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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

Energy of the Soul

By

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Date: May 12, 1987

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Above all, I would like to thank my family. My husband, son and daughter all had to make sacrifices so that I could reach my goal. I realize that the change in lifestyle was difficult. Their support was monumental, and without it I would not have made it through.

INTRODUCTION

"The artist must ignore distinctions between 'recognized or unrecognized' conventions of form, the transitory knowledge and demands of his particular age. He must watch his own inner life and harken to the demands of internal necessity. Then he may safely employ means sanctioned or forbidden by his contemporaries. This is the only way to express the mystical necessity"¹

'Energy of the Soul' is a body of work that deals with my idea of inner necessity. An artist must draw upon the depths of the soul to find those elements that are important. It involves risks, but I have learned those risks are well worth the taking.

'Energy of the Soul' involved drawing, painting, papermaking and computer graphics. It has also involved research into ideas from past artists and writers. Above all it has been a personal search to find a means to successfully convey an inner need. This paper addresses the thought processes as well as the physical making of the works of art.

EARLY BEGINNINGS

Ideas come from unexpected sources. While reading Jose Arguelles' book The Transformative Vision², an image came to mind. Having pastels and paper at my side, I quickly made a sketch (see illustration 1). My inner necessity had begun to speak. I was on my way.

From that image came many words that intrigued me, power, ambiguity, inside and outside, vortex, energy, creation and mystery. With this list of words a foundation was laid to build a body of work that took shape in a variety of ways.

The sketch became a study for the first painting. Although the scale seemed right, the total application and visual result appeared weak. The realization that not all attempts are successful is an important step in the growth process of an artist. I experienced my first lesson.

The format of the square became important at this point in the work. A four foot by four foot dimension was established. The tension created by the geometry, set up a space that was not the typical format, but one that I

found challenging. The square presented compositional problems that lead to centered images and later to symbolic references.

The idea of doing paintings in groups or series also came about at this point. The desire to change images from one to the next became an integral part of the work. The idea that a painting is a work by itself and yet can also be part of a larger totality was intriguing. This concept mirrored the idea that man is a microcosm in a macrocosm. This seemed important and was influenced by readings of Ouspensky.³

The painting titled 'Energy Unleashed' (illustration #2) was executed next. It is the first successful painting in the series. The color selection and the application of the paint to the surface conveyed ideas of power and energy. The open space at the lower center of the painting deals with ambiguity and mystery.

Three more paintings using the central theme of energy were completed. The final in the series is 'Radiant Energy' (illustration #3). The time span required to develop 'Energy Unleashed' to 'Radiant Energy' was approximately six months. However, another series was also completed in this same time period; the VORTEX SERIES.



Illustration #1-Untitled/Pastel



Illustration #2-Energy Unleashed/Acrylic



Illustration #3-Radiant Energy/Acrylic

VORTEX SERIES

While working on the energy series I began to research the ideas of Vorticism. The concept of energy was an integral part of the thinking of painters and writers at the turn of the century. Society at this time was dealing with mass industrialization. Artists throughout the continent were embracing the machine and making art about it. The Futurists, as well as the Vorticists, were involved. I found Vorticism more relevant because of its main proponent Ezra Pound.

Pound wrote for the Vorticist publication BLAST. In the first issue he described the main ideas of Vorticism as follows:

'The vortex is the point of maximum energy.
It represents, in mechanics the greatest efficiency.
...All experience rushes into the vortex. All the past
that is living and worthy to live. All momentum, which
is the past bearing upon us, Race, Race-Memory, instinct
charging the Placid.'⁴

These ideas drew me in and inspired the Vortex Series. The idea of race memory spoke of primal knowledge. A knowledge that the soul must deal with.

Again the four foot square format and four paintings were completed in this series. A very direct approach to color was employed with the color selection being confronting and full of energy (see illustration # 4). With this series of paintings, the grouping together became more important. Although they have the ability to stand individually, I believe a stronger impact results from viewing them all at the same time, side by side.



Illustration #4-Vortex Series, Race Memory/Acrylic

SUPPORTIVE WORK

While working on the two series already mentioned several other explorations were going on. The use of papermaking, and several drawing media supported the painting. In this section I plan to explain how the different drawing techniques and papermaking influenced my work.

