DISCIPLINE TO FREEDOM

A Thesis

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by

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Lao Tzu...lived in Chou for a long time, but seeing its decline he departed; when he reached the Pass, the Keeper there was pleased and said to him, 'As you are about to leave the world behind, could you write a book for my sake?'

Ssu-ma Ch'ien
1st Century B.C. 

We see in painting everything that man has seen.
Everything that he has been living to see. We are
that same man...Painting is the immensity, the torrent
of the world in a small parcel of matter.

Paul Cezanne

It has been my intention to pursue, through historic and natural inves-
tigation, a course of action which would raise my cultural consciousness from
a surface (objectivism) to a more universal substance (subjectivism) which
appears to me to be purely visual. There are two basic means of visual
perception: the first is conscious (habitual or customary) visual perception,
which is objective as well as social, and the second is subconscious
(esthetic) visual perception, which is subjective and more universal. My
subconscious visual perception deals primarily with abstract pattern relations-
ships (pure form) instead of manifestations of objective reality. Apparently,
subconscious perception is the basis of my creative behavior.

To achieve pure form as a painter, one must discipline oneself to let


go of preconceptions about painting. Without preconceptions, there is no past
reflection or future projection; in the present the only constant is change.

"It is overlooked that in art—and in nature as far as we can judge it through
the medium of art-permanence is a function, a consequence, of changes in the
relations they sustain to one another, not an antecedent principle...Nature
and life manifest not flux but continuity, and continuity involves forces and
structures that endure through change; at least when they change, they do so


2Marcel Brion, Cezanne (Doubleday & Company, Incorporated, 1974),
P. 5-23.
more slowly than do surface incidents, and thus are, relatively constant."

Change, then is fundamental to pictorial organization (expression).

A musician uses musical contrasts (pitch, rhythm, duration) to make a whole piece of music. These musical relationships may be dependent on such differences as the simultaneous intervals in chords (vertical), the intervals in a melodic sequence (horizontal), or on the individual's visual/tactile relationship with his/her personal rhythm (kinesthetics). The painter uses visual contrasts in much the same way. Walking is an example of personal rhythm. Everyone knows how to walk, yet each person's gait is unique to him/her self. This can be applied to painting as the kind of confidence needed to attack the canvas without having to stop for interruptions of conscious thought.

Awareness of letting go of one's conscious thoughts is critical to that subconscious action (personal expression) which leads to universal truth. This attitude is contingent on past experience with pictorial order. Reality is subconsciously universal within the cultural and personal limitations of the society. "Whatever our way of life is, being alive is the reality of life, and there can't be such a thing as living outside the reality of life." It is the painter's obligation to strive for cultural equilibrium. "Every expression of art has its own laws which accord with the principal law of art and life: that of equilibrium...The aspiration toward equilibrium and that toward disequilibrium constantly oppose each other. This is only the

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expression of culture moving toward equilibrium."⁵ As a painter, I am deeply concerned that my work should reflect universal reality (cultural equilibrium). (Pure reality)"...can only be established through pure plastics. In its essential expression, pure plastics is unconditioned by subjective feeling and conception...To create pure reality plastically, it is necessary to reduce natural color to primary color...in plastic art, reality can be expressed only through the equilibrium of dynamic movement of form and color;...pure means affords the most effective way of attaining this. When dynamic movement is established through contrasts or oppositions of the expressive means, relationship becomes the chief preoccupation of the artist who is seeking to create equilibrium."⁶ In order to achieve this level of reality, the painter must realize what painting is capable of and what painting means and what it means to be a painter.

A warrior has to walk alone and believe that he is a warrior if he is ever to be himself. He is involved with the act of doing as well as of what is done. ("Art is a quality of doing and of what is done...The product of art...is not the work of art...we receive but what we give, And in our life alone does nature live; Ours is her wedding garment; ours her shroud.")⁷ There is commitment to the lesson to be learned and to the knowledge of that which passes in his own mind.

The painter has to be able to see the painting as a whole, a total gestalt, rather than as one part or detail after another. The common


ontogenetic center of all human beings is the navel. Mentally, as in the Oriental martial arts, it is a conscious focus of concentration to center the personal rhythm. Once one can center oneself then it becomes possible to center in the whole field of activity, which in painting is the rectangular plane of the canvas. This ability to center one's focus somewhere within the whole rectangular surface is essential to perceptual unity. (Artists whose work can be used as examples of this perceptual unity are Turner, Rembrandt, Cezanne and Mondrian.) See plate #1 (Cezanne). My own work seems most satisfying when I set up a primary focal point (on a large canvas, I may establish two or three subsidiary focal points). Focusing allows me to watch the whole canvas, instead of my hand, and allows me to be sensitive to the peripheral cues in the visual field which direct the painting's perceptual unity by suggesting what needs to be done next.

Mondrian is a major theoretical influence on my thinking: "Culture produces relative consciousness of the changeable expression of reality. When this consciousness is attained, a revolt takes place: the beginning of the deliverence from that expression of reality. Destruction of its limitation follows. The culture of intuitive faculties has conquered. A clearer perception of constant reality is possible. A new realism appears..." I see my paintings as an expression of the limitations and possibilities of my culture. Again, equilibrium is the aim.

My work is dictated by the first mark and is finished when the pattern of dark, light and bright shape relationships has the same visual believability as nature. These formal concerns and maintaining a flatness

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of shape patterns on the canvas plane allow me to develop my own personal relationship with this self-centering experience.

The visual dialogue between me and my canvas is the issue of my investigation. When I let go of my preconceptions, painterly (subconscious) decisions become free of logic and reason for the action. This discipline (of letting go) maintains personal direction (sophistication of style) without verbal dialogue, and is realized when the essential patterns are appropriate to the pictorial field; i.e., when the shapes comprising the field of the canvas are interrelated (in size, flatness, tri-dimensionality, ambiguity, figure-ground, contrast, etc.) in a meaningful or satisfying way to me, the painting has perceptual unity.

If you came upon an infinite path of colored stones and were given a sack to carry all you wanted, how far would you get? It would depend on how many colored stones you picked up and how many colored stones you let go. Once you see them, you have them in your mind and there is no reason to carry what you don't need because possessions possess the possessor, which slows down the investigation. In other words, there is no need to think consciously about what is already subconscious thought.

The first direction in my visual investigation was to use a grid system as a means of controlling pattern distribution on the pictorial plane. This grid system was based on the mathematics of the I Ching (sixty-four squares). I thought that this system would control my intellectual curiosity and would allow more subconscious freedom in my painting. When I realized that this direction was visually naive, I became involved in simplifying my approach and redefining my visual attitude. My painting motifs were instigated by simple, free style drawings. I changed painting mediums, from acrylic to oil and then to encaustic (oil and wax).
Encaustic seemed to suit my esthetic sensitivity best because of its sensual, buttery quality. The variety of my pattern invention continued to grow and color became integral with the complex linear patterns that were developing in my work. I began to work with color alone and the color-pattern character became more complex as did the use of texture as ground. See plate #3 (linear). My most recent motifs are personal visual statements based on subconscious pattern organization. To reiterate: It is the painter's obligation to strive for cultural equilibrium. My own work is reproduced in Plates #4 through #9.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


PLATE NUMBER 3

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PLATE NUMBER 6

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PLATE NUMBER 8