DEVELOPMENT OF MY PAINTINGS
1964 to 1966

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

by
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Painting is a moving experience—it changes, shifts, evolves and reverts. It has a life of its own and can be described by what was, not what will be. Two years ago my ideas about painting and naturally my painting were based on making an abstract expressionist style convey a message. I thought that my paintings should contain information but only very subtly. The viewer was expected to bring a great deal of experience to the painting before he could get anything out of it. This desire to make a painting a two-way street seemed to indicate both the style and the content of the painting. The work had to be unobtrusive and not thrust itself onto the general scene. It was reticent about giving its information.

And what was this information which was so closely guarded? It was from another atmosphere. The creating of a work of art by the artist can direct the viewer out of the real world or conversely, lead the way into the world. A world which was the same as the viewer's because the painter was part of the real world, yet it was different because it was a contained rather than a continuing experience. Each canvas was a micro-universe and because it was the product of one person, it was much easier to approach and understand than the real world. The canvas was a substitute reality. The surface was a geography where
one could lose himself. The viewer had to have a philosophy or pre-existent point of view toward the world because the reaction to the canvas was extremely personal.

Now my criteria have changed. A painting is still required to have a concept of the world, a way of dealing with reality. It must still offer the viewer something. But how and what is offered is quite different. Instead of a place of refuge, a viewpoint is offered. It is a way of looking at the real world rather than a micro-universe. The painting is a statement about a way of seeing things. Since the painting is a way of seeing things as the artist sees them, it is an invitation to see his "real" world. The invitation is to escape a single way of relating things as they appear to one usually and to see how the artist relates them. Since this is a statement about the real world, the work must now compete with advertisements, radio, television and the walls surrounding it; to gain attention it must actively offer its attitude. This calls for a radical change of image—nothing reticent now—it is in competition with everything around it and it must "yell".

Emotional reaction does not come because the viewer has brought something to the painting but because the work actively gives something to the viewer. This giving is an intrusion into the environment and a statement about it. Because it is an intrusion, it is no longer silent. Rather than being an invitation to enter into something removed, it is a statement about what and where you already are.
Before attending college I had some art training at The People's Art Center of The Museum of Modern Art in New York City. The emphasis at the center was on expressionistic as opposed to representational art. It was here that I developed certain criteria for painting and these criteria led me to choose abstract expressionism as my style of painting when I was an undergraduate. While I was attending school at Pennsylvania State University I was presented with essentially two aspects of painting. I could represent the external world through a mixture of nineteenth century realistic and impressionistic styles. And barring this approach I could reject subject matter entirely and paint in some style of abstract expressionism. I took the latter approach.

The criteria I had for a painting were based on the ideal of "self expression". They were concerned with my speaking to or understanding myself rather than communicating something to others. If I did communicate my understanding to others, this was acceptable although hardly important. Rather than just a projection of self-understanding, the painting was a self exploration. In fact, a certain obscurantism was considered necessary to show that I was dealing
with personal feelings rather than external ideas. I could come to know myself not in relation to the outside world but just in terms of personal involvement with the canvas and paint.

Soon after my arrival at Ohio State University, I began to doubt that my criterion of personal involvement was sufficient for the purposes of making a painting. I wanted something which would definitely communicate my concept of the world to an observer. Moreover, I wanted to be more in control of the quality and quantity of what was communicated. This concern with communication developed upon my realization that when I returned to look at my paintings after a period of time had elapsed, I no longer was completely certain of what type of motivation or feeling had stimulated the work.