Pastels

The use of pastels to develop drawings has held much appeal. The translation of color and attitude are easily done from pastel to paint.

The first ideas translated into pastels dealt with the idea of energy as creation. A number of drawings were done that explored the female aspect of creation. An amphibious figure emerged, charged with cosmic energy (see illus.#5). Although a series of drawings, mainly using pastel, was created, the choice not to translate them to paint was made. Decisions about the best means of expression always have to be considered, and the choice was made to leave these as drawings.

The idea of the creation series drawing came intuitively as much of my imagery does. This poses problems at certain points. Intuitive imagery involves risk taking and a lot of introspection to discover what these intuitive images suggest. The decision to not translate the drawings to paint were influenced by my own feelings of baring this part of my soul to the public. At this time I was not willing to take that risk.

Other pastel studies were done from time to time. Pastels afforded a quick means to test ideas and color relationships. Using pastels as a testing ground became an integral part of my artistic language. I feel a kindred spirit with Paul Klee when he wrote 'Colour in its most violent tensions and subtlest dynamic relations became the vehicle of the dynamic unfolding of space.'⁵ Through the exploration of color, interesting spatial combinations began to happen.

Computer Drawing

The use of a machine to aid in the production of art work seems foreign to a lot of fine artist. However, it has had a very beneficial effect upon my ability to create imagery.

During the summer between my first and second year, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to work on a MacIntosh computer. This experience changed the way I now generate some images. The computer has become another drawing tool to sketch with. The ability to change images with the speed of a keystroke is invaluable. From the computer drawing I learned the importance of layering.

The computer drawings served as brief ideas for paintings while at other times the computer drawing was translated either directly to paint or handled with pastel as an intermediate step. The painting 'Orb' .(see illus.#6) is a direct result from a computer drawing. The painting 'Effulgence' (see illus.#7) was first done in pastel and then in paint. The intermediate step was to develop color exploration which is not present in the computer drawing. The use of black and white however has its advantages. Black and white makes it easier to develop a strong composition.

The ideas behind the imagery done on the computer deal with energy. However, a more complex language started to appear. Readings in Theosophy and Mysticism started to influence my work.(see bibliography) Theosophy's concern for nature along

with ideas of the individual's relationship to the cosmos were influencing my imagery. Expressions with positive and negative connotations were developed. The computer drawings represent a necessary, transitional, stage. The soul was restless and its energy needed direction. The explorations with the computer helped to firm up ideas.

Papermaking

The experience of a completely new medium provided the ability to explore ideas with no preconceived notions. To physically manipulate a material brought about a great feeling of freedom. It was refreshing to deal with an immediate process.

Papermaking influenced my painting in two major ways. The first way was in the simplification of imagery. Working with a small format (8"x10") forced one to think about making a statement with the least amount of confusion. The old adage that less is more was applied here. This idea took a while to sink in, but it finally did.

The second area where the papermaking influenced my work was in edge treatment. The nature of papermaking provides for variation in edges which results in a sensuousness. There appeared hard edges as well as soft edges in the papermaking process. The transition of these edges seemed to lend interest to the imagery. This attitude was carried over to painting.

Papermaking also directly influenced the last series of drawings that lead to the last series of paintings of my thesis work. The basic arch shape that appears in my papermaking shapes reappears in the series of oil pastel drawings and in the 'Floating Square Series'.

