WHO IS THE REAL
THEA PARLOR?

A Thesis
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by
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INTRODUCTION

The problem of an artist speaking or writing about his work is a difficult one. We are so accustomed to expressing ourselves in visual terms that to try to relate our thoughts and feelings about our visual statements through speaking or writing is an arduous task. Nonetheless, I must now make an attempt somehow to translate the visual representations of my ideas into coherent and logical words. The easiest way to accomplish this is to describe my works physically, and to trace the changes and developments of my ideas and interests and how they are reflected in my art. To state what my paintings mean or what I am trying to say through my art is unreasonable; it would be presumptuous to do so. My paintings and prints must speak for themselves. Indeed, if they did not, it would be useless for me to try to do so. Therefore, I will describe my interests and ideas from the time I began my work at O.S.U. up to the present, examine their changes and subsequent development, and relate how these changes manifested themselves into visual statements.

DEVELOPMENT OF PAINTINGS AND PRINTS

When I first began my work as a graduate student, I had already developed several definite interests as an undergraduate. My subject matter generally dealt with fashion models, or less specifically, feminine images, many of which were taken directly from fashion magazines. I have always
been very interested in, and in many ways influenced by, the contemporary high fashion image which certain publications, especially *Vogue*, have created. I have used this imagery throughout the development of my work, to explore certain problems and arrive at specific ends. An interest in working with repeated images also remained, as did an insistent use of highly intense color. Subsequently, my first paintings were composite representations of these influences.

These early paintings comprise a series of studies in color and space. (See Plate I.) Although repeated images are used, the images themselves are not as important as the planes and subsequent space which they create. In fact, these images, which are abstracted faces of models taken from fashion magazines, become almost imperceptible. More importantly, they form horizontal patterned bands which contrast with the solid bands and through the use of overlapping and the variation of color intensity and value, create a feeling of space. At that time, I was mainly interested in using extremely pure and intense colors, the combinations of which often resulted in optical vibrations. At first the images were screened on to the canvas; but eventually I found that hand painting these hard-edged areas of color was more satisfactory to achieving the effect I desired: one of very sharp, crisp, flat forms.

My graphics reflected the same interests which were
displayed in my paintings. I incorporated repeated images, in the form of abstracted horizontal planes, and vivid colors together to create small facsimiles of my paintings. (See Plate II.) My graphics then played a minor role in my general interests; I spent most of my time learning and experimenting with technical processes, rather than becoming as concertually involved as I was with my paintings.

After working for about six months within the rigid framework which my repeated-image paintings imposed, I began to feel the need to break away and explore new possibilities. Thus I did a painting which represents a transition between my flat repeated-image paintings and the series of paintings which compose my next area of interest. In this painting (see Plate III.) the imagery is reduced to a single large figure instead of many small repeated ones. This presents a major change in that the interest is placed back on the centralized figure which is now recognizable as a woman, rather than being merely a component of an abstract group of faces forming a plane. My subject matter still consists of feminine imagery from fashion magazines, of which the source becomes an important and integral part of my work. In my transitional painting the space is still very flat and two-dimensional. The figure itself is constructed of flat, hard-edged shapes of color, and the ground becomes more flat shapes. No modelling of paint suggests any three-dimensional surfaces; each area is flat.
and matt. The colors still remain quite vivid and pure, as in the earlier paintings. However, it was in the use of the large centralized figure which led me into my next major group of paintings.

In this group of paintings I continued to use one or two large centralized figures. However, my interest began to shift from using all two-dimensional planes to introducing some three-dimensional elements. I still broke down the figures into definite hard-edged color areas; however, to vary the surface, some of these areas remained flat and matt, while others were modelled to create a feeling of three-dimensional form. (See Plate IV.) Although most of the colors remained very pure and intense, I began to introduce more subtle colors, such as greys and light tints, into some of the paintings to develop a greater range and richer effect. (See Plate V.) In addition to the acrylic paint employed exclusively up to this point, I began to use oils, first simply to facilitate the blending process, then to give a definite change of surface from the flat, matt acrylic finish. Over-glazes and varnishes were added to increase the shiny oil appearance, and distinctly differentiate the two materials. It was at that time that I began to be sensitive to surfaces, an interest which subsequently developed into a major element in my later works. The space in these paintings remained flat, with the ground coming through as flat color shapes surrounding the figure.
It was then that I developed an interest in mannequins. I felt that the mannequin image was related to the commercial models presented in fashion magazines, and offered me a new variation on the theme. However, more importantly, the mannequins offered me more flexibility since I could photograph them myself. I thus spent many hours photographing mannequins in stores, accumulating a large supply of source material. This interest eventually led me to purchase my own mannequins from a department store, enabling me to dress, arrange, and light them myself for more controlled results. It was from my rich supply of photographs that I chose the subjects for my paintings. (See Plate VI.) I simplified and modified the photographs to obtain the final results which I desired, enlarging them onto the surface of my canvas. These paintings were treated in much the same manner as the other paintings during that period: being composed of bright colors, flat, hard-edged color shapes, two-dimensional space, and some three-dimensionally modelled areas. These paintings presented an important step in my development, as they denote my beginning interest in photography, which led to the eventual use of actual photographic images in my work.

