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A creative interpretation of abstract painting

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A CREATIVE INTERPRETATION
OF ABSTRACT PAINTING

A Thesis
Presented to the
Art Department Faculty
Indiana State Teachers College
Terre Haute, Indiana

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Dwight Winenger
August, 1959

INDIANA STATE
TEACHERS COLLEGE
TERRE HAUTE, INDIANA

THESIS APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis of Dwight Winenger, contribution of the Graduate Division, Indiana State Teachers College, Number 195, Series 1, under the title--

A Creative Interpretation of Abstract Painting

is hereby approved as counting toward the completion of the Master's Degree in the amount of 8 hours' credit.

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PREFACE

This paper was an outgrowth of the writer's need to develop a creative philosophy of art to guide him in his work as an artist and teacher. The purpose of this paper was not primarily research, although extensive research was carried out to form a necessary background for the development of a defensible philosophy. It deals largely with a series of paintings which were executed to show the effect of the writer's philosophy upon his work and to serve as a concrete basis for drawing conclusions about his philosophy.

A paper which deals with the two very different methods artistic expression and philosophic thought must solve certain problems of organization. The writer believes that the philosophic thinker must be objectively concerned with the formulation of ideas suggested by experience. The artist's method should be more intuitive and more subjective. He deals with experience, but his personality is employed as a medium. The philosopher minimizes the effect of his personality to obtain a more universally valid statement. The artist, on the other hand, feels that the effect of his personality is necessary to make his work pertain to human experience. The artist attempts universality, but personality

is his key to expression. This paper attempts to achieve an artistic expression with sound bases in philosophy. It further attempts to analyze the artistic means of expression and derive principles which will continue to guide the artist in his production. The writer of this paper, therefore, is at times a writer stating philosophic thoughts and at other times an artist expressing himself through artistic means. He feels that his situation should be explained to the reader so that there will be no confusion when the term of reference might be changed from writer to artist or from artist to writer.

It is the writer's opinion that the purpose of a philosophy of art is to justify, in a sense, and to explain and unify an artistic expression. A philosophy of art implies an extant mode of expression. An art can be influenced by its organized philosophy; it can grow more confident and purposeful as a result of its being defended, but an art is not the product of its philosophy. A philosophy of art is an outgrowth of the art itself. Thus, the mode of artistic expression which was the subject and object of this paper was necessarily in a nebulous state of existence before any research was carried out for this paper. The exact problem, then, is not the development of an expression and its philosophy, but rather it is the identification of an expression and its philosophy. The research part of this paper was completed, therefore, with a definitely philosophic purpose. It could

not be coldly objective. Similarly, the portion of this paper which deals with specific artistic expression would be profoundly affected by the results of research. The creative part of this paper, therefore, could not be entirely subjective and self-contained. The integration of objective and subjective effects helped prevent inconsistencies of tone from endangering the organization of the paper.

The writer wishes to acknowledge the assistance of Keith Hall, who photographed the paintings which are reproduced in the third chapter of this paper. He also wishes to thank the Audio-Visual Center of Indiana State Teachers College for the use of certain of their facilities. The writer feels it necessary to comment on the quality of the reproductions above mentioned. The mechanical considerations of the nature of the film and of the developing process resulted in a mutation of color in many of the reproductions. The color orange, which the artist used in many of his paintings, became grayed in many of the reproductions. White areas often emerged as areas of light red-violet or blue-violet. Cropping slightly altered the proportions of some of the paintings, but the reproductions are otherwise quite accurate.

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PART I.

CHAPTER I

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

Statement of the problem.--This paper is an attempt to solve a primarily creative problem. It intends, first of all, to define a mode of artistic expression and, further, to define an appropriate philosophy of art. These definitions were accomplished by two interlinking processes: historical research with a vague purpose already in mind and purposeful creation with the harvest of research dimly in the background. The mode of expression was, of course, a personal one, based upon strictly personal tastes and philosophy. It must be admitted, however, that even the most hermetic personality is a product of its durational environment; therefore, even a strictly personal interpretation of life or art has social significance. No one can remain unaffected by his surroundings; and by reacting constructively to his environment, one actually adds to his surroundings and contributes not only to the accumulations of culture but also to himself directly and indirectly. The ideal purpose of this paper was to make such a contribution.

Analysis of the problem.--The solution of the problem involved, as has been said, two interlinking processes. This

fact is of utmost importance. It profoundly affected the methods which the writer used; it affected the form which was necessary for the paper; and it gave some clue as to the nature of the problem itself. The dualistic process of research and creation was a basis of control and an assurance of a unity and direction of purpose. Material was gathered with a vague, yet influential pattern of interest. The pattern of interest was directed toward the realization, in more or less distinct terms, of a philosophy of art. The definition of a mode of expression was the goal of this philosophy, and the mode of expression was also the motivating and guiding factor in the formation of its philosophy because the mode of expression was already present in an undefined form in the mind of the writer at the time of his writing.

The writer's problem, therefore, was to allow an intuitive philosophy to give itself birth by providing it with meaningful images which could nearly parallel the meaning of the philosophy. Research was accomplished to glean such meaningful images from the pages of works of authority as well as to collect ideas which might enhance the value of the philosophy itself. At best, an objectified philosophy can only parallel the conception which is denoted by it. It is the nature of abstract thought, as will be shown, to be often imageless or, at best, to possess only approximate images. When images are chosen to represent a concept, one must often be satisfied with approaching a similar meaning or obtaining a qualitative approximation. The only other alternative would be the coining of new

terms whose meaning would be controlled and exact; however such a solution would be far from satisfactory. Abstract terminology must be understood in terms of the abiding and cumulative quality of many particular effects. An understanding of broad concepts is gained only through the experience of particulars. Thus, a new term can only be explained by reference to other older terms because pure experience is a completely individual matter. Experience can be communicated only in terms of abstractions, and abstractions are necessarily approximate. Should one attempt to define new concepts without reference to older concepts which are necessarily inaccurate, he should have to coin further terminology. Such a procedure would necessitate the endless project of redefining definitions, and the logical conclusion of such a project would be the impossibility of inventing a new language based upon highly restrictive and exact meanings and experiences. Such a procedure is made impossible by more than temporal circumstances.

The quality of experience varies from individual to individual, therefore each individual would require his own private language. In effect, each person does have his own language even though he may use the same words as other people to denote and connote similar meanings. The agglomerate of effects which are associated with a word constitutes its meaning. This mass of effects is at least slightly different for each individual since no two people possess exactly the same experience. The point of this discussion of abstract symbolism is to make clear a vital aspect of this paper's problem. Meanings can

only be approximated in communication. Symbols, we must remember, are not intended to be absolutes. Nevertheless, it is necessary to give even approximate names to concepts in order to clarify thinking and to make discussion possible.

Need for the study.--Whereas the purpose of this paper is largely personal, i.e. an outgrowth of personal needs on the part of its writer, a need for the study can well be perceived beyond the limits of the writer's particular needs. It is a well-known fact that abstract art--the broad term is here used to include so-called semi-abstract and non-objective works--is very much misunderstood today; not only by the layman, who will boast of his illiteracy, but also by the more artistically literate and by many artists who scorn modern art on supposedly technical bases or who have an affinity for modern art but are content to justify it on very superficial grounds. The superficial appreciator is perhaps the most insipid of the lot and more dangerous than the others to the cause of art because he is mistaken to be an authority. If a supposed authority cannot effectively defend his convictions, one should not expect that the innocents who look up to authority will be impressed or enlightened by his small accomplishment.

Art today, as many other of today's human pursuits, has become a specialized field; however art's popular roots have laid it open to criticism to which other modern fields, mathematics for example, have not been subjected. The modern man on the street does not question Einstein's theory of relativity. He is resigned to the supposed fact that he was not meant to

understand it. He assumes with little question that if the experts say that Einstein's theory is valid, it must be valid. His acceptance of such views give science its nearly unquestioned popular reign today. Science has always been esoteric. It has always had its specialized language and its specialized methods. Art, fortunately and unfortunately, is quite another matter.

Art is as old as the race of man itself. Art is an outgrowth of that consciousness of self which has helped make man different from the other animals. Art has grown from a very primitive foundation. Man is accustomed to understanding and feeling close to his art. Art today is as much a part of contemporary life as it has ever been, but man's way of life is quite different today than it was three hundred years or three thousand years ago. Today, art serves purposes similar to those it served then; but in remaining subject to our way of life, art has been affected by the scientific method without becoming a part of science. Art today must analyze itself and prove itself. Most of the radical changes which has occurred in our art may be traced to the fact that even today's art must have logically defensible bases. The crime, however, is not that the layman does not understand today's art. The crime is that he does not comprehend the reason for his lack of understanding. If the common man today could understand his complicated world, it would almost inevitably follow that he would understand the art of his time.

The writer of this paper was well aware that his work probably would not travel beyond the audience of a thesis committee; however, that probability was not sufficient to deter him from

writing out of a socially felt need for an understanding of abstract art.

Technical terminology.--It might well be suspected that much of the confusion which exists in today's contemporary field of art is a direct result of an ignorance of terminology on the part of experts as well as on the part of lay people. The writer found a fairly complete discussion of the derivation, connotations, and usage of terms in Blanshard's Retreat from Likeness, Chapter Six. Her discussion was welcomed for its eclectic objectivity.

Ritchie observed that the term "abstract" carries a negative connotation. The verbal "to abstract" commonly means to remove or to take away details.¹ Ritchie failed to mention, however, that such taking away is a means to a positive, not a negative, end. Most abstraction is accomplished to create a unified picture not to destroy or disassemble nature; although such disassembling is necessary, it is a means to reassembling, a means of creation. On the artistic level, nature can only be "used"; i.e. nature's elements and the effects of its elements are not imitated but utilized to form a human expression. Art and nature are separate entities.

Ritchie's observation, although it was basically true, indicates a need for reorientation. The abstraction denotes an entirely different type of art. The state of abstraction refers to something which has already been extracted from natural particulars. Such a work of art has no particular reference to nature as

¹ Andrew Carnduff Ritchie, Abstract Painting and Sculpture in America (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1951), p. 11.

such. One might hear objections that such an abstraction is in reality a new object, an object which is as real and as natural as "a leaf or a stone."² This same "object" of art might be called not abstract at all but rather "concrete"³ because it is a contribution to, and therefore an object of, nature. Some authorities would object to the assumption that a work of art can be a concrete or natural object because, they would maintain, art is a conscious product of man and therefore not truly natural. Others would maintain that the works of certain automatists might well be considered concrete because they intend to be not consciously perpetrated. Others would assert that every work of art is a product of the conscious, that man receives stimuli from his environment through his conscious being even though he may not always be aware of it. They would further maintain that it is highly unlikely that a man can consciously exploit the unconscious. At any rate, they would suggest, if such exploitation were possible, it could only be objectified in a work of art by the conscious. A consideration of the term abstract inevitably leads one into a maze of definition. It seems that one must define terms as he uses them; however, the term abstract found its use in the title of this paper precisely because it has a broad reference.

The writer originally intended to treat the subject of so-called non-objective art, but the subject had to be approached upon firm ground. Thus the broad term abstract suited the purpose of

² Frances Margaret Bradshaw Blanshard, Retreat from Likeness in the Theory of Painting (2d ed.; New York: Columbia University Press, 1949), p. 119. (The words are Arp's.)

³ Ibid.

this paper's title because it includes here all forms of abstract art from near abstraction toward what is commonly called non-objective or non-representational art.

The writer found that it was also necessary to consider the terms non-objective and non-representational. Both terms were objected to by various authorities on the grounds that their connotation is negative. "Paintings distinguished chiefly by what they avoid do not arouse eager expectation."⁴ Furthermore, the term non-objective might possibly be construed to mean that such works are lacking in objectivity or that they are devoid of reality.⁵ The term originally meant to convey the idea that the non-objective work patterns itself after no particular object in nature, but the nature of the term itself can make it misunderstood to mean a work which has no purpose or goal, a haphazard splashing as it were.

The term non-representational can also be objected to on the grounds of its negative connotation. Josef Albers proposed that the term was furthermore fundamentally redundant. He suggested that the prefixes non- and re canceled each other and that a more economical term would be the term presentational.

To hold that something does not refer to anything is to affirm that it makes a direct and immediate impression. This last statement surely holds of an abstraction: it exists in itself and is directly apprehended.⁶

Here, Blanshard was using the term abstract in its "pure" abstract or absolute sense. It is necessary to understand what is meant when

⁴ Ibid., p. 120.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

such particular and general terms as "presentational" and "abstract" are used; but it should not be the artist's practice to choose a particular style of painting to follow even though the specific naming of types of painting facilitates such adoption of stylistic traits. The reasoning behind the preceding statement and its implications will be discussed later in this paper. It should be sufficient to state here that such conscious adoption of stylistic traits is superficial at best. Its aesthetic potentialities are hardly creative since the technical form of such a work does not arise from any personal need for expression.

