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ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
The College of Fine and Applied Arts
in Candidacy for the Degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

A View of the Creative Process Influenced
by the Philosophy of Susanne K. Langer

By

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April 2, 1984

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Date: April 2, 1984

DEDICATION

To Dianne G. Foster for her love and support.

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I. INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

My thesis work consists of a series of figurative paintings that began as direct responses to the female nude model and then were completed without her presence, utilizing glazing and palette knife techniques. This approach allowed more freedom for creative resolutions. The creative process involved is highly personal and this paper represents an effort to gain a greater understanding of its complexities. The emphasis will be on the creative process in the visual arts. The direction of my research has been strongly influenced by the philosophy of Susanne K. Langer. I have found that her concept of what constitutes a work of art has a strong support in the studies of the creative process, of depth psychology, and of the evolutionary survival behavior of man. These areas of study have proved to be enlightening and provocative, and they form an essential basis for my view and understanding of the creative process.

II. SUSANNE K. LANGER

Susanne K. Langer is a philosopher who has written a number of scholarly books dealing with symbolism, art, and the human mind. I have found her work to be illuminating and relevant to my view of art and the creative process.

In Philosophy in a New Key, Langer proposed that one of man's basic needs is to symbolize. Symbol making is a primary activity, a constant fundamental process of the mind, that occurs both on the conscious and unconscious levels. She believes that symbolization is essential to thought and occurs prior to it; and that in addition to the symbolism used in discursive logical reasoning, there are symbolic non-discursive forms that provide a rich reservoir of mental life.¹

Discursive symbolism refers to language and the symbolic use of words and word structures. Language is discursive in that its form requires a linear sequential arrangement of ideas. It consists of units, words, that have assigned meanings and that can be combined into larger units, such as phrases and sentences, to communicate ideas from one individual to another. The connotations are general, requiring non-verbal acts and/or voice inflections to give specific denotations to its terms. This is quite different from non-discursive symbolism in which there are no defined symbolic units which are arranged linearly and translatable, and there is no

direct communication of generalities.² Langer's consideration of non-discursive symbolism was developed into a comprehensive theory of art in her later publication, Feeling and Form. Major elements of this theory were also presented in Problems of Art. Although her theory of art touches the areas of the visual arts, literature, music, dance, drama, and film, I will restrict my discussion to the visual arts.

Language is a powerful tool that allows us to think, remember, imagine, and conceive an idea; and it is with language that we can communicate with written works and audible sounds. All language requires the communication of ideas in a linear structure, and "...by reason of it, only thoughts which can be arranged in this peculiar order can be spoken at all; any idea which does not lend itself to this 'projection' is ineffable, incommunicable by means of words."³ Thus, with all its power, language has its limitations; for there is a reality of the mind that cannot be expressed with words and that is closely tied to our sensory awareness. "Nature speaks to us, first of all, through our senses; the forms and qualities we distinguish, remember, imagine, or recognize are symbols of entities which exceed and outlive our momentary experience."⁴ This is our subjective life of non-discursive symbolism.

This inner reality that cannot be verbalized is the matrix of art, the objectification of the subjective life. This concept is the basis of Langer's definition of art.

A work of art is an expressive form created for our perception through sense or imagination, and what it expresses is human feeling. The word 'feeling' must be taken here in its broadest sense, meaning everything

that can be felt, from physical sensation, pain and comfort, excitement and repose, to the most complex emotions, intellectual tensions,⁵ or steady feeling-tones of a conscious human life.

The expressive form is then an objectified metaphor of the inner subjective life. It "...exhibits relationships of parts, or points, or even qualities or aspects within the whole, so that it may be taken to represent some other whole whose elements have analogous relations."⁶ Langer sees the process of understanding one thing by means of another as a deeply intuitive mental activity; one thing becomes the symbol for the other. Furthermore, the distinction between the thing itself and the symbol may not always be clear.⁷

At this time it is necessary to present Langer's distinction between her term, the Art Symbol, and the symbols found in a work of art. The expressive form, the work itself, is the Art Symbol -- a single symbol, an organic whole in which the component elements are interdependent. The work exists as an indivisible unity. "The elements in a work are always newly created with the total image, and although it is possible to analyze what they contribute to the image, it is not possible to assign them any of its import apart from the whole."⁸ Langer believes that the import of a work of art can never be verbalized.

A work of art is an expressive form, and therefore a symbol, but not a symbol which points beyond itself so that one's thought passes on to the concept symbolized. The idea remains⁹ bound up in the form that makes it conceivable.

Symbols used in a work of art are elements in its unified structure. They function in the normal manner of symbols,

having meaning beyond what they present. The Art Symbol is the work of art itself.

It is not a symbol in the full familiar sense, for it does not convey something beyond itself. Therefore it cannot strictly be said to have a meaning; what it does have is import. It is a symbol in a special and derivative sense, because it does not fulfill all the functions of a true symbol: it formulates and objectifies experience for direct intellectual perception, or intuition, but it does not abstract a concept for discursive thought.¹⁰

Langer feels that any work of art must have the essential quality of "vital import,"¹¹ a quality that is intuitively perceived. By vital import, I believe she refers to a non-verbalized perception of the human condition -- what it feels like to be alive. In using this term, she is also suggesting a strong analogy between a work of art and a living organism. The work of art has a composition that is analogous to the internal organization of a living organism; the compositional elements interact in a dynamic unified structure. Thus, the work "...seems to be a living form, created, not mechanically contrived, for the expression of a meaning that seems inherent in the work itself: our own sentient being, Reality."¹²

Our sentience is the capacity for having sensation which is a basic level of consciousness. In the early development of the human mind, sensations are more generalized. Later, these sensations become more specialized into distinct emotions, desires, and directed drives. Because life is sentient, feelings and emotions and remembrances of them in our mind are intricately intertwined with our organic structure and biological processes.¹³ A work of art, then, expresses human feelings,

feelings that cannot be expressed verbally, in a perceivable form that has dynamic qualities similar to life itself.

These feelings that are expressed in a work of art are not symptomatic of the artist's emotional state at a particular moment; the work is not an automatic expression of an emotion. It is obvious that it would be difficult to work during an overwhelming emotional crisis or elation. As stated by Langer, an artist expresses his knowledge of feelings; he does not have to experience in actual life the feelings he expresses.

He formulates the elusive aspect of reality that is commonly taken to be amorphous and chaotic; that is, he objectifies the subjective realm. What he expresses is, therefore, not his own actual feeling, but what he knows about human feeling. Once he is in possession of a rich symbolism, that knowledge may actually exceed his entire personal experience. A work of art expresses a conception of life, emotion, inward reality.¹⁴

As an artist's artistic experiences widen, his own expressive forms may gain greater universality. Encounters with various forms of art may enrich the artist's own expressive powers. In a sense, his art becomes a vehicle for a greater understanding of the human condition.¹⁵

Langer discusses in her writings what actually is created in the various arts. In painting, what is created is virtual space. She relates the space created in a painting to the space of an image reflected in a mirror. A mirror consists of glass with a reflective backing and a painting consists of a canvas and pigments. If you were to touch both surfaces, you would encounter only glass or paint. The space perceived in the painting and in the mirror is illusionary. The image in the mirror is the reflection of actual space. The space

in the painting is created, and it may be two-dimensional or three-dimensional.¹⁶ The space is created for vision only, even if the paint or other material projects from the canvas; the virtual space may not only penetrate the canvas, but also project from its surface. It is this virtual space that is developed into the Art Symbol.

