NATURE AND ART

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by

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

To determine what one likes and dislikes is a difficult problem and few people are concerned enough to make a sincere effort to find out. A beginning to the realization of our individuality can be a result of close analysis of what we think we like or dislike. When talking about an experience we have had, which may be anything from swimming to looking at a picture, we may express ourselves by making the statement "I like that". An expression of this nature points out that the positive characteristics of the experience dominate over the negative characteristics. Positive and negative in this context refers to those qualities that one likes or dislikes. On the other hand, when the statement is made "I don't like that" it reveals that the negative qualities of the experience dominate. An important discovery awaits us when we become aware of this phenomenon because it is then that we begin to make definite choices and in turn begin to participate in and have around us those things that we enjoy. It is through the same process that we do not participate in those things that we do not enjoy.

I have a very positive attitude about nature and consequently enjoy her very much, particularly in her natural state. Natural is used in this context in reference to nature in her most original condition, in other words the less nature has been altered by man the more
natural she is. It is because of this awareness of my feelings for nature that my art work has developed and I hope that what is portrayed in my art forms projects these feelings and in turn reflects my individuality. Mr. Hans Hofmann expresses this thought further when he says, "Every deep artistic expression is the product of a conscious feeling for reality".¹ In this case reality to me is nature.
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Nature for me has always supplied the essentials for the formulation of my art. I do not work directly from nature but rather I make art forms that are visual statements of my interpretation and understanding of nature. James Jarves reflects a similar idea when he says, "Art-forms are, first, the expression of man's attempt at a portraiture of nature, in its manifold variety, according to his individual understanding thereof". It is during the process of producing my art form that similar feelings are evoked in me that were felt during my past associations with nature. Because of this experience I feel that if an artist is able to portray his deep feelings about something, with understanding, then it is possible that he will have a deeper understanding of life. James Jarves says, "Art leads to a more profound concept of life, because art itself is a profound expression of feeling".

Out of the various activities that give a person real satisfaction and enjoyment, my participation with nature is to me the epitome of this reality. This involvement includes an awareness of natural things such as sky, water, land, and plants. Within these categories there is a wide variation of types and within these there are literally millions of small objects such as buds, leaves, berries, clouds, rain drops, snow flakes, and rocks. Most people are vaguely aware of nature and have only experienced
her to a minimum. Because of this unawareness it is safe to say that there is more in nature than man realizes or can imagine. Mr. Robert Conover reflects a similar viewpoint when he says, "Life, or nature, is infinitely more varied and complex than man's imagination". Regardless of how one experiences nature a keen sense of curiosity is desirable because there is so much in nature that is missed if an individual is not willing to investigate. Robert Henri puts it this way, "If your attitude is negligent, if you are not awake to the possibilities you will not see them. Nature does not reveal herself to the negligent". An infinite variety of form, design and color becomes apparent only through close observation. At first glance nature may be interpreted as areas of weeds, trees, hills and sky. For the one willing to investigate there is a revealing experience ahead of him.

Nature for me is a combination of order and disorder. Order is suggested in the growth cycle of vegetation. A seed is planted and if the season is conducive for growth the seed will develop into a plant. The change that certain trees go through during a season is depictive of order. Their leaves fall in autumn, they are dormant during the winter, they produce buds in the spring and leaves and fruit in the summer, and the cycle begins again in the fall. If a specific item within nature such as a leaf is analyzed, an orderliness soon reveals itself. A leaf is
developed from a central stalk with ribs growing out towards the edge of the leaf from each side, creating a definite formal pattern. The exterior of a watermelon or a pumpkin is orderly in its design. The manner in which the kernels are placed on an ear of corn provides a strong repeat pattern. The seeds of the pea and bean plants are placed formally in their respective pods. Most plants grow, bud, bloom, and die in a sequence of events.

Disorder in nature is also represented in a variety of ways. Plants do not grow together in a specified, orderly manner, in other words they do not grow naturally, in rows, circles, or in any other type of organized pattern. Buds and leaves on many trees and bushes grow without any visual organization and their limbs grow at random from their respective trunks. The phenomenon of the natural balance that is necessary in nature is not the point at this time; what is being referred to is that form is placed at random rather than in a controlled, orderly, pattern as man seems to prefer. The method by which leaves fall from plants or the manner by which seeds are dispersed have certain disorderly connotations. Leaves drop freely and seeds are distributed at random. The placement of vegetation in nature is depictive of disorder. There are various species of plants that ordinarily do not grow in separate areas. Grass does not grow in one field, dandelions in another, and thistles in still another, but rather they may all grow together in one location. Within landscape, hills, valleys,
cliffs, and rocks are randomly placed. One could continue giving an infinite number of other examples of order and disorder but it is my intention to only point out to the reader that order and disorder do exist in nature, and can be dealt with in visual form. Since I am convinced that they do exist in nature it is only obvious that my art work should portray order and disorder as I interpret them. (Plate II)

The element of craftsmanship is as important in my art work as it is in nature. The methods by which an artist constructs and renders his art form and uses his materials should be such that they will communicate his idea. In my case I think of nature as a great craftsman, consequently I take care when building and developing a work of art. I want my products to be long lasting as I think of nature as being long lasting.

