced glow because of the transparency of the paint. The foliage of the landscape is built up from small dabs of paint in three shades of green and sometimes black. Crivelli's method of painting makes use of a variety of ways of applying
paint. The result is a lustrous surface which offers a variety of paint marks.

The lustre Crivelli gets with his manipulation of paint is complemented through his choice of colors. The Child's garment is a light tint of yellow. It appears cool against the peach colored flesh and harmonizes with the greyed purple of the cushion. The greyness of this purple then compares with the warm rose color of the Madonna's tunic. The still different grey-purple of the screen behind the Madonna is a further variation on this harmony. The purple screen is a middle value of the grey which is close to the large light areas of green in the landscape. Similar in value is the part of the cloth which hangs in front of the balcony and the greyed red of the front of the balcony. The peach color of the flesh is similar to the lighter pink color which underlies the entire painting.

The colors in the painting are local or specific to the things depicted. Lights and darks are modifications of these local colors. The lights and darks have been applied in a separate manner. Color areas are further separated by precisely drawn outlines used to clarify the major silhouettes.

The handling of materials in my painting shows less preciousness. The surface of my painting appears dry and matte. There is little organization to the paint strokes.
No change in method distinguishes the depiction of lights and darks from the depiction of local color. The surface of the painting is merely a vehicle for color. The top of the table has been painted over several times with thin layers. The brush has been used in the same horizontal direction each time. A thin texture has been built up that reflects the dragging of the bristles through the paint. This texture also occurs in the stacked plates. In other areas the paint has been applied in a dense, scrubbing manner. The brushstrokes go in different directions. The texture from the brushstrokes of underlying paint interferes with the textures of subsequent layers.

The paint has been applied in deliberate patches. The painting has been divided into five major color areas that comprise patches all similar in color. The major color divisions conform to the local colors of the things in the painting. The table cloth hanging in front of the table is a grey-purple color. The table top and plates are a greyer, whiter color of purple. The linen drapery is a very grey color which tends to warm red. The other drapery is a deep yellow. The folded cloth on the table is a blue-black color. Within these major color areas are modulations of the color. In the forward plane of the table cloth the color changes slightly in greyness and also from a more reddish to a more bluish purple. In the yellow area the light areas are a relatively clear
yellow, and the dark areas change between a dull reddish brown and an olive color. There is a casual blending of these variations and they seem numberless within a certain range.

The paint has been applied in deliberate patches but the paint has usually been blended into already wet paint. This creates nearly imperceptible edges between some of the shapes. While the paint itself is matte, a resonance, which might be compared to the lustre in the Crivelli, is created by this modulation of colors within a narrow range. There is a resonance between the general color of the area and the constant change of color within the area. The color of the entire area can be seen in two ways: as a general color in comparison to the other general colors of the painting, or as a range of color changes or colors related to one another within the area.

The paint is always opaque. The layering contributes to the surface texture but not the color. Any lustre is created by the interplay of color rather than ambiguity about how the paint reflects light. The casual approach to surface in my painting provides a foil for the relish of meticulous surface in the Crivelli painting.

There is some fastidiousness to the paint handling in #24. It is derived from the attempt to control the character of the edges between color shapes and the attempt to keep color decisions deliberate and coherent. The thinness of
the paint also contributes to this appearance of tidiness. I have begun this comparison with two opposed dimensions of a depictional painting, the things depicted in the painting and the painting's surface. I took my cue from the museum's introduction to the Crivelli. I think that the immediate experience of the Crivelli is notable in these two areas. Furthermore, my painting contrasts with the Crivelli significantly in these areas. The characteristics of each painting which I have observed so far, their surfaces, how the paint has been applied, and what has been depicted contribute to a further dimension of each painting: light and space. This dimension, while more complex to achieve, may not be any less immediate to experience. Crivelli used a number of methods for suggesting light and space. They echo Alberti's analysis of painting fundamentals. My painting demonstrates a single method applied to the problem. It is based on empirical observation and on the relativity of color.