In creating an emotive symbol, or work of art, the creator does articulate a vital import which he could not imagine apart from its expression, and consequently cannot know before he expresses it. But the act of conception which sets his work going, whether it comes suddenly like an inspiration or only after much joyless and labored fuddling, is the envisagement of the 'commanding form,'¹⁷ the fundamental feeling to be explored and expressed.

In this statement, Langer presents a concept of the creative process that will be expanded upon in the next chapter.

III. THE CREATIVE PROCESS

My concern here is with the creative process in the visual arts, but this process is not the exclusive activity of a select segment of our human population. I believe this is an essential activity of all mankind, and that this process stimulates intellectual growth and facilitates emotional and physical survival.

Creativity is the ability to make innovative combinations that result in new and original ideas and/or objects. The creative process is the means to achieve these combinations by symbolic manipulation within the mind.¹⁸ Desmond Morris links this creative activity to an instinctual exploratory urge that is in itself related to the degree of specialization. Mammals that have a high degree of specialization have a weaker exploratory urge. This specialization may be an excellent survival device as long as there are no major environmental changes. If such a change occurs, the specialist may be doomed. Man, the most opportunist of all the non-specialist mammals, has a strong infant exploratory urge that is maintained and strengthened in the adult. This behavior has strong survival value. Man is never satisfied. Each answer to a question leads to another question. Man is attracted to the new; but at the same time, he fears it. Morris labels these conflicting tendencies as neophilic and neophobic, respectively.¹⁹

We are constantly in a state of shifting balance between the conflicting attractions of the exciting new stimulus and the friendly old one. If we lost our neophilia, we would stagnate. If we lost our neophobia, we would rush headlong into disaster.... We explore and we retrench, we investigate and we stabilize. Step by step we expand our awareness and understanding both of ourselves and of the complex environment we live in.²⁰

In effect, Morris relates creativity to a biological and behavioral need.

Carl R. Rogers points out this same relationship in man's inner need to develop his fullest potential. Man like any living organism has a strong tendency to expand, develop, extend, and mature.²¹ This tendency is viewed by Abraham H. Maslow as an essential element of human health, and the process is one of self-actualization.²² The relationship between self-actualization and creativity is strong and based on a mutual foundation of integration and wholeness. "To the extent that creativeness is constructive, synthesizing, unifying, and integrative, to that extent does it depend in part on the inner integration of the person."²³ Thus, the actualizing of the new idea is not only dependent on the degree of the individual's self-actualization, but is also instrumental in its development. If, as Morris suggests, the process of creativity is ultimately an evolutionary outgrowth of man's survival behavior, his exploratory urges; then Rollo May's idea of creativity as man's yearning for immortality can be seen as an extension of this survival behavior. May points out that man recognizes that his death is inevitable and must develop the courage to face it; but at the same time, he must rebel against it. Creativity is born within this conflict.²⁴ Man's exploratory

urges now extend into a search for meaning in this life, and this search is an inward journey most clearly reflected in the arts.

In discussing the creative process itself, the work of Graham Wallas will be most useful. Wallas distinguishes four different stages: preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification.²⁵ These four stages will be used as a generalized model. The order of these stages is not rigid, for they interweave and may all occur in any one stage of a larger creation. The process is dynamic and may not reflect the four stages distinctly, but the model and terminology will be useful in the following discussion.²⁶

For the artist, scientist and other professionals, the stage of preparation must include the development of skills and the acquisition of knowledge. This may involve the investment of many years and must require a high level of motivation. Creativity does not occur in a vacuum. Thus, the artist and other professionals must have a foundation that will allow the creative process to occur. This is also true of the non-professional, but to a lesser degree. With this foundation, the individual must then become aware of a potential problem or creative object through active search or through increased sensitivity to its presence.²⁷ Motivation now plays a key role in the engagement of the creative process and sustaining it.

The motivation of the individual is intrinsically meshed with a feeling of self-confidence that a solution to the recognized problem can be found. There is a strong desire to solve

the problem. This desire may be based on a hoped for reward of money, power or social recognition. It may be based on the anticipation of satisfying an inner non-verbal need or the pure satisfaction of exercising pleasurable skills or the aesthetic pleasure in the created object.²⁸ In fact, there is an inherent pleasure and satisfaction in the creative act itself; and this may be the only clear basis of motivation within a vague complexity of emotions.

With the recognition of the problem and the desire to solve it, the individual begins to analyze the directions of his efforts and to gather the relevant material. The search involves diverse symbolization and an effort to keep the various elements of the possible solution vague in order to avoid a fixation on one approach or imagery.²⁹ If after intense manipulation of the prepared material there is no solution, the material is then committed to unconscious incubation.

As the incubation stage begins, there is a sense of fatigue and frustration. This frustration along with the organized body of work is essential to the unconscious activity of the mind. The conscious mind frees itself of the problem, while strong desire and frustration drive the unconscious mind to pursue the solution.³⁰ It is here in the unconscious that a rich source of symbolism is found. There is the preparative material along with material that has been committed to memory and material stored in memory that never reached a level of conscious awareness. This period of incubation may be a few seconds or many years. The end of the incubation stage occurs

with the emergence of illumination, also called inspiration or insight. The insight may occur at resumption of active work on the problem or during times of relaxation.³¹

It is the answer to the problem posed, the fruit of the preparative labor, the new combination, the birth of a new idea. It is also the prelude to proof, to verification, to the fabrication of what³² is to be communicated or displayed for public acclaim.

The insight may be fleeting.

The insight is purely personal in the satisfaction and the elation it brings. The verification is the valuable thing given to the world. The pure germ of the idea is usually not acceptable, be it a work of art or literature, a visualized machine, or a hypothesized coordinating principle of natural phenomena. Work is needed - the 'nine-tenths perspiration'³³ - to give valuable form to the thing conceived.

Verification may consist only of minor revision of the insight if the creation is relatively simple. For a larger more complex creation, verification may include the following steps.

- (1) Elaboration
- (2) Minor insights
- (3) Minor complete cycles of the creative process to overcome³⁴ local blocks.
- (4) Revision

The emotions accompanying the verification stage are sometimes conflicting. The insight carries the individual into unexplored areas, and he stands alone feeling both elation and separation from his peers. It is the tension of this separation that is the driving force of this process of verification. It is this verification that removes this sense of separation by communication, by sharing in concrete form. At this time there is the pleasure of the aesthetic encounter of the creation and often the discouragement in not fulfilling the

complete potential of the initial insight. The individual may have actually accomplished this fulfillment, but he cannot re-experience the elation of that initial insight. That elation can only be experienced in the perception of new insights.³⁵

In order for this creative activity to occur, certain conditions must exist. Carl C. Rogers suggests that the first and most important condition is the emotional courage to be open to new experience; an openness that allows for personal honesty and a tolerance for ambiguity. Another condition involves a personal criteria for the evaluation of the created product. The initial value is determined by the creator himself and not by some external set of standards. The creator must also have the ability to manipulate freely ideas and symbols.³⁶ The setting of this activity must include an atmosphere of psychological safety that promotes these inner conditions. There must be an unconditional acceptance of the individual's worth along with an absence of outside criticism. Rogers believes the creator must have a sense of complete freedom of expression.³⁷ Such freedom can exist only in the arts, and only in a society that promotes artistic freedom. Unrestricted freedom in areas other than the arts is not possible without the destruction of the society that fosters it. The arts allow man to explore his inner nature and outer environment, and to express his discoveries in concrete symbolic form. Artists "...reveal the underlying psychological and spiritual conditions of their relationship to their world..."³⁸ With this special symbolic freedom of the artist in mind, this

investigation of the creative process will continue with a stronger focus on the visual arts.