Initial assumptions.--It must be assumed at the outset that it is possible to do relatively objective preparation with a purpose in mind. Objectivity should not, in other words, imply total disinterest or lack of purpose. Such objectivity would see one's energies expended ineffectually in all directions. Secondly, it must be assumed that it is necessary, or at least reasonably so for the purposes of this paper, to justify a mode of painting. It would seem that rationalization and justification are characteristics of the critical mind. Verbalization furthermore makes ideas articulate and communicable to a certain extent. Communication is a necessary human activity. Communication permits the exchange of ideas and it presupposes the formulation of ideas into communicable symbols.

It must be assumed that a paper such as this one can accomplish the task of not only communicating ideas through symbols but also of permitting its writer to organize his impressions and thoughts more effectively. This paper must also act as a medium

of another sort. It must mediate between non-verbal works of art and a verbally as well as visually interested audience. A final assumption would be that such mediation is necessary and possible.

Works of art, as opposed to works which are primarily assertive, employ a language of intuition and feeling. Authorities seem to agree that an artist is not mysteriously endowed with the ability to communicate feelings and emotional attitudes. Few men, furthermore, are endowed with the ability to directly communicate assertions. It requires one type of constitution to be intuitive and another type to be logical and formulative, but the actual ability to communicate intuitions and assertions is learned. It must be assumed that the writer of this paper has sufficient control of his apperceptive nature to enable him to conceive valid paintings and also to analyze his work and communicate his feelings to an appropriate audience with only a minimum of difficulty and a comparative maximum of effectiveness.

CHAPTER II

THE NATURE OF ART AND ABSTRACTION

The implications of an empirical study.--In building toward a defensible concept of abstract art, it should be desirable to begin with nearly common experience. Moore, in his The Process of Abstraction: an Experimental Study, attempted to explore abstract thought on a very elementary level. His purpose was to discover the nature and composition of abstract thought. His method was to study empirically, by means of calculated experiments with controllable elements, the fundamental human process of abstraction. His was a psychological purpose, but his work was broadly enough conceived to be applicable to the purposes of this paper. Moore's experiments dealt with basic apprehension and recognition or recall. These very elements are the basis of the interchange between man and nature, and art is an outgrowth of this relationship.

Moore differentiated between centrally and peripherally excited sensational and affective elements.⁷ The difference which Moore found between these elements was largely a matter of relative accessibility, and the difference varied from individual to individual. Furthermore, the location of centrally

⁷ Thomas Verner Moore, The Process of Abstraction: an Experimental Study (Vol. I, #2; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1910), p. 81.

and peripherally aroused elements was a changing or transitory one even within the individual. Thus, a single element of perception might at one time be aroused centrally in the mind and at another, not very distant time, be peripherally aroused, i.e. vaguely accessible.

And yet the matter of being centrally or peripherally aroused was not merely a matter of the mind's attention. The attention could be consciously directed toward peripherally aroused elements; however, even when the peripherally excited stimuli were the exclusive object of attention, their symbolic meaning could not be clearly perceived. The peripherally aroused elements existed in the mind more on the level of feeling than on the level of image. On the other hand, when the attention was directed toward the centrally aroused ideas which the peripherally aroused elements further suggested, a "meaning" was perceived; but errors or lapses in the stimuli might then pass unnoticed⁸ seemingly because of the very nearly imperceptible nature of the peripheral feelings.

The foregoing ideas were suggested to Moore by the experiments of Taylor. If the writer may be allowed to explain these ideas more graphically, perhaps a certain ambiguity will be dispelled. Each centrally aroused idea is a sort of image, i.e. an idea with a perceptible meaning; however the centrally aroused idea is surrounded by peripheral ideas which contribute meaning in the form of feelings to the centrally aroused stimulus but do not have an imaged meaning of their own even when attention is shifted positively upon them. In other words, the

⁸ Ibid.

peripherally aroused stimuli are only indirectly accessible to symbolization. When attention is directed to the peripherally aroused ideas, they do not gain a directly perceptible meaning, but the effect of the peripherally excited elements of the peripherally aroused idea leads to the perception of another idea which can be given an imaged meaning.

Thus we see that the ideas which possess definite imagery are intertwined with ideas which do not possess such a concrete means of reference. The peripherally aroused elements lend definite feeling to the nature of the centrally aroused elements. They also contribute to the mood of the idea's concept, but they cannot be directly comprehended or perceived. They can only be apperceived as stepping-stones or intermediaries to other, more directly meaningful ideas. Artistic expression is in many ways dependent upon the intricate relationships which exist between the components of ideas.

Watt's attempt to explain the flow of consciousness⁹ may be related to the above concept of the nature and structure of ideas. Meanings or images are linked by feelings through moods, i.e. ideas have a tendency to move in an almost mechanical manner through the conscious mind. Two ideas which have been related at some time in the past will tend to relate themselves again in the consciousness. In other words, conventional "trains" or patterns of thought are set up.

However, this process is not merely mechanical. Trains of thought may be controlled and new relationships created by any "task" which the mind may attempt to accomplish. Thus an active

⁹ Ibid., p. 95.

mind which continually places new tasks before itself is a growing mind because ideas are thereby brought continually into new relationships. The need to establish conscious relationships between existing, but apparently unrelated, ideas furthermore tends to create mental tasks for the introspective mind. In addition, a mind is made more accessible by purposeful thought. Purposing pushes thought beyond the comfortable limits of the existing linkages between ideas, and new meanings are constructed from purely experiential content. A mind has reached a sort of fulfillment when all the elements of past and present experience are accessible.

The writer has observed that many modern art forms, including contemporary painting and poetry, make extensive use of the broad relationship which exists between ideas centrally perceived and ideas peripherally apperceived. He would offer the suggestion that the contemporary artist, and the poet especially because he more obviously makes use of symbolization, is capable of a broad, even though unconsciously realized, view of his own experience. The contemporary artist may apprehend not only one idea at a time with its peripheral feelings and its abiding mood, but he may apprehend several, originally related ideas complete with their peripheral feelings and moods. The poet's subject matter, therefore, may be imageless feelings expressed in terms of broadly related meanings. The creative product of such an athletic mind may often appear so incomprehensible that even the poet himself may attribute his work to the unconscious. Only when the poet attempts to exploit this misunderstanding, however, does his

work become really incomprehensible. The poet will naturally tend to associate ideas freely. He should not be expected to have a formulated understanding of his own thinking process. The artist's work is truly creative when it proceeds from an almost naïve psychic motivation of relationships.

Perhaps the reader may feel at this point that his writer has wandered beyond purposeful limits, that he has created, perhaps, an opaque myth of pure words. The writer would defend his discussion by pointing out that his purpose has been to relate purely abstract thought to artistic expression. That relationship has been roughly sketched; but, on the other hand, it may be advisable for the writer to return to a point near his original starting place and recollect some definitions and empirically supported facts which may make the relationship between thought and expression more clear. Moore cited the experiments of Bagley. In his experiments, Bagley found an element which he did not feel was either imagery or feeling. This other element of understanding was given the name "mood." "The mind adjusts itself uniformly to uniform conditions: this seems to be the essence of the apperceptive "mood."¹⁰ That is to say that the mood of a concept is a type of general impression of the effects of the particular elements which comprise that concept. The mind manufactures a uniform approximation of uniformly related experiences, and that approximation is called "mood." Mood is definitely associated with the revival of past experience. Moore stated that mood is not mental imagery but that it may include mental

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 81-82. (Moore quoted Bagley.)

imagery as a part of its complex.

An idea, however, is not an entity. Ideas are inextricably related one to another in the mind. Thus one cannot say that the "mood" or the "concept," which Moore himself considered to be the kernel of imagery and feeling,¹¹ is distinct from other concepts. One may arbitrarily draw a boundary around an idea, its imagery and its feelings, and call this the "mood" or the "concept" of that complete idea, but he will inevitably be led to consider that the peripheral feelings of one "concept" may also be included within the limits of other concepts as perhaps similarly peripheral feelings. Concepts, as it were, interlock; and it is this very flexible interlocking which gives thought its dynamic quality. The abstract term "concept" is a convenience made for the sake of examination. We must therefore be careful not to mistake the rigid abstraction for its dynamic counterpart.

The foregoing statements bring to attention another aspect of thought: that of the consciousness of relationship.

Dürr thinks that along with our sensations there is our consciousness of time and space, of identity and similarity, etc. These things are not sensations or reducible to sensations. They might all be classes under the expression "consciousness of relationship," and this it is that will prove to be the ultimate analysis of thought.¹²

The atoms of thought, to use a more or less graphic illustration, are surrounded by an ethereal quality. Imagery becomes the nucleus of the atom concept or mood. Feelings become its electrons, and the entire space between the elements of the thought

¹¹ Ibid., p. 187.

¹² Ibid., p. 107.

atom and between the atoms themselves becomes the ether of relationship. The consciousness of relationship is important. The relationship itself would exist whether or not one were conscious of it; but when one becomes aware of the relationship between elements, he can critically employ it toward conscious goals. In much the same way as a consciousness of gravity makes it possible for the astronomer to locate new bodies in space by noting the affected orbit of a known body, one may locate and realize new ideas by locating the cause of certain effects of relationship upon known ideas. It becomes a matter of bringing the unknown internal elements of experiential quality into an accessible consciousness where they can be used to enrich further experience. Thought, or the train of consciousness, depends upon the conscious use, intuitive though it may sometimes be, of the relationships which exist between the elements of experience.

If the concepts of image, feeling, and mood are now understood, it may be desirable to define, for the sake of technical accuracy, three terms which have been employed in this section. The three terms are: (1) perception, (2) apperception, and (3) apprehension.

In the visual perception of an object there is one point which may be regarded as a stage of relative perfection, and that is the acquisition of a definite image. In the process of apperception there is no such stage which may be designated as perfect, nor indeed is it always easy to say whether or not the object has been apperceived at all. . . . Perception and apperception were intertwined in the process of apprehending the common element.¹³

In the light of what has been previously set down, these three

¹³ Ibid., p. 128.

terms seem merely to be specialized terms of reference. If one may assume, for the purposes of this discussion, that the transitive verb to sense approximates the collective meaning of the transitive verbs to perceive, to apperceive, and to apprehend; it may be maintained that a perception is the sensing of an image, and apperception is the sensing of a feeling, and an apprehension is the sensing of a concept or mood. Thus, an apprehension denotes the collective quality of a perception and its apperceptions since a concept or mood includes an image and its concomitant feelings.

In conclusion, it should be noted that the specific lines which have been constructed to make clear certain elementary aspects of abstract thought are entirely arbitrary even though they may be based upon empirical evidence. In a very true sense, it has been necessary to abstract in order to understand the sensational aspects of apprehension and abstraction. For purposes of illustration, the writer has crystalized and examined in comparative detail the aspects of abstract thought. He would repeat the warning that the process is not so simple as it has been presented to be. The thinking process is dynamic, always shifting, and flexible. There are as many types of thought as there are individuals, but the basic process is consistent.

Binet arrived at the conclusion that neither visual imagery nor internal word, either alone or together, account for that complex mental process which we term thought.¹⁴ He also concluded that the image is an arbitrary sign to which the subject

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 89.

gives at will a particular or general significance.¹⁵ "Concepts then, not images, are the essential elements of our thinking."¹⁶ Concepts, however, may often include images. An important thing to remember is the fact that "there exist imageless mental contents representative of a visible object."¹⁷ The key word in the preceding sentence is the word "representative." The visualization of a visual object presupposes an image, but a visual object may actually be represented abstractly without any particular image.

[There] are mental states in which several concepts tend to appear in consciousness--but no one succeeds in doing so. As a result, you have a more or less unanalyzable mental state without definite characteristic. The tendency of the many "concepts with meaning" to appear in consciousness results in an imageless mental content, which is hard to characterize, simply because many characteristics tend to come before the mind but no one succeeds in doing so.¹⁸

The above quoted paragraph recalls a proposition which the writer made earlier in reference to the contemporary poet. The proposition referred as well to the contemporary artist because it depended upon a quality of the contemporary mind. The writer's proposition asserted something to the effect that the mind of the modern poet is often able to consider thoughts, ideas, or concepts broadly, i.e. that he is able to give nearly equal consideration to several concepts at once. The result would be similar to that which Moore above refers to as "an imageless mental state." However, it is the creative artist's further duty,

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 90.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 102.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 180.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 183-84.

in a sense, to approximate this imageless mental state, to create an approximate, at least partially imaged, concept and then to further approximate this concept in terms of objective, that is to say concrete, form. It should be obvious that such concrete approximation cannot be carried out in terms of any one existent image. It therefore becomes often necessary for the modern artist to create new concepts which approximate imageless collections of older concepts. The result of such creation must be truly inspiring for the artist because he will have created a new concept which will in turn beget, so to speak, a natural object, an object which can be experienced by others. In addition, and perhaps the fact of most importance, the artist will have expanded his own understanding of the universe.

