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FLAT UNMODELED FORM IN PAINTING

Candidate for the Master of Fine Arts
in the College of Fine and Applied Arts
of the
Rochester Institute of Technology

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PURPOSE OF THE THESIS

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the qualities of flat, unmodeled form, simplified by the blotting quality of the applied pigments and to create a series of paintings utilizing this investigation.

INTRODUCTION

The artist sees and he expresses. The intent to express is universal although the reasons are not. Intent is really never known, for the mind reinterprets what it sees and the subconscious does not show us what it knows. The artist then does not have a claim to a special authority over his work. Truth only comes through knowledge. Knowledge then can come only through the study of the content within the work.

"A dancer once said, when asked what her dancing meant, that if she could say what they meant she would not go to the great trouble of dancing them."¹

This thesis is an investigation into the qualities of flat, unmodeled form in painting. The fruit of the investigation is seen within my work. Any other information gained from this paper will have to come from a forced regurgitation of thoughts and interpretations concerning the six paintings involved.

1. Sidney Gendin, "The Artists Intention," The Journal Of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 23:196(Winter,1964).





THE SKETCH

Before beginning a painting I always produce a series of sketches. The sketch usually develops from a very quick, spontaneous approach to a finished and polished piece. Each sketch from the first to last is kept and used as the painting progresses. Ideas are used or eliminated as they are conceived. Paintings are never made directly from the sketches.

This point is quite interesting for I originally wished to use finished sketches of the same proportion as the canvas, then simply use an opaque projector and project the image onto the canvas. The expedience of this technique is obvious when using a hard-edge painting technique where forms must be perfectly shaped and positioned. The results, though, were quite startling. There was no comparison of imagery between the small sketch and the image when it was projected onto the larger canvas. The two objects were completely different and could not work using the same form. The answer was simply working wash painting over wash painting directly onto the canvas until the imagery was satisfactory. Color was then worked into the imagery and again the long process of applying a color

to an area only to find it not acceptable. A cover coat of Gesso then must be applied and the process must start again.

Ultimately, ambiguity was eliminated and the quality of a simple, direct statement was achieved.