My graphics at that time correlated quite closely with my paintings. (See Plate VII.) I thoroughly explored the mannequin theme in my prints. The photographs which I took could be utilized more directly in the graphic process by
using actual photo-graphic processes rather than working indirectly from a photograph as I did in my paintings. In the photo-graphic processes, I could directly transfer on to a plate, stone, or screen a whole, part, or composite image obtained from my photographs. The image then was incorporated into a composition of flat planes and bright colors, which resulted in much the same effect that my paintings achieved.

It was at that time that I began to develop a somewhat different interest in images and ideas. My main concern was still for the contemporary fashion images with which I had been working, but I became intrigued with the new trend toward nostalgia. This resulted in a series of graphic works, entitled my "Thea Parlor" prints, which dealt with a concern for nostalgic, twenty-, thirt-ish motifs and ideas embodied in a made-up name and dance hall girl image. With this theme came a new interest in surfaces and materials: glitter, flowers, lace, satin, fringe, beads, etc., all of which were the sparkling trimmings of the '20's and '30's in fashion trends, reflecting the glitter and excitement of the times. At first these humorous prints were done on paper, but very soon I realized that fabric much more suited the effects I desired. Thus I did my first experiments with printing etchings on fabric, a technique which I found to be very successful. These experiments resulted in a series of printed "Thea Parlor"
satin pillows, complete with luxurious stuffing and black fringe and sachet scents. (See Plate VIII.) Thus a whole new direction was revealed to me: one of fabric and ribbons and softly stuffed objects, all of which became an exciting exploration of new surfaces and materials.

At that time my work both in painting and graphics began to change, moving more and more toward the three-dimensional with an ever increasing interest in surface, texture, and details. Two important changes occurred in my paintings: a move toward a more three-dimensional handling of the objects, and the incorporation of a deeper space in terms of the ground. These two factors became important elements in my next group of works. The development of a more solid, three-dimensional form is represented in one particular example. (See Plate IX.) In this painting the entire figure is treated as a solid, whole form, rather than being broken into separate color areas, some modelled, some flat. The figure becomes a three-dimensional object, floating in front of a flat plane upon which it casts a shadow. This painting is an important step in my work, as it indicates a break from the previous limitations represented by flat planed shapes, into a much wider, more exciting range of three-dimensional form. It also allowed me to break away entirely from the two-dimensional and freely explore the three-dimensional, the latter becoming a stronger interest in later works. Interestingly enough, this piece was the
most difficult for me to paint, as it represented such a change that I never completed it.

My interest in developing a deeper space first becomes apparent in another specific painting. (See Plate X.) This deeper handling of the space is achieved simply by changing the relative sizes and positions of the two figures pictured: the front figure becoming so large as to extend off the canvas, the second one, considerably smaller, being located in the upper section of the canvas. The manner of achieving the effect desired is simple; the important factor is that a new range of elements was opened up to me: the use of a deeper space, and subsequently a more interesting relationship between the figures themselves, and between the figures and the ground. These relationships become an integral part of my later paintings, developing from a more obvious, simple usage to a subtle complexity.

My printmaking, like my painting, began to develop more toward the three-dimensional. However, unlike my painting, the change was not in creating an illusion of three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional plane, rather it was the creation of an actual three-dimensional surface, and finally a three-dimensional form. I was able to achieve this by utilizing my newly discovered process of printing on fabric. By stuffing the printed fabric pieces I was able to obtain not only a three-dimensional surface, but also a three-dimensional form. As a direct progression from my
edition of pillows, I decided to expand upon the idea and make a stuffed satin quilt. (See Plate XI.) Size has always been an important factor in all my work, and finally I found a way in which a print could obtain the size and monumentality of a large painting. I designed my quilt to be eight feet square, composed of a series of repeated faces, relating back to my early paintings. Only this time the image was not abstracted to the point of being non-objective, nor was it functioning merely as a pattern in an abstracted composition. Instead, it was a recognizable portrait of the cool but sensuous British model Jean Shrimpton. My quilt represents one of the most important achievements in my development, as it denotes an expansion and clarification of new ideas and attitudes. Most importantly, it demonstrates a heightened sensitivity to materials and surfaces which would remain a very important factor in my subsequent works. It also indicates a change in attitude about my graphic work: up to that point, my prints were merely copies of my paintings, secondary and insignificant. With the creation of the quilt the graphics attain the status of a separate and equally important work of art.

