COLOR ORGANIZATION AND SYMBOLISM

A Thesis

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

by

Diane L. D. Powell, B.F.A.

The Ohio State University

1971

Approved by

Hoyt L. Sherman
Adviser
Division of Fine Art
This thesis is dedicated to my parents and to my teacher, Mr. Hoyt L. Sherman, for their sight and insight.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CATALOGUE OF WORKS</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COLOR ORGANIZATION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SYMBOLISM</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOOTNOTES</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1    Study for Sweet Nothing Machine
Figure 2    Study for Night Machine
Figure 3    Study for Night Machine
Figure 4    Color Study for Picture
Figure 5    Color Study for The Speech
Figure 6    Drawing for Woodcut Series Mythos
Figure 7    Drawing for Woodcut Series Mythos
Figure 8    Drawing for Woodcut Series Mythos
Figure 9    Drawing for Woodcut Series Mythos
Figure 10   Drawing
Figure 11   Drawing
Figure 12   Drawing
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plate</th>
<th>Work Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yellow Ochre Laboratory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sweet Nothing Machine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The Big Operator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The Night Machine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Bandwagon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Hurly Burly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Unicyclist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Laboratory #2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Avant Garde Magenta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Picture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>The Speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Woodcut -- Builders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Woodcut -- Communicators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Woodcut -- Mythos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Woodcut -- Mythos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Photographer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Levitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Blindfold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Lipstick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Trance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Basket</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Picnic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Monika</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Avant Garde Green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Magician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Magician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Sez You</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
COLOR ORGANIZATION AND SYMBOLISH

COLOR ORGANIZATION

Color organization is the primary formal concern of my painting. The basis for exploration into color structure has emerged from the realization of color as the formal element of painting capable of infinite complexity. That is, color in painting has a nature of its own. This nature is non-verbal although it has been described in such terms as hue, saturation, brightness contrast and so on. Through color relationships the painter has the unique possibility of satisfying the desire for variety within the overall unity of form.

Color structure is the process of building expressive formal relationships with color; of using color in a painting so that it is realized as color in addition to the sense of value. Personally, I use the full spectrum in my color structure. As Samuel Palmer wrote in 1824:

"Excess is the essential vivifying spirit, vital spark, embalming spice of the finest art. There are many mediums in the means — none, of, not a jot, not a shadow of a jot, in the end of great art. In a picture whose merit is to be excessively brilliant, it can't be too brilliant, but individual tints may be too brilliant... We must not begin with medium, but think always on excess and only use medium to make excess more abundantly excessive."

1
An abundance of color is achieved by using saturated hues, of using the full range of tonalities, of warms and cools. All colors can work together if they are brought together at the right time.

The act of painting requires preparation and an approach that is both disciplined and free. This has meant becoming familiar with the fundamentals of handling paint, to become so accustomed to the brush and canvas that the actual application of paint becomes automatic and rhythmic. This preparation has also meant the knowledge of paint itself, the different pigments, the colors and their interactions with each other, as well as the awareness of process in the technical sense, such as learning about grounds, mediums, and extenders.

The act of painting requires a number of elements. Key elements of this act are: learning to remain concentrated on the whole painting, learning to keep loose enough to look while not looking, learning to be aware of ideas when they are flowing, how to encourage ideas that seem elusive, when to play with them, when to turn to other activities and allow the mind freedom so that the ideas can emerge out of the work.

Other painterly problems that I have worked on are technical and formal in a sense. They may be described in
formal terms in order to examine the plates as solutions of the problems: shape relationships, the organization of brightness contrast, maintaining a saturated ground, keeping the shapes "flat" and "volumetric" at the same time, painting from the inside of shapes so that they evolve, maintaining a consistency in color relationships so that the parts can develop out of the relationships, keeping the subject subordinate to the formal relationships, using line as a boundary and as an element in the painting.