In reality, the new concept can exist only in the artist's mind. His work can be little more than the approximation of an approximation. Satisfactory creation encourages further creation because it constitutes original personal experience. Even an original concept has intrinsic elements of feeling which may serve as intermediaries to related concepts. These concepts exist potentially in feelings derived from the experience involved in the creation of the work of art. They may also potentially exist in the experience of the past, or of the future, which may yet find some peripheral element in common with the original concept.

The foregoing discussion suggests that the artist, in a sense, carves his own road through his mind. External conditions have, of course, their profound effect upon the artist and his work; but his pathway of ideas is plotted largely from strictly personal experience since the artist is the only person who can

actually know his experience after he has reached the point where he is able to originate concepts. The artist cannot communicate the pure mental content which he has conceived, and yet his creativity is assured by its psychic presuppositions as long as the artist conscientiously pursues his path to fulfillment.

An absolute fulfillment, however, would seem impossible. A point of perfection beyond which all experience is meaningless cannot exist in the live being. An existential fulfillment is the only possibility, and such fulfillment is entirely satisfactory because it offers the possibility of immediate satisfaction which promises to reproduce its kind over an infinite temporal duration. Experience is at the roots of art, and experience can carry its own rewards if it is accepted with an aesthetic awareness.

Absolute artistic volition and the impulse to imitation.--

Since this paper is to find a vital and unaffected mode of artistic expression, it will be necessary to show just what the source of such an expression might be. Worringer asserted that absolute artistic volition is the source of all true art. Research has shown, he said, that the history of art is not a history of ability.¹⁹ Ancient art assumed its various forms not because ancient artists had not the ability to do otherwise but because ancient artists willed not to do otherwise. Ancient and modern abstraction is not, therefore, the necessary product of any artistic inability. Abstraction is, on the other hand, the necessary expression of an artistic volition which can not be satisfied by any other mode of expression.

¹⁹ Wilhelm Worringer, Abstraction and Empathy; a Contribution to the Psychology of Style, trans. Michael Bullock (New York: International Universities Press, 1953), p. 9.

Worringer stated that archeologists have found that two distinct types of art coexisted in ancient Egypt. One type was the so-called "court art"; the other was a more popular type. Whereas the court art was an apparently disciplined art in that it bore only a general resemblance to nature and was rigorously stylistic or abstract, the popular art was quite "realistic." Early historians, assuming a "materialist" theory of art which held that art is basically a product of materials and techniques, found difficulty in explaining the coexistence of two such different types of art. The Egyptians should not have been able to create such realistic works as the "Scribe" or the "Village Magistrate" because their court art showed that they lacked the technical ability to produce realistic art. An explanation was found in politics. The realistic art was obviously a product of the monotheistic and individualistic reign of Ikhnaton. But this did not explain why, after the Egyptians had attained such an apparently high level of ability, they should return to the more abstract art. In actuality, the two arts had existed at the same time. There had been no return to court art. There merely had been a return to the predominance of court art. Logically, if ability and technique were the motivating factors in art and if realism were art's goal, two such divergent arts could not have coexisted, and a return to a lower type of art would have been highly improbable. Worringer's solution to the problem explained that purely "realistic" art is the product of a mere impulse to imitation. The reign of Ikhnaton encouraged elements of realism in art, but that art which is conceived as an attempt at imitation, the realistic art whose realism makes no reference to psychic conditions, is not the product of the absolute artistic volition.

If the history of art is the history of the evolution of artistic volition, it must be assumed that technical ability is only a secondary consequence of volition.²⁰

By "absolute artistic volition" is to be understood that latent inner demand which exists per se, entirely independent of the object and of the mode of creation, and behaves as will to form.²¹

"Absolute artistic volition" is not in itself unchanging. It grows from man's psychic perception of nature in relationship to himself. Artistic volition is dynamic; and yet, from a philosophic distance, artistic volition is a type of absolute in that its dynamism is internal. Technically, it is not qualified by any external consideration.

Artistic volition visualized as a sphere with two opposing poles which represent states of relationship between man and nature is an absolute. The manifestations of volition vary as the relationship between man and nature varies, but artistic volition includes this variation.

At one pole of the sphere representing artistic volition, man stands awed by the phenomena of nature. Nature is incomprehensible in its infinite confusion. At the other pole man stands in empathic communion with nature. Nature, in a sense, becomes an extension of man. Man identifies himself with nature's intricacies. That which moves in nature moves in man as well; and truly, that which man sees in himself he also sees in nature.

One pole represents the transcendental outlook; God is above nature. Nature can only bestow anguish upon man's soul. Man's burden is to withstand the ravages of nature, and his goal

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

is to eventually escape nature to unite with God.

The other pole represents the classical attitude; God and nature are one, which is to say that man and nature are one.

The process of disputation between man and the outer world naturally takes place solely within man, and is in truth nothing else than a disputation between instinct and understanding.²²

Instinct is, then, in a sense, imposed by heredity or by non-rational learning. Understanding, i.e. knowledge, is of man. It is a product of the identification of man with nature. Understanding is a non-defensive objective. Instinct, on the other hand is man's mysterious God or a "supplied" understanding--irrational rationalization if you will. The disputation between instinct and understanding, nature and man, takes place solely within man. The world must be, in actuality, indifferent; and man's God must be within man. Thus the classical outlook sees God and man united in nature.

It appears by contrast that transcendental art is in essence an imitation of a transcendental God. Man, in an attempt to gain respite from nature's unfathomable diversity, creates an image of God which, although it may make use of natural subject matter, is unlike nature. Natural forms are avoided. Where nature is inevitable, it is altered or abstracted by man's intellect. Confusing three-dimensionality is avoided. Primitive art tends to be functional and ornamental. Where it is representative, it takes abstracted two-dimensional forms. Primitive sculpture, even though it is realized in a basically three-dimensional idiom, gains much of its impact from the fact that it is conceived in two-dimensional

²² Ibid., p. 128.

terms. Modernists who conceive of art as primarily stylistic handling often unwittingly refer to the primitive sculptural two-dimensionality as a feeling for the material. Such stylists overlook the psychic implications of a piece of wood sculpture which still resembles wood. The purpose of such primitive handling is not necessarily to maintain the honest identity of the wood any more than it is necessarily a result of the use of primitive tools and materials. Rather its purpose might well be to assert the identity of man.

Primitive lines are not voluptuous. They are either straight or regularly curved. Primitive man's intellect imposes itself upon nature because he feels alien to nature. Much modern abstraction is thought by some authorities to rise from a similar feeling of alienation, but modern abstraction exhibits itself in a much more sophisticated manner. A quality of spontaneous slickness often takes the place of the naïve respect for content.

When realism was found among the art of primitive peoples it was thought to have sprung not from any psychic necessity but from the natural impulse to imitation. "The primitive imitation impulse has prevailed at all periods, and its history is a history of manual dexterity, devoid of aesthetic significance."²³ Such imitation is considered "magic" and not "art." Purely technical exercise is an embodiment of superficiality and arrogance. Such characteristics find no place in an aesthetically defensible art. Indeed, they find no place in a defensible philosophy of life.

Classical art takes joy in nature. "Art is no more and no

²³ Ibid., p. 11.

less than 'objectified self-enjoyment' (Lipps),"²⁴ but art is self-enjoyment not for the pleasure of self. Art enjoys the glories of nature because of the psychic interchange which is a vital part of such enjoyment. The self is extended to include nature. Art is the manifestation of a love which understands and bestows itself without qualification. The classical spirit furthermore finds a unity between instinct and knowledge. Man is instinctively led to search for knowledge, and an understanding of nature encourages man to trust his instincts.

Thus the evolution of artistic volition fluctuates between the poles of transcendentalism and classicism just as man's view of the world fluctuates.

Art is simply one more form for the expression of those psychic energies which, anchored in the same process, determine the phenomenon of religion and of changing world views.²⁵

Art, however, does not attempt to fulfill functions which are not its own. It cannot serve the purposes of literature or religion. It must, however, grow from the same psychic impulses from which literature and religion spring. Art must be the product of a psychic volition.

Naturalism and style.--The fluctuations in the quality of the artistic volition may be observed in the art of various cultures, and they may also be observed in the works within a given culture or even possibly within the range of the works of a single artist. Worringer pointed out another dualism which may be perceived within the work of art and which may be directly related to

²⁴ Ibid., p. 132.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 127.

the artistic volition. This dualism consists in the relationship between the two more or less relative concepts of naturalism and style. The term naturalism refers to those characteristics in a work of art which can be traced to the positive influence of nature. Worringer used the term naturalism as it was above defined. He did not necessarily refer to the more common empirical naturalism which attempts to imitate nature. He called naturalistic any element which identified itself, however remotely, with nature.

Naturalism is a correlative of style. Style refers to that tendency in artistic expression to consider means as an integral part of the expression. A painter will, of course, use means which lend themselves to painting, and he may in the same painting employ naturalistic content. Naturalism and style may be considered separately, but Worringer intended them to be complementary in the work of art. A relative balance of naturalism and style may be found in the works of the African negro as well as in the works of the ancient Greek. The style will have changed, of course, as the reference to nature will have changed. Here, style does not refer to the stylistic traits which are so easily adapted to modes and fashions of decoration. It refers, as has been suggested, to the unaffected adaptation of expression to technical means.

Worringer suggested that the classical attitude would encourage a predominance of naturalistic elements. The forms of nature would be celebrated. Transcendental art would not necessarily by contrast emphasize stylistic elements. Style in itself is a derivative of the respect for the nature of means, and yet style is implied in transcendental art. "Art is not nature, but is nature

transformed by entering into new relationships where it evokes a new emotional response."²⁶ Thus all art transforms nature to add artistic meaning to its objective content. Art implies experience, and the nature of this experience is made evident in a work of art by its stylistic features.

Stylization, in the present sense, heightens in the work of art the quality of resistance and conflict between man and nature. "Resistance and conflict have always been factors in generating art."²⁷ If there were not a measure of resistance and conflict between man and nature, there would be no art. Man, like the animals, would take an uncritical place among the phenomena of nature; however, man is a self-conscious animal. He is aware not only of the nature around him but also of himself in that surrounding nature. He not only perceives nature, but he sees himself as a perceiver. Man's mind has set up a conscious barrier between man and nature. This barrier finds art as a means of expression, and art is that ideal expression which allows man to make clear to himself that he does comprehend the mysterious nature of his existence. Naturalism and style are inevitable elements in any work of art, and the degree of predominance of either in a particular work is determined to a large extent by the nature of the creative intuition of its creator.

The concepts of naturalism and style may be noted as manifestations of knowledge and instinct. The writer wishes to make clear that style, i.e. the style which is pertinent here, must be closely related to instinct. Stylistic traits, on the

²⁶ John Dewey, Art and Experience (New York: Minton, Balch, and Company, 1934), p. 115.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 339.

other hand, are often intentionally employed for superficial effects. Style then becomes knowledge rather than instinct. Style, however, is instinctive and not knowledge when it is not intentionally employed as style. An artist instinctively knows that a painting is not nature, and he handles his tools in a manner which will allow the true nature of his painting to be evident in the finished work.

Style and technique are very closely related. Technique just as style, when it is valid and necessary, will proceed naturally from the very act of expression; and such a natural technique will inevitably suit the mode of expression because of the very nature of its derivation. The writer's discussion suggests that style and technique are so closely related to basic expression that when their relationship is not strained they exist as one.

Form is similarly related to technique and expression. The term form is here used to denote the broad concept, the abiding quality that carries a work's very expression. Form denotes "the total arrangement of the picture space."²⁸ The total and immediate impact of a work of art is a result of its form. Form is often discussed in terms of compositional conventions. Such conventions can be employed with calculated and sometimes remarkable results. The product of such formulations, however, can only be mechanical at best. This discussion would imply that form, just as style and technique, must grow out of the quality of expression and into a quality of experience, which is in reality the true form of a work.

²⁸ Blanshard, op. cit., pp. 151-52.

Content is another aspect of form. Content in modern abstraction has become direct and formal. Contrasted with representational art, the content of an abstract painting is almost directly available. In a painting by the romanticist Delacroix, for example, content is largely emotional, and the emotional content is conveyed both directly and indirectly. Some of the content is carried by the formal patterns of value and color, but the majority of the impact is made indirectly by the connotations of recognizable subject matter. Human figures are represented in emotionally suggestive stance and with emotionally fired expressions. A lavish use of symbols are found in the form of classical drapery, torches, and the like. Later, Cezanne made a revolutionary advance when he decided that the still life was an ideal subject for a painting. Lemons, cloth, and crockery are not in themselves as emotionally suggestive as prancing horses, semi-nude women, and recently expired corpses; but for Cezanne, his subject matter was preferable to that of Delacroix because it allowed him to be more direct in his appeal. It allowed him to make a painting which was more nearly self-contained. Delacroix depended to an enormous extent upon the indirect suggestions of his subject matter.