My following and present period of interest is merely a more clear and directed extension of the ideas presented in the previously discussed works. My main concern is in creating sensuous, tactile, three-dimensional forms, both
on the two-dimensional surface of my paintings, and in
the making of actual luxurious three-dimensional stuffed
quilts. In my paintings I have continued to experiment
with both elements discussed earlier: the use of three-
dimensional form and the use of deep space. But before
this can be discussed, a new development must first be men-
tioned: my change of color usage. Up to that point, my
use of color had been more or less consistent; I had gen-
erally dealt with very pure and intense colors and color
combinations, at times interjecting neutral tones as a con-
trast. The paintings which compose this present period
display a drastic change from my previous color studies.
Indeed, the color is practically eliminated. (See Plate
XII.) My gradual developing interest in surfaces and sur-
face changes has led me to become less concerned with color
changes and more concerned with light changes, specifically,
how light defines and describes a surface, both in terms of
its volume and in terms of its texture and detail. By elim-
inating the color, I was able to concentrate on describing
the form and recreating the actual tactile sensations of
the various surfaces. However, to achieve this, my techni-
que of painting had to be refined to enable me to capture
these subtle changes and effects. Therefore, I had to ren-
der carefully each value change, surface change, and tex-
tural change. Thus the surfaces of my paintings have be-
come very rich and alive. (See Plate XIII.) The exten-
sive use of values in my paintings creates a specific effect: one of cold starkness, giving the figures a lifeless, stone-like appearance. The simplification of the faces (the elimination of wrinkles, etc.) also tends to give them a statue-like effect. To achieve a slight contrast to this distinct coldness, and to add a feeling of warmth, I have introduced touches of color in a few areas.

These paintings, especially the one found in Plate XIII, present a subtle change in the use of the ground and its subsequent effect. The paintings preceding this one deal with a simple deep space relationship between the figures. Here the relationship is not quite as obvious. The figures themselves suggest a deep space relationship because of their drastic size variation. However, because the ground is absolutely blank, giving no clues as to how to read the surrounding space, two different relationships can be observed, depending on how the viewer perceives them. The space can be read as a deep space with one figure standing a considerable distance behind the other. Or the figures could have no apparent relationship to each other and could simply exist side by side on the same plane, suggesting a miniature figure floating in space above a very large figure. The uncertainty and vagueness of the space creates an ambiguous and thought provoking relationship between the figures and between the figures and the ground. It is these subtleties and ambiguities which I
find to be very interesting and exciting additions to my paintings, becoming of considerable importance in my later works.

My quilts also display my developing sensitivity to subtleties in color, texture and surface, and subject matter. After I completed my first quilt, a whole new area of discovery was open to me. First I began to explore different subject matter other than my fashion models, and I returned to my interest in nostalgic images. I found a wealth of material available to me: old family photographs, baby pictures, photographs of old screen stars, etc., all of which suggested so many exciting themes for new quilts to come. I chose the theme of a self portrait through the use of my old baby pictures for one quilt. (See Plate XIV.) This subject immediately suggested the inclusion of a wider variety of fabrics to help create the nostalgic, old-fashioned feeling which is evoked by these pictures. Already my interest was expanding to explore and incorporate new surfaces and textures into my quilts. By combining satins, velvets, laces, and ribbons, all in shades of browns, beiges, and creams, together with my old photographs, I recreated the sentimental mood of a reminiscing journey through someone's old family album. This quilt, to my delight, proved to be a great success. Not only did it encourage me to search for more new and varied materials to utilize, but it also revealed to me an exciting discovery:
its extreme personal appeal. I realized that these quilts could very easily be made to order, using the patron's own family photographs. Thus each quilt could be a personal statement of that particular individual. The possibilities seem infinite.

Not only am I interested in exploring new images and materials, I am also sensitive to the variation in surface and actual form of these quilts. The fact that the quilts are stuffed gives me the opportunity to experiment in creating different surface changes. By appliqueing on separate shapes or forms (as in my portrait quilt where I appliqued on small, individually stuffed satin frames), I can vary the height of the surface, as well as its texture and color. These subtle variations give my quilts a very tactile and sensuous effect: they demand to be touched and felt. Thus their place is on the bed rather than on the wall. As elegant and fine as they may be, they still are to be used, physically appreciated.

Although the quilts are really two-dimensional planes with designs and compositions rendered on one side much like a painting, they begin to attain actual three-dimensional form. The stuffing gives them a certain low relief, sculptural effect, as does the various fabrics and textures used. The fact that they are actual objects, quilts, which have substance and form, also lends to them a certain solidity or dimensionality. However, it is the position—
ing and displaying of these quilts which ultimately give them their three-dimensionality. I design and create these quilts with the idea in mind that they will be placed on a bed, viewed in an environment. By doing so, the quilt is given form by the bed, and the bed becomes part of the work of art. The environment as a whole becomes the total effect. To complete this feeling, I have designed pillows to match each quilt, to be placed on the bed, in the environment, inviting someone (the passive, uninvolved viewer) to crawl in and snuggle up.

CONCLUSION

The impending termination of my graduate career marks an end to my formal education; however, the development and creation of my art work has not come to an end. Rather, my graduation indicates a new beginning, and I feel confident that I can and will continue in the directions which have already been determined. I foresee my paintings to be a continuous exploration into the realms of surface changes, light effects, and ambiguous relationships. Already several works are underway, and several more are in mind, all of which deal with these various elements. I still find myself fascinated by the starkness and coldness which values can attain, and I will continue to utilize this effect. However, I find myself returning more to color, not in itself, but as a contrast to the stark use of values. I am in the
process of working on a painting which displays just this: two figures rendered in cool values are floating in a very blue cloud ridden sky. Not only does this indicate a change in color usage, it also introduces a more defined ground, which at the same time sets up a more ambiguous relationship between the figures and the ground. It is these ambiguous, and perhaps even strange relationships, of which I find particularly intriguing and fascinating, that seem to offer an exciting avenue of exploration in my work.

I have also become more aware of new techniques and materials which will enable me to achieve a wider variety of effects. The use of the air brush in painting is presently wide spread, and I intend to experiment to discover new ways of achieving various surfaces. I do not intend to replace my carefully rendered hand painting with air brushed areas; rather, I plan to incorporate both techniques and effects into my paintings, to enrich and varigate the surface. I have also done some investigating into different materials on which to paint. The metallic surface has always interested me, especially in conjunction with achieving a stark, cold appearance. I have planned several paintings to be executed on metal (aluminum), to enable me to experiment with this metallic surface and its subsequent effect on the figures which are rendered upon it. I have also become interested in contrasting this hard,
rigid metallic substance with the softly stuffed forms with which I have been working. This innovation may indicate an eventual convergence of my paintings and quilts, in the use of materials and form. The possibilities and results are unfathomable.

It is my quilts, however, that seem to offer the most exciting and innovative possibilities. With the completion of each quilt, new ideas and plans begin to formulate themselves in my mind concerning future quilts. The source of subject matter, especially nostalgic images, and the range of various materials with which to work, seem endless. At the moment, I have several new quilts in mind and under way. One of these is my old movie star quilt (my "Silver Screen Queen Quilt"), which incorporates spectacular, passionate still shots from old movies of all the great silver screen queens of the past. The materials will consist of white satin, silver lame, rhinestones, and marabou. My designs and layouts are also becoming more complicated and exciting. In this particular instance, each photograph will be shooting around in a chaotic turbulence of silver screen excitement.

Besides exploring the alternatives which my quilt making alone offers, I am also intrigued by the possibilities of the expansion of my ideas into whole settings and environments. When considering the presentation of my quilts, I found myself becoming concerned with their setting: specif-
ically the bed on which they would be placed. This consid-
eration suggests new avenues to investigate. I find it
necessary to display my nostalgic baty-picture quilt on an
old, elegant brass bed. My movie star quilt, however,
should be placed on one of those huge Hollywood beds with
the white tufted leather headboards. And, of course, this
could all lead to designing coordinated wall paper and
matching furniture. Ultimately, I can see myself designing
whole rooms in which to house my quilts. Perhaps future
exhibitions will no longer be held in galleries: entire
hotels will be my show place, with each room designed as a
coordinating environment for each specific quilt. With all
these ideas in mind, I can only see this point of time in
my work not as an end but as a promising, exciting begin-
ning.
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