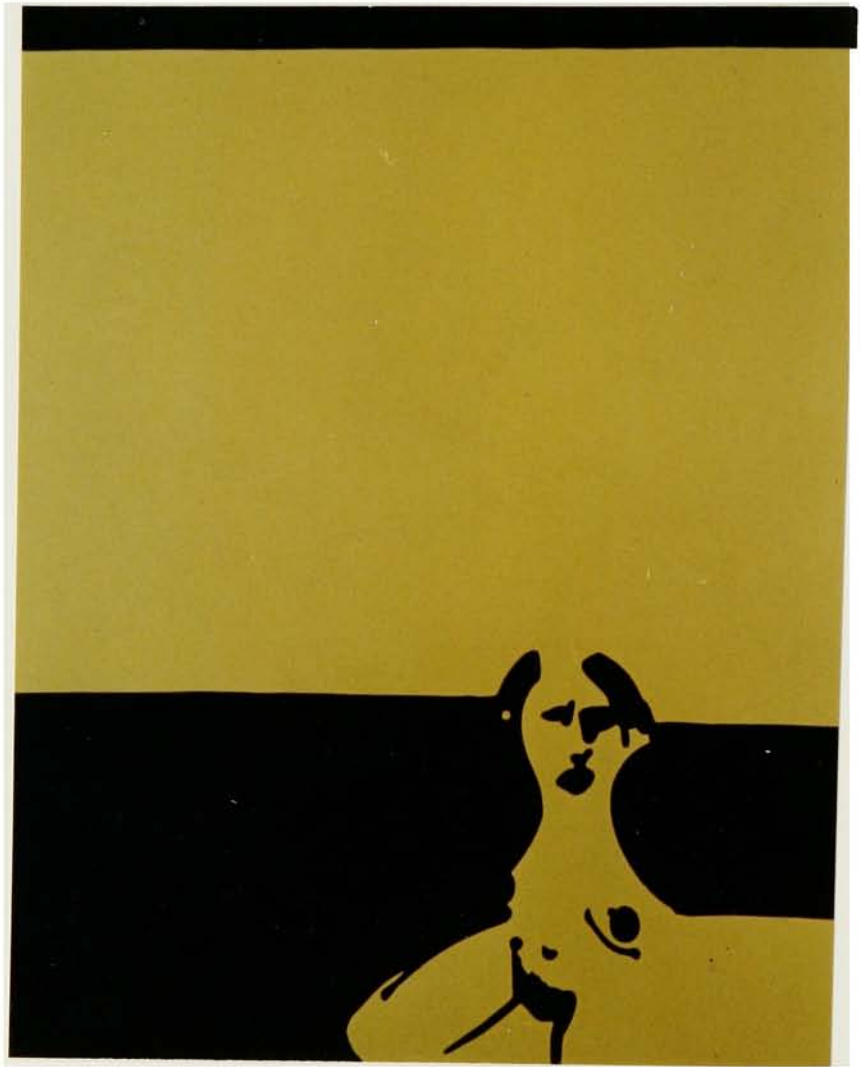


PLASTIC PAINTS

The development and use of plastic paint today is an unparalleled example of how scientific development of a new artists' material can have such a fantastic effect upon the artist's imagery.

The hard edge approach seen in painting today, in both "op" and "pop", have been a direct result of the technical innovations brought about through the development of plastic paints. Most important is the almost instant drying qualities found in these paints. The artist no longer has to wait hours or days to change a color or shape, but can almost immediately paint over an undesired area. The imagery seen today in the works of many advanced artists could not have been accomplished without this new paint. In cases where it could, the time element would have certainly minimized the quantity of such work.





FLAT QUALITIES OF PAINT

The technique of producing a flat color area without brush strokes or without a change of surface quality was one of my main technical difficulties.

Flat areas could easily be achieved, but only when the application of the pigment was very heavy, leaving brush strokes within the area. This was not satisfactory and new means had to be devised. Thinning the paint to a milky consistency did give a fine, flat quality in the large areas, but when redefining or reworking the contour of the figure, a glossy effect would occur. The more an area was worked, the glossier it would become. Many techniques were tried, thin coats of paint applied over thicker ones, matt medium and others, but none eliminated the gloss created by the reworking of the paint.

Finally the desired flatness was achieved. First the hue desired was applied as flat as possible (using three or four coats of a thinned mixture). Then by mixing the paint to a thick, creamy consistency and flowing it on in a manner which would let it flatten under its' own weight; a consistent color was achieved.



BLACK AND WHITE

The uses of black and white are not new to painting but are given much more importance now as a visual vocabulary. This new importance has given the go-ahead for vast change in acceptable imagery.

"In our century it was probably Matisse who with his great paintings of 1918 re-opened our eyes not only to the possibilities of black, but also to its use by great masters of the past. Matisse revealed black as color, Picasso demonstrated its expressive power and Mondrian used it as a carrier of symbolic abstract form." 1

Last year I painted primarily in black and white. I did not use black as color but as an object. Black, I think, is the only color that can be used this way; used as a tool to create pattern, spacial qualities and shapes without any or all of the subjective qualities found within other colors.

The development and use of color within my work emerged as the form of my work opened. Color could not be used as an object now, but had to exist as a domain in which objects have to live. The environments which I created for the nude consist of color only, color which is of extreme importance in serving what I wish to express.

1. Henri Matisse, "Problems in Aesthetics," An Introductory Book of Readings, Morris Weitz, ed., as quoted in October House, Ben Heller, 1963.



CANVAS SIZE

A canvas of a very large size commands a respect not found in a smaller canvas. For this reason alone I am dissatisfied when painting on a small canvas. I respect size whether it be physical or metaphysical.





THE SIMPLIFICATION OF THE FIGURE

I cannot adequately express the reasons why I simplify the figure within my paintings. I suppose it has something to do with purifying form or heightened awareness. I do, however, know how I simplify it and how it developed.

