PAINTINGS AND PROCESSES; A PASSAGE

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

by
Eglé Mary Gatins, BVA

The Ohio State University
1975

Approved by

Robert D. Kny
Adviser
Department of ART
# Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................ iii

I. INTRODUCTION .............................................. 2

    Passage: Columbus Ohio ............................... 3

II. PROCESSES ................................................ 4

III. WORK AND RATIONALE ................................. 9

    Part 2. Work and Rationale .......................... 14

    Passage: Paris-La Chezotte ......................... 16

IV. CONCLUSION .............................................. 17

BIBLIOGRAPHY ................................................. 18

ILLUSTRATIONS ............................................... 19
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my parents.

I would like to thank my adviser Robert King for his help and direction during these past two years.
I. INTRODUCTION

This paper deals with my response to physical space, the affects of personal experience, and the application of formal principles to the development of my painting. The distinctions in categorizing thoughts about process, work habits, or the work itself, are artificial, since all are actually part of a continuum of interacting levels.

The section on process is concerned with the importance of immediate space and the importance of the work process. Both the larger space of Columbus, Ohio and the limited space of my studio have affected my work over these past two years. Through working I have gained a greater understanding of the importance of materials, gesture, and timing, which also affect the final image.

The paintings are the result of both formal and personal considerations. The formulation of each occurred together, in the sense that as the form grew clearer, so did the personal considerations. The principle source in charting the development of my thinking has been my notebooks which I have kept since 1974. Certain excerpts are quoted to support the topic being discussed.

Definition: Passage.

1) the act of or passing: movement or transference from one place to another, as through or across a space or element: Transit.
2) a continuous movement or flow.

3) a specific act of travelling, a passing from one place to another, journey between two points.

4) a particular portion constituting a part of something; a part of a painting.

5) a short phrase in a musical composition.
Passages: Columbus, Ohio. September 1973 to June 1975.

First impression: Ohio seems a landscape stetched; a thin line of horizon separates a great amount of sky and earth. The structures of man and nature jut from this line, never getting close to the expanse of space. The openness is monotonous; in the exposure one feels small. New environments involve a new scale.

Notebooks: Driving through the rain and dawn from Georgia, the landscape progressively flattens. Incredible sky and clouds upon approaching Columbus. The clouds skim across the sky so silently. Feel I've been gone for... September 25, 26.

View from above: Snow has fallen scattering white over the pattern of the land. In places the dark earth bleeds through, exposing furrows and contours. The land seems familiar; the definition of the areas, the solids, and voids of the textures. As we approach for landing, depths become visible and the land is dense with buildings.
II. PROCESSES

My work is involved with the following:

1) the importance of the studio space
2) the importance of gesture as an extension of the body
3) the importance of materials and media
4) the importance of timing
5) the importance of the cumulative aspect of the work, both as individual and collective pieces

Over the past two years these concerns have emerged and developed as necessary to the process of working. These factors may appear obvious, yet they are directly responsible for the type of responses which occurs in the paintings themselves. Consequently, these concerns have resulted in a growth in my work as well as affected change in my personal vision.

Notebook: Have just moved from my first studio in the back of the room to a large one in the front looking over 17th. Finally enough space, two large windows, a warm breeze and a tree. Birds sing. I've painted the tall, solid wall at the end white. The other partitions are lined with shelves, tools, images, and reproductions. The central area is free, two tables face the window. The first studio was crowded, this one is enclosed and orderly. June 21, 1974.
The studio space cannot be taken for granted. It is important as the focal area for the physical and mental activity of making art. The studio also imposes scale limitations on the work itself. If one can only step back three feet, it would be difficult to work on a large painting. In the same manner, the availability of light will affect the seeing and usage of color. The studio is a place where I can be alone, separated from people and everyday situations and concerns. I need this concentration to work.

Painting is the result of the physical act of motion and gesture. The person becomes the control factor within a given space: moving back and forth across the space, working close to the floor, or climbing on a stool. The non-static activity of the body extends to the hands which directly control the marking process. Standing one foot from a painting and drawing a line will cause a different result than standing four feet away and drawing a line. A stroke can be the result of the arm describing an arch, or of letting the arm simply drop. The touch and character of each mark vary with the manner they are put down. Whatever the activity, be it mixing paint, or building and stretching a canvas, the physical level is basic to the enjoyment of the art process.

The choice of materials directs the outcome of the work. This occurs not only with media-oriented materials
such as graphite, charcoal, chalk, and paint, but also with the use of tools such as erasers, staplers, scissors, mat knife, and ruler. The choice of supports, whether canvas or paper also directs the final image. All are used to establish a set of reactions and relationships which control the piece. Materials have inherent characteristics. It has been my concern to understand the relation of these materials and explore the limits and potentials of each. These past two years have been important in learning how to manipulate materials; mixing colors to achieve certain colors, or arriving at certain surfaces and textures. Experience and observation is the best way to discover the potentiality of media.