Cezanne's subject matter was relatively unimportant. Nature furnished him with colors and forms which he could organize into a picture whose content was largely independent of external considerations. The next logical step in the process was the complete elimination of subject matter as such. The content, of course, remained. Much of the content of a Delacroix is carried

by its general form. Even more of the content of a Cezanne is communicated by its form. Almost all of the content of a painting by Arshile Gorky is realized in terms of formal considerations. Abstract art has not deleted content; it has intensified content by deleting what might be considered the indirect means of external subject matter.

In abstraction, form and content are obviously the same; there is no separate content. Form and expression are one; the arrangement of color and line in itself is moving. Form and color are one; the arrangement of colors constitutes the form. Form is the whole composition, the artist's ordering of his materials in perfect unity.²⁹

This perfect unity is not an arbitrary device. It is an essential outgrowth of the desire for an intense and direct expression of experience.

A work of art may pursue one of many paths to realization. An artist must be able to choose a mode of expression which is appropriate to the nature of the expression itself.

But whatever path the work of art pursues, it, just because it is a full and intense experience, keeps alive the power to experience the common world in its fullness. It does so by reducing the raw materials of that experience to matter ordered through form.³⁰

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Dewey, op. cit., p. 133.

PART II.

CHAPTER III

A SERIES OF CREATIVE EXPERIMENTS

Introduction.--The discussion at the close of the preceding chapter implied that the spectator of the unmodified work of art can know little of that work but its form. Since style, technique, and content grow from the nature of the expression and since style, technique, and content manifest themselves in a formal quality; the expression, the nature of its volition, and the quality of the aesthetic experience are directly available through the form of the abstract painting. The unmodified work of art, however, does not imply a title for the work. It does not imply, in fact, any external knowledge outside the work itself. A painting of a crucifixion scene, therefore, cannot be an unmodified work of art unless the spectator knows nothing of Christian literature. The ideal spectator would even know nothing of the conventions of artistic technique and symbolization. Literary and conventional references are external qualities of paintings and they therefore modify its pure formal meaning for the spectator.

The paintings which are the components of this thesis are in many ways modified works of art. First of all, since they were conceived in terms of the purposes of this paper, they are actually aspects of a larger form. Secondly, the paintings have titles which either contributed to the nature

of the paintings' conception or, at least, continue to influence the reception of their form by the spectator. Thirdly, the paintings are being discussed by their artist as the writer of this paper to make clear certain applications of the works to the paper and vice versa.

Because of the foregoing reasons, the paintings here discussed are not unmodified works of art. As such they would need no qualifications beyond the boundaries of their form. However, the artist made an honest attempt to develop his paintings naturally and unaffectedly as works of art. He attempted to exclude as much as possible from his work considerations which would be foreign to them. The knowledge formulated in the first part of this paper was assimilated, but it was not consciously employed in the painting of the works which were to be the primary concern of this paper. The paintings were not intended to be exercises conceived to prove a point, and yet they had to be called experiments because they were not completely self-contained. They necessarily depended to a certain extent upon the external motivation of this paper.

The purposes of the artist's discussion of his works are largely descriptive. The artist is attempting to describe verbally the paintings themselves and their meaning to him. He further is attempting to describe the paintings in relation to one another and in relation to the purposes of this paper. Technical descriptions are included wherever they find a purpose within the broader purposes of the paper. The purposes of this paper and thus of the paintings, however, are not primarily technical. As has been suggested, technique must grow from

volition and into form. Volition is the source of a work of art, its matrix; form is the qualitative manifestation of a work of art; and technique, as the term must be used in this discussion, is little more than the mental and material medium between volition and form.

The paintings were given titles. The situation of naming varied from work to work. The titles for the first seven of the fifteen paintings included in this paper were conceived before the execution of the paintings. The titles for these seven paintings represented specific experience. The title labeled the experience, and the painting approximated the experience as defined by the title. Coincidentally, the latter approximate half of the number of paintings became increasingly non-objective or presentational. The artist found that specific subject matter, as it had been defined by labeled specific experience, proved to be increasingly restrictive. The last eight paintings were labeled presentational. They were further given titles which were in some way evocative of a quality inspired by the form of the paintings. The last two paintings of the series were presentational to the extent that their titles are nearly formal with little relationship to qualitative evocations. An authority has said that titles can be no more than conveniences of reference. This fact is especially true of the last eight paintings in this series, and it is particularly true of the last two.

Experiment number one.--"Distant Train Whistle #2" was the second of two paintings with the same subject. A reproduction of the first painting was not included here because that painting

Figure 1. "Distant Train Whistle #2." Oil on
canvas board, 16" x 20".



FIGURE 1.

was for the most part in the nature of an awkward prelude. It was executed in oil on canvas board with a palette knife. Appropriate colors, thinned with copal painting medium, were applied to the canvas with the knife, and oil base zinc white was applied with other colors and worked into the surface to produce a thick and opaque, yet atmospheric, quality. The form recalled the rusty blue of distant skies, the steaming whiteness of turbulent motion, and the intimately exciting orange of a restless and vague yearning. The canvas was divided realistically into three areas. The upper portion of the canvas was reserved for aerial qualities, the lower portion for earthy colors and textures. The subject distant train whistle was located in the distance of the painting near the visual center of the composition. Rhythmic strokes were scratched through the layers of paint to remind the spectator of the immediate and transitory quality of the subject. This painting was a first attempt; and although it possessed certain intriguing qualities, the artist disqualified it for the purposes of this paper as being staid, unimaginative, and even clumsy. But it was a beginning.

"Distant Train Whistle #2" brought the artist nearer his subject. He became less an observer and more a participant. In the first "Distant Train Whistle," the artist viewed the subject with a minimum of identification and in an environment which placed the subject clearly outside the artist. In "Distant Train Whistle #2," the artist more closely associated the painting with his subjective impression of the subject.

A wash of oil color thinned with turpentine was brushed over the canvas approximating what would be a final form. Areas

of blue, varying in intensity and value, were applied with a red sable round brush. Areas were treated, for the most part, two-dimensionally with thick strokes of pigment; however the cumulative effect of flat area placed next to flat area was three-dimensional, and the underlying was and even the latex underpainting were occasionally allowed to show themselves as reminders of the genetic quality of the painting process. A good deal of the atmospheric quality of the first "Distant Train Whistle" was retained, but the subject was now more integrated into the complete form of the painting. The symbol whistle remained orange, but it became a more vibrant red-orange. The whistle itself also kept much of its original yearning and restless quality of shape. Its quality was even heightened by intruding streams of steamy white and by outcast sparks of red-orange that glowed and flickered against the turquoise coolness of the milieu. This painting and the following six paintings possessed subject matter; but the subject matter was not a visual image, nor a sound image translated into visual equivalents, but a subjective impression of specific experience visually realized.

Experiment number two.--The artist, in attempting to render non-visual subject matter, had achieved a certain abstractness in his painting. He found that sound images and their subjective suggestions furnished interesting material. Experiment number two was a continuation in the direction set by experiment number one. The peculiarly mournful and plaintive call of the mourning dove was the inspiration for the painting called "Mourning Dove." The essence of the painting's form was an almost sweet over-ripeness of luscious pinks and golds. The luscious quality

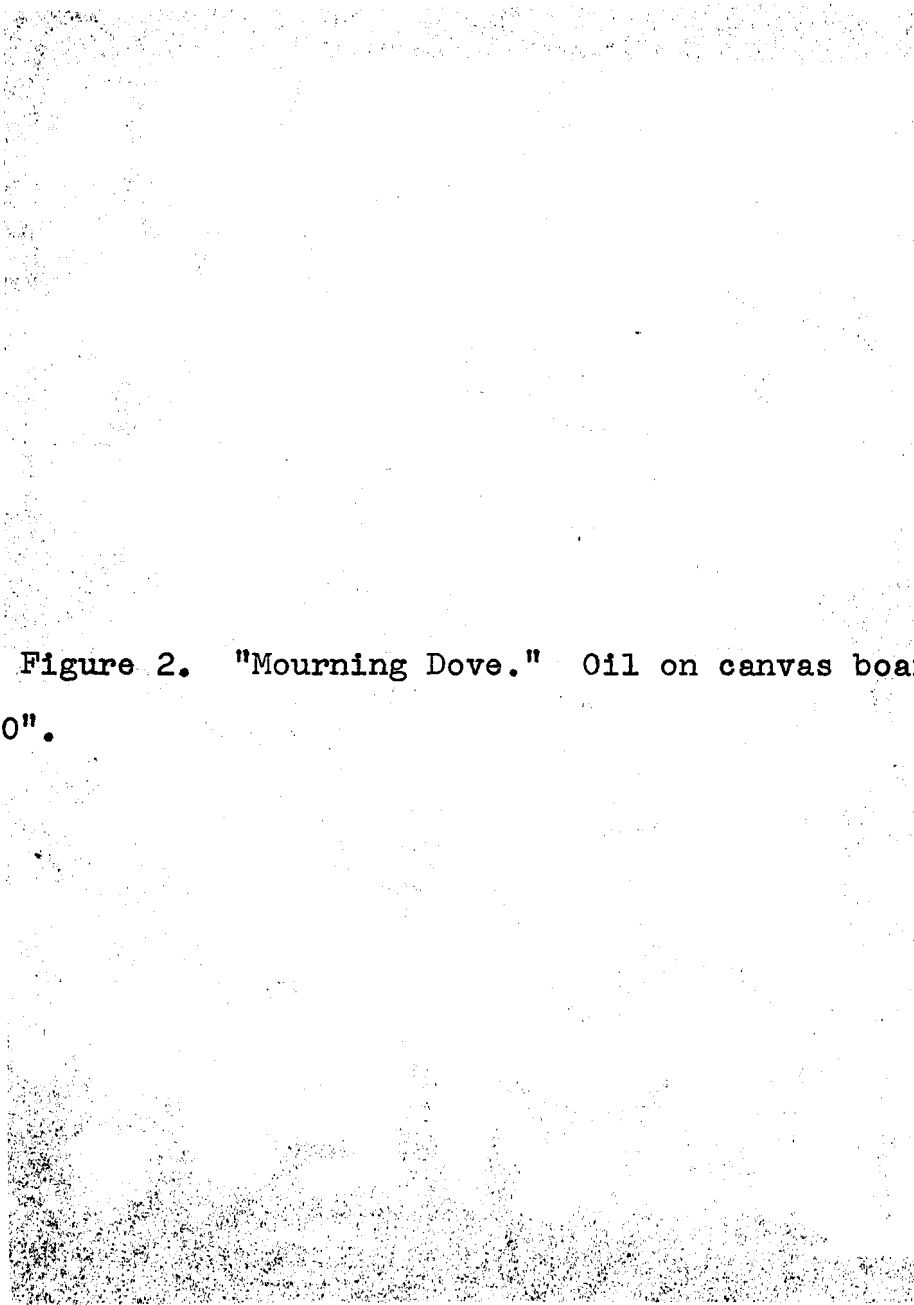


Figure 2. "Mourning Dove." Oil on canvas board,
16" x 20".



FIGURE 2.

was carried out entirely by color and line quality and not by a "luscious" paint application. Intestinal forms plied their impulsive ways through the composition, and white for the first time began to assert a negation of picture space in the form of ovaloid impositions of void which the writer will call penetrative elements. The specific sound of the dove was identified with the gray-gold form near the center of the picture, but the subject had begun to push itself into the entire composition. The center form possessed almost no meaning without the offering of the surrounding pinks and blues, and their offering was not merely environmental. The object and its environment were growing empathic to the extent that their meaning existed one within the other.

The paint was applied smoothly with a sable brush. The style of painting, with exceptions, had become more picturesque in that the painting existed nearly on a two-dimensional picture plane. The two exceptions were the oval-shaped voids, which nearly placed the picture on a secondary level, and the thorn-like protrusions into the picture area of a reminiscence of realistic relationships. However, the reference to reality had been to a great extent pushed out of the picture. The artist identified the thorny shapes with the same grotesque reality he had sensed in the first "Distant Train Whistle." In "Mourning Dove," however, this reality was no longer actually vocal. Its absence was suggested by what could only be vestigial parts.

The artist was becoming aware of the fact that pictorial space need not be handled in a manner which suggests real space. Real space refers to that space outside the picture. He was

beginning to sense that the picture can be independent of realistic relationships of value and color.