The model of the creative process just presented indicated the involvement of the deeper layers of the mind, especially in the incubation stage. Anton Ehrenzweig explains that there is a complex interplay between the surface mind and the depth mind which has many levels. The surface mind is our conscious awareness, while the depth mind refers to the various unconscious levels of mental activity. Our surface mind has an articulating tendency referred to by some researchers as the gestalt tendency. We tend to organize our perceptions into precise forms that are simple, compact, and coherent; a good gestalt. Form experiences evolving from our depth mind are just the opposite in that they tend to be inarticulate, vague, and incoherent. Our observing surface mind perceives these experiences as chaotic.³⁹ The depth mind provides a rich source of images and forms which carry emotional charges; feelings that cannot be expressed verbally. These feelings that are part of the amorphous form experiences of the depth mind are allowed a measure of expression through symbolization. Repressed human emotions and drives may be expressed in a symbolic form that is more acceptable to the surface mind. For the artist, this symbolic transformation is crucial to the external form of a work of art and the entire creative process.⁴⁰

Form in art is the artist's means of communication. "The artist externalizes what he feels and imagines in sensuous form."⁴¹ Ben Shahn states that this form evolves from an

interaction of content and materials in such a way that form actually becomes the embodiment of content; a structuring based on the needs of content.⁴²

The work of art is the created image and symbol of a specific value; it was made to contain permanently something that was felt and thought and believed. It contains that feeling and nothing else. All other things have been excluded.⁴³

This form, this objectification of the subjective life, has a structure that may be considered a good gestalt; and it is this good gestalt that may provide aesthetic pleasure.

...the aesthetic pleasure generally adheres only to the gestalt elaborations which the surface mind projects into the inarticulate symbolic structures of the depth mind. The style and beauty of art is a superstructure serving to hide and to neutralize the dangerous symbolism hidden in the unaesthetic inarticulate structures below.⁴⁴ The creative process occurs in these hidden layers.

These gestalt elaborations affect not only the artist, but also the viewer perceiving the work of art. The artist, as in some abstract paintings, may present rather raw inarticulate imagery that is characteristic of the depth mind, and that necessitates the viewer to project into it a more aesthetic and articulate structure. Every work of art contains in varying degrees inarticulate imagery which allows the viewer an individual interpretation; and just as the interpretation may change from individual to individual, so may it change from generation to generation.⁴⁵ This idea is supported by Rollo May who believes that when we encounter a work of art, we are experiencing a new sensibility, a new insight. Thus, the appreciation of a work of art is a creative act in itself.⁴⁶

The artist's search for an expressive form involves both

conscious and unconscious mental processes which include intellectual and perceptual reasoning. Rudolf Arnheim sees conscious reasoning, both intellectual and perceptual, as being rather rigid and somewhat restricted to certain patterns. On the other hand, unconscious reasoning allows for more fluid patterns and freer combinations and recombinations of ideas and images. As indicated earlier, the stage must be set for this unconscious mental activity by the preparative work of the conscious mind. Another characteristic of unconscious reasoning is its primitive or archaic preservation of the organic unity of thought and image; there is a unity of sensory perception and abstract idea. Thus, the artist is able to find symbolic meaning in the perceptual world and to express his insights in concrete form through the unconscious activity of the depth mind. This primitive reasoning is centered around basic concerns of life and death and has greater honesty in dealing with these concerns.⁴⁷ I believe that these unconscious sensitivities to life and death are expressed in all significant works of art; this is the vital import of a work of art that Langer talks about.

Silvano Arieti states that in the creation of the work of art, the artist must be open to sensory perceptions and images that evolve in the mind. As previously indicated, the surface mind has a tendency to see things in unities or wholes. The mind receives so much sensory input that there must be a filtering process to restrict conscious awareness to what is important at a particular time. There is a strong survival value in quickly perceiving change in our environment. In perceiving

an object, only the pertinent information necessary to identify and categorize is registered in our surface, conscious mind. The details are not considered important and tend not to be perceived; but this sensory stimuli is not lost. The sensory stimuli not registered is still stored in the unconscious. There is another tendency of the surface mind to perceive objects as having constant form regardless of the distance or angle of observation. We are able to identify and classify quickly despite the apparent distortions created by foreshortening; again, this has obvious survival benefits in speed.⁴⁸ This is normal perception. Artistic perception involves the by-passing of the gestalt tendency of the surface mind to tap the unique capabilities of the unconscious.

Normal perception of the surface mind facilitates a quick awareness of the gestalt structure of a visual stimulus; and in the process, a great deal of information is eliminated from consciousness. Thus, the first requirement of artistic perception is to look at the objects for an extended length of time. In doing so, more information becomes available to the surface mind as the eyes move slowly over the objects. This activity enables us to see the subtle nuances of the form. Now as we focus on one part of an object, we find that the other parts are to some degree out of focus and vague. The perception of the object in its entirety, with all its visual information, involves a kind of diffuse vision which is characteristic of the depth mind. This diffuse vision is the special character of artistic perception. The artist cultivates this

ability to turn the mind's energy towards the deeper levels of mentation where vision loses its sharp edge and forms become more fluid, vague, and ambiguous.⁴⁹ The mind has a great ability to avoid boredom; an ability closely allied to the mind's survival ability of detecting change in the environment. Constant stimuli tend to drop out of conscious awareness. When the mind is forced into viewing an object or objects longer than it normally would, the initial gestalt relationships are broken down; and the mind actively seeks new combinations and patterns. The searching begins in the unconscious levels of the depth mind and then surfaces as new insights.⁵⁰

Arieti points out that perceptions involve external sensory structures whereas images are pure elements of the mind, although the initial raw material for these images is sensory in origin. Images provide the foundation for the inner reality of the human condition, and imaging is a dynamic and constant activity of the mind at all levels.⁵¹ Images may quickly associate with other images; they may fuse, separate, and replace. In the deeper layers of the mind, this activity is unceasing.⁵²

These images, along with perceptions and memory traces, are organized into what Arieti calls endocepts. An endocept is a non-verbalized association within the unconscious levels of the mind that carries an emotional component that is vague. Although these endocepts cannot be directly verbalized, they exist in our depth mind and influence our conscious activity. The endoceptual experience may remain in the deeper layers of

the unconscious; and at other times, it may be felt as an intention or atmosphere or vague feeling as it reaches closer to a preconscious level. Sometimes the emotions associated with these endocepts are very strong even though they cannot be verbalized.⁵³

Endocepts as complex dynamic associations of images are in constant change in terms of structure and movements to various levels of consciousness. Endocepts form the loose structure of the depth mind, and it is this endoceptual activity that occurs in the incubation stage of creativity. To engage the depth mind, the artist must loosen conscious control through relaxation. This does not mean that the deepest layers of the mind are immediately reached.