The Madonna dominates Crivelli's painting. He has created a shallow foreground by placing the screen behind the figure. Its closeness is shown by the shadows cast onto it. The balcony wall in front of the Madonna is used to articulate this foreground space further. The cloth draped over the wall creates receding parallels on the upper plane which helps cohere the foreground with the
landscape. The relationship of the treetops to the horizon also helps orient the landscape to the foreground.

The silhouettes have a precise sepia-colored outline except for some receding upper surfaces such as the Madonna's right shoulder and hand. Some major silhouettes have been incised into the surface of the painting. The hatching method, because it is a succession of lines, has been used as a succession of contour lines. The lines have been drawn to suggest they follow the curve or direction of the surface depicted. The density of the lines has been used to suggest the play of light across continually changing surfaces.

The use of white for light areas and sepia for dark areas has necessitated the generalization of surfaces into major planes, either lighted or shadowed. The right-facing receding planes on the right sides of the heads are hatched with sepia. The forward-facing planes of the front of the faces, that recede gradually to the left, are colored with white. The vertical plane of the cloth facing directly forward is colored with yellow only. Crivelli has also indicated secondary highlights within the shadowed areas, especially along receding edges. This is caused by light reflecting off of a nearby lighted surface back on to a shaded surface. This is evident on the extreme right of the Madonna's neck and jawbone where the surface receives
light reflected from the left-facing side of the mantle.

Crivelli's painting method separates the selection of local color from the articulation of light and shade. His coloring attributes a particular color to each substance in the painting, then considers a modification of that color due to the effect of light on surfaces. The unifying presence of light is matched by a coherent method for the depiction of light. This method is the addition of white and black throughout the painting. There is a conceptual link between the coherence of the painting and color value.

In #24 the subject depicted provides simple cues for determining space. The table fills the painting. Its top is the major receding plane. The drapery hanging in front of the table and the drapery behind the table is vertical. The foreshortened shape of the table top and the shapes of the dishes on it primarily establish the sense of space in the painting.

Changes in the directions of these major planes have been matched by changes in color. Cast shadows have been depicted as patches of color. The color remains in flat patches to show the lighting of planes. Its use to form lines has been resisted. On the extreme left of the painting a vertical fold of the linen cloth protrudes forward. On the left of the fold the receding plane is depicted by a thin vertical area of dark reddish grey. The forward-facing
plane of this fold is depicted by a wider vertical area of a middle valued bluish-grey. The right-facing plane of the fold is depicted by another vertical area of light yellowish-grey. These shapes are roughly painted on. There is little blending of the transition between planes.

The underlying aspect of the judgement of color which establishes a coherent depiction of space and light is the judgement of value. Value means the relative lightness or darkness of a color because of the relative volume of light being reflected by a surface. The areas of lightest value in my painting correspond to planes which face upward or to the right. Vertical forward-facing planes are depicted by middle values within the range offered by the local color. The darkest valued areas correspond to leftward and downward facing planes.

There are also two sources of light which affect the color choices in the painting. Diffuse natural light plays across the objects from the front and right. It is distinctly blue in color. Artificial light, alizarin in color, affects the still life from above.

Comparisons have been made considering the attitude to detail, materials, and the treatment of light and space. In respect to subject I will only state the obvious, but the difference here permeates the attitudes evidenced in each painting. Crivelli is trying to include the world in his painting, from cracks and insects to distant cities. I
am trying to express myself through attention to a very spare and select subject, a small sliver of the world. COMPARE CRIVELLI'S PAINTING WITH ALBERTI'S "ON PAINTING"

I have described from primary observation a number of comparisons of my painting with an historical example (Crivelli). I selected this example because Alberti's theory which underlies it also underlies my painting. The following comparisons are intended to place this example within the context of its underlying theory. I will begin with pertinent aspects of Alberti's treatise then discuss The Madonna and Child in view of those topics.

