

AN ATTEMPT TO FIND A MATURE DIRECTION IN
PAINTING THROUGH PERCEPTION OF THE MEASURABLE

by

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"Perception of the Measurable", when defined, will help clarify how I see things and how I present them in my paintings. Realizing that the words perception and measurable have various meanings, I will define them in my own terms.

Perception is the awareness of sensory impressions acted upon by the mind. Things I perceive through my senses first cause emotional reactions before they are comprehended intellectually. Then my mind makes mental images which are stored until time for use. Each time a similarity to one of these mental images is observed, the similarity becomes intensified. My mind records this impression, but my memory has a tendency to forget details, and the new mental image becomes simplified until only the most important features are retained. It is possible that my mind causes the senses to see things a certain way. The layman may even be more restricted than the artist in perceiving visually, because the artist not only experiences sensory impressions but graphically creates them.

Measurable involves evaluating things, by comparison, for their pictorial worth. When I view something I see one thing in relation to another. A formal element in my painting is measured for its inherent worth to the entire painting or to a certain area within the

painting. After the evaluation, I may alter the element until its existence seems justified.

Upon viewing the reproductions included, the reader will probably notice two different directions, the earlier being non-objective.

Abstract Expressionism was the current style during the time I first indicated a real interest in painting. I was influenced by the style, because I had been studying design for several years. I also was influenced by the works of Motherwell, de Kooning, Tomlin, Brooks, and more locally, Littler. I marvelled at the immediacy and integrity of the two dimensional surface in their paintings. A lot of what the non-objective artists painted was controlled by their responding to marks made by the brush. Their paintings presented the continuous movement life possesses. This movement has many focal points and may be observed in the reproductions of my non-objective work.

Unlike most non-objective painters, I do not necessarily present pictorial things on the surface or within a limited space close to the surface. I am more naturally drawn to working with implied depths which seem closer to the space between things in my environment.

I learned many things from working non-objectively. At first it was frustrating for me to make paintings which had no pictorial system, such as perspective. There was a great deal of experimentation

involved. Many accidents occurred and were accepted or rejected in the attempt to satisfy a complete statement. At times I approached the canvas not knowing what I was going to paint. The first mark was very exciting. It would mean so much even though it might be buried in the end. I felt that each move did something which could be retained even for use at a later date.

Finding unity through inventing symbols and their environments, I maintained a non-arbitrary position. Color was not always constructed in the plastic sense. It was used as a drawing medium and to break monotony. It remained more organically related to the desert where I was living. Color was not consciously considered for its orchestration until I became involved in guiding classroom experiments with color.

"Perception of the Measurable", related to my recent collages, involves observing then evaluating non-objective images for their pictorial worth. "Collage with Red" best illustrates what I mean. In forming the collage I wanted to evoke a feeling of continuous movement. The formal elements in the collage were organized in relation to this objective. I had to observe and evaluate the importance of these elements in relation to my objective and the organization of form. Viewing the final product, I find all the elements demand attention but not with the same forcefulness. There

seems to be a spatial play back and forth between the elements which relate to the collage as a whole.

Recently, I have considered the motivation of my early vision. The mental images recorded as a child have affected my perception of visual things.

I looked at the hills and ships at the docks. I saw large shapes. Gabled houses were separated by shrub masses. Glaring light penetrated the trees. I remember my environment as being strong in its simplicity.

Currently I am concerned with relating my early vision to subject matter and presenting a direction which is formally controlled.

Subject matter is not necessarily required of painting. To me it is another dimension (representation and its psychological associations). Psychological associations in my paintings reflect my response to experience. In this sense my paintings involving subject matter may come closest to presenting what I see. I am limited by the painting medium and my preparedness for organizing form. I am directed through a response to things perceived and their interpretation.

Discovering new pictorial solutions, I am trying to increase unity in the vision my paintings present. After I make a pictorial solution to a problem it may be necessary, in anticipation of the outcome, to alter the solution. In other words the outcome is what

matters. If I accepted each answer to a problem the result would be a conglomeration of answers, not a painting. Solutions to problems in my paintings are discovered at two different levels; first, that of sensory awareness, and second, that of comprehension. I have experienced solutions which are only sensed for a period of time before they are understood. These answers are more exciting for me. I emotionally respond to their presence and remain curious as to their importance. After a period of time the pictorial answer which is only sensed may be understood and used again. A solution in the large "Self-portrait" helped develop my vision. For some time I altered elements behind the figure. Finally I realized these elements were not compatible with the figure, so I painted them out. I soon discovered the tonality in the figure had been greatly enhanced by the color of the background. The painting "Raima" allowed me to explore similar tonalities even further.

Thus far I have only mentioned solutions to pictorial problems in paintings. Recent answers, outside of painting, have also increased my vision and have found their way into my paintings. Perhaps these solutions were introduced through working non-objectively in the collage medium. Working in collage, as Schwitters did, I arranged discarded materials on a limited surface. The materials immediately, when put into this limited area, took on new

meaning. Last summer I did a drawing which called for two different objects, one a tree, the other a figure; when combined, they evoked a meaning not unlike the collages.

Some of my current paintings can be better understood through the discovery of the compositional device used in the drawing. The large painting "Raima" was developed in a similar manner. Different studies before and during the growth of the painting were combined in organizing the painting. The painting "Calendulas" was formed directly and in the studio. The composition was unknowingly inspired by the drawing of the figure and the tree. The painting "Desert House" required a compositional device which revealed itself as a building from a different location.

"Perception of the Measurable", related to my present paintings, involves observing then evaluating objective images for their pictorial worth. "Meyer Street" is a painting which can be explained through my observation and evaluation of what I saw. I wanted to paint the location because it reminded me of simple shapes I saw as a child. Each element in the environment seemed important. In order to achieve simplicity I found it necessary to make continual alterations. I discovered I was also influenced by what appeared to be continuous movement in the location. In order to paint the wide area which excited me, it was necessary to use many focal points. The movement which resulted was similar to the movement in my non-objective work.

This painting suggests a link to a previous way of working. I had to continually observe then evaluate objective things, both in the location and the painting.

Recently I noticed the divisions of halves and thirds in both my early and late paintings. This was a rather exciting discovery, for it made me more clearly understand my way of seeing from its earlier development, as a child, up to the present time. It has also been rewarding in explaining why I prefer such painters as Hopper, Motherwell, Corot, Picasso, Mondrian, and Morandi. I hope to make conscious explorations of these divisions in my future work, and study the paintings of those who have used similar divisions.

It is too early for me to make any evaluation of my present ideas in terms of my work. I am only beginning to find my own answers.

APPENDIX



Figure 1. Young Man. Oil. 12 x 12 inches.



Figure 2. Collage with Red. Mixed Media. 18 x 24 inches.



Figure 3. Still Life. Oil. 30 x 23 inches.



Figure 4. M Collage. Mixed Media. 40 x 45 inches.



Figure 5. Raima. Polymer. 66 x 84 inches.



Figure 6. Self-portrait. Polymer. 33 x 46 inches.



Figure 7. Study. Polymer. 18 x 20 inches.



Figure 8. Desert House. Mixed Media. 24 x 32 inches.



Figure 9. Meyer Street. Oil. 20 x 30 inches.



Figure 10. Calendulas. Oil. 18 x 24 inches.