Finding myself disillusioned with abstract expressionism but not totally willing to give it up, I became interested in the semi-abstract style which dealt with realistic forms in relationship to their environment employed by several faculty members at Ohio State University. This way of dealing with forms did not plainly express a message although it did contain more of a positive attitude toward reality and information than did my former abstract style. This information was introduced by way of words, parodies of other paintings or various representational shapes such as lips, flowers, hands, etc. And these information carrying symbols such as parts of the human form or words started to find their way into my painting.
When I finally began to introduce this new awareness of forms into my paintings, I found myself concerned with the type of information I wanted my paintings to carry. To be exact, I had to determine what content I wanted my paintings to express. Content in painting has always meant a statement which, by its very nature, had to be visual rather than verbal. It had to deal with things which could not be expressed verbally. I believe that the only reason for painting is to express ideas or emotions for which there is no adequate verbal symbol. The content that I wanted to deal with might be termed an image. I paint because I cannot and do not want to talk about content, instead I envision it and that vision is my image. There is a type of content which cannot be dealt with verbally, it is this content I want to express in my images. This type of content deals with people, their relationship to their surroundings, how they see their relationship and how I see them seeing their relationship.

Children's art has long fascinated me because of its lack of concern for the "correct" method of seeing things. By correct method of seeing I mean those academic rules which mechanically determine the size, proportions or shapes of things. A child might see an apple tree as a green shape sitting on top of a brown column with an apple on it as large as the green area. This would be a valid statement for the child because this expresses his concern with and his relationship to the tree while it has nothing to do with the adult way of seeing things.
Children's drawings seem to me to be a kind of shorthand. They are being constantly bombarded with so much new material that they can only summarize its salient features. They are hyper-aware of everything and are also free to make this awareness felt in a very direct fashion. They seem to have a more honest appreciation of things such as size. Shapes are of a certain size because they have an order of importance. Since the child is most aware of himself as larger than other things. This seems to me to be very logical since the world can be seen and understood only through oneself. We necessarily encompass the various stimuli reaching us and in that fashion are larger than any of them. Not only does children's art appeal to me because of its abbreviations and its alteration of size relationships, but also for its concern for the statements it makes. This statement is about how to see the world. It is a learning process and the formulation of a new visual concept. This concept is one of taking all the stimuli reaching a child and reproducing them in such terms that the child can encompass and make them a part of himself. Each form is a symbol for a visual idea. The idea of the child's drawing seems to be in the very nature of its form. A child paints a house smaller than himself and the size relationship of the forms is the idea. The shapes and ideas seem to me to be totally integrated. Although it is possible to talk about the shapes and then perhaps about the story they represent,
the essential idea behind the child's drawing is to make a non-verbal idea visually understood. The drawing says something boldly, nakedly and each symbol is necessary to the statement. In children's paintings a shape or color is never altered or replaced once it is committed to the page. The absolute commitment to the page, the lack of hesitation or readjusting of shapes once they are stated is very appealing to me.

This concern with the unique qualities of children's drawings led me to explore the possibilities of employing them in my own works. The problem then was what to do with these qualities now that I had discovered them. I could not in reality become a child and loose all the sophistication that I had. Therefore, I turned away from children's drawings to such things as children's coloring books and games. These however did not give me the same visual satisfaction as did children's drawings. The major reason for this lack of satisfaction was the unavoidable element of adult logic in the production of coloring books and other drawings for children. The shapes are usually simplified in order to make them easy for a child to understand. In a child's painting, on the other hand, the shapes are simplified in order to state the relationship the child feels between himself and the shapes. Therefore there is no ulterior motive to a child's shapes. Conversely, in an adult's drawings for a child the shapes are made falsely simple.

It was for the above reasons that I rejected the illustrations that adults created for children and returned to drawings made by children. But I was still faced with the same dilemma, how to
reconcile my own sophistication with the images I wanted to produce. Finally I decided that I would reproduce both the form and the content of children's drawings as carefully and exactly as possible. The only change I would make is to transfer them to a canvas six foot square, that is to enlarge them enormously. The reason for this reproduction was to communicate a visual awareness as exhibited by children's art. An awareness which amounted to a non verbal statement about our relationship to their surroundings. I felt that the images children made could, if properly used, enable me to communicate their special visual concepts of object symbol.