In his treatise, "On Painting," Alberti identifies three major elements of painting language, "circumscription," "composition," and "the reception of light." "Circumscription" he describes as the "guiding of an outline with a line." Composition is the "rule by which the parts of the things seen fit together in the painting." The primary "part" in the painting is the "plane." From the planes are constructed "members," from the "members," "bodies," and from the "bodies," an entire "istoria." "Reception of light" is the determination of the "colors and the qualities of planes." Alberti's analysis revolves around planes as the basic units of depiction. Line is used to outline them and organize them in space. Color is used to describe their character according to how they are lit.
Primary to Alberti's treatise is the idea that "all things are known by comparison." The sizes of planes are relative as are the sizes of things depicted. The character of planes he describes as "differences;" "born by light." He maintains that there are only four major colors from which all others are derived: "Red is the color of fire, blue of the air, green of the water, and of the earth grey and ash."

Alberti describes colors as subordinate to "light and shade," which are depicted by the painter with "white and black." He treats "light and shade" separately. He identifies "white and black" with light, and hues with the colors of things. But he refers to all equally as "colors."

Alberti's analysis is demonstrated by Crivelli's painting method. Throughout the painting there is a dialogue between outline and color. The two aspects of color, hue and value, are handled separately in the painting. Local color is applied first, then light and shade added over top.

If Alberti's treatise is compared with Cennino's "Handbook" a shift is noticeable from the interest in color relativity. In his article, Mr. Cameron notices, "Cennino is preoccupied with the construction of the sign-vehicle, and though the aim is convincing naturalistic rendering, his
advice comprises mainly the prescription of particular configurations of paint marks," and "when he expresses his fascination for pictorial illusion he shares with Alberti, he speaks of it as a transformation of materials." And this preoccupation is still evident in Crivelli's painting, executed 44 years after Alberti completed his treatise.

Crivelli uses gold, which Alberti condemns. He does not relegate the painting's surface to secondary importance as Alberti's theory demands. He is, however, concerned with convincing rendering. The use of perspective follows Alberti's description. Thus the vanishing point is placed along the center of the picture vertically, and leads to the practice of including surfaces in the painting that are perpendicular to the picture plane, and whose edges will diminish toward the central vanishing point. Crivelli has placed the bunches of fruit so that they jut into the upper corners along diagonals through the center of the painting. This suggests the desire to reinforce this Albertian system.

Crivelli is fascinated with extreme changes in scale. Figures in the distance appear on the painting surface no larger than the fly in the foreground. He understands this relativity both as necessary for the illusion of space, and as a device to make the Madonna seem colossal.

Crivelli has an interest in variety. Alberti encourages that a painting should show variety, but within
moderation. 30

Alberti discusses aspects of color which are outside his discussion of methods of depiction. "Rose near green and sky blue gives both honour and life." 31 Crivelli uses color in this way also.

COMPARISON OF MY PAINTING WITH ALBERTI'S TREATISE

My painting method was derived from an analysis of Alberti's theories. Are Alberti's theories apparent in my paintings?

My painting displays a relegation of the picture surface to relative unimportance. The paint is on the painting as color. Furthermore, the relativity of color is stressed. This is evidenced by the opacity of the paint because this means that the colors, as they appear, have been deliberately mixed on the palette. Variations of how the light reflects from the paint have been reduced to create a common basis for the comparison of color. To a large extent the color is wedded to a surface plane depicted in the picture. To a lesser extent the color is wedded to the physical material of paint or the evidence of particular brushstrokes. In some places color and plane are wedded in a single brushstroke.

There is a sustained effort to record nuances of color change across the surfaces depicted as patch-like modulations within the general color of the plane.
This concentration on color gives a generality to the surfaces. Their softness or hardness is indicated, but not their textures.

The illusion of space is not completely convincing in #24. There is an awkwardness that betrays the interest in the color shape (on the canvas) rather than color plane (in the model). The illusion of space is the result of the comparison of color value. There is a methodical approach which is in keeping with Alberti, but there is a lack of dexterous handling. No outlines occur. Value, hue, and intensity of color are fused in a single color choice and the painting is the sum of these choices. Because all the information is translated by color patches without the aid of outline or hatching, the relativity of the color, and consequently of the material surface, is stressed even more. This seems consistent with Alberti's stressing that all things are known by comparison and his theory that there are only four major colors from which all others are derived.

