EARTH, SKY, PEOPLE IN BETWEEN

A THESIS

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

By

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* * * * *

The Ohio State University
1969

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to the quasi-free drifters
and the steppenwolves that follow.

Yours is the world
free as the air.

And for you there is no tomorrow
nor yesterday;

You forget the good and the bad alike
there is nothing you desire

Nothing you regret

Nor do you care whether
the morrow finds you

A palace or a hospital.

"The Beggar"
Jose De Espronceda
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my teachers and friends my sincerest gratitude and best personal wishes.
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I. INTRODUCTION

Let me first say that I am a romantic and that I am also a humanist. Although I am not an intellectual as one is defined, let me say that my heart is large. So you must expect that this thesis, which is a verbal analysis of my paintings will also be perhaps more romantic than intellectual. That is the way I am.

I will say little as regards to the matter of composition, balance, closure, empathy, rhythm, harmony, figure-ground relationships, juxtapositioning, and other fundamentals we all learn and hopefully master in order to arrive in this present position. Their uses are readily apparent to the most casual observer.

I will discuss however, the progression of my style, some aspects of technique, and the content of my work as it becomes important to individual paintings.

Let it be understood that this analysis of my work is a result of retrospection and that because of this there are ideas both lost and gained in the process.

My "paintings like any act of creation do not proceed from the conscious mind alone. The strongest impulses and most telling images often arise from levels of the unconscious and though I cannot help
painting them I cannot always name them."¹

I will discuss my work under separate topic headings in this paper. However, at most times it is rather difficult to speak of any one of these topics without mentioning their counterparts, and so with this in mind I will proceed with analyzing technique, style and statement in conjunction with the history of my development.
II. AN HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF STYLE AND TECHNIQUE

The development of which I speak had its roots in abstract expressionism. From in-depth studies of the attitudes and attributes of the abstract expressionists there grew within me a deep concern for and appreciation of the freedom of expressing one's subjective self, the introspection needed to convey an emotion or thought that words alone could not express. The fact that today there is less concern for that type of statement (indeed the opposite seems to be true) does not negate its validity.

I can't say that I have produced that many acceptable expressionistic works in my attempts at working in that manner, for after all the crises and impetus that had produced the abstract expressionist movement had long since passed by the time I began my art studies. But as a means to a beginning for my present work the lessons it taught me have proved invaluable.

These lessons have included experiencing "autonomous activity and the autogenesis of images as a means of expression." Working with oil color in this manner over a period of time, I developed a deep sensibility towards color. It was a new experience for me to discover the impact and emotionality of pure color.
alone, the ambivalence of warm and cool. Working in this way I also learned the nature of color mixing; from books I studied color theory. At times however, I found myself agreeing with Picasso who said, "if I have no blue I take red in the last resort the choice of means and themes is a matter of indifference, all that matters is the intensity of the experience."³

The subconscious and instinctive associations the viewer sees in the totally non-objective work fascinated me to no end, but no more than my own work fascinated my own "self." It is this content with my own work and what it was saying to me that kept me working in the abstract expressionist, non-objective manner. I think perhaps the best example of that early phase is seen in Plate I where I have attempted to use the technique to impart upon the viewer a feeling of earth, sky and figure and our relationship to it and our "self." (I will say more of this when I discuss content more fully.) This relationship is conveyed without any noticeable images appearing. I worked in this manner for some time producing several paintings, always improving my awareness of color, shapes, and technical solutions. Even at this point I could say that I was developing a "style" of sorts. It was an
introverted, personal art that contained a mystique.

Eventually it became apparent to me that I wasn't really communicating my thoughts as well as I wanted to, it was no longer enough to remain introverted. I needed to communicate with a larger audience than myself and some other abstract expressionists. It is only a naive artist who claims he paints for only himself. "The form in which art like any form of communication which is not purely private expresses itself has to be more or less 'conventional' and the most original and creative genius has no alternative but to make use of tacitly accepted forms if he is to make himself understood."^4

These forms began to originate subconsciously and showed themselves in my work as it progressed. The beginnings of my concern for more definite form is more recognizable in Plate II. I am here concerned with the figure and its relationship to its surroundings. Still using what I have learned from expressionistic work about the emotional and psychological impact color can have on the viewer. But I thought perhaps the image was still too unclear for my satisfaction. The lack of distinction in some areas of what was figure and what was ground was a little too am-
biguous for my purpose. The figure on the right seems to have a more definite existence in space than the figure on the left. Also the presence of so many smaller shapes and lack of closure in some areas made the image a little obscure. I feel however that in its execution I had learned a lot. Once completed it has stood on its own and provided me with another stepping stone to my most recent work. "The paintings an artist leaves behind him are scattered signs of himself and he expends himself without expressing neither himself or the world completely." ⁵

It was never my desire to express the world completely "for describing the world as it is, in itself, nothing is better than science and scientific techniques. The function of painting is to show us the painter's feelings, outer or inner or both kinds."⁶ This function was first fully realized in Plate III; in it I have successfully incorporated statement (feeling) and form.

This form becomes a juxtapositioning of rigid geometric shapes with the more soft and sensuous effects of the atmosphere. I use the geometric shapes interchangeably to mean both the human or the environment depending upon the particular painting. That is if the
painting is begun with the soft-sensuous quality belonging to the figure the ground becomes more rigid and geometric in form; if the figure becomes geometric the ground then becomes soft and sensuous. It is this combination of bold structure with soft suffused light that has become the crux of my work.

I find that even when my work becomes more realistic as in plates VI, IX, XII and XIII there remains an underlying organization of abstract patterns. I find that in these paintings, I am at a kind of stylistic halfway house between representationalism on the one hand and formal geometry on the other. I seem to have become a romantic abstractionist. My concerns have become my impression of the world we live in.