Experiment number three.--"Cat Sharpening His Claws" represented an advance into another area of expression. The artist could not identify any portion of the picture with a cat as such, although the branching form in the upper left-hand corner of the painting at one time possessed certain claw-like qualities in the artist's mind. However, the intent here was carried by a pervading quality, a deliberate instinctiveness. The deliberate rectangle near the center of the composition is plied, for example, with nearly imperceptible indications of instinct, a quality of chance: the occasionally blurred edges, the patch of canvas showing at the lower right-hand corner, the subtle bands of intense and grayed color. These same elements were carried throughout the painting in the demarcation of other forms and in the very handling of pigment. The effect is one of intense concentration, but a concentration whose intent is instinctive enough to be mindless and glorious.

The artist had discovered that he could render a type of paradox. Thus far his paintings had been statements of singular quality. "Cat Sharpening His Claws" explored a new and important possibility for sensitive and meaningful expression.

Experiment number four.--"Barnlot Dusk" represented an attempt at the evocation of an eloquent richness. However, the quality of the richness is of such an earthy hue that the expression became more accurately pungent. The form is dark and even brooding, but with a ripeness of color that certainly gives evidence of a previous or promised vitality. A sun already set, or a suspected

Figure 3. "Cat Sharpening His Claws." Oil on
canvas board, 16" x 20".

Figure 3

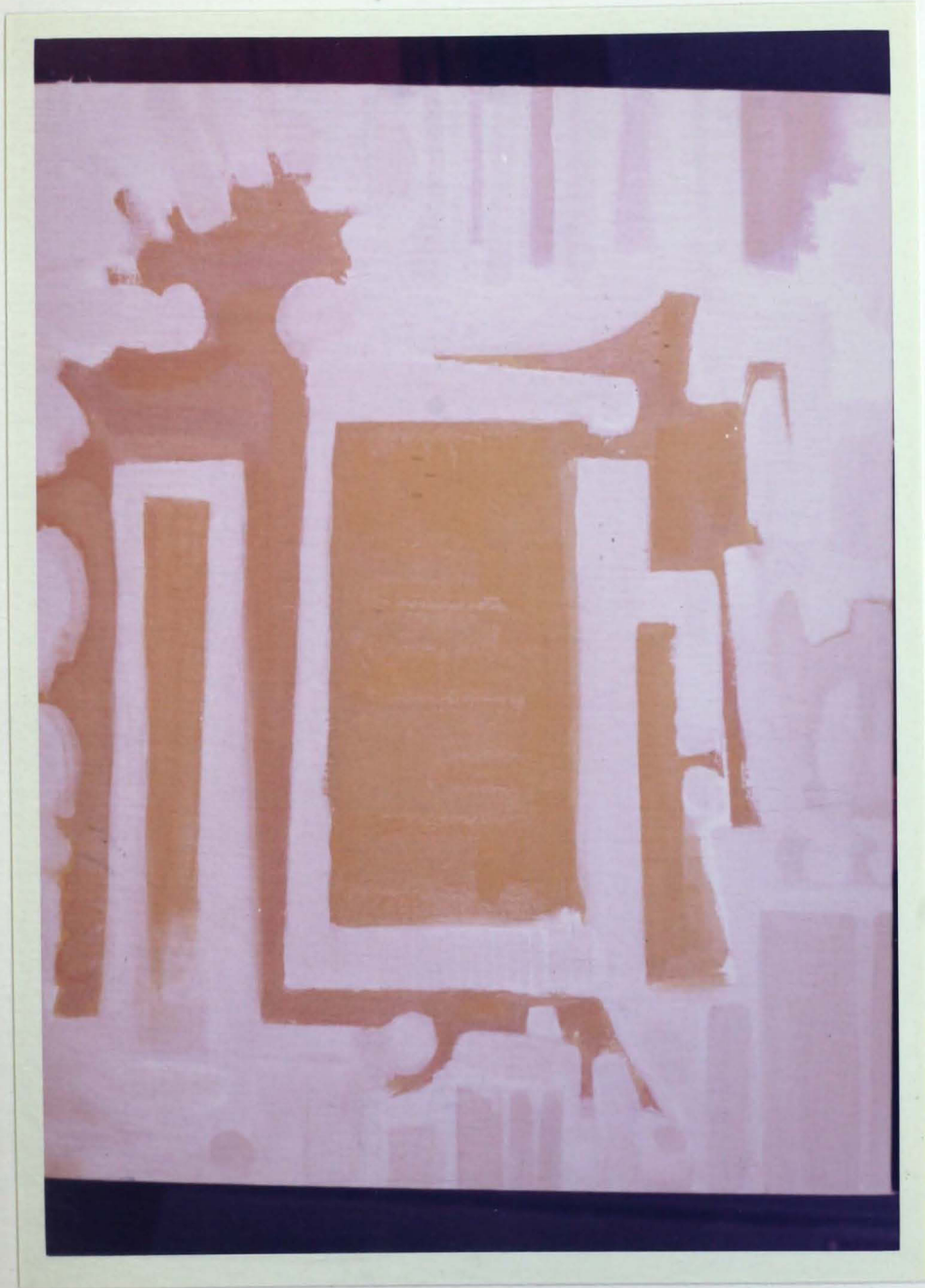


FIGURE 3.

moon, drifts over the surface of the canvas, directing a would-be brilliance into the composition. Luminous whites bespeak a bacterial soil, and vibrant greens and oranges tell of a peculiarly morbid vitality, a pregnant unity of life and death.

"Barnlot Dusk" was another rendition of a paradox. The union of life and death possessed that same quality which had so intrigued the artist as the deliberate instinct of "Cat Sharpening His Claws." The exploitation of paradox was not merely a device however; it was a necessary technique for the capturing of an ambiguous quality.

Experiment number five.--"Field Mouse" was, in a sense, a type of regression; but it was a regression which grew out of a necessity of purpose and a regression which made the artist aware of a fallacy in his method which had not earlier been apparent. To recall the quality of a field mouse; timid, wholesome, yet tragic; it became necessary to adopt a mode of expression which would reap a certain obvious preciousness; a preciousness which could be captured only by the conscious employment of sweet browns and greens, rounded forms, and apparently clever textures. In this case such an obviously shallow technique was not only justified but necessary. The artist visualized a field mouse; he analyzed its forms and qualities; and he painted as he had to paint. The spectator may identify a soft furry body, a vague allusion to Mickey Mouse ears, and one very round and intense eye complete with highlight.

With the realization of this picture, the artist became aware of a despotism exercised by subject matter, even when it is

Figure 4. "Barnlot Dusk." Oil on Upson board,

18" x 24".

FIGURE



FIGURE 4.

so abstract as a specific emotional quality. The artist had been forced by considerations of subject matter to render a painting which he could call only "fun" or entertaining. The painting itself had no vital meaning for him outside its relationship to subject matter. The artist could rationalize and say that it had been necessary to sacrifice vitality, but it had been necessary only because of the dictates of subject matter, a morbid directive; and yet, the artist was not confident in his ability to desert specific subject matter. He could only attempt a new approach.

Experiment number six.--"Haymakers" was less consciously perpetrated than was "Field Mouse." The artist began with only an idea of haymaking. He worked quickly in order to minimize the compromising effect of obvious reason, and the painting developed from idea to idea with such freedom that the artist was quite pleased with the process as well as with the result.

The painting was on Upson board, which tended to give it a dry texture. Broad areas of approximate colors were flowed onto the board with a sable brush. Picture elements were isolated and balanced. Colors were clarified and picture levels made consistent. The form became an urgent quality of heat and force, man's purposive will against nature's mindless existence. Symbolism was not consciously employed, but the artist was fascinated to note, upon examination of the finished painting, the resemblance of the figure in the upper left-hand corner to the lashing arm of a mechanical hay baler. The white areas were applied with a painting knife to break the monotonous heat and action of the

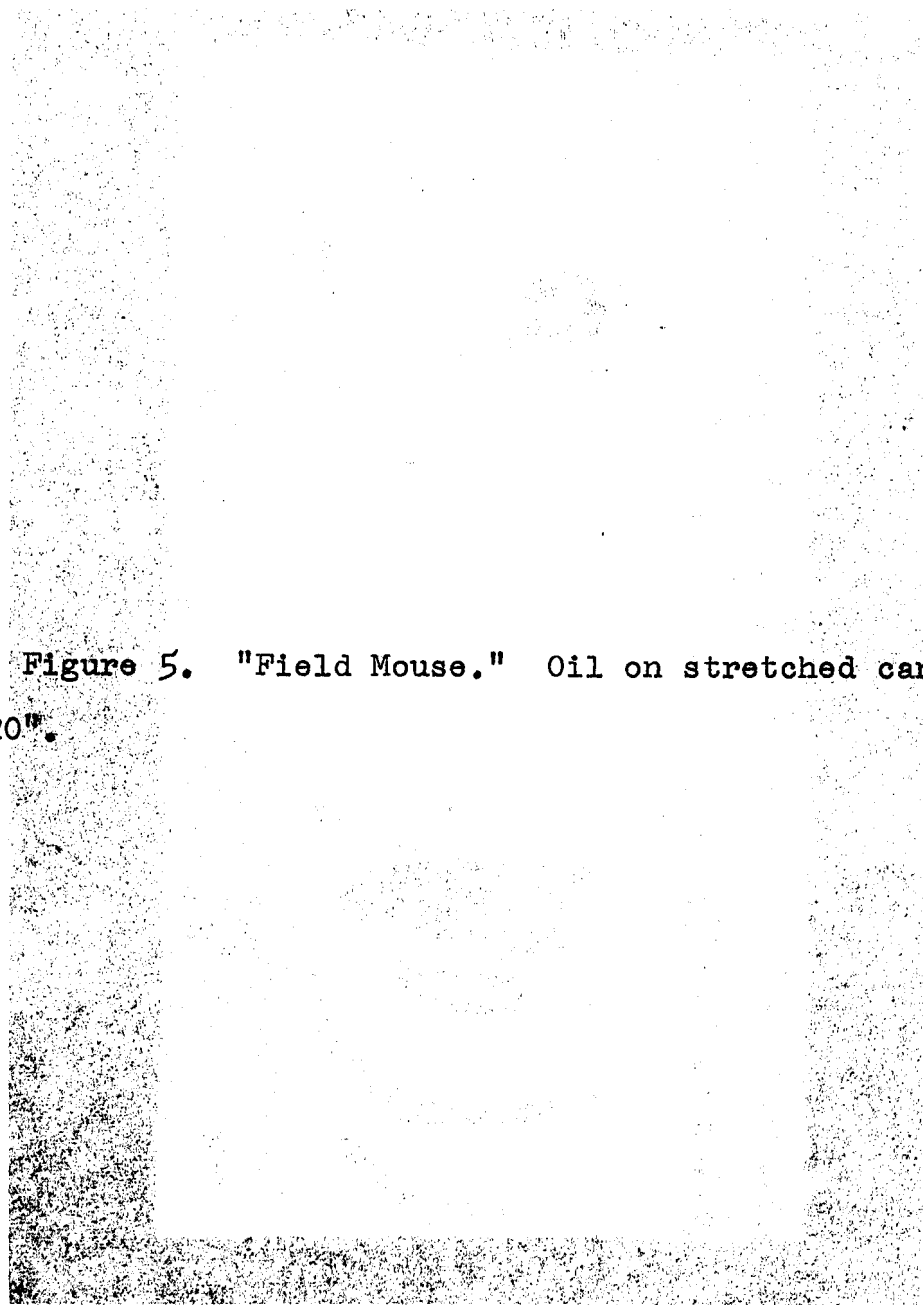


Figure 5. "Field Mouse." Oil on stretched canvas,
11" x 20".

FIGURE 5.



FIGURE 5.

chopping, rhythmic figures. Prickly textures were scratched through the white areas to integrate them with the surface of the painting and to lend that unpleasant feeling of frantic labor in spite of utter discomfort.

Experiment number seven.--"Tree House" calls up the fluctuating patterns of sunlight pouring through summer trees and the crisp rustle of fretful leaves. The dark to light pattern in blue and blue-green closes the composition in a feeling of cozy security, and yet the complementary play of orange against blue provides that excitement which is a part of every youth's concept of a tree house.

The writer wishes to point out here a definite return to the penetrative ovaloid which was first noted in "Mourning Dove." The penetrative element was used in "Tree House" to disintegrate the picture surface. A need for revolt may have been the cause of this disintegration. The artist had sensed that his pictures were restricted by the nature of their conception in terms of specific subject matter, but he could only revolt by violently breaking up the picture plane into many levels. The nature of his pictures' restriction evidently had not yet become apparent to him.

