THE PICTORIAL RESOLUTION OF AMBIGUITY

A Thesis

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for the Degree Master of Arts

by

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This paper is dedicated to Mr. Sidney Chafetz, artist.
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MY GOAL AS A CREATIVE ARTIST

My immediate goal is to create art with a vocabulary of ambiguous relationships among finite visual elements. Beyond this lies the resolution of reality. The following thoughts seek to give some degree of understanding to the kind of thinking which provides the basis for my paintings and prints.

As men we attempt to question our existence but the fallibility of our senses renders us defensive, withdrawn and distrustful. Let us use these limited powers to uncover, understand and develop our individual worlds.

My position is to question reality by combining ambiguous relationships among different finite realities and to place the burden of resolving confusion on the observer. My goal is to make him think about his reality.
THE POSITION OF FINITE ELEMENTS

Is the finite a distraction from, or a vehicle to the infinite? One is initially pulled to the painting or print by the finite elements within the work. The finite pictorial elements are color, shape and surface. As long as an element is considered a complete unit it is an observed and finite thing. As no thing may be experienced, no thing may be infinite. At this stage the work of art is regarded as a collection of independent elements and not participated in by the observer.

In my work a group of enigmatic relationships are presented among various combinations of finite elements. Most of these problems deal with position in space. Is color a crack within or a mark upon the state of black? Ambiguity may also be achieved by means of inversion or antithesis, a substitute of the opposite for the real. An example of this would be a painting of grass done in aluminum paint, where organic form is complemented with inorganic
color. Once the challenge of ambiguity and the ambiguous state is accepted, one is more free, perhaps, to explore his introspective position. Should the viewer not respond to the ambiguous elements of the work, he may return to the finite, a welcome distraction.
BLACK AS A CONDITION

Black is black. It is a void. It has no surface. Black, devoid of light and color, is a perfect visual condition with the potential of infinity. At first, however, black is a finite element serving as a visual component in a visual work of art. It is an isolated color with a shape defined by adjacent shapes as well as having a conscious surface. If the ambiguous state of the work is realized, black becomes the primary concern of the observer. This occurs once one becomes involved in the abstract problem of the work which dissolves its physical reality. Since the defining properties of black have disappeared, it now has the potential of being realized as a state. This is the critical last step, the introspective experience with black as the catalyst. It is a state where the mind as well as the eyes open wide to a pure condition, void of temporal reference and focal point.
THE IMPLICATION OF TIME

The finite concept of time may be included here. The idea of time passing, rather than the everpresent "now," may give the most inert object vitality. The "glimpse" through the wheels of a passing train vanishes with the train, revealing a most static view. I attempt to capture this transient quality through configurations which imply the potential for momentary change. These occur in two basic themes. The first consists of rhythmic patterns of rectangular shapes moving across the surface of the work. Examples of these may be found on Page 14. The second theme concerns itself with energetic organic forms which may at any moment escape from their frozen monumentality and rush on. Examples of this theme may be found on Page 15.

The idea of transition is continued into my attitude toward black. We expect the comfort of light to come, as day will follow night -
day, with its countless specific components. The black of the painting holds itself in a transient position, vanishing with the state of conscious attention. Alice returns from the looking glass.
AMBIGUITY OF SPATIAL POSITION

Space exists in my painting when it is experienced. By questioning the spatial position of visual elements one raises the question within the observer's mind as to his own perspective and scope of things. A variety of conflicting experiences places the resolution of the ambiguous state within the observer.

A geometric rather than informal definition of areas allows the created shapes in my work a greater lattitude in ambiguity with spatial position. Irregular shapes, for me, have the essential qualities of "marks" or objects, with a specific position in space, whereas the tangency of geometric areas may not so easily be interpreted as contour.

To achieve a more perfect spatial ambiguity I avoid the traditional use of traditional artists' tools which leave traces which we identify as the marks of the tools. A "mark," by definition, is to be found upon a surface or within an object, but never within a space.
Such marks allow little room for spatial ambiguity. Instead of the easel-painter's brush, I use a rag to manipulate paint. In place of the printmaker's gouges and chisels, I use the house-carpenter's saw and the sharp blow of the mallet. I prefer that my marks create shapes on the picture plane without leaving their mechanical references. For me these techniques create fresh visual experiences.

Color itself is often "marked" through our sophisticated and natural conditioning. Those colors which can most completely avoid symbolic or associative references come closest in inducing introspection in my art.
CONCLUSION

Elements from all our senses may be mixed to provide reflection of the infinite. A single note may be coupled with a single step to provide the most profound key. A single spoken word combined with a seemingly unrelated object may create the discordant condition necessary to question one’s reality.

The potential of aesthetic experience lies within all finite relationships. My role as an artist is to provide through my pictures a more discernable catalyst for the enrichment of life.
INTRODUCTION TO PLATES

The following photographs were taken of black and white prints selected from a series of 50 wood block carvings. The square shaped works measure 12" X 12" with the oblong sizes measuring 12" X 14". This series was executed between August, 1962, and July, 1963.
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