My working process is specifically concerned with timing. All paintings evolve over a period of time; each spanning a certain duration. In my work, the process of putting down marks and colors is done quickly. This quickness responds to the directness of seeing and responding immediately. Each piece also contains an inner rhythm that must be searched out and respected. The central issue has been knowing when to stop working. This stopping is crucial in letting reactions in the painting "be", and in allowing my eye to see freshly. This sense of knowing when to stop or continue comes with growth in visual experience that includes a sense of detachment. At first, I was anxious about resolving
a painting fairly fast. Perhaps resolution was a measure of success. I no longer outwardly cared about finishing a piece; working for short spans of time the painting gradually evolved. By working on a few pieces at a time, the temptation of directing all one's energy in one place is limited. Timing is essential in my work habits and in helping me retain a clear vision. "As Chardin used to say, 'I add (or take away a lot) until it looks right.'"

The final product of a painting is deceptive. A painting is not only the surface level, but the sum of all previous marks and colors underneath it. These varying levels may be visible or obliterated, yet all establish successive interactions. The cumulative aspect of achieving the right reaction is concerned primarily with search. As George Braque writes, "For me the act of painting always remains more important than the result attained." 2 In a broader sense, each painting is the result of all previous paintings, which in turn is the result of my visual and life experiences. Finally, all these varying concerns are synthesized and affect the two dimensional surface.

-------------------


Notebook: Dream. Awaking in my studio, realize I am blind. I think I can recognize paintings at the end of the studio aisle, but all I feel is a thick darkness in my eye sockets. October 6, 1974.
III. WORK AND RATIONALE

In my work, there has also been emphasis on the development and articulation of formal considerations within the context of clarifying personal imagery.

My first concern was in establishing a relationship among the three media I work with, drawing, collage, and painting. The emphasis was not placed separately on any one media, rather on a totality among the three. Initially, collage served as a link between drawing and painting. In collage, the process of choosing colors and shapes is simplified and speeded up by the act of pasting, tearing, cutting. Forms and colors can be altered, added to, or concealed immediately. Collage seemed more accessible in its limitation of scale and materials, color harmonies evolved quickly as did surface and textural variations. The types of shapes, their placement and overlapping in space, the activity of the lines; all characteristic of the collages, were incorporated into my painting. Gradually all three media became part of one process. A continuous interchange of information occurred from one medium to another.

The basic consideration is the flat two dimensional space of the canvas and paper. The initial emptiness is exciting.
Definition: Space.

1) that which is characterized by extension in all directions, boundless, and indefinite divisibility; the subject of determination of positions and directions.

2) a limited extension in two or three dimensions; a part marked off in some way.

3) an extent or area set apart for a particular purpose.

Once the plane is established, the next consideration is establishing intervals and relationships within the space.

Color is a vehicle for establishing space "between". Color has inherent qualities such as saturation, light, or value, as well as the ability to make shapes. Color is common to all shapes whether they are marks-linear or marks-planar. Matisse expresses a basic usage of color. "No doubt there are thousands of ways of working with color. But when one composes with it, like a musician with harmonies, it is simply a question of emphasizing differences."³ Colors, singly or as sets, will oppose or have affinity one with the other. This also applies to differing shape characters; a visible line opposes an erased one, a freely drawn line opposes a ruler drawn line, an organic plane opposes a geometric plane, and a flat plane opposes a textured plane. The principle of contrast can be pushed to much greater lengths and complexity. The important concern is that

³Flam, Matisse on Art, p.99.
within a certain range a maximum of variety occurs based on the relative position of each element.

Within a given field, the interaction of color and shape causes movement. Movement implies direction, rhythm and tension. Non-static, dynamic quality is essential in my paintings. Movement and counter movement exist on primary and secondary levels, in the sense that pieces have central directions contained in multiple activities. The relationships of overlapping and juxtaposing shapes establishes tension in space laterally, diagonally, and in depth. Each painting has a life of its own. The artist summarizes these activities into a particular harmony and order, holding together and limiting the range of possibilities.

My approach to color and form is intuitive, based on seeing and feeling and the accrued experience of working. The result of color interaction is the creation of the illusion of space. I will illustrate changes in space and color relationships in the following paintings. The collage Past Seashores (plate 6), represents a limited use of color in that only a few hues are used to achieve an overall tonality. Even though the forms are still stacked, the organization has become more open by the introduction of linear elements which react against the solid paper shapes. The linear characters as shapes, and as marks above the shapes create a multi-layered, in depth tension. This emphasizes the ambiguity of the space and
the motion within the space. The color orchestration in *One, Two, Three* (plate 10), employs a much wider range of hues and intensities. The variables are increased. The space is clearly defined in terms of front, middle, background space. The confusion of multiple overlapping shapes is eliminated by having fewer figures on the ground. Calligraphic markings have taken on a greater importance, which causes a strong linear pattern and rhythm through the space. This painting resolved the search for a balanced interaction between planar and linear marks. The painting *Passage: Paris-La Chezotte* (plate 11), is the result of the increase emphasis on linear activity. In this painting the middle ground shapes have been eliminated. The linear characters react with each other on a flat expanse of color. The color configuration is altered in terms of much larger or smaller amounts. The space is finally open, affecting an important scale change.