In "Tree House" the penetrative ovaloid was sometimes white sometimes other colors, but it seemed always to push out from the picture surface or to push into and behind it. The ovaloid form was also echoed in picture elements which could not be called penetrative because they were not treated flatly. Such forms appeared as rendered spheroids. They were not truly penetrative because their rendition suggested not only an advancing

Figure 6. "Haymakers." Oil on Upson board,
24" x 18".



FIGURE 6.

surface but also an invisible retreating surface, and the edges of both these curved planes were sloped to unite at the picture plane. The rendered spheroid was an entity within the picture plane, although it might protrude and recede, whereas the relationship of the penetrative ovaloid to the picture plane was minimal. It was concerned with the picture, but it was for all practical purposes outside it, in front of it or behind it and always visible.

Again, the primary concern of the painting was subject matter, and the artist quite frankly admits that, although the painting in question had qualities which were interesting, he was bored with the work as soon as it was finished. He felt that it was a premature and therefore misguided revolt. Its primary interest lay in the implications of unconsciously employed technical devices purposefully related to external and specific subject matter.

The artist learned with this painting that technical devices do not guarantee a satisfying painting, at least satisfying to the artist. He felt that something profound was missing in "Tree House," but he could not put his finger on it. He could justify the painting on technical bases, but it had really accomplished very little in terms of creative growth because it had not shown the artist anything new about himself or his work.

Experiment number eight.--"Wedding of the Ant Queen" saw an innovation in medium which was an almost inevitable outgrowth of developmental creative considerations. The penetrative elements

Figure 7. "Tree House." Oil on Upson board,

18" x 24".

FIGURE 7



FIGURE 7.

discussed earlier found an almost isolating role in "Wedding of the Ant Queen." The picture plane proper was actually sunken beneath another plane executed in white, latex base paint. The painting was originally done entirely in oil, but it was found that zinc white in an oil medium was entirely unsatisfactory for the role which it was required to play in this particular painting. Although zinc white makes other oil colors more opaque when it was added to them, it was found that used alone zinc white is far too transparent, and it possesses not a pleasant transparency but rather a transparent opacity. Such a quality was not at all suitable for the painting in question. It was necessary to find a suitable flat white which would impose a necessary artificial surface outside the picture plane. Latex base white paint proved to be the ideal medium because it was a neutral white; it covered well, it was opaque and flat; and it was of a thick consistency, it could be used in such a manner as to leave textural evidence of brush strokes. This textural quality would prevent the imposed plane's becoming sterile and devoid of interest.

"Wedding of the Ant Queen" was the artist's first truly presentational painting in the series encompassed by this paper. It was begun with no external subject matter whatsoever in mind. The painting existed with only internal content. It did not stand for an experience; it was an experience for the painter, and it may continue to incite a quality of experience whenever it is viewed because each viewer may perceive it in terms of his own experience. The artist did not concern himself with relationships outside the work. These relationships might, however, find a

Figure 8. "Presentational: Wedding of the Ant Queen." Oil and latex on stretched canvas, 18" x 24".

FIGURE 8.



FIGURE 8.

spontaneous inclusion in the work because of the influence of cumulative experience; but any reference to external relationships would have to be general rather than specific because of the general nature of the work's conception. Thus the spectator need not possess knowledge of any particular experience outside this painting. The work should be available in its entirety to anyone who is capable of accepting experience at its face value and for its own quality. The artist believes that this is a direct art. There are no intermediaries between the artist, the work of art, and the spectator. Their relationship appears to be direct and dependent only upon immediate contact. The foregoing concept may represent an artistic trinity of sorts. This discussion would suggest that the artist, the work of art, and the spectator are independent but inseparable; but each must accept the other on those terms or the relationship will become strained.

"Wedding of the Ant Queen" was named several days after the painting was completed. It would truly offend the artist, therefore, if some all but well-meaning viewer should attempt to identify an ant in the painting. The painting possesses a quality which suggested an ant queen to the artist, but to identify specific subject matter within the painting would truly be a breach of the painting's integrity. The artist would rather the spectator create a new personal experience upon the material furnished by his work than vainly attempt to locate any specific intent in the work. The artist feels this way because of the very nature of the work's conception and naming. The picture was named after its execution; and in naming his work, the artist had assumed the role of a spectator. Any spectator can similarly find an experience in the

presentational work if he will allow the experience to occur, and he may even give the experience a name if he wishes. The name for the experience should vary from spectator to spectator as the experience itself varies; however, the artist's name for the painting must remain as the accepted term of reference because of its priority.

Experiment number nine.--After the successful conception of "Wedding of the Ant Queen" as a painting without specific subject matter, the artist foolishly attempted a similar painting using similar stylistic devices. A similar painting was achieved, but it was entirely unsatisfactory. It was shallow, stereotyped, and uninspired. It had been an attempt to ignore subject matter as a manner of conception, but it had possessed a type of subject matter in that it had attempted to approach the form of another painting. After much reworking, a satisfactory painting emerged which was called "August Trial." The original painting had been a horizontal one which the artist ludicrously called "Chinese Saint George Battling the Dragon with Chopsticks." The painting finally emerged a vertical canvas, and a new technique had asserted itself.

The action of various reds and oranges had tended to carry the painting beyond reasonable pictorial limits. It became necessary to reinstate a certain measure of pictorial reality, so to speak, in order to make the painting seem comfortable upon the canvas. Paint thinned with turpentine was allowed to drip down the painting. This very action, controlled as it was, reasserted the painting's existence within itself; it caused the painting to speak

Figure 9. "Presentational: August Trial." Oil
and latex on stretched canvas, 18" x 24".

Figure 9.



Figure 9.

FIGURE



FIGURE 9.

as paint would have it speak. It stated the painting's vertical position beyond doubt, and it also served an integrating function. A natural technique had calmed an unnatural turbulence.

The artist had become aware of a new relationship of technique to pictorial reality. The term pictorial reality does not refer either positively or negatively to the natural reality outside the canvas. It denotes a type of stylistic appropriateness within the canvas. The original painting in experiment number nine had been unsatisfactory because it had not seemed to exist comfortably within the limits of the frame. It became necessary to unify the canvas, to reconcile its contrasting elements, in order to make the painting articulate.

Experiment number ten.--In "August Trial," the imposed secondary picture plans which had been so effective in "Wedding of the Ant Queen" proved so unsatisfactory when used as a conscious device that it had to be disintegrated to restore unity to the composition. The latex white became smeared with thin color, and it was repainted in such a manner as to reassert the primary picture plane. In "Painted Sea" there was a return to the pseudo-transparent, oil zinc white. A cycle had been completed. The artist had returned to the use of a single picture plane, and he had consequently returned to an almost exclusive use of oil as a medium.

A developmental direction should also be pointed out. From "Wedding of the Ant Queen" to "Painted Sea" through "August Trial" there was a definite pattern of evolution toward an over-all, integrated pattern. The conventional center of interest became

Figure 10. "Presentational: Painted Sea." Oil
on stretched canvas, 24" x 18".



FIGURE 10.

almost non-existent in favor of an instantaneously conceived entity within the picture. There was likewise a tendency away from the split-level picture. Thus the picture was tending to become integrated on a basis of width by a breaking down of diverse factors concerned with the surface. It was also becoming integrated on a basis of depth by a breaking down of depth factors, by a restoration of the dominant picture plane. There was a tendency away from the split-level painting toward a purely two-dimensional picture; and disrupting contrasts of hue and value, which are sometimes employed as interest devices, were becoming less frequently utilized.

To achieve an integrated pattern of color, "Painted Sea" was painted using only three basic colors: a thin mixture of cadmium yellow light and cadmium yellow orange, a mixture of burnt sienna and Indian red, and zinc white. (White is not technically called a color. It is here referred to as a color to simplify the terminology of the discussion.) The orange and brown patterns were painted as a thin turpentine wash over a latex white ground. As soon as an integrated pattern became evident, zinc white, thinned slightly with copal painting medium, was applied with a painting knife to clarify a rhythmic "sloshing" of form. Spontaneous brush strokes remained and there was no attempt to obliterate the evidence of knife technique where it was not objectionable.

"Painted Sea" seemed to be a natural expression. The artist felt it to be spontaneous and sincere. He found that if he did not work quickly, he had the unfortunate tendency to overwork his paintings and to spoil the unaffected expression which is so

vital to his work. "Painted Sea" indicated a point where the artist became more confident in his intuitive expression. As soon as the artist was satisfied with the painting on an almost non-rational level, he forced himself to set it away so he would not spoil the work's feeling for spontaneity. The next day he looked at the painting, and it still said what he wished it to say.

Experiment number eleven.--Sitting before a white canvas and feeling a new confidence, the artist allowed his brush to move across the surface before him. Each stroke was strong and sure, knowing the relationships it felt because the strokes seemed to originate in the hand rather than in than in the brain. The paint was thin, and it glowed quietly as the white underpainting showed through. The major strokes were finished. Minor calligraphic lines completed the idea, and firmness and a sense of permanence were all that was further required. The more or less spontaneous lines were framed with latex white applied thickly to give a heavy texture. The lines were then reinforced with a select application of a thick, related color; and the artist saw before him a "Silent Image." Silence was the evocation of fused vertical and horizontal lines. White bespoke silence, but emptiness was avoided by the use of a textured surface. Nearness of value, a minimum of contrast, suggested quietness to the artist. Only the informal quality of the lines; their variation from the absolute horizontal and vertical, their varying width and depth, their frayed edges, and the single, small run of paint; asserted the image; and the painter felt it a wise and silent image.

Figure 11. "Presentational: Silent Image." Oil
and latex on stretched canvas, 24" x 20".



FIGURE 11.

The artist learned with this painting that confidence, when it is consciously employed, can be insipid. The lines of "Silent Image" are confident, but there is a cerebral exactness in their design which makes the painting seem rather cold. Wisdom may sometimes enforce a certain distance, but that fact does not save this particular painting in the eyes of the artist. The explanation itself suggests the cerebral nature of the work.

Experiment number twelve.--Contrasts of value make "Shallow Haven" a statement of comparatively strong quality. Deep, dark lines converge toward a point outside the picture's boundary. Icy blocks of white float relentlessly toward an unseen goal. Flecks of orange reassure the spectator that in spite of a certain fatalism there is still purposeful life in the world, and wriggling spots and splashes of white scintillate somewhere between the world and the observer, lending that evasive element freedom which keeps life surprising.

The artist learned here that a painting can be conceived in presentational terms and still be identified by viewers with personal visual experience. "Shallow Haven" was not conceived in terms of visual images outside the picture, and for the artist it does not refer to external visual suggestions. However, various spectators of the painting noted various visual responses which were external in their reference. Some felt that the painting was an aerial view of a city at night. Others felt that it obviously was not that, even if it were winter in the city, but that it was only reminiscent of tall building viewed from the ground. The artist had never been in an airplane. He was therefore certain

Figure 12. "Presentational: Shallow Haven." Oil
and latex on stretched canvas, 18" x 24".

FIGURE



FIGURE 12.

that it was not his intention to render an aerial view. It seemed to him that individuals had merely interpreted an absolute visual image, which contained elements of perspective in converging forms, as a representation of their own personal visual experience. It seems to the writer that people may find a painting personally satisfying on a level quite removed from the artist's intent. This, of course, should not invalidate their experience before the work. They experience as they can and in relation to their past experience. Art may furnish that sublime experience which will bring them ever nearer to the point where the artist's experience will be accessible to them. It would seem that only when the artist's experience is available to the spectator through the work of art can the artist's intent be pertinent to the communication.

Experiment number thirteen.--"Seed of Rapture" showed a further dependence upon a type of descriptive form. "Shallow Haven" used elements which were reminiscent of the natural relationships of perspective. "Seed of Rapture" used elements reminiscent of mass. Still, because of the presentational nature of the painting's conception, one must remember that any description here noted is in actuality being read into the work by the artist as a spectator. The work was not intended to describe a specific object, situation, or attitude. But the use of forms identifiable with nature and the use of subjectively charged symbols, even when they are unconsciously employed, represents a type of description. Four vertical shapes vaguely resemble the translucent forms of four grains of rice. The artist identifies

Figure 13. "Presentational: Seed of Rapture." Oil
and latex on stretched canvas, 18" x 24".

FIGURE 13.



FIGURE 13.

them with a quality of perception, an innocence of feeling. The artist further identifies the radiating lines of orange with a feeling of infinite curiosity, an honest and bursting love for all creation as it exists.

"Seed of Rapture" may represent a desire to know the universe. It further constituted a return to an unaffected spontaneity similar to that employed in "Painted Sea." The painting was conceived so completely that it remained unaltered, with the exception of one minor brush stroke, as a complete and valid expression. The artist believes that this painting was so quickly conceived because he felt a motivation in a single direction from the time he began the painting till it was finished. This singular motivation may in turn have been a result of the painting's rapid execution. It was done quickly enough to prevent alien considerations from asserting their influence. Thus a type of reciprocal feedback between spontaneity and singularity motivated the painting from start to finish, and such a motivation practically guaranteed a purity of conception.