In my painting, the character of edges, their relative distinction, becomes a factor which can confirm or deny the illusion of light and space. Alberti does not recognize this factor.

The receding edges of the table indicate a vanishing point to the left of center. This oblique view-
point suggests a divergence from Alberti's constructive system of perspective. A direct observation of these diagonals is allowed for within Alberti's theory but a constructive approach to perspective would be a closer conformity.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

I began with a comparison between the painting exercise, from which my painting method is derived, and Cameron's analysis of Alberti's "On Painting". Cameron sets out to detect an approach to art "in terms of conceptual understanding".32 Corollary to this, he links illusion (an extreme form of depiction) with conceptual understanding though illusion begins with empirical observation and engages other purely sensual considerations (harmony and variety of color). My comparison locates the different parameters of the exercise within this hierarchy of considerations.

The exercise focuses on illusion. Alberti's treatise shows the ideas of early 15th Century Italy from where we can trace a history of figurative art to the present day.

Because while theory informs painting, even motivates it, it is the work itself which establishes the history of art. So I have based my discussion on a comparison of two specific paintings.
The comparison revealed some differences. Crivelli packs his painting with a wide variety of space changes, and textures while I limit myself to a shallow space and almost ignore texture. Crivelli embellishes both the subject he depicts and the surface of the painting itself. I do not embellish my subject and treat the surface as a mere repository.

I have a painting method derived from a modern view of the Renaissance theory of Alberti. I have discovered a number of differences between my painting and a specific Renaissance painting. These differences include a comparison of methods. How does the Renaissance painting compare with Alberti's version of Renaissance theory? This comparison revealed that Crivelli's manifold painting method parallels Alberti's organization of painting language. Local hue and intensity are treated separately from general values caused by the reception of light. Crivelli uses perspectival cues to space which echo Alberti's suggestions and he uses scale juxtapositions for spatial and expressive effect. However traits reflecting the Gothic tradition which Alberti was trying to escape persist in Crivelli. The elaboration of the paintings surface, especially with gold, and the sense of transforming the materials themselves deny the relativity of the material surface.
Finally I compared my painting with the main points of Alberti's treatise especially as they are conceived by Cameron.

The basic approach of Alberti based on the relativity of the material surface is evidenced by #24. There is not the same interest in subject as containing meaning or as something to embellish. It is something to observe. Neither is there an interest in the transformation of materials. The interest is in the translation itself.

If we examine Cameron's exercise in relation to his analysis of Alberti we find that the exercise works to demonstrate Cameron's organization of relationships as they occur in his analysis. There is a bias to the analysis which seeks to confirm a conceptual approach to art. Alberti's attempt to develop a general system for depiction is, in itself, a conceptual approach. Cameron's exercise which develops a depictional method also displays a conceptual approach. It begins with the notion of a painting as a surface with a "color-patch pattern".

The still life paintings which I began prior to graduate school and have continued more extensively in graduate school are motivated by Cameron's opening statement: "My own line of inquiry hinges on an intuition that the historical emergence of 'art' from the art of painting proceeds on the basis of innate potentialities
in pictorial signification." I have been working with his painting method in search of the potentialities rooted in depiction. The attraction is also to the organization of ideas and the methodical use of a consistent painting method.

Figuration does seem to provide a basis for the exploration of these other levels of "pictorial signification" such as color harmony or spacial composition or associations with what is being depicted. Plus the conception of the painting as a "color-patch pattern" informs the manipulation of surface design because it recognizes the contingency of the colors on one another.