More normally, what comes to the fore in relaxation will be the fairly disorganized result of the interaction among the various layers. When the process is close to the surface - as in daydreams, doodles, or free association - automatisms will go into action, daylight thoughts and the afterimages of recent experiences will float by, modified through erratic intrusions from deeper levels....Any true work of art requires the co-⁵⁴operation of all the essential layers of the mind....

An artist creates a painting with both conscious and automatic form control. The proportion of each determines the degree to which the painting is gestalt-bound. Even the most representational painting will have some vague and ambiguous form control in its background despite a strong gestalt-bound foreground; this results from automatic brushwork influenced by the endoceptual activity of the unconscious. This automatic form control is probably more clearly seen in the work of the abstract expressionists whose foreground and background

distinctions are vague or non-existent, and whose final forms are essentially gestalt-free and retain much of the endoceptual character of the depth mind.⁵⁵ A work of art is created through the interaction of depth mind imagery and the diffuse vision of artistic perception, which allows both foreground and background forms to be seen simultaneously and new relationships and patterns to be seen. This interaction stimulates the formation of new images that may even exceed the artist's immediate and personal experience.⁵⁶ Whether or not the imagery is acceptable for the artist's personal expression is determined by the conscious activity of the surface mind; and this acceptability is influenced by the artist's openness, honesty, courage, and sense of self-worth. When the artist focuses in on his area of interest, he generally does not know the exact direction of his efforts. After contemplation of his subject, an initial insight may point the way; but the final form of the creation is not known and will not be known until it is actually achieved.⁵⁷ For the artist, the beginning of a new painting is the beginning of a new journey of discovery.

The artist looks at his model in search of visible answers to the question: What is the nature of this life? More precisely, he seeks perceivable similes for the constellations and processes of reality.... The creative individual has no desire to get away from what is normal and ordinary for the purpose of being different. He is not striving to relinquish the object, but to penetrate it according to his own criterion of what looks true. In the course of this penetration he abandons, often unwittingly, the normal view.⁵⁸

IV. PERSONAL WORK

In this section, my intent is to clarify the relationship of the previous discussion with my own work. I agree fully with Langer's concept of art as an expressive form that illuminates the human condition. I believe that a work of art does, in fact, express feelings that cannot be verbalized. These non-verbal feelings are part of the inner reality of the mind. Each of us is alone; we are locked into a biological loneliness that can never be obliterated. It is a fact of our existence. A work of art enables one human being to experience in some degree the personal reality of another; and in doing so, our biological isolation is softened. This does not mean that the artist sets out to communicate specific feelings. The creation of a work of art begins as a need for expression within the artist. This need may evolve from the artist's direct responses to his surroundings or images of past experiences or both. This need provides the motivation and general direction of the work. The actual creative process is a journey of discovery. As indicated in the previous section, this process involves both conscious and unconscious decisions. The final form of expression is not known from the initial insight; it is only vaguely sensed. The artist alone knows when the expressive form has been achieved. Only the artist can make this final decision; and this final decision is dependent on the

artist's sincerity and honesty. This is a matter of personal integrity. The work must feel right. The elements of the expressive form must interact to create a sense of unity both in composition and content. As Langer has pointed out, the feelings expressed are inextricable from the form and cannot be explained discursively. The viewer does not have to have the meaning of the expressive form explained in order to sense its truth. In fact, an accurate explanation by the artist or interpretation by the viewer would be impossible. The truth exists in varied forms; and because of this fact, there is a degree of ambiguity in all works of art. The vital import is sensed, but it may be sensed through various emotional references. We recognize the truth of the feeling being expressed even though the perception of the expressive form may vary from artist to viewer or viewer to viewer. The perceptual experience of the viewer depends, to a great extent, on the conditions of the encounter. These conditions include the location of the event and the physiological and emotional state of the viewer at a given time. The emotional state of the viewer will also be affected by his or her life experiences. Thus, the perceptual experience of the viewer may vary with each encounter of the work of art. This discussion of the viewer's encounter with a work of art is important in relation to the artist's intent. In my own work, I do not set out to express specific feelings. The feelings that are expressed in a particular painting have evolved with the creation of the painting itself. In the following pages, I will attempt to provide some

insights into the general creative process involved in my work.

All of the paintings are developed as initial, direct responses to the nude female model in a studio setting. I have chosen the nude female as an essential element in my paintings for several reasons. The nude female figure is rich in associations and as a source of evocative feelings that encompass the entire realm of the human condition. I attempt to view and manipulate the figure as a pure shape in the overall composition, but I find this to be impossible. Regardless of how distant and objective I may attempt to be, there is still present an awareness of the sensual and erotic. These sensual and erotic feelings permeate all the encounters and influence all other associations perceived on unconscious and conscious levels. This sensuality is partly expressed in the visual and tactile quality of the applied paint. The positions of the figures in some paintings may suggest sexual relationships. If the suggestion is there, it was not consciously developed. Of course, anytime you place more than one nude figure in a painting, a sexual intimacy may be interpreted. I am consciously using the figures as elements of design while allowing the unconscious to perceive the emotional associations and influence the conscious decisions.

These paintings are not portraits; they are expressions of feelings. The figures are painted representationally, but with a looseness that allows for more expressive possibilities. Although a single model was used in the painting sessions, multiple figures of varying sizes appear in the paintings. The

increased number of figures in the painting allows for more complexity in composition and content. The contrast in size of the figures in any one painting may be great or minimal; and this size contrast, along with abstract background elements, creates ambiguous time-space relationships. I find this ambiguity a positive and desirable quality of the painting; for the painting now becomes freed from the restrictions of the studio setting and enriched by the imagery of the unconscious. In the act of responding to the female nude, I allow the unconscious to help decide the initial placement and size of the figures. I do this through alternate periods of prolonged observation of the model and periods of contemplation of the blank and subsequent developing canvas. When I look at the model, I attempt to use a diffuse vision wherein I become sensitive to the entire figure and background elements simultaneously. The sensation is similar to that of peripheral vision.

I do not use any preliminary sketches before approaching the canvas; I find that such a process is personally deadening to the work. Instead, each new canvas is a fresh and anxiety ridden adventure. I do not know what the final results will be. Each painting begins with rather vague instructions to the model to take a standing, reclining or sitting pose. The model then arranges her props and takes several variations of the requested pose until I feel a particular pose is right. This is the initial insight; and the actual painting now begins. Because I do not use preliminary sketches, there may be a number of false starts in terms of size and placement. So in the be-

ginning of the painting, there may be as much destructive work as there is constructive. I feel that this approach allows for a freshness and spontaneity in the painting. As the figure is developed in this first pose, background elements are abstracted and loosely incorporated into the composition. The model will then take additional poses until I find a pose that feels right for the composition and content of the painting. The placement of these additional figures undergoes the same process as the placement of the initial figure. Each placement is a new discovery. The incorporation of several figures creates tensions and new emotional and intellectual associations. I cannot consciously verbalize the full meaning or import of these interactions of figures and background elements; but I know their relationships have validity in my unconscious, because consciously these relationships feel right and true. My personal honesty is my single guide, and what is appropriate and what is not appropriate in a particular painting is a conscious evaluation. This play of unconscious and conscious mental activity occurs throughout the entire evolution of the painting. Each mark of the brush or palette knife is not consciously evaluated before it is executed. Much work is accomplished through semi-automatic painting that reflects the unconscious activity of the mind. This is then evaluated consciously; and if necessary, removed or revised. As the painting develops, the composition and the emotional component of the content crystallize even though the feelings being expressed are vague.

