COLOR AND FORM

A Thesis

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by

Sidi Grunstein Gluck, B.Sc., M.A.

The Ohio State University

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Approved by

[Signature]
Adviser
Division of Art
This thesis is dedicated to my husband Peter Gluck and to my friend Eleanor Smith who gave me much encouragement and support throughout.
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Media, by altering the environment, evoke in us unique ratios of sense perceptions. The extension of any one sense alters the way we think and act—the way we perceive the world.

—McLuhan and Fiore—
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COLOR AND FORM

Introduction

This statement will attempt to describe the development and change in my paintings since my M.A. degree in 1968.

Hans Hofmann spoke of a "sixth sense of sensibility" that enables us to look into things in depth so we can discover their inner meaning. He said,

"We see only the surface of things, but our sensibility explores the inner life of everything and has the capacity to feel every new relationship within this inner life. This is naturally an extremely complicated process. And that is the reason that it is extremely difficult to explain and bring out. You have to have certain experiences before you can understand what I speak about here."

I think that Hofmann has said what I am trying to express in my present paintings. I find that I am doing paintings as sermons, concerning the way I feel about life around me. In the painting titled "Painting Is Alive and Well and Living in the Hearts of Men, Women, and Children" (Plate I) I wanted the title to carry the message that I tried to express in the formal qualities of the work. At this time I tried to shed outside influences and get to the essence of the moving forces that are my own, and can become a foundation for pictorial expression in the future. The paintings of this period also reflected the stresses and agitations that came about through certain external events in my life, but more essentially show a self-imposed reordering of my primary concerns in painting.
In my earlier paintings, as evident in the M.A. thesis and exhibition, I was concerned with creating painting through the use of basic and minimal elements. Formally, the paintings were rectilinear arrangements of color areas, mostly in primary hues. For example, "Still Life No. 1" (Plate II) was composed of five 72-inch panels of unequal width; the panels consisted of bands of color with an overall quality of white. The hard-edged bands of yellow functioned as an interchangeable figure - ground, interrupted by the dark value of the spaces between the panels. The dark spaces were meant to relate to - and be echoed by - the black stripe on a panel of red juxtaposed to a band of white in a violet field. This pattern arrangement corresponded to a yellow stripe in a white field. All other paintings of this period were generally composed of bands of color on a white field; the bands were hard edge, presented on an unmodeled surface. This group of paintings were executed on well-primed canvas to keep color as a surface plane, creating a presence upon the canvas rather than making it an integral part of it. In retrospect the earlier paintings used color to elicit a sensual reaction in the viewer; however, I think, this reaction was somewhat neutralized by the minimal style of the paintings.

As I continued to paint, I found the need to shift my position from the restricted rectilinear format toward a more complex configuration. To reach this position I moved cautiously at first; in general, my approach was very much like that of the M.A. series of paintings.
This is evident in the painting titled "Scrolls" (Plate III). The format for this painting was completely developed before the execution of the painting. The painting was composed of three panels, each being a self-contained unit as well as part of a whole. Color is still confined to well-delineated areas. The painting created a statement about the environment as well as being an environment itself.

Development of Change in Style

In the M.A. paintings I deliberately stressed a unity of style and mode of expression, whereas in the recent paintings (1968 to the present) I approached each painting as a separate entity, a sort of microcosm independent of the other paintings. Each painting was created within a short span of time, as "Scrolls" (Plate III) and "Family" (Plate IV) would indicate. In "Scrolls" the style is more or less calligraphic, relating to a minimal ground. In "Family", however, symbols were used that related to people, animals, and events of the particular time in which the work was created. The imagery is obviously subjective, yet, hopefully, it has enough universal symbolic content to elicit a somewhat similar response in the viewer. This is in sharp contrast to the earlier works where imagery may be related to landscape; the wide open spaces that I remember from my native country; and in a great measure, the experiences that I have had through travel in the
United States. I think that the imagery in the later paintings was derived less from the geographic environment and more from the limited confines of my social contacts.

The transitional paintings of this group began with certain preconceptions as to form and color; however, in their development they went through a number of changes. They developed more organically and remained very fluid even in their final form. Although in general I planned the painting beforehand, I did not hesitate to let the painting go through a number of metamorphoses if I felt different about the way it was developing at a given time. I also allowed all kinds of influences to affect the painting: things I read or saw, people I met made their presence felt in a way they never had before.

My approach to the transitional paintings, apparently, was similar to Tworkov's way of working in the fifties.

"In the fifties, I was not thinking in terms of composition. In fact, I was thinking more in terms of anti-composition, not composing. There was a naive point of view involved. The idea was that if you did not circumscribe yourself with ideas about composition, if you permitted a kind of direct flow, just following clues as you worked, that you would come to a certain amount of more true painting."

