THE ROLES OF SPIRITUALITY AND MATERIALISM
IN MY PAINTING

A Thesis

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by

Donald Robert Welty

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Master's Examination Committee:                  Approved by
Robert Shay                                        George Brinton
Alan Crockett                                      Adviser
Georg Heimdal                                      College of Art
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VITA


1982. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . A.A., Everett Community College, Everett, Washington

1985. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . B.A., Fine Arts, Central Washington University, Ellensburg, Washington

FIELD OF STUDY

Major Field: Fine Arts
In *Zen and the Art of Archery* the author states that a person must practice breathing for years before the task of drawing the bow can be addressed. Likewise, I feel that a painter must have the experience of continued practice at making a mark until the mark is correct in its own context. When this mark is correct its appropriateness becomes evident not by logical deduction or conceptual rationalization but by a dawning awareness that it has become complete.

This awareness of completion or correctness is the result of a faithful search. In some cases the search itself exposes an experience much more significant than the artist's original reason for creating a painting. However, insecure or doubtful I may feel at the start of a particular painting, I have faith that my marking and developing of the image will eventually result in a work of art. The search will reveal new and challenging discoveries. The marks will be correct.

My early narrative work seemed to be progressing both figuratively and abstractly and yet I felt it was lacking in personal engagement. The content of my narrations and my obvious desire to paint was being hindered by a need to be more specific and illustrative. I realize now that the
narrative aspects of my painting were devoid of any strong personal convictions while my material application seemed to be more poetic and indicative of my physical and mental reactions while painting.

Feeling a change was necessary, I became increasingly occupied with the application of material in 3 dimensional form. The "hands on" quality of these works gave them a character that seemed more significant than my paintings. The conceptual aspects of each of these new pieces were as obvious as the narrative messages in my paintings. When I finally stopped questioning the potential for a painting or an object to possess meaning without having such a narrative message, I felt a sense of freedom and confidence.

Through these experiences I gained a faith that these artistic struggles would for some reason yield a more significant personal experience. By being sensitive to my experiences and possessing faith in what will become of these experiences I've found my work constantly informing me of changes in my attitude and perceptions.

The faith I possessed while painting "The Eye of Osiris" is indicative of my search for something unknown through the creative act. Most of my recent paintings were light in value and devoid of intense hues. They were also comprised of many layers of transparent paint. "The Eye of Osiris," however, became a dark saturated field of blue.
Its thick, opaque encaustic surface contains painted shapes and carved markings.

Due to its odd nature, "The Eye of Osiris" became increasingly important to me. It has since spawned a series of brightly colored, awkward paintings.

With "The Eye of Osiris" I had not only succeeded in completing a painting very different than my previous work, but I willfully questioned and contradicted many of my preconceived notions about what made a painting successful. The importance of this piece lies in what is contained within the skin of blue, both physically and mentally.

When a mystic meditates and has a fleeting moment of illumination how does he relate this experience to others? He does it by description and suggestion. Likewise, as a painter I attempt to similarly document the experience I have while painting. As I develop the painting's surface I reveal my thoughts, feelings and reactions. Hopefully, the remnant traces of these elements will suggest some form of imaginative discovery on the part of the viewer. I choose not to be extremely descriptive in a literal, narrative sense but rather I paint abstractly suggestive paintings; paintings suggestive of my fears, hope and beliefs to which others can relate. Just as the mystic meditates, contemplates and believes enough to capture something unknown to others, so the artist attempts to transcend existing
confinements, engage in a faithful act and ideally convey the essence of this discovery to others.

Formally speaking, painting to me is about object, material and inference through application and manipulation. I strive for the essence of structure and most of all the elimination of all distracting or frivolous decoration. I hope to have enough faith in myself to realize when that which exists in a painting is everything and when that which doesn't is unimportant to the piece. How can each piece speak as clearly as possible, not through logic and reason, but through instinct and intuition?

What I have described throughout this paper is not a vague mystical process, rather this process specifically addresses the ability to communicate an experience through mark making and material manipulation. It is also not an entirely wide open indiscriminate process. As mentioned earlier, training and practice are essential in facilitating the ability to reveal personal truths and then to communicate those to others. Finally, I have faith in the power of painting to communicate on a level that transcends common communication. Without this faith I would find little reason to create.