Each painting begins with a direct confrontation with the model, but it is completed without the model present. This allows for more freedom in composition, and for more subjective elements to enter the painting. All of my paintings in this series are approximately four by five feet. I find this size appropriate for my particular use of the brush and palette knife. The actual paint application involves considerable physicality and muscular movement. I find that there is an emotional connection between the sensuality of the nude female and the sensuality of the paint itself and the actual paint application process.

My goal was to develop in the paintings areas of thick paint and transparent glazes while still retaining elements of the initial drawing and color washes. To attain this goal, I followed a general procedure; but this procedure is not rigid, and the sequence of paint application will vary with each painting. My palette was limited to the following colors: titanium white; yellow ochre; cadmium yellow, medium; cadmium red, light; cadmium red, medium; alizarin crimson; cobalt blue; Prussian blue; viridian; green earth; raw sienna; raw umber; burnt sienna; burnt umber; and ivory black. The color composition of the final form is the result of the evolutionary process of the individual painting. The colors used in a painting are personal and have little reference to the local colors of the model's setting. I allow the unconscious to direct the choice of colors; and this choice is directly related to the painting's content. I cannot explain the reasons for my color

choices. I can only state that the choices felt right for the individual paintings. There is a certain continuity in the import of this series of paintings; and as a result, there is a similarity in color choices. In general, the composition is developed directly on the canvas with a turpentine wash of burnt sienna or burnt umber. The initial statement is very linear and tentative. These particular washes allow a flexibility for a progressive definitive visual statement that is not overpowered by the initial tentative exploration of the blank canvas. The figures are then more fully modeled while the background elements are kept more abstract. The model is present only for this stage which is allowed to dry before building up color.

Color areas are first established with turpentine washes which may be modified or completely changed later as the painting develops. Once this is done, I begin to apply paint with either the brush or palette knife. This will vary. I may apply thin transparent or semi-opaque glazes with the brush using a paint medium consisting of one-third turpentine, one-third linseed oil and one-third damar varnish. The alternative procedure is to apply thick paint directly with the brush or palette knife. I try to bring up the figure and background to the same level of paint application at the end of this painting session. Then, I allow this work to dry. To facilitate this drying process, I use Grumbacher MG quick drying titanium white and a small amount of Grumbacher Cobalt Drier. I have found that even with thick applications of paint, the surface is dry

to the touch overnight in most cases. During the next painting session, I bring up the painting with additional applications of glazes and thick paint using the brush and palette knife. I again work the entire painting and then allow it to dry. I continue this procedure until the painting is completed. Because of the need for drying time between painting sessions, I work on several paintings at the same time. I do not begin and complete a painting before starting on the next. This process provides a strong degree of continuity in the series while allowing each painting to be a unique experience. The flexibility of this approach allows each painting to dictate its final form.

I have discussed the creative process involved in the evolution of both content and form in my paintings as a group. I believe this approach is appropriate for the creative process presented. My paintings are explorations into the inner reality of the mind. I do not consciously question each step of the journey; I choose a path, but I do not know the final destination. Even when the destination is recognized, I cannot fully explain its import; and if I did, I would question the validity of the explanation. Each painting must be encountered to sense its import. In discussing the individual paintings, I can provide only personal fragments of meaning. The truth lies beyond words.

Shescape (Ill. I) was the first painting. The figures and background elements were initially interpenetrating with thin loose paint applications. I wanted a more tactile paint sur-

face, so I built up a heavier paint texture with the palette knife. As the figures became more solid, the interpenetration of background elements and figures was lost. This was no longer important to me because of the unity created by the textural quality of the paint. The relationship of the three figures is ambiguous, and this is true to a degree of the figure relationships in all of the paintings in this series. The figures in this painting may or may not be sharing the same space and time. They may be separate individuals or they may be different life phases of the same individual. The background elements add to the ambiguity in that they may suggest folds of cloth or organic terrain. Facial expressions and body positions are powerful emotive elements in a painting. Here, two of the figures stare boldly and directly out of the canvas, while the third figure is passive. Are the two figures challenging my presence? Are they protective of the third?

The main figure in Mind Shadows (Ill. II) appears to project a dream state where the two smaller figures inhabit a landscape of fragmented female forms. Is the female form seen as a sensual landscape to be explored and possessed? Here, the main figure and the smallest figure are passive while the figure in the middle ground confronts me directly. Am I overstepping emotional boundaries?

In Sisters (Ill. III), the two figures share the same space. The similarity in facial appearance suggests siblings. They appear receptive and at the same time questioning my presence. The background elements are not as ambiguous as in the

previous paintings. They suggest fabric and a space of intimacy.

Soft Currents (Ill. IV) also has two figures sharing the same space, but the space is more ambiguous. The background elements are soft and the figures appear melancholy. There is no direct confrontation; the figures are more demure. There is a sense of the sea, a life source with surface tranquility and unseen conflict in its depths. I feel no aggressiveness, but I am still wary. I sense an invitation to envelop the sensuality, but there are barriers. What barriers? They are felt, but they are not seen.

In Point of View (Ill. V), the central large figure is seated in a throne-like form that extends into background elements that provide niches for the smaller figures. The main figure looks directly out of the canvas. She appears apprehensive; a little uncomfortable with setting. In contrast, the smaller figures appear more relaxed, more casual, and maybe a little wanton. I sense conflict. Is this a madonna-whore burden of my past?

Friends (Ill. VI) presents less ambiguity of time and space; the figures appear to be three separate individuals. Here, two of the figures avert their eyes. The third figure, farthest in the background, confronts me. Does she question my viewing privileges? Are my aesthetic interests turning prurient? Were they always prurient?

Isolates (Ill. VII) contains two large figures in the foreground that share the same space. Their relationship with

the three smaller figures in the background is more ambiguous. One of the large figures is melancholy or in despair, while the second major figure is alert and challenging. The smaller figures in the background suggest an element of voyeurism. I sense vulnerability. I sense intellectual and emotional complexity along with fleshy sensuality. Is this a new or old conflict?

Separate Plane (Ill. VIII) has a strong dreamlike quality. The central large figure is alert, but her eyes are averted. There appears to be no direct confrontation. The smaller figures are suggestive of life phases. I sense elements of the womb and of death. I sense a promise and a despair.

The large figure in Island (Ill. IX) appears receptive and alert. The smaller figure does not share the same time and space. She appears to be a dream or memory of the main figure. The background elements are ambiguous, but there is a suggestion of a sea cove and sand dunes. Is this a personal fantasy? I sense lost memories and solitude. I sense unfulfilled dreams and fragile promises.

Sequence (Ill. X) is similar to Separate Plane in having a strong dreamlike quality. I sense the sensuality of youth. I sense promise and aspiration. I sense loss and transitions, transitions of time and death.

Tandem (Ill. XI) is the last painting in this series. The two figures share the same ethereal space. There is a suggestion of a more explicit sexual intimacy. Am I projecting a personal fantasy? This is the only painting in which two dif-

ferent models were used. I did not influence the choice of poses taken by the models; and they did not pose together at the same time. The figure on the right was positioned first. The figure on the left was then positioned into the composition. I attempted to manipulate the figures objectively; but this cannot be fully accomplished. Is there a hidden sense of power? Are the figures manipulated to do the bidding of the unconscious drives?