What can be derived from the comparison of my painting with the Crivelli and with Alberti's treatise is that my primary interest is in the translation of light through color. This is what I believe my painting method does in its simplest form. This is how I believe I intuit a sense of unity or completeness in my painting. When I set up a model to work from, I look at the way the colors generate the light. I must like the light. Then I paint it by translating the colors into color-patches of paint on my canvas. I constantly experiment with different models and different objectives to avoid consciously trying to determine the expression of the light. I prefer to be only aware that I like the light.
I avoid an awareness of a specific light such as noonday sunlight or harsh night-time neon light. That may be what I am painting, but I try to see only the colors. I seek the unity of a specific light without its specificity.

Another important interest in my painting is the isolation of models, models I want to paint strongly enough to sustain my interest through to the completion of a painting. This involves not only the colors the model generates, but my response to the objects as objects. The decision usually comes to simply whether or not I might be able to paint the object or collection of objects. Their shape and color contribute to this decision as much as any associations they might generate because of their identity.

With my selection of objects, as with my response to lighting, I try not to be too conscious of the influences involved. I try to proceed in an intuitive way, almost disinterested. Often the interest in the objects or the light is dependant on the process of painting them. And the interest in the painting is dependant on the interest in the objects, or their colors, or their shapes which might inform the painting. This symbiosis is a desirable situation. It is present in my paintings which come nearest to completion.
ASPIRATIONS

My discussion so far has been a verbalization of the ideas and influences which contributed to the development of my paintings. Now I would like to respond briefly to the question, "Where is this all leading to?" or "What is your present stance as an artist?"

A characteristic of my work which is at the basis of the comparison with Crivelli is that it is figurative. My painting is experienced as a picture of something. This picture is a world quite separate from the immediate time and place that the picture is being viewed in. If the tradition of modernist painting is a tendency toward an increasingly direct or immediate experience of the artwork, ("I want to express my feelings rather than illustrate them" — Pollock) then my paintings are retrograde in reference to that tradition.

I prefer to model my aspirations in reference to literature. My construction of aspirations involves connections I notice between my experience of pictures and my experience of reading novels. The comparisons I make between novels and my paintings can begin with some comments on the modern novel by Robbe-Grillet.

In his essay "From Realism to Reality", Robbe-Grillet relates a story to help illustrate the interests distinguishing his modern writer:
"When I was writing 'The Voyeur', for instance, while I was desperately trying to describe in detail the flight of the seagulls and the movement of the waves, I had occasion to make a brief winter trip to the Brittany coast. On my way there I said to myself: this is a good opportunity to observe things 'from life' and to 'refresh my memory'...

But the moment I saw my first sea bird I realized how wrong I had been: on the one hand the seagulls I was now seeing had only the vaguest connection with the ones I was describing in my book, and on the other hand I was quite indifferent to this fact. The only seagulls that mattered to me at that moment were the ones in my mind. They too had probably come, in one way or another, from the external world, and perhaps even from Brittany, but they had been transformed, and at the same time had seemed to become more real, because they were now imaginary."35

He had believed he was describing the reality of seagulls until he had reobserved the seagulls 'from life.' Only after confronting real seagulls did he realize how imaginary those in his book had become. Robbe-Grillet is seeking reality. But, he recognizes the subjective nature of reality.

His new definition for the realistic author is "a creator of a material world with a visionary presence." He anchors his aspirations in the necessity of the depicted world, and of a convincing depiction, but he declares 'verisimilitude' or, the "little detail 'that makes you think it is true'" to be no longer of any interest.37 Instead he demands a "precision" or "clarity" of description to create a "hallucinatory effect" or "visionary
presence." In contrast to a strictly empirical sensibility Robbe-Grillet holds as a paradigm Flaubert's ambition: "starting from nothing, to build something capable of standing on its own feet, without having to lean on anything exterior to the work." But even as Robbe-Grillet constructs, he must describe, and while he does not translate things, he admits the seagulls in his novel "probably came from the external world, one way or another."

He suggests the creation of a "new sort of narrator," "he is not only a man who describes the things he sees, but he is at the same time a person who is inventing the things that surround him, and seeing the things he is inventing." This allows the introduction of the subjective nature of reality as the narrator's experience of reality. But Robbe-Grillet hints that his new narrator could serve as a model for his modern writer.