The structural organization of my work is derived from Cubism. The concerns of space tied to the picture plane, of the ground as a fixed plane as in relief, of geometric and interlocking shapes, all are used in my painting.4 The attempt to represent three dimensions, or space through interlocking and transparent planes.

---

placed in succession on a background offered a point of departure for my organization. The early pieces follow the principles consistently. The last paintings have eliminated the clutter of multiple stacked form, striving for a greater expansion of space.
PART II. WORK AND RATIONALE

The imagery and the personal rationale for my painting has evolved over the past two years. The change in imagery is directly tied to an increased knowledge of formal problems and processes. This has led to a more concrete directing of personal, subjective motivations.

My first pieces were studies, establishing an exchange between the surface and the configuration. Gradually, as a result of manipulating materials, certain pieces became suggestive as places. Places as general or imaginary; color affecting mood, architectural or organic shapes suggesting landscape, or textures suggesting physical properties of earth.

A lasting impression in my life is that of seeing land from planes. A sense of being on the land and above the land, while detail flattens out into pattern as one climbs into the sky. This aerial view of the earth has had a strong influence on my visual experience.

As the form of the paintings evolved, their content and associations became clearer. Never was there any attempt to chart specific meanings to color, space, line, or shape—this color will equal that mood, or this shape will represent that area or feeling. The
paintings became metaphors which were evocative in nature. The three paintings (plates 11, 12, and 13), are concerned with summarizing my personal and earliest experience of travel. To begin these, I recalled mental and visual images relating to a certain trip and place. The examples which I gathered in my sketchbook (plates 14-18), involved landscape characteristics, light and atmospheric conditions, or the charting of roads between places. These serve as points of departure. The final paintings translate the information into a life of their own.

I think of travel within a limited and fixed time duration, as motion from one static point to another, as a spanning of large expanses of physical space. A passage of the person within a given space establishing intervals, paths, and directions.
Passage: Paris-La Chezotte.

These are secretive and mysterious images, hidden. The departure from Paris in hot July to a part of central France remains with me because of its repetition over the years. The place, La Chezotte, brought a sense of closeness to the earth, to time as it spans space unhurried. The grey suburbs of Paris are left behind, as is the flat expansive land to Orléans, Vierzon and its trains, Issoudun, and La Châtre. Between each place the landscape unfurls, composed within the window frame. I know the road, and recognize its movement and fixed points. The road has gradually narrowed, un-winding towards the abandoned hills. The air is quiet, and clear. Hear the sound of running water. The tires crackle over the gravel as we pass the gate.
IV. CONCLUSION

Two years ago, I looked forward to a new environment as a neutral ground removed from my past experience. I looked forward to change in my work and in myself. It took time before I wanted to be here rather than somewhere else. These years seem defined; a beginning and end, a forming of habits.

I walk the same path each morning to my studio, down the hall from the elevator to the far door. This way it will seem familiar.

Tomorrow the place will become memory.

Realization that I will continue working results from these two years. I will continue with the form and imagery of my last pieces which involve the relationships of large color areas to smaller characters. More possibilities exist in the way in which the ground is divided up. I also want to explore surface and textural qualities using paint, paint and additives, or non-traditional materials.

Future directions in my painting will be based on the process and discipline of the last two years. Exact directions cannot be predicted. One realization passes, becoming a different concern.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Plate 1. Passage Form, 40" x 40", acrylic and paper.

Plate 2. Grid, 21" x 18", collage.
Plate 3. Untitled. 50" x 38", collage.

Plate 4. Desert Landscape. 27½" x 20", collage.
Plate 5. *Upward Flight*. 50" x 38", mixed media.

Plate 7. Paysage en Tiers. 7½" x 62", acrylic.
Plate 9. Untitled. 50" x 38", mixed media.

Plate 10. One, Two, Three. 86½" x 62", acrylic.
Plate 11. Passage: Paris-La Chezotte. 23" x 63½".
acrylic.

Sketchbook Study. 11" x 17".
Plate 12. Passage: Night, Day, Georgia. 77" x 65", acrylic.
Plate 13. Passage: Colombie. 82" x 61", acrylic.

Plate 14. Sketchbook Study. 11" x 17".
Plate 15. Sketchbook Study. 11" x 17".

Plate 16. Sketchbook Study. 11" x 17".
Plate 17. Sketchbook Study. 11" x 17".

Plate 18. Sketchbook Study. 11" x 17".