In review, I feel that this series of paintings has both expressionistic and surrealistic qualities in both form and content. The paintings are expressionistic in the actual paint application and the emphasis on the human condition. There is a strong relationship between the ideas of Langer and Ehrenzweig and the surrealist school of thought that champions the full utilization of the creative potential of the unconscious. As indicated in the previous discussion, the unconscious plays a vital role in the evolution of each of my paintings. Although I recognize the expressionistic and surrealistic aspects of my work, I would not fully align myself with either artistic direction. As a student of art history, I am aware of the various artistic concerns and painting techniques. My work has not evolved out of a vacuum. I have been influenced by my exposure to the works of past and present artists. I feel that there is no single artist whom I can point to as a definitive source of emulation regarding painting techniques and/or content. I believe I stand alone in the pursuit of my artistic inquiry, but I am guided by the lives of two significant artists of the

twentieth century. I am inspired by the integrity of Alberto Giacometti's intense lifelong struggle to come to terms with his inner vision of reality and by the energy of Picasso's artistic prolificacy and his courage to create new visions of reality.

V. CONCLUDING STATEMENT

I have found my thesis work to be an invaluable experience both in the actual painting and in the research into the creative process. The reading provided confirmation of unexpressed ideas and stimulation of a strong desire to further my investigation into the relationship of the creative process and the sensory perception of reality. Each painting provided an opportunity for me to gain a greater understanding of the creative process as it relates to my philosophy of art, and I believe my personal philosophy has been further expanded by the works of Susanne K. Langer. Her philosophy has been invaluable to my personal artistic growth. I now understand more fully the need for sensitivity to the creative potential of the unconscious. My paintings are not mechanical projections of initial images. They each begin with a general direction, and then proceed with a great deal of trial and error. The final synthesis of form and content is not known from the outset; and there are no recipes for success. The creative process involves facing the anxiety of the unknown with courage; for the unknown includes the anticipation of achievement and the possibility of failure. A work of art is an adventure and an exploration of life and the human condition. This adventure is both life enriching and life sustaining, for it fosters intellectual and emotional growth. A work of art has the capacity

to unite humanity by increasing our awareness and appreciation of what it feels like to be alive.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Susanne K. Langer, Philosophy in a New Key: a Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1942; Mentor Books, 1948), p. 45.

² Ibid., p. 89.

³ Ibid., p. 77.

⁴ Ibid., p. 87.

⁵ Susanne K. Langer, Problems of Art (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957), p. 15.

⁶ Ibid., p. 20.

⁷ Ibid., p. 21.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 134-135.

⁹ Ibid., p. 67.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 139.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 59

¹² Ibid., p. 58.

¹³ Ibid., p. 46

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 26

¹⁵ Susanne K. Langer, Feeling and Form: a Theory of Art Developed from "Philosophy in a New Key" (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 391.

¹⁶ Langer, Problems of Art, p. 29.

¹⁷ Langer, Feeling and Form, p. 389.

¹⁸ John W. Haefele, Creativity and Innovation, Reinhold Management Reference Series (New York: Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1962), pp. 5-6.

¹⁹ Desmond Morris, The Naked Ape (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967; Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1969), pp. 106-107.

20 Ibid., p. 115

21 Carl R. Rogers, "Toward a Theory of Creativity," in The Creative Encounter, ed. Rosemary Holsinger, Camille Jordan, and Leon Levenson (Glenview: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1971), p. 4

22 Abraham H. Maslow, "Creativity in Self-Actualizing People," in The Creativity Question, ed. Albert Rothenberg and Carl R. Hausman (Durham: Duke University Press, 1976), p. 92.

23 Ibid., p. 90.

24 Rollo May, The Courage to Create (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1975; Bantam Books, Inc., 1976), p. 27.

25 Graham Wallas, "Stages in the Creative Process," in The Creativity Question, ed. Albert Rothenberg and Carl R. Hausman (Durham: Duke University Press, 1976), p. 70.

26 Haefele, Creativity and Innovation, p. 17.

27 Ibid., p. 7.

28 Ibid., pp. 20-22.

29 Ibid., pp. 42-43.

30 Ibid., pp. 22-23.

31 Ibid., p. 69.

32 Ibid., p. 84.

33 Ibid., p. 104.

34 Ibid., p. 105.

35 Ibid., p. 106-107.

36 Rogers, "Toward a Theory of Creativity," in The Creative Encounter, pp. 7-8.

37 Ibid., pp. 10-11.

38 May, The Courage to Create, p. 53.

39 Anton Ehrenzweig, The Psycho-analysis of Artistic Vision and Hearing: an Introduction to a Theory of Unconscious Perception (New York: George Braziller, 1965), p. 3.

40 Harry Slochower, "Psychoanalysis and Creativity," in Essays in Creativity, ed. Stanley Rosner and Lawrence Edwin Abt (New York: North River Press, Inc., 1974), pp. 156-158.

- 41 Ibid., p. 159.
- 42 Ben Shahn, The Shape of Content, The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), p. 70.
- 43 Ibid., p. 107.
- 44 Ehrenzweig, The Psycho-analysis of Artistic Vision and Hearing, p. 13.
- 45 Ibid., pp. 13-14.
- 46 May, The Courage to Create, pp. 15-16.
- 47 Rudolf Arnheim, Toward a Psychology of Art: Collected Essays (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), p. 289.
- 48 Silvano Arieti, Creativity: the Magic Synthesis (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1976), p. 40.
- 49 Ehrenzweig, The Psycho-analysis of Artistic Vision and Hearing, pp. 30-31.
- 50 Arnheim, Toward a Psychology of Art: Collected Essays, pp. 296.
- 51 Arieti, Creativity: the Magic Synthesis, pp. 44-45.
- 52 Ibid. pp. 48-49.
- 53 Ibid. pp. 54-55.
- 54 Arnheim, Toward a Psychology of Art: Collected Essays, p. 177.
- 55 Ehrenzweig, The Psycho-analysis of Artistic Vision and Hearing, p. 33.
- 56 Slochower, "Psychoanalysis and Creativity," in Essays in Creativity, p. 163.
- 57 Vincent Tomas, ed. Creativity in the Arts, Contemporary Perspectives in Philosophy Series (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), p. 98.
- 58 Arnheim, Toward a Psychology of Art: Collected Essays, pp. 298-299.