Oil Pastels

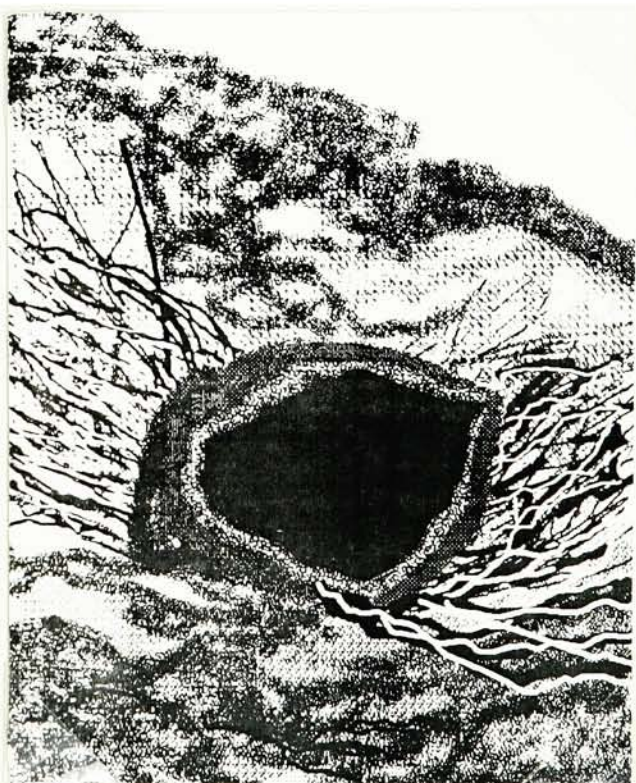
The use of oil crayons was influential in my paintings. By developing a series of drawings in oil crayon my ability to layer and make similar marks in paint as those used in the making of the oil crayon drawings became important. The use of line as an element in painting appeared as a direct result of these drawings(see illus.#8).