Color schemes used in my art work are not taken directly from nature but are derived more as a result of the design problem that presents itself in each art form. There is a parallel between the hues I use and the color in nature in that we both exhibit all colors in an infinite number of combinations. (Plate X) In a specific work I may limit myself to a definite color scheme as nature may limit herself. (Plate XII) For example, a tomato plant containing tomatoes has a variation of hue within the range of green and red. During the fall season when the leaves
are turning color a tree or bush may contain colored leaves all within the reds, browns, and oranges. Or a tree may have only a slight variation within the range of yellows. A gourd, when ripe, may contain only a slight variation of a specific hue. Taking all of my work into consideration, especially those pieces produced recently, I find there is not a limitation of color, there are only limitations within individual pieces. (Plate IX)

As I make and analyze my work, I find little emphasis placed on the odd or even numbers used within a composition. Again relating to my interpretation I do not find a concern or a preference for numbers in nature. I was taught that odd numbers are more interesting than even numbers but since nature appeals to me I find I am influenced more by nature's characteristics than I am by man's standards. Consequently odd and even are used at random in my work. (Plate VIII)

The design qualities that are most appealing to me in nature and that are dominating in my work are strong horizontal and vertical movements. (Plate I) Diagonals are not used to any great degree but there are times when the composition may dictate their use. (Plate IX) Also related to design is the use of the egg shape. (Plate VIII) It is obvious that this shape be used in my work since it is basic in nature's make-up. Seeds, fruits, leaves, roots, tree trunks, rain drops, pods and cones all have
shape characteristics that are variants of the shape of an egg.

As incentive for my own work I find that repetition is characteristic of nature. Trees, plants, rocks, snow flakes, and numerous other forms are repeated over and over. If one is not aware of the variants he may interpret repetition in terms of monotony. As one drives along the highway he may see a field that has very few trees in contrast to wooded areas. On one beach a few shells may be visible but another beach may provide a vast variety. A field covered with freshly fallen snow may not have any track marks while another field may have thousands. A lake on a calm day may have only a few waves but a windy day will change the surface of the lake quite radically. Repetition and its variants are depicted in my work as small areas of unorderly activity or as large areas of controlled activity of limited areas or shapes. (Plate VII)

In my recent art forms the open composition becomes more obvious as part of my overall design than in much of my previous work. The reason for this is that I want the composition that exists on the canvas to give the impression that it continues beyond the edges. Each picture is a symbol of small areas that exist in nature. Since our vision is not capable of viewing nature as a whole we only look at parts. Each part does not end where our vision ends but rather it continues beyond the edges of the visual field. I hope my pictures are depictive
of this phenomenon. (Plate VI)

The full implications of what I am doing may be understood if one thinks in terms of a visual representation of total nature in her unaltered form. James Penney implies a similar idea as he talks about his work. "My work tends more and more to become a symbol of a total experience rather than a momentary one".⁶ In my case, a symbol of a total experience with nature. Paul Klee expresses a related concept when he said "Art does not reproduce the visible; rather, it makes visible".⁷ As I view my work, feelings are evoked that were felt when I experienced nature through my association with her. In other words my art represents my interpretation of nature in picture form.
Notes


3. Ibid. p. 56.


BIBLIOGRAPHY


CATALOGUE OF PLATES

I.  "Order and Disorder No. 1". Acrylic on canvas, 48" x 60".

II. "Order and Disorder No. 2". Acrylic on canvas, 48" x 60".

III. "Natural Forms No. 1". Oil and acrylic on canvas, 54" x 66".

IV. "Natural Forms No. 2". Oil and acrylic on canvas, 51" x 74".

V.  "Bands of Order". Oil and acrylic on canvas, 48" x 54".

VI. "Revelation". Oil and acrylic on canvas, 48" x 72".

VII. "Nature Represented". Acrylic and collage on canvas, 52" x 75".

VIII. "A Variation of the Egg Shape". Acrylic on canvas, 48" x 72".

IX.  "Nature Symbol No. 3". Acrylic on canvas, 12" x 12" x 96".

X.   "Nature Symbols No. 1, 2, and 3". Acrylic on canvas, ea. 12" x 12" x 96".

XI.  "A Variation of the Carrot Shape". Acrylic on canvas, 49" x 84".

XII. "Fruit of the Plant of the Genus Musa". Acrylic on canvas, 54" x 60".
PLATE I

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