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I. Shescape



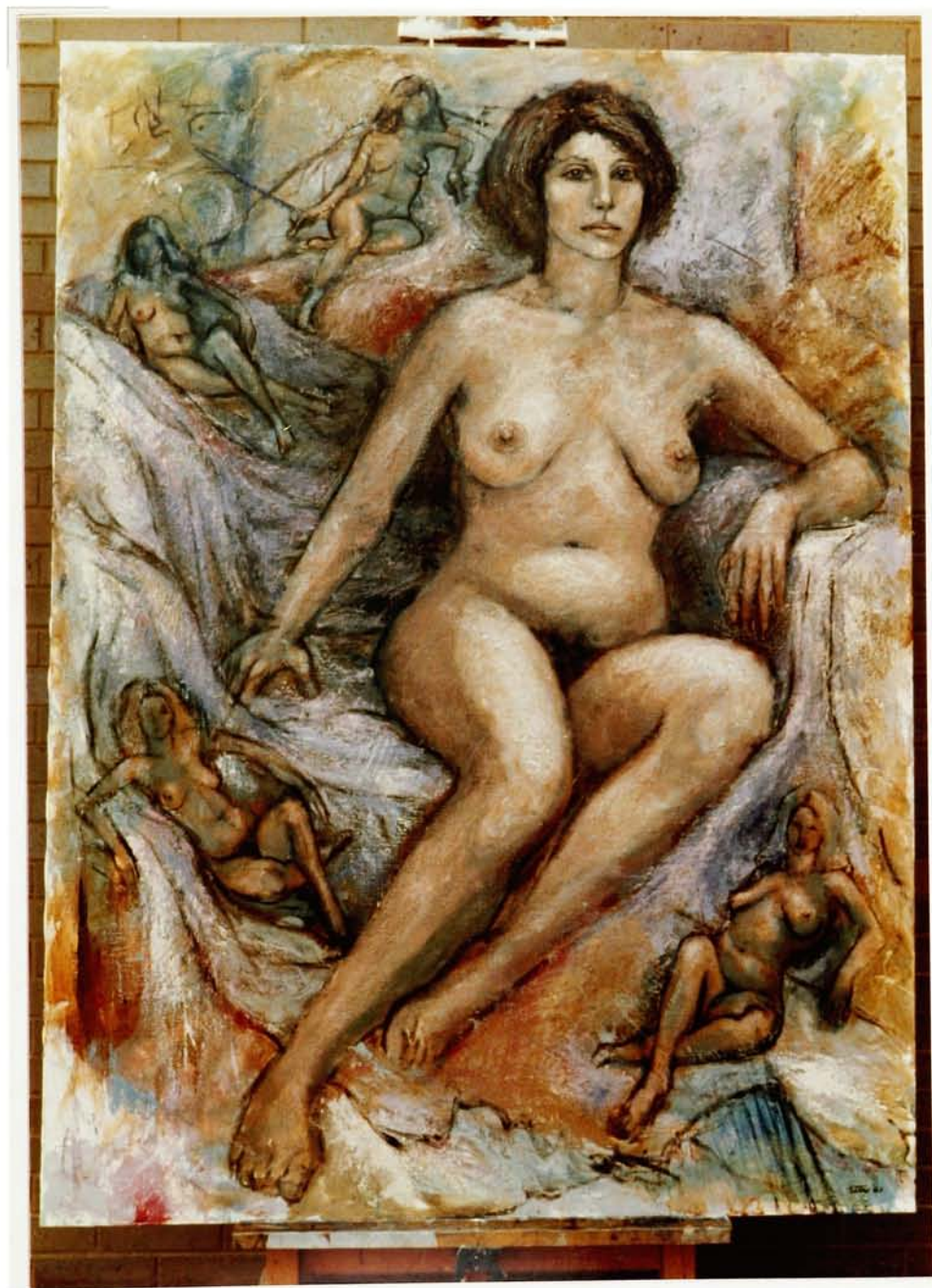
II. Mind Shadows



III. Sisters



IV. Soft Currents



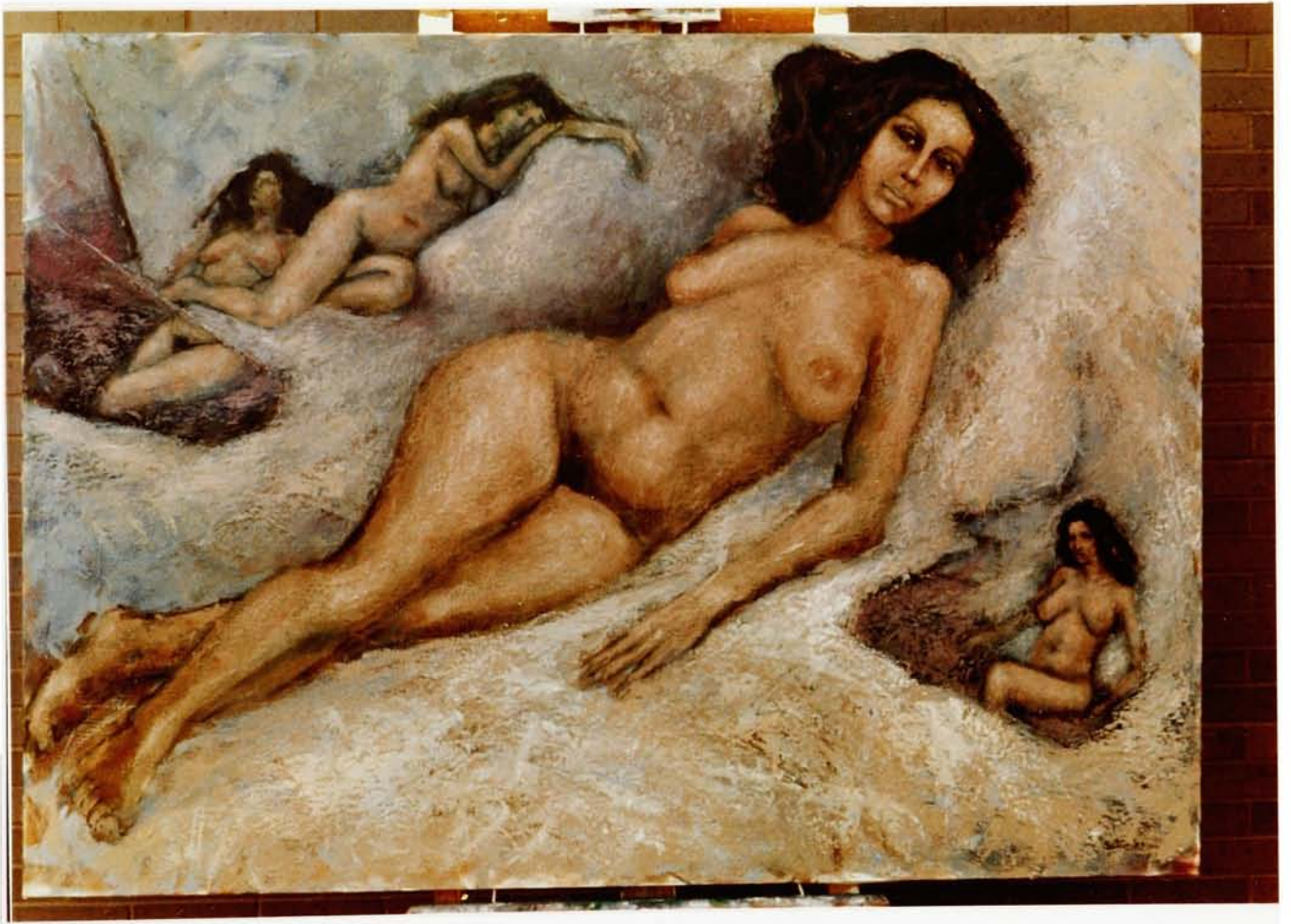