It is here that I would like to discuss the content of my work as it concerns these feelings about life and people. Again within the context of the history of my development.
III. AN ANALYSIS OF CONTENT

My paintings record my impression of life and the
times, the way that I experience them. I cannot over-
emphasize the "I" as my paintings are personal and
indeed could pass for "self-portraits," although I
believe all paintings are self portraits; some are
more apparent than others. As I stated in the intro-
duction, I am a romantic and a humanist, the humanist
side of me rebels against the "mechanization of life,
the reification of culture, the institutionalization
of human relations, and atomization of functions and
the feeling of general insecurity." This same sense
of life leads to similar artistic forms.

Plate IV is a good example of my thoughts as con-
cerns my vision of the times we live in. It was begun
in Dallas and completed in Columbus and now belongs to
Dr. Martin Luther King's Alma Mater.

Dr. Martin Luther King has been killed
I won't paint for awhile
When I stepped from the train in Kansas City
a man whose business is selling life insurance
told me that the box in the baggage car came
from Viet Nam
I won't paint for awhile
We will meet with anyone, anywhere at anytime
but the site hasn't been right
When the archives are finally opened we will find
that few of us were ever Artists
I won't paint for awhile, but I will
I now have a dream.

-8-
It is a painting which demonstrates my thoughts verbally; no imagery could convey my feelings other than mundane images. More often than not the tragedies, comedies and paradoxes of life become an impetus for a painting.

My paintings are, then, reflections on life made visible. From that painting onward I realized that my paintings revealed my reaction to the life around me; in that sense they could be classified as social commentary as well. We are fast reaching an age of increased alienation as our intellect grows and knowledge is computerized. The human is becoming more machine-like and is finding it harder to be effective in the masses. The individual has less control over his destiny and relinquishes more of his freedoms to the dictates of society. Less merit is placed on emotions as the brain replaces the heart.

To better illustrate this point I include some readings from Fowles whose ideas reflect the times.

"1 Strait times come in history.

2 Our time is such a time, end of millenium, full of fast currents, tossing, eddied, dangerous to pass through.

18 Our time is strait because each of us becomes each day more isolated. Scien-
tifically we know more of each other, and yet, like the receding galaxies, we become remoter, lonlier.

24 Never were there so many dissatisfied people in the world: Men and women like a vast and mounting shore of empty cockleshells.

25 To take mankind by the scruff of the neck and shake it.

27 I want to propose a new man: I call him the Aristos.

28 He is an ideal, not a real, man; an ideal only for a world in which alienation and rootlessness are ubiquitous characteristics of the individual, just as brainwashing, and dehumanization are ubiquitous evils of the society the individual is an atom of.

64 Our stereotyping societies force us to feel more alone. They stamp masks on us and isolate our real selves."

The alienation and isolation of the individual is emphasized by the depiction of that element in my work, the emptiness and loneliness of that world is represented in various paintings. Typical of these are Plates VI, VIII, and XII. The sterile landscapes, desolate buildings and cold figures impart the theme of alienation.
IV. THE UNION OF TECHNIQUE, STYLE AND STATEMENT

In order that I might communicate these feelings more effectively, I found I had to become more explicit with my images; it was no longer acceptable for me to rely on the more obscure expressionistic sensibilities. I began simplifying my composition even further and juxtaposed organic forms (people in between) with larger architectonic forms and color fields (earth, sky). The larger color fields began to mean more to me than the random strokes of the former period. Tapping areas helped draw attention to their importance and my forms became more simple, true and specific. I innovated the surface quality of my paintings somewhat after gaining an appreciation of the minimalist product. This quality was accomplished without relinquishing the statement I was making. The surface quality of which I speak is perhaps most apparent in Plates XII and XIII.

I have discovered now that my surface characteristics readily adapt themselves to my subjective subconscious, depending on the concept I wish to convey in the individual works. That is, if I have a more preconceived rational idea about a specific image I wish to convey it is reflected in the paint surface,
the more preconceived the image the less "worked" appears
the surface quality (Plate XII). But because the bulk
of my work stems from the collective subconscious, there
remains more of the "worked" surface quality.

To sum up this "surface" let me say that in my
work I am more concerned with its "macro-level" or
image than with its "micro-level" or surface quality.

"An artist isn't serene; he rages over
the disparity between original con-
ception and ultimate consequence, the
gap between what he sees (and seeks)
and what he settles for (and sells).
He has a vision, and if he's worth a
damn he loathes each clumsy image of
it and claws on angrily to the next
approximation. The difference between
an artist and a technician is the dif-
ference between an obsession and a job."

Marcuse
V. CONCLUSION

In the text of my thesis I have described the development of my paintings historically, emphasizing the interdependency of technique, style and statement. I have stated that from the aesthetic of the abstract expressionist school of painting I first gained a technical proficiency in color and an autogenic image.

The content of my work revolves around my interpretation of the times in which we live, stated in a visual language which underlines the feeling of alienation and isolation brought about by the opposing forces of mechanical versus humanistic qualities. It is the person caught between the earth and the sky.

It would be my hope that we can "accept our limited freedom, accept our isolation, learn our particular powers, and then with them humanize the whole."
FOOTNOTES


3. Ibid., p. 382.

4. Ibid., p. 382.

5. Ibid., p. 390.


7. Hauser, Mannerism, p. 357

8. Fowles, Aristos, pp. 3-6, p. 16.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


EXHIBITS

The following is a partial listing and illustration of my paintings and prints which were exhibited as the "studio" portion of this thesis. These works were exhibited at The Ohio State University School of Art Gallery in August, 1969.


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