Note the telling return of orange as an important color; truly it is the only color employed since white is not technically a color: And, although certain conventions of composition were unwittingly employed in the placing of picture elements, the artist felt definite tendencies toward a meaningful type of surface decoration. The relationship between the white figures is, in spite of its exact pertinence, informal; and the simplicity of handling makes for an intensity which was quite unusual in the experience of the artist.

Figure 14. "Presentational: Orange Piece." Oil
on board, 28" x 23".



FIGURE 14.

Experiment number fourteen.--"Orange Piece" was the product of an almost bursting creative motivation. Its conception required more time than did that of "Seed of Rapture" because its idea was more complex and because its technique was more consciously directed toward form. But the artist maintained a pervading sense of freedom and a feeling of undetermined purpose during the execution of this work. The painted surface was consciously exploited. Paint was applied transparently and opaquely, sometimes carefully and sometimes with abandon; but contact with the painting itself was never lost. Paint was applied in the manner which seemed appropriate and in the place where it seemed necessary, and such needs were determined spontaneously. The definite area of color was shattered into many single strokes of paint in order to suggest a total surface. When rampant color promised to destroy the feeling of paint or when it threatened to assert a purely cerebral fantasy, thin paint was applied to run down over the surface, redefining it in terms of paint and re-orienting it to a pictorial reality. The result was a vivid, sometimes seethingly atmospheric, rendition of pure picture space in terms of closely related color.

The artist had crossed a boundary in his experience which he had somehow feared, and he entered into a region of expression which had long fascinated him. He became a handler of pure picture elements. He used a two-dimensional surface and he used areas of two-dimensional paint which were defined by the nature of the brush to render what to him seemed a truly absolute work qualified by no external circumstances and comprising its own natural reality.

Figure 15. "Presentational: Orange Piece #2."
Oil on stretched canvas, 18" x 24".



FIGURE 15.

Experiment number fifteen.--"Orange Piece #2" represented the culmination of a movement in the direction set by the painting "Seed of Rapture." The eager radiations of orange were shattered in the first "Orange Piece." They were reunited and concentrated in "Orange Piece #2." If "Seed of Rapture" exhibited a desire to know the universe, as the artist considered it to do, "Orange Piece #2" realized the universe in a canvas of almost shocking intensity.

Cadmium yellow orange and cadmium yellow light were thinned to a smooth consistency with copal painting medium. The two colors were mixed in subtle shades of various oranges and applied with a red sable brush, dipped in turpentine, so as to attain a maximum intensity of color.

There were no true forms within the painting. Variation of color was not introduced to define forms but rather to execute a single form, to create an intricately unified surface and an almost imperceptible but nearly shouting form. The center of interest was the entire canvas. The entire content of the work was concentrated upon that positively two-dimensional area.

The artist felt that in this painting the process from volition through technique to form was as direct as possible. There were no outside considerations. The work was not planned beforehand, but rather it developed its own plan before the artist as he worked. This spontaneous process, when it was more or less consciously employed, provided a maximum of creative climax; and erotic comparisons may not be idly made. The personal rewards of such an inspiring kind of creation were enormous. "Orange Piece #2"

was the expression of such a process; and it appeared to be entirely uninhibited in its appeal, an absolutely extrovert essay.

On the series as a whole.--Although each of the paintings which comprised the creative portion of this thesis possessed distinctive qualities, they held certain factors in common. They were, of course, executed by the same artist. This fact alone should unite them irretrievably. Products of a single personality, no matter how diverse that personality may be, cannot but find some unifying ingredient. Furthermore, the paintings of this series were, in a sense, organized for inclusion within a paper possessing specific purposes. The purposes of the paper, however, made it imperative that the paintings not be executed with the paper as a primary motivation. The paintings were an experiment dealing with volition. They were an attempt to find an unaffected mode of expression based upon concrete knowledge, the knowledge having been accumulated to give the artist confidence in the quality of his own volition. The paintings furthermore were conceived within the period of a week, sometimes at the rate of three or four a day. The fact of their intense conception should give the reader some idea of the purposeful concentration and the inspired working, if you will, of the artist's creative faculties during the realization of these works. The fact of their concentrated execution also made these works less affected by the passing of time. An individual changes as his experience changes him, and time can rarely pass without concomitant experience. Since the artist produces

through his personality, the works included herein were executed quickly with the purpose of reducing the effect of passing time.

Although this group of paintings can be viewed as a more or less integrated whole, the whole can be broken down into groups of paintings related by characteristics which flexibly define those groups. The paintings which were the subjects of experiments one through seven including "Tree House" were inter-related in that they possessed a specific subject matter in the form of an emotional reaction to specific experience. The concluding eight of the series grew increasingly presentational or non-objective out of a need for more direct expression.

The writer considered it appropriate to discuss here a painting which he has thus far ignored. A seventeenth painting was executed. It was finished ninth in order. A painting originally called "Pawpaw Grove" represented the transition between the group of paintings possessing subject matter and the group of presentational paintings.

"Pawpaw Grove" began as an attempt to capture the primitive quality of an early adolescent experience, an animalistic communion with nature. The painting developed as a group of crisp figures of transparent green enmeshed within a natural flickering of dark blues and blue-greens. A chance running of paint bestowed that animalistic quality of immediate aimlessness. This particular painting never reached a satisfactory conclusion however, before it developed into another type of painting. The painting became affected by considerations outside the limits of its subject matter; and as the artist worked and continued working on the painting,

the purlieu of cool darks became a black, Nordic outlining. The crisp areas became reduced to thick layers of grayed, light color.

As the artist was working on "Pawpaw Grove" in the yard behind the building where he resided, two neighborhood children, a girl and a boy aged perhaps five or six, entered the yard to watch "the man paint." The artist became aware of something very interesting in the behavior of the children. It is usually assumed that children at play are the most unaffected of human beings, that they behave spontaneously and naturally. The artist listened to the children make their human noises about what they were doing, what they had done, and what they were going to do:

"I'm going to ride my bicycle down the hill again."

"Look Eric, I found something new." (It was a new way to ride down the hill.)

"I'm going through here."

"You better not. Somebody'll get you."

"You always say that. You always say people will get you."

"The police will get you."

"You always say that. I'm going anyhow."

"You better not."

But Kathy followed Eric into the neighbor's yard. They pursued their little competitions with such unthinking affectation that the artist became aware of a type of sordid determinism in their actions. These children might have been primitive reflections of the selfish behavior of their parents. Their motivations were

certainly not ideally childlike and unaffected. They were almost predetermined. The children's reaction to a given situation might almost have been predicted by a consideration of relative competitive motivations.

Perhaps it is natural for children to vie for honors, but the artist got the peculiarly unsavory sensation of compulsive aggression and unconsciously enforced inhibition, a truly sordid combination, from the behavior of the two child friends. This sensation managed to show itself in the painting of "Pawpaw Grove" to such an extent that the painting had to be renamed. It had lost all pertinence to its original subject. The artist chose a second title, "Child's Play." The effect of the children's behavior had not consciously been adapted to the painting. The painting had simply developed beyond its original intention affected by unconscious factors. Specific subject matter had been routed by a tendency toward unconscious and nearly general reference.

A Nordic outlining contained the descriptive forms of the painting. Nothing moved without a cause, and all movement was along predetermined lines. The once spontaneous running of paint was framed in layers of unwholesome hue, and the motif was systematically repeated. The entire form was so closely knit that it sent chills up the artist's spine. The effect was so horrifying to the artist that he was conscience-forced to paint over the painting because he couldn't stand to look at it.

"Child's Play" now lies buried beneath the luminous layers of "Orange Piece #2," but "Child's Play" had served a purpose in

terms of the artist's development. It had represented a realization and a transition. The artist realized that there was a potentially unwholesome determination lying in the bowels of subject matter as such. The artist illuminated his subject matter, as it were, with his personality; but even then it was possible for his volition to be compromised and forced. Subject matter had been a crutch; and, unless a compulsive dependence upon the crutch develops, it will be discarded when it is no longer needed. When the crutch of specific subject matter was no longer needed, it became a loathsome thing. The presentational painting "Wedding of the Ant Queen" was the immediate reaction to and the development from "Child's Play." A new independence and a new vision had been discovered within the picture. It could be a nearly absolute statement.

Within the two broad groups of the artist's paintings with subject matter and paintings without subject matter, there were subgroups of action and reaction. "Distant Train Whistle #2" was a reaction against the cold interpretation based upon realistic relationships, found in the first "Distant Train Whistle." "Mourning Dove" was a step toward the absorption of the entire picture surface into the content of the painting, and within the same painting there existed the thorny remnants of a cold external reality and the bold fragments of a new dimension. The penetrative elements may have been a reaction motivated by the sudden constriction of picture reference. As the relationships enforced by nature were dropped, it became necessary to explore a new depth within the picture. The multi-level picture plane was expedient.

In effect "Cat Sharpening His Claws" continued to exploit the multi-level picture plane. The two levels are distinct but not unequivocally related one to the other in this painting. The artist recalled the intense purpose with which a cat will shred a piece of wood, and yet is the cat's motivation purpose or primitive muscular instinct? And may not instinct possess some quite distant purpose? At times the painting seems to be concerned with the figures described by its darker values. At other times the painting seems to deal with the lighter value patterns defined by the darker areas. The equivocal relationship of dark and light areas suggests a dynamic dualism of purposeful instinct.

"Barnlot Dusk" was a return to a single plane. The plane was enriched and patterned to capture a particular quality, and "Field Mouse" was also an attempt to define a quality; but "Field Mouse" required a conscious objective motivation toward its subject matter, and the artist unknowingly employed in "Field Mouse" a device which definitely related the expression of the painting to its external subject matter. The rectangular patterns of color which extend into the painting and from the painting construct a bond with the painting's external content; and at the same time, these bonds are conscious reminders that the painting does not exist solely within itself. This device first appeared in "Cat Sharpening His Claws," but it was not truly operative in "Barnlot Dusk" because the painting was more earnestly concerned with its subject matter. The artist had not yet become fully aware of his picture's dependence, but his use of rectangular bonds with external content was an unconscious assertion of its subordination.

The same device was used in a very obvious manner in "Haymakers." The artist practically stated in this painting that it was only a manifestation of something more specific. He did, in a sense, apologize for the painting's dependency; but he boasted as a sort of over-reaction. The artist also used penetrative elements in "Haymakers." Whereas in "Mourning Dove" the artist used penetrative elements to reinstate a capacity for reference, in "Haymakers" he had not felt particularly restricted in his approach to the subject matter. He had felt it unnecessary to push the vocabulary of the canvas beyond the one basic plane. He therefore scratched thistly lines through the paint to restore the areas of white to the picture plane proper. The artist's use of penetrative elements in "Tree House" was primarily sensational. "Tree House" was that resigned compromise with subject matter which would be corrupted in "Child's Play" and which would be subsequently overthrown in "Wedding of the Ant Queen."

The artist had long felt that subject matter was a necessary evil. When he found that for him it was also an unnecessary despot, his eyes were opened; and a new horizon of expression became accessible. The first awareness was exhilarating, then came the oppressive realization of the vastness of the new possibilities. The artist reacted by restricting his use of the picture's resources. The multi-level picture plane combined with the effect of the penetrative element provided a solution. The actual content of "Wedding of the Ant Queen" is confined to a submerged picture plane. It is walled

in and protected by ramparts of heavy, white space. "August Trial" was first conceived using the same mechanism; but before it was finished, the white areas were penetrated and circumvented by paths of exploring color. The artist had become aware of a universe of expression, and he had also managed to make that universe accessible by dismissing his own timid fears of the new freedom.

The subgroup of paintings including "Painted Sea," "Silent Image," "Shallow Haven," and "Seed of Rapture" may be considered to be primarily exploratory. There seems to be little continuity between them, perhaps, because each painting represented a tremendous leap across expressive territory. But the group possesses a tendency toward the integration of the picture plane and a tendency toward the predominant use of colors related to orange. A major disruption of the use of orange is found in "Shallow Haven" where the basic color is dark blue. The use of dark blue was, however, a conscious reaction on the part of the artist to the awareness that he was tending toward the predominant use of orange; and even "Shallow Haven" contains flecks of orange which are employed as a foil to the deep, cold blue. "Seed of Rapture" reaffirmed the vitality of orange and began the development which would culminate in "Orange Piece #2."