Usually a painting develops naturally from a drawing (Figure 1, Study for Sweet Nothing Machine), and is painted directly. Sometimes a painting begins with color, drawn to establish the relationships as in Plate 1, Yellow Ochre Laboratory. I occasionally make small studies to explore the possible alternatives of the idea (Figures 2 and 3), which are studies for Plate 4, The Night Machine.

The process of establishing color relationships is facilitated by maintaining a full spectrum on the palette at all times. In general, this aids in staying in the middle range of hue saturation and brightness. This in turn facilitates in mixing the colors as they are needed in the particular painting. I have found that the painting very early begins to determine the color key, and the palette becomes an additional way of
FIGURE 1  STUDY FOR SWEET NOTHING MACHINE

FIGURE 2  STUDY FOR NIGHT MACHINE

FIGURE 3  STUDY FOR NIGHT MACHINE
checking the painting visually, for the palette reflects the color key, hue variation and brightness contrast in the painting.

Sometimes the painting begins with a pictorial idea. A few shapes or a line curving in a particular way will suggest a pictorial possibility -- and suddenly the whole visual idea emerges. This can be the most critical part. Many hours may be required to develop the pictorial idea into specific forms. It is important at this stage to recognize potential structural weakness. The shapes must sustain the color and the brightness. So, basically the pictorial form at this point comes back to the three elements of shape, color and brightness.

I would like to examine some of my work in terms of certain aspects of these formal relationships. First, as to shape relationships, one recurring problem is size variation. A similarity of shape size tends to negate the expressive possibilities, even when the placement, the direction and color are present. One solution to this has been my use of a limited number of big shapes, starting with the ground, and a limited number of very small shapes. Another way I have handled this problem is by working on a variety of canvas sizes ranging from four inches square to eight by nine feet. Another critical aspect of shape is direction, as this is most effective in maintaining variety, See Plate 17, Levitation. Still another
aspect of shape is its closure function. That is, it simultaneously defines a given shape while closing with or relating to a surrounding shape(s). See Plate 5, Bandwagon. One other important factor of shape is its critical influence upon color and brightness. See the shapes of the figures in Plate 24, Avant Garde.

The second problem is maintaining the brightness contrast. This may be seen in all of the plates. An interesting phenomenon of brightness is the fact that a middle value hue may appear to be a higher brightness because of its color saturation. It is a challenge to use this dual capacity. See Plate 10, Picture.

The third basic formal element in my painting develops from the highly saturated color and its relationship to shape in the configuration. The color relationships emerge in terms of hue saturation rather than as an adjunct to value. The hue saturation is dependent on the relationship of all the other colors in the painting. The range of this hue saturation can be seen in Plate 5, Bandwagon, Plate 6, Hurly Burly, Plate 7, Unicyclist and Plate 8, Laboratory #2.

In process the initial colors serve as the framework for feedback which provides a basis for further development of the color relationships. Figures 4 and 5 show the paintings
Picture and Speech as examples of two different phases of development. Plate 10 is the completed painting, Picture, and Plate 11 is the completed painting, Speech.

My use of saturated grounds intensifies the feedback phenomenon. See Plate 2, Sweet Nothing Machine, and Plate 8, Laboratory #2.

Certain problems present a secondary challenge. One of these problems is keeping the shapes in the painting both "flat" and "volumetric" at the same time. This can be best seen in some of the details within the paintings. For example, in the relationship of the woman's head to the arch in Plate 6, Hurly Burly. This use of space can be seen also in the woodcuts, Builders and Communicators, Plates 12 and 13.

Another consideration is the necessity of staying on the inside of shapes and letting them evolve out of the relationships as the painting develops. Since this is a part of the act of painting it is difficult to demonstrate in the finished work. The general process may be seen in the studies; see Figures 6, 7, 8 and 9, studies for the woodcut series, Mythos, and two of the finished blocks in Plates 14 and 15.