V. Point of View



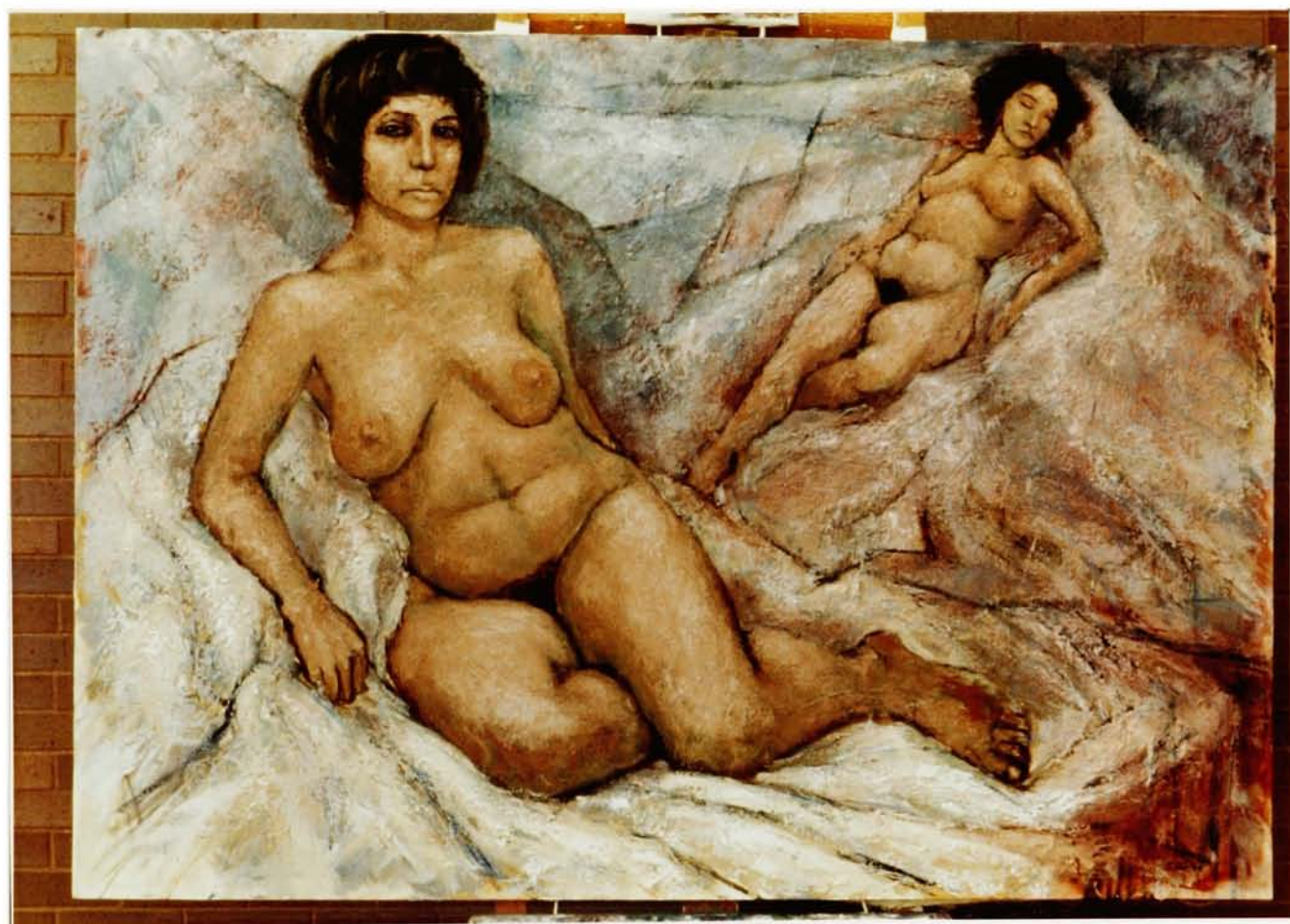
VI. Friends



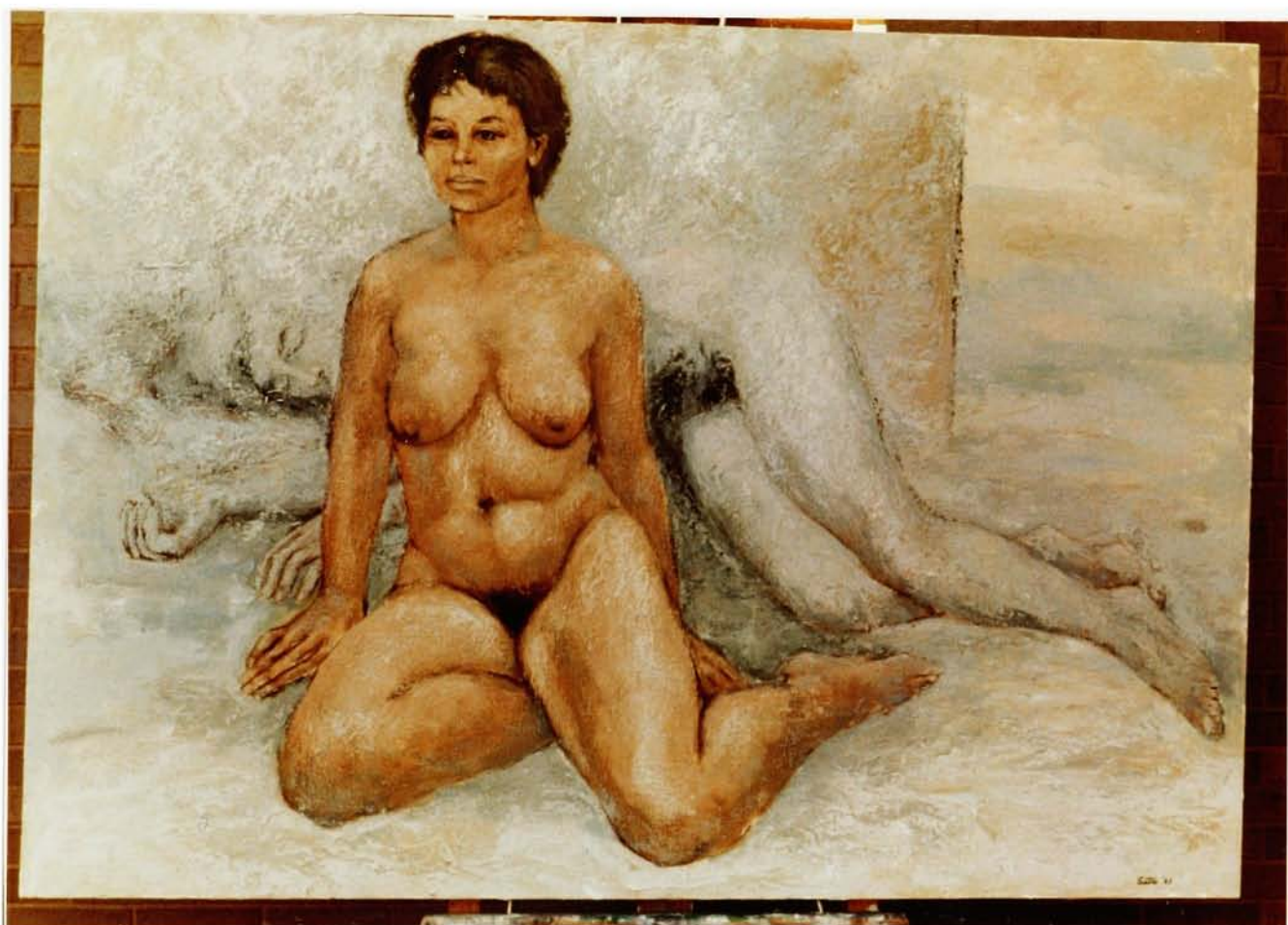
VII. Isolates



VIII. Separate Plane



IX. Island



X. Sequence



XI. Tandem