The paintings in this series were related in a process and through a unified function. Each represented a stage in the intensive creative development of its artist, and each was approached by another painting and departed from in order to reach a further goal which would be the realization of a painting. The above

progression seems to indicate an existential quality in the creative unfolding. It would seem that no artistic goal, especially when it is reached, is absolute. It presupposes factors which lead to it, and it suggests goals which may lie beyond it. The absolute goal, then, is a cerebral imposition. It can be imagined as a source of motivation; but when the ideal is reached, the live mind must move onward toward other goals which can be no more absolute than their predecessor.

Mondrian, for example, did not cease to paint when he could be satisfied that he had reached the ultimate in a direction of development. Mondrian reached an abstract fulfillment along objective lines, and it is the writer's opinion that he became more truly an artist when he realized that pure objectivity is not the realm of the artist. Mondrian's last few paintings showed the quality of his realization, but he died before he could perfect his new style. He did not die, however, before proving that the artistic fulfillment must be immediate and only vaguely protracted if it is to be realistic. In conclusion, the writer would comment that the rewards of the creative project inspired by this paper have been abundant. As an artist, he could not have hoped for a more satisfying existential fulfillment.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

General considerations.--The purpose of this final chapter is twofold. It should summarize and bring together the diverse elements of the preceding chapters, and it furthermore should formulate the results of research and experimentation. The primary purpose of this paper was to enrich the creative resources of the writer. The nature of creative expression is, of course, quite distinct from the nature of formulative assertion; and the thesis of this paper consists of the formulation of an assertion which deals with the nature of creative expression. The writer, therefore, found it necessary for his paper to deal effectively with two quite dissimilar attitudes, and he was therefore required to exercise the very difficult discipline of controlling not only his point of reference but also his method of reference and even the very nature of his thought processes.

The nature of abstract thought.--The first section of chapter two suggested that abstract thought exists on various levels. Many authorities think the primary element of abstract thought is concerned with the relationships which exist between concepts and within concepts. The concept is composed of more or less specific matter, which is called "imaged meaning" or

"centrally aroused" matter, and fringe impressions, which contribute meaning to the concept in the form of feelings. The fringe elements, the peripherally aroused feelings, do not necessarily belong to a single concept. Concepts may overlap and therefore contribute meanings to one another, and the train of consciousness may tend to move from related idea to related idea. Concepts furthermore tend to revert to previous associations in a given train of thought; however the mind, influenced as it is by a more or less uncontrollable environment, finds it necessary to set tasks for itself in order to adapt the organism to environmental conditions. This setting of tasks tends to direct the flow of consciousness from concept to concept thereby forcing concepts to come into new relationships. New relationships may in turn assert new concepts, thus making the mind more agile, more effective, and more accessible to consciousness.

The process thus far outlined appears to be quite simple. It is still concerned with the simple co-functioning of individual and environment. The practical mind serves to adapt the individual to his environment. However beyond a certain point, and here the discussion is no longer mere summary, the mind becomes aware of its functioning within the individual; and it becomes, to a certain extent independent of the relationship between individual and environment. The mind which is aware of itself becomes capable of reflection, and reflection is not immediately practical. Its purpose is the development of the mind and not the adaptation of the individual to the immediate

environment. Pure thought may or may not relate itself to nature, but in either case it is not directly motivated by natural circumstances.

Abstract thought is outside nature in that it is not necessarily qualified by a consideration of nature. On that level it is impractical in that it does not find a cause or a practice relating to nature. On the level of the individual, however, abstract thought finds a use. Abstract thought brings pleasure to man because it is fundamentally impractical. The mind functioning on an abstract level can originate experience which is not related to nature as such. Abstract thought is man's glorious freedom. Without it, man fears nature because he cannot escape its effect, but abstract thought gives man respite from nature's directives. He can then be empathic with nature because, being free from the absolute dominion of nature, he can view nature objectively.

Abstract art is primitive man's attempt at objectivity, but primitive man cannot be objective because he cannot escape nature's influence. Primitive art relates itself to nature through a function. A stool may look like an abstracted crouching woman. A knife handle may be shaped like an abstract bird, or an idol may find its function in a superstitious religion. The primitive religion is practical in that it represents an attempt to understand and control environment. Primitive art disdains nature, and it therefore cannot escape nature's influence. Primitive abstraction ignores nature or adapts it to unnatural forms, but it implies nature by its very negation of natural forms.

Modern abstraction, on the other hand, is a direct manifestation of the classical empathy with nature. Modern man as an ideal has developed to the point where he can afford to consider the relationship between himself and nature to be of minimal importance. Man can control nature to a certain extent by submitting to its rules and by using them to his benefit. Because he can control the effects of nature to a certain extent, modern man can be impractical, i.e. he can function without reference to a practical consideration of nature. His action need not grow out of nature's influence, and it need not be directed toward the influencing of nature.

Abstract thought and naturalism.--Abstract thought exists apart from nature. Abstract thought is in actuality a product of nature, but it is a discrete product. Just as the child is a discrete product of the mother, abstract thought has developed a personality of its own, a nature of its own, outside the dominion of nature. The mind has developed its own internal requirements which affect the mind's workings just as nature's requirements affect its workings. The elements of abstract thought are subject to natural laws of association, but these laws are the mind's laws and not those of external nature. Abstract thought may therefore concern itself with nature and yet do so on its own terms.

The artist is an intuitive thinker. His reference to nature may be broad and not necessarily logical. Breadth of reference and abstractness, however, are two different things. In chapter two, the writer discussed the imageless mental state which

is the result of the attempt of several concepts to enter at once into the consciousness. This imageless state of mind may provide the artist with material from which he may create a new concept which is, in effect, abstract because it includes the effects of several concepts. Broad reference is at the roots of abstraction, but it is only a means. When broad reference is the goal of expression, that expression is bound to be shallow because the resulting statement must be merely a conglomeration of partials. There is no concentrated intent in the mere broad reference. The work will have fallen short of making a coherent statement. An abstraction makes an implicitly intense statement. It furthermore cannot be redefined in other terms. The statement is inaccessible through other media. The technique will have become a vital part of the expression, and the work of art will have become the ultimate statement of an abstract idea.

In the execution of the fifteen paintings which were the subject of chapter three of this paper, the writer as an artist underwent an evolution toward abstraction which, after some study of the works, becomes apparent. He began with what amounted to a broad reference to nature, an attempt at the effect of abstraction. The first "Distant Train Whistle" was such an attempt. The reference was somewhat more concise in "Distant Train Whistle #2," but it was still upon an image in an environment. The image was more or less subjective reaction to a material stimulus, and the environment was treated in such a manner as to accentuate the image itself; but the subject matter was entirely natural, including the almost animalistic reaction to nature. The characteristics

of the first seven paintings with subject matter were similar. They were all functional in that they attempted a subjective interpretation of nature which was for the most part specific and communicable, i.e. intended for the comprehension of an audience of some sort. The style of painting changed immediately when two elements of conception changed. When specific subject matter was no longer a source and means of expression and when there was no longer any attempt to communicate out of practical considerations, the statements became clearer and less intricate in effect. The painted form began to make a unified and intense statement which was truly abstract. Nature as such had finally been deleted from the canvas and brought under a more objective scrutiny, and "Orange Piece #2" was that final statement of pure joy which declared beyond doubt that the origination of an abstract idea had occurred and that intense empathy was possible for the artist.

Final considerations.---The writer of this paper believed that his application of the theories induced from experimentation with abstract thought to the subject of abstract expression was original. He was aware, on the other hand, that much experimentation and research had been accomplished dealing with the process of creative thought as such, but that process is more general than the process of abstract expression. The writer had encountered no material dealing specifically with theories of thought composition as related to abstract expression. He thought this paper to be an original contribution on that particular topic.

Late in chapter three, a suggestion was made which might well be expanded upon at this point. It was suggested that there might be erotic implications in the creative process. The term erotic is used to indicate sensual gratification directly and indirectly related to sex motivation. Here, reference is not made to the obvious symbolizations of sex objects and situations but to the very basic motivation of artistic form as such. The writer felt that the psychological effect of nearly all artistic formal means is based to a large extent upon erotic association.

In the particular situation in which the suggestion was first made, the intention was to point out erotic implications in the nature of the consciously and unconsciously motivated procedure which the writer had found especially satisfying as an artist. He had preferred to work spontaneously, starting with canvas and paint and handling them in an essentially unplanned manner, working toward an unformulated but instantly recognizable climax of creative activity in which the work emerged in what for all practical purposes would be its complete form.

The time arts; music, literature and poetry, drama, dance, and related media; find the erotic motivation directly satisfied in the manifestation of durational form which makes perceptible use of rhythm, tension and resolution, and climax. It is no coincidence, for example, that the driving rhythms and clumsy manipulations of contemporary popular music are so admired as expressive by many modern adolescents. It is also no coincidence that music which is more subtle in its handling of rhythm and more deliberate in its exploitation of climactic form should find its audience

among a more mature folk. The same principles hold true for the other art media. Music is cited as an example because its abstract use of form is more conscious and more easily observed. The subtle drama, by the same token, will make no great impression upon the ordinary adolescent. He will usually prefer a more sensational form.

Painting and sculpture however, not being basically time arts, cannot so obviously exploit the erotic tradition of durational form. Only the mobile sculpture and the abstract motion picture can call the time element their medium. The mobile's use of time, furthermore, cannot be purposefully controlled without making it mechanical and therefore ineffective; and the abstract motion picture is often too aware of its sensational quality to make effective and serious use of durational form.

Painting and sculpture find their formal erotic implications almost entirely in the very act of creation. Whereas the composer of music and the writer of drama may work painstakingly to achieve a form for their audience, the painter may exploit durational form to his own satisfaction in the very process of creation. And if he is clever enough to make his procedure effectively evident, the experienced spectator of his work can also recreate a measure of the durational form of the creation for his own enjoyment.

Painting and sculpture may become the artist's art whereas music, literature, et cetera must largely be the art forms conceived for the satisfaction of the audience. The exception of

jazz is outstanding. It is the rare composer, however, who can work quickly enough and spontaneously enough to gain real satisfaction from the durational span of the creative process itself. He may enjoy creating, but his enjoyment is tied up with the product of creation. Rarely can the composer exploit the creative process itself. The process must be realized in such a manner as to constitute a unified experience if it is to be truly gratifying as an experience.

This discussion finds implications in child art and in other perhaps immature expressions, and this section is for the consideration of such implications. If erotic considerations are as important to art as this discussion would indicate, child art, which is not obviously prodigious, would have to be invalidated as true art. Child art, for all its sometimes sincere quality and surprising spontaneity, can rarely be executed with the formal resources which are so vital to mature expression. It is the writer's conclusion that the child may accidentally stumble upon an intriguing composition. He may even have a flair for organization, but his expression cannot become truly artistic until he is capable of feeling the very sensitive relationships of tension and resolution, rhythm, and climax in a very vital sense.

Psychologists maintain that children do possess erotic impulses, but they admit the qualification that child eroticism is autoeroticism, i.e. sensual gratification with innocent and purely selfish intent. Mature art, because of the social or moral nature of the mature individual, pertains to human society. It contains moral implications without intending morality. An

example in literature might be more concrete than one in painting. A man whose wife has run off with another man may write a novel about a situation similar to his own. He will probably not write out of moral intentions. He may write because he wishes to objectify an intense experience, and he will probably write for his own satisfaction. But others may share his objectified experience and draw moral implications from it.

The work of art must be the product of the complete organism. It must be the result of an impulsion toward expression. Considering art to be a broadly human expression, the normal child cannot create true art because he cannot be considered to be a complete organism but rather a potential human being. One may teach the child procedures, and he may teach the adolescent technical considerations. The child and the adolescent may be creative, and that vital spark should not be extinguished; but one should not call the immature product true art. If the child and the adolescent are truly creative and not just curious, they will continue to produce; and when they are more mature, their expression will find its instrument in valid works of art.

This paper finds implications in individual philosophical development as well as in art education. It made it possible for the writer to develop, as an artist, a spontaneous mode of expression in terms of the exploitation of a durational creative process. This work carries implications for other artists and writers as well. An intuitive expression can be found through intensive development if rational impulses are not allowed to inhibit production. That which occurs in the artist must be of most

importance to him. And an intuitive expression may be logically analyzed. Analysis is made easier if the works are executed quickly so that the artist's development is as much as possible recorded on canvas. The artist may develop through thinking. An artist who thinks constantly about his work but who paints only an occasional picture will find it difficult to organize his paintings in terms of a unified evolution because many "missing links" will not have been put into objective form. An intensive series of paintings may be more easily analyzed to note developmental tendencies.

The artist can learn to understand his intuition in terms of instinct and knowledge. Technical knowledge is important to the presentation of an expression. Intuition cannot be effectively objectified, however, until technique has become more or less instinctive. The writer's work would indicate that when technique has become the almost unthinking intermediary between the volition to form and the formal manifestation of the work of art, the artist's intuition has become truly articulate because instinct and not knowledge must be the medium of expression for intuition.

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