Last year I became interested in the process of the monoprint. I would simply apply pigment to a flat glass surface and press a printing paper to the surface. The pigment would flow under the pressure and would produce a blotting quality, eliminating all, or most of the detail within the original drawing. Using this technique of the monoprint I began a series of etchings using basically the same principal. But rather than pull a print from a surface, I would paint a lift ground directly onto the etching plate, and apply pressure to the areas in which I wanted the paint to spread. The quality I achieved seemed to fit and advance my expression so I continued this quality within my paintings. I did, however, go one step further. I eliminated the original steps and eventually found myself synthetically producing the effects of my original experiments. I no longer blotted pigment for effect but painted the blotting qualities directly on the canvas. I eliminated the accidental and am now using the

knowledge gained from the original experiments. I still however, will let the paint flow when I apply it and let it seek out its own form.



SPACE, TIME AND MOTION

I enjoy these forms where there is both a knowledge of space and movement. The figure seems at times to be at rest and in motion. There is a quality of timelessness here, one found only within space and the knowledge of its vastness.

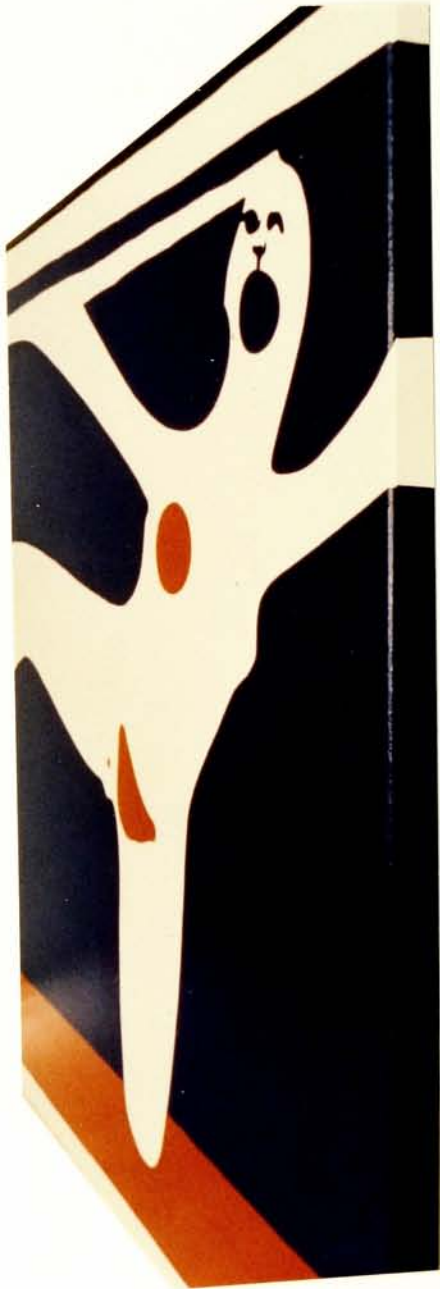




THE EROTIC APPEAL OF THE NUDE

"There is an erotic appeal present in certain forms of artistic expression which is integral to the work and cannot be explained without impairing if not destroying its aesthetic merit. This is especially true of art employing the human figure, particularly the nude. Yet, the presence of powerful sensual appeal is hardly surprising, for probably no object is infused with such emotional meaning as the human body. And this is transferred with no effort to representations of and illusions to it. Not only does the form of the body have aesthetically sensuous attraction; the function of its members does as well. Is there not a beauty in the free and graceful movement in the body? A beauty which is perhaps bound up with its' form? " 1

1. Arnold Berleant, "The Sensuous and the Sensual in Aesthetics," The Journal Of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 23:185, (Winter, 1964)



FRAMES AND STRIPPINGS

The use of frames or strippings on most paintings seem to act as a fence with a "keep out" or "keep in" sign attached. The artist seems to relish the environment he has created and wants to keep it apart from the world.

Most advanced painters today seem to completely eliminate the use of the frame. They no longer wish to eliminate the outside environment from their work. It is important to them to have an interplay between their work and the environment where it is found. With the elimination of a frame a painting can more easily become part of the world in which it and the artist live.



CONCLUSIONS

This paper hopefully has served two purposes; a document of my work during the last ten weeks, and an insight into the feeling and involvement which has lent to their creation.

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