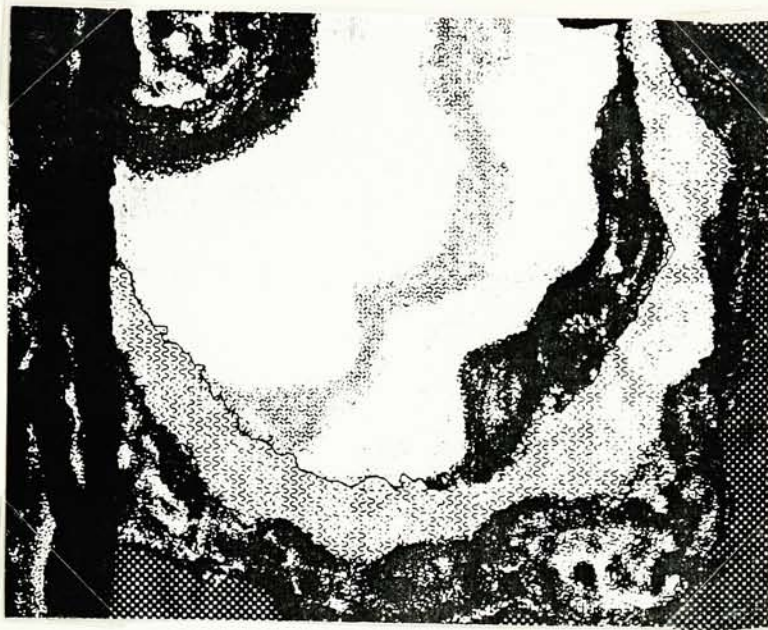
Illustration #5-Pastel on Paper



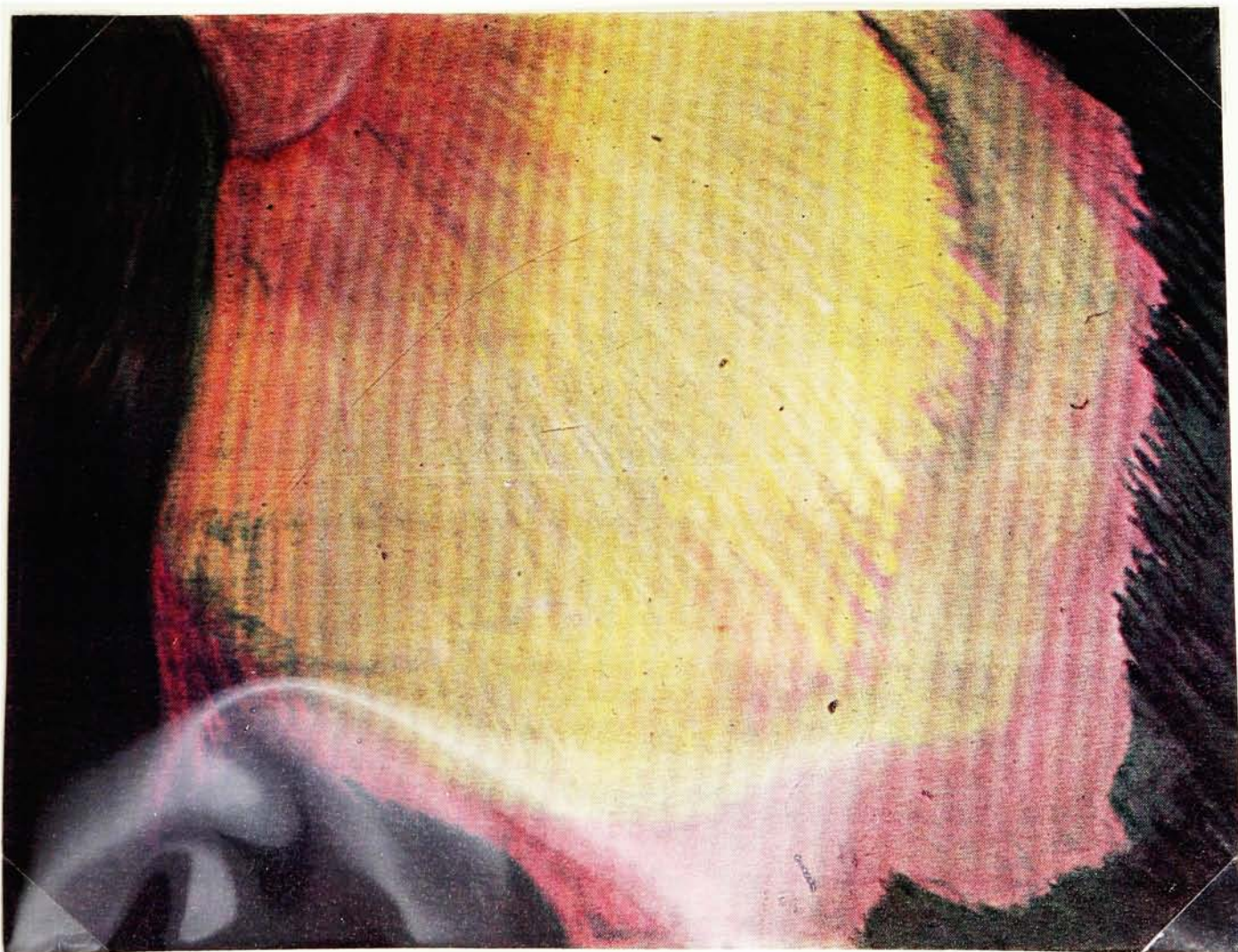
Illustration #6-Orb/Acrylic



Computer Sketch



Pastel on Paper



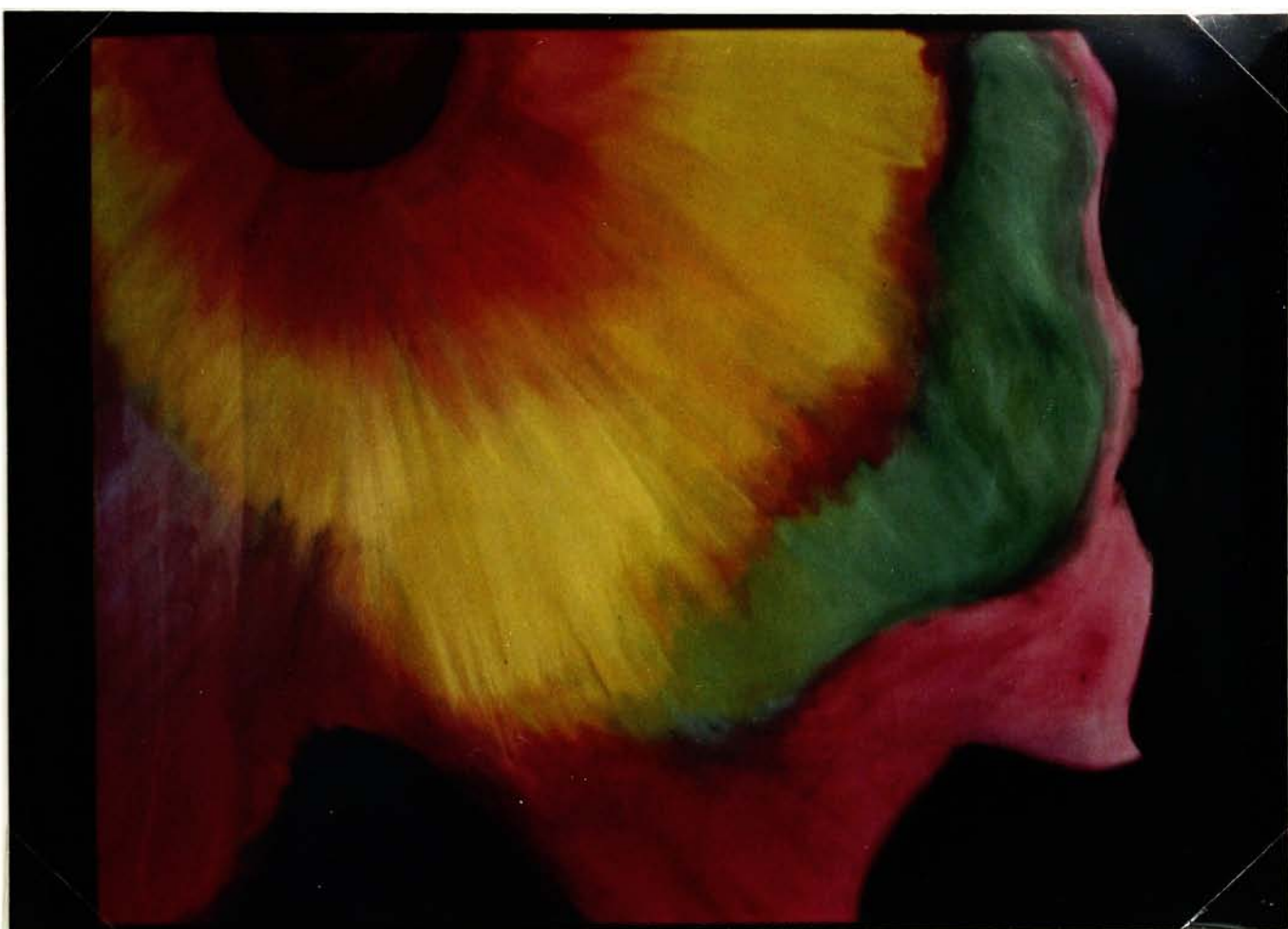


Illustration #7-Effulgence/Acrylic

Color Considerations

Color has always been a major part of my work. While working on the thesis, there was no exception. A shift in palette occurred. This was due to a desire to change the way the image was viewed.

In the early stages a concern for power was dominant. The Vorticist painters Wyndom Lewis and MacDonald-Wright, used pure pigment to make strong images. The use of pure pigment was an integral part of the Vorticist philosophy⁶ Since power and strength were ideas I was dealing with, the application of pure pigment made sense.

As work progressed so did ideas about color. Exploration into toning down the palette became necessary. The desire to make a more complex image where the viewer would be drawn into the painting and linger for longer periods of time became a primary concern. I no longer wanted to be confrontational. The work of two artists, Paul Klee and Mark Rothko, showed me the way to achieve this goal.

Paul Klee's color studies provided valuable information. His work during the 1920s and early 1930s, served as examples of

color combinations that were vibrant and spiritual. The idea that the primary colors are more psychologically important yet could be combined with greys was important.⁷ In my last series these ideas were applied.

Viewing Mark Rothko's work had a profound influence. I was fortunate to see Rothko's work at the Fogg Museum in Boston, Massachusetts, and at the Albright Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York. These two experiences made it clear that a subtle combination of color could be just as effective as pure pigment in giving a sense of spirituality to painting. The life and vibration of Rothko's work served as an example of what I wanted to achieve.

Floating Square Series

As stated before, preliminary drawings, and papermaking lead to the last series of paintings. Again, there are four paintings to the series. The scale is larger and varies. The 'Floating Square' paintings flow from all earlier work. An understanding of color, composition, edge treatment and subject content, were brought together.

The spatial aspects of the work deal with ideas of openings. The arches are windows of the soul. A mixing of Western and Eastern philosophies brought me to a point I truly call my own. The risk was taken to listen to my soul and react. A desire to express what I truly knew could not be held back.