Although Tworkov's quotation referred to his Abstract Expressionist period, he later evolved a more Constructivist style. My work, on the other hand, seemed to fluctuate back and forth from Expressionist-like to Constructivist-like style, as evident in one of my earliest paintings, "Bathshebah" - 1965 (Plate V). Here the style
is Abstract Expressionism. The painting also included a capital L-shaped hard-edged pattern on one side, creating the impression of a painting within a painting. This hard-edged shape inspired me to simplify the format of a number of later paintings.

Conclusion

Since my principal concern is the use of color, it seemed appropriate to refer to two artists who not only have worked with color, but have also published their points of view: Johannes Itten and Josef Albers.

In his book The Art of Color Itten speaks of color as being "radiant forces of energy that affect us positively or negatively, whether we are aware of it or not." He traces the use of color by artists of many periods. He says, "The artists in stained glass used color to create a supramundane, mystical atmosphere which would transport the worshipers to a spiritual plane." In his view, "color should be experienced and understood, not only visually but also psychologically and symbolically." Thus, according to Itten, color can be examined from several different aspects. For example, he cites that, "Discovery of relationships, mediated by the eye and brain, between color agent and color effects is a major concern of the artist. Visual, mental and spiritual phenomena are multiply interrelated in the realm of color and the color arts." Itten further says, "The artist, finally,
is interested in color effects from their aesthetic aspect, and needs both physiological and psychological information.\textsuperscript{7}

Josef Albers in his \textit{Interaction of Color} claims that "The purpose of most of our color studies is to prove that color is the most relative medium in art, that we almost never perceive what color is physically."\textsuperscript{8} His assembly of color plates, accompanied by text, is a record of an experimental way of studying and teaching color. Albers points out that color offers uncertainties and perceptual ambiguities; and he encourages the student to understand them so that he may avoid - or use them. For example, he states that two different colors may appear to be the same, depending on their relationship to a given environment, or that the same color can appear to be different, again depending on its environment.

The influence of the above and other theories in my use of color is at a minimum. Although I have paid some attention to them, I have never set out to test the concepts these theories enunciate. In general, my approach has remained intuitive, perhaps influenced by the free use of color in the art work of my young students. As an enrichment of color, I have also been interested in the surface of painting; texture has been created by rolling paint and using oil-base crayons.

I have also used any imagery that may be available at the moment, as in "Homage to Picasso" (Plate VI) where I quoted literally,
so to speak, from Picasso's sketches for "Guernica" and his paintings of "Mother and Children". The result was a watercolor-like amalgamation of textures and images.

In conclusion, although the M.F.A. group of paintings may seem to have developed in a random order, they do have an orderly progression similar to that of the M.A. paintings. Although they contain some figurative elements, they are, I think, essentially as abstract as the M.A. paintings.

At present, my future activities are not quite defined. I do, however, intend to continue developing my painting. Since I have always had a strong interest in color, I hope to continue in this direction. Needless to say, the present Color Field movement has a real interest for me. In fact, a number of my recent canvases have been of this order; however, I feel that a more complex configuration would enhance my use of color.
NOTES


4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

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CATALOGUE OF PLATES


II. "Still Life No. 1". Five panels. Acrylic on canvas, 72" x 105". 1966

III. "Scrolls". Three panels. Acrylic on canvas, 108" x 60". 1969

IV. "Family". Acrylic on canvas, 72" x 82". 1970

V. "Bathshebah". Oil on canvas, 60" x 60". 1965

VI. "Homage to Picasso". Acrylic on canvas, 72" x 82". 1970

VII. "Scrolls No. 2". Acrylic on canvas, 42" x 42". 1969

VIII. "Eulogy". Acrylic on canvas, 60" x 60". 1969

IX. "Wind Dance". Acrylic on canvas, 40" x 40". 1970

X. "Color Opus". Acrylic on canvas, 60" x 60". 1969

XI. "Summer '70". Acrylic on canvas, 68" x 68". 1970

XIIa. "Color Opus II". Color serigraph, 18" x 24". 1969

XIIb. "Forms on White". Color serigraph, 18" x 22". 1969

XIII. "Self Portrait". Acrylic on canvas, 12" x 18". 1966

XIV. Untitled. Acrylic on paper, 18" x 24". 1970
PLATES
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"Painting Is Alive and Well and Living in the Hearts of Men, Women, and Children"
PLATE II

"Still Life No. 1"
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"Scrolls"
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"Family"
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"Bathshebah"
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Untitled