Although I wanted to employ their visual concepts I wanted to do it in a fashion which would acknowledge my adult sophistication. This sophistication prevented me from merely copying children's drawings or drawing like a child. If I were to paint using child like symbols or in some fashion copy children's art it would have to be different from children's drawings because I would be doing it voluntarily. The large awkward shapes would exist because that is what I wanted rather than that was the extent of my motor ability. In this way choosing children's symbols became symbolic of a way of looking at reality in another context, that of a child's images. I found that by increasing the size of the child's drawing to approximately six feet square I would maintain the child like method of painting while actually creating a statement of my own.
The child uses drawing to express an object, to discover the form of an observed shape and to state his relationship to that shape. It is a statement about his understanding of reality. I used children's symbols to express a point of view toward the relationship of people to objects and to other people. This change of the use of the symbols and the meaning of the symbols has led to the change in scale. The image may remain the same but the viewer's relationship to it is different and so is the paintings content.

The painting not only uses symbols, the child like shapes standing for objects, it becomes a symbol of how to look at reality in another context. This context is no longer children's art, it is an adult's use of a child's symbols. The child's painting is usually small. Its significance is changed through the change of size. This change in size forces the image upon the attention of the viewer and the viewer has to adopt a new relationship to the work. This relationship may be considered the statement of how I want the viewer to look at the world, the new information about the world I want to convey.

When I first started, there was however, one flaw in this technique—I was limited in subject matter. For although I could determine my own subject matter by sifting through large numbers of children's drawings and picking out the most appropriate, I could not always obtain the exact image I wanted. Not only did this limitation of image limit my content but using only one child's drawing
became rather mechanical. Therefore, during this earlier phase of my painting I felt constrained by not always finding the image I desired. This was especially true since I found that in my painting the content was totally expressed by the image. Thus, aside from spending all my time trying to collect great numbers of drawings, there seemed to be no solution to the problem—at least none was visible if I continued to use the method I had been using. I then decided that I would have to find a way of not being dependant on directly copying a particular child's drawing. By combining several children's drawings into one image I found that I could drift more spontaneously into a childlike quality of making images without directly copying a particular drawing.

I found that by referring to the symbols from several drawings and fusing them into one I changed their relationships and meanings. This juxtaposition of several child's images not only permitted the freedom to invent new relationships but through my personal interpretation and sophistication I felt that my creation ultimately had no mechanical relation with any single child's drawing or even several children's drawings.

By completely deciding on the desired image and committing myself to the immediate result, I could internalize the child's way of making pictures. To explain what I mean by immediate result is quite simple. I permit myself no corrections or adjustments. If it is not right at first, it is totally wrong. In this
technique a painting might easily be accomplished insofar as the physical act is concerned, in less than one hour and frequently no more than twenty minutes. However, this does not include the time spent prior to the act of painting. The time spent prior to painting in setting up the mental image of the vision to be described is probably tenfold larger and just as necessary as the act itself. For, if I am not adequately certain of the image I find that the painting does not "come off". It either becomes "cute" or in some way loses the directness I expected of it. Since I preclude any correction, it must be discarded entirely or begun again. Although by using this method it is possible to obtain paintings which give reality to my vision, I have not altogether abandoned copying of children's drawings directly.

There are several reasons for my writing this statement in the way I have. The first is in being a painter, a painter must move and change in response to his environment and the changes in his philosophy. I felt that rather than state where I am now, I would explain how I got here. In this explanation it is hoped that instead of stating a position which I expect someday to go beyond, I have described a process which might remain valid for whatever comes next. For like painting which must be spontaneous and free, so must the act of changing be free. Because it is impossible to tell whether the style or technique of the moment is actual growth or merely novelty, it is necessary to be unconcerned about abandoning all that was accepted before as the truth.
It is through hindsight that work can be judged. The judgement comes from what new directions and insights are gained during a specific period and what they lead to later. It is not the truth which changes but we who grow and so change our relationship to it. The abandoning of a certain style is not saying that it is not true—it was true when it occurred and for that time still is true. However because of growth, it is necessary to continue to be open to change, to new truths while not claiming the old is now false—just that the relationship to style and vision have changed because of growth and so another image takes over.
ILLUSTRATIONS

The following plates illustrate the works exhibited from August 21, 1966 to September 2, 1966 in the New Fine Arts Building as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Fine Arts.
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