The square manifested itself as a symbol. The human element, the reference to computer pixels, and to heavenly light are all present in this one element. The paintings became a spiritual experience much like a mandala.

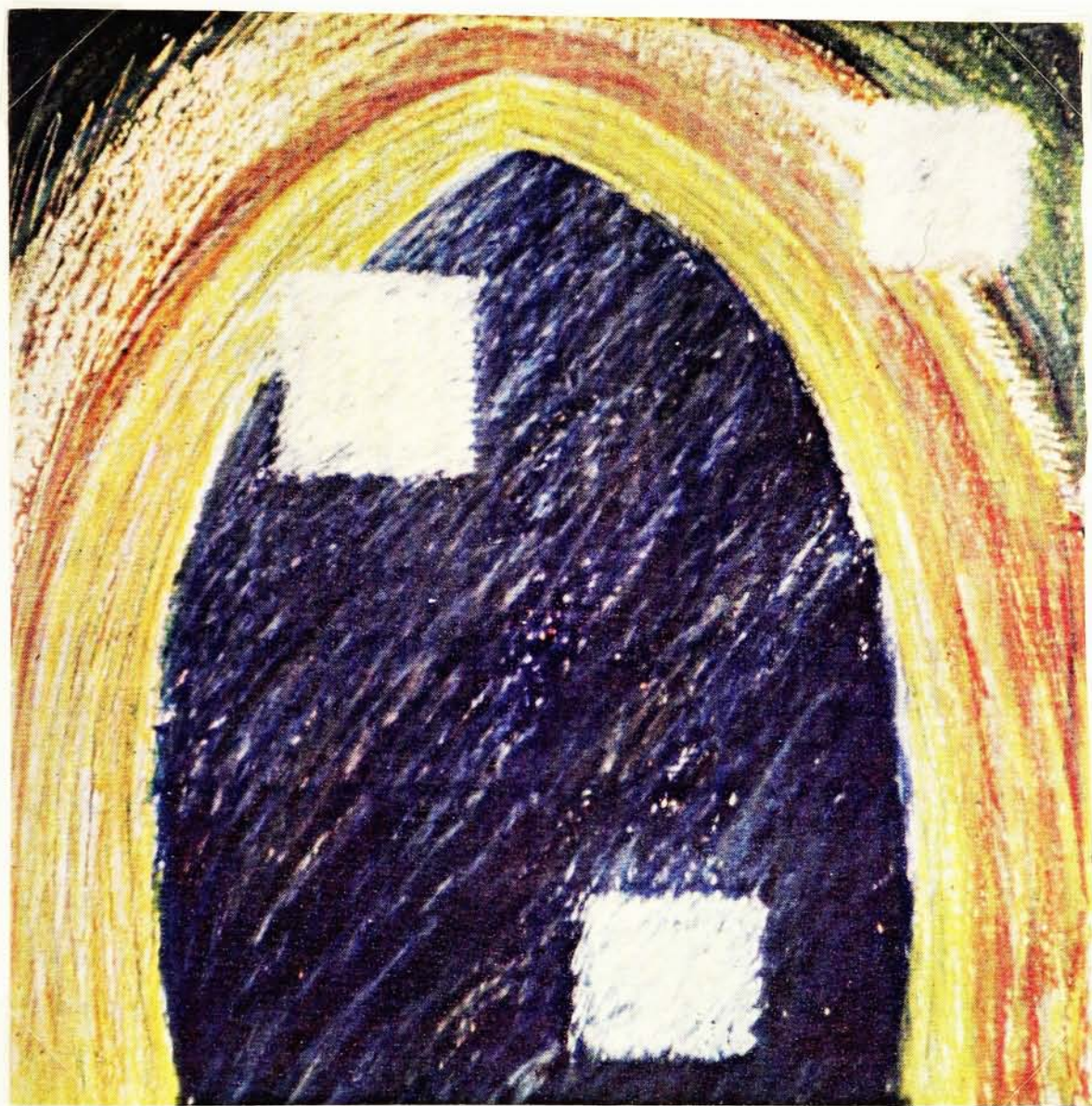


Illustration