Robbe-Grillet is talking about a result rather than a method. He wants convincing realities born from the writer's conviction in the world he is constructing. The conviction should be so thorough that description becomes a simple, precise statement of facts. But, according to Robb-Grillet, for a modern writer a reality commanding this degree of conviction is likely to be fictional.
These ideas sketch my understanding of my goals. I want my pictures to compel because of my conviction of the world I am portraying. Robbe-Grillet talks about an artists "interests." I intend to accomplish my goals through seeking my interests. I can introduce conviction into my pictures in two ways: through the models I set up to depict, and through a systematic method for depiction. Both of these areas allow the directing of intuition and therefore an idiosyncratic pursuit of choices.

The models are interesting in several ways. One can respond to the objects themselves or to their juxtaposition with each other and with other elements of the model such as the type of light or the character of the space. The lighting of the model or the character of the surfaces portrayed can be expressive in themselves. The color harmonies that the model displays may refer to a variety of interests (from a detached, calculated attempt to recreate the harmonies of a Poussin, to a more direct response, "I like those colors together.") All of these elements contribute to the unique character and cohesion of the world I am portraying.

My method of depiction also allows intuition to come into play. The whole orientation of my depictional system in the empirical context is toward color. The attempt is
to respond to the model through discrete color choices rather than with a vocabulary of paint handling or lines. This ideal goal emphasizes the relativity of color along the dimensions of hue, value, and intensity. Corollary to this, the picture plane is emphasized as the arena for this relativity and as separate from its surroundings. This possible set of relations within the picture, unrelated to the world outside the picture, provides the starting point for my personal involvement. The relativity of the material surface starts with the relativity of color. I am proceeding on the possibility that a sense of light can be intuited from a sense of the relativity of color. The empiricism of my depictional method is necessary for the presence of light in my work because of my pursuit of the intuited presence of light through the intuited relationships of color. But the empirical method is not absolutely necessary for my goals as I have construed them. In the end, it is the result that is essential, not the method.

Robbe-Grillet blurs the distinctions between his "narrator," his "character," and his modern writer. This can give the novel an autonomy and immediacy because the reader is brought very close to the construction of the novel's reality as it occurs. This desire for immediacy puts Robbe-Grillet in line with the maxims of
modernist painting as I have suggested them to be. This is indicated by his title, "From Realism..." (the illusion of)...to Reality" (the statement of). In forming this conversation with Robbe-Grillet I am not seeking to credit my paintings as modernist. I am interested in this model of the artist generated by Robbe-Grillet through his construction of modernist aims in a literary context. The artist can compel us with his precision because he is convinced of his pursuit of reality, but what is most real to him is likely to be of his own invention.

Robbe-Grillet takes Kafka as an example. His novels present a material world with a visionary presence. Cri-velli also creates a unique world, and one as compelling as Kafka's. To continue the pursuit of his personal vision he detached himself from the mainstream of Renaissance Italian art. But his paintings are still shown in museums and admired for reasons all of their own. They have a "visionary presence" comparable to the works of Kafka. I feel that this achievement Robbe-Grillet finds in Kafka, of a compelling, convincing vision, is ubiquitous in the world of art. It can be found in contemporary as well as historic works.
1. Eric Cameron, "Painting II" (Syllabus, Department of Fine Arts, University of Guelph, 1973).


6. Ibid., p. 68.


10. Ibid.

11. Ibid., p. 25.

12. Ibid., p. 28.


15. Ibid.

16. Ibid., p. 25.

17. Ibid., p. 28.


19. Ibid.

20. Ibid., p. 72.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid., p. 68.

24. Ibid., p. 55.

25. Ibid., p. 68.

26. Ibid., p. 50.

27. Ibid., p. 82.


(Alberti, trans. Spencer, p. 85.)


35. Ibid., p. 156.

36. Ibid., p. 158.

37. Ibid., p. 157.

38. Ibid., p. 159.


40. Ibid., p. 156.

41. Ibid., p. 157.
I. Carlo Crivelli: *Madonna and Child*
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