Still another secondary problem is that of using line both as a boundary to circumscribe a shape, and also as a color shape which functions as a division between two adjacent
colors. This use of line in an ambiguous role can be seen in all the plates.
SYMBOLISM

What of the content?

The subject matter is in an essential relation to the formal organization. As Klee says, after enumerating and defining the formal elements in his essay, "On Modern Art,"

"This is the climax of our creative effort, This is the essence of our craft This is critical, from this point, given mastery of the medium, the structure can be assured foundations of such strength that it is able to reach out into dimensions far removed from conscious endeavor."

Our human desire to find and impress meaning is related to the unconscious transformation of forms into symbols. Historically these symbols have found expression in the intertwined history of religion and art, reaching back to prehistoric times. It is the record that our ancestors have left of the symbols that were meaningful and moving to them.

I would like to examine the symbols in my own painting in terms of two recurring themes — magic, and the relation of man and woman. First, as expressions of concerns which reflect psychological conditions shared by most of us as artists in the modern world, and second, as personal subjective statements emerging from the process of painting and within the framework of visual experience.
The four functions of consciousness described by Dr. Jung, "thought, feeling, intuition and sensation" are the equipment used to synthesize and organize impressions of the world. These functions enable one to comprehend and assimilate his experience. It should be emphasized that the projection of psychic content, according to Dr. Jung, is a purely unconscious process.

"Such things cannot be thought up but must grow again from the forgotten depths if they are to express the deepest insights of consciousness and loftiest intuitions of the spirit, thus amalgamating the uniqueness of present day consciousness with the age-old past of humanity". 3

It seems safe to say at this point that the general movement of history after the Renaissance could be regarded in terms of the triumph of logical thought and the submergence of religious feeling, accompanied by a corresponding submergence of the irrational and mystical which had played so great a part in the medieval period.

Today our spiritual longing for completion, and for participation in "the eternal" described by writers and religious leaders is so separated from us that we are barely able to recognize these feelings. Daily concerns of survival, of learning the new technologies, as well as such problems as the "shrinking world", urban environments and ambiguous moral responsibilities
seem to mitigate against other kinds of awarenesses.

This separation has resulted in the bankruptcy of many of the symbols of the past; symbols which had a definite religious and emotional reason for being have no meaning today. There are very few single meaningful configurations that have definite meanings (with the possible exception of the eastern meditational symbols that are purely geometric in design). In painting today, it is more common to observe the destruction of symbols, and the expression of incoherent and chaotic relationships. As Yeats said so eloquently:

"How can the arts overcome the slow dying of men's hearts that we call the progress of the world and lay their hands upon men's heartstrings again, without becoming the garment of religion as in old times?"  

Many, many painters have consciously tried to formulate symbols that express their times yet, as Dr. Jung points out:

"A time symbols appears only when there is a need to express what thought cannot think or what is only divined or felt."  

The psychological fact of the artist functioning as an instrument and as spokesman of the spirit of his age may be examined from different points of view. First, in terms of personal psychology. Though this might be of value, it is beyond the scope of this writing. A second viewpoint is the function
of the artist as a maker of forms, whether conscious or uncon-
scious, forms which express the nature and value of his time.
This nature and these values have, in their turn, shaped the
artist.

Jean Bazaine writes in "Notes On Contemporary Painting,"

"Nobody paints as he likes. All a painter
can do is to will with all his might the painting
his age is capable of."6

And Kandinsky said in his essay, "Concerning the Spiritual in
Art":

"Every epoch is given its own measure of
artistic freedom, and even the most creating
genius may not leap over the boundary of that
freedom."7

The aim of the contemporary artist to give expression
to the inner vision of man, to the spiritual background of life
and the world, has led to the abandonment of the concrete and
sensuous as well as the individual. The collective quality of
contemporary art affects many people, the only remaining vestige
of the individual being the manner of representation, the style
and the quality of the work. Today the symbolic language of the
individual work of art must be learned in order for the viewer
to determine its expressiveness.

For example, I have used the symbolic theme of magic in
my painting, as in Plate 3, Big Operator; Plate 17, Levitation;
Plate 20, Trance. The tradition of the "magic" object and the
secret soul of things is not new. Bezaine wrote:

"An object awakens our love just because it seems to be the bearer of powers greater than itself."\(^8\)

Jung might have attributed this idea of magic to the alchemical concept of spirit in matter, believed to be the spirit in and behind inanimate objects like metal or stone. This spirit is the unconscious, manifesting itself when the conscious or rational knowledge has reached its limits and the mystery sets in.

The choice of the symbolic theme of magic, of magicians, and trance-like phenomena, such as Figures 10, 11 and 12, in drawings and paintings has, I think, a relationship to the idea put forward by Dr. Jung in his essay, "Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle."\(^9\) It is based on the assumption of an inner unconscious knowledge that links a physical event with a psychic condition, so that a certain event that appears "accidental" or "coincidental" can in fact be psychically meaningful; and its meaning is often symbolically indicated.

Yet another aspect of this symbolic theme of magic has been stated very beautifully by Yeats when he wrote:

"All art that is not mere story telling, or mere portraiture, is symbolic, and has the purpose of those symbolic talismans which medieval magicians made with complex colours and forms, and bade their patients ponder over daily, and guard with holy secrecy; for it encloses, in complex colours and forms, a part of the Divine Essence."\(^10\)
FIGURE 12  DRAWING
The second symbolic theme I have called "the relation between man and woman" simply because the subject of so many of the paintings has involved two figures, a man and a woman, in varying situations. This theme could also be described as figurative expressions of the complexities of communication, (Plate 8) or identity, (Plates 1 and 4), or love, (Plates 10, 19, 22), or humor (Plates 16 and 27), or dependence (Plates 17, 18, 20), and independence (Plate 7), and so on. Some of the paintings deal with these things explicitly, such as the aspects of communication in Plate 19, *The Sweet Nothing Machine*, or of dependence in Plate 18, *The Blindfold*, or of identity in Plate 4, *Night Machine*.

However, the specific subject matter has always emerged out of the process of painting. They are the result of visual experience, thought and feelings that somehow come together in the act of painting. They are not preplanned, or thought up; rather the paintings are felt out.

What is this process of feeling and acting? Jung said "Proceed from the dream outward..." So then, what is the dream? It is made up of ideas and images in the mind which are not under the command of reason. The "dream" includes reverie, imagination, daydreaming, and visions -- any experience which emerges from the realm of the subconscious. Different levels of consciousness seem to exist in a multi-dimensional relation to one another.
In painting there is a passage way between them. In the process of painting, one learns to move between one realm and another, from conscious to the unconscious, from physical reality to psychological reality, in order to create. Anaïs Nin has defined symbol as "uniting and synthesizing various forms of reality". So in the process of painting, the painter functions as sensor and translator of "real" experience into structured communication. This "real" should not be misunderstood as "realism". As Fellini said,

"Realism is a bad word. In a sense everything is realistic. I see no line between the imaginary and the real. I see much reality in the imagination."  

The aims of the artist are to capture the transient and ephemeral in life and to make this permanent, to reconcile the inner image with the external world by seeing and shaping. The painting process reveals part of the internal world, and the symbolic aspect comes about through the selection and the organization of parts -- the parts that are necessary to the structuring of the painting. It all seems to come down to a matter of balance. As Roger Fry pointed out, even in Rembrandt's etchings there can be seen occasionally the sacrifice of the formal elements to the logic of the subject although usually it is to the contrary. Basically the formal organization is the framework and ultimately
this organization is the profound expression of the work.

As Max Bill stated more precisely:

"...art can originate only when and because individual expression and personal invention subsume themselves under the principle of order of the structure and derive from it a new lawfulness and new formal possibilities. Such lawfulness and such inventions manifest themselves as rhythm in an individual case. Rhythm transforms the structure into form; i.e. the special form of a work of art grows out of the general structure by means of a rhythmic order."\(^{13}\)

"Structure, in its basic sense, is the created unity of the parts and joints of entities. It is a pattern of dynamic cohesion in which the noun form and the verb, to form are coexistent and interchangeable; of inter-acting forces perceived as a single spatio-temporal entity."\(^{14}\)

Structure is also central to our understanding of our ways of understanding. Studies of our perceptual and cognitive processes by Gestalt psychologists show that psychological events do not occur through the accumulation of individual elements of sense data but through the coordinated functioning of clearly patterned networks of sensation determined by structural laws.

As to the symbols which are structured in my paintings, I think about the symbolic content in somewhat the same way Amy Lowell wrote about her own poetry:

"I meet them where they touch consciousness, and that is already a considerable distance along the road of evolution."\(^{15}\)
Returning to my painting, the "patterned networks", thought of as configuration, are unique in their formal organization. For example, the impassivity of the couple in Picnic, Plate 22, may be said to occur through the posture and faces of the figures as well as the cool gray tones juxtaposed to saturated orange. These elements contribute to this quality of expression.

Certain proportions, certain combinations of color carry distinctive modes of expression. I call these modes "expressive structure". This expressive structure is dependent on the organization of the "tremendous fragments of meaning"\textsuperscript{16} that are the color, the brightness, the shape and the line. Each combination of these fragments has its own particular constructive expression, each has its own features.

They, the images, have the power to move me to paint them. The only control I have is over my own creative method. The occurrence of people and situations in the paintings has no relation to satire, or social comment. They are not illustrations, though some obviously have a relation to literary ideas or sources. For example, Picture, Figure 12, and Plate 10, came from a line from one of Robert Creeley's poems,

"And I will send you a picture too, if you will send me one of you."\textsuperscript{17}
However, the literary or allegorical element of most of my work is minimal.

I do not identify with them, except occasionally with an aspect of a painting, after not seeing it for some time. It is always a surprise to me when people notice a feature or some aspect of the painting as a deformation. For example, it was pointed out to me that the arms of the woman in the painting, Monika, Plate 18, were huge. I had never seen them that way.

The deformations and clumsy aspect of the expressive structure may appear to be arbitrary. In fact they are not. The figures are not natural forms and not realistic representations.

Symbolic themes are rich and effective in painting precisely because they do not limit meaning. They allow for the expansion of meaning according to the invention they contain.

Symbol is the language of spirit, intuition and that mysterious channel of personal memory reaching into an ancient and timeless memory that Jung calls the great unconscious. My theme is the human spirit. The use of symbol is therefore an important part of expression in my paintings. The "expressive structure" would fail of realization without the disciplined use of color and shape. These are the foundation of this thesis.
FOOTNOTES


3. Carl Jung, *Man and His Symbols*

4. Yeats, op. cit. p. 162

5. Carl Jung, op. cit.


7. Kandinsky, "Concerning the Spiritual in Art"

8. Jean Bazaine, op. cit. p. 250

9. Carl Jung, op. cit., *Man and His Symbols*

10. Yeats, op. cit. p. 148


16. Klee, op. cit., p. 65

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Carroll, Paul, The Poem In Its Skin, Bigtable, Chicago, 1969

Creeley, Robert, For Love Poems, Scribners, New York, 1960


Kepes, Gyorgy, Education of Vision, Braziller, New York, 1965

Kepes, Gyorgy, Structure in Art and in Science, Braziller, New York, 1965

Kris, Erns, Psychoanalytic Explorations in Art, Schocken Books, New York, 1952


Rose, Barbara, American Art Since 1900, Praeger, New York, 1967

Sarris, Andrew, Interviews With Film Directors, Avon, New York, 1967

Sitney P. Adams, Filmculture Reader, Praeger, New York, 1970
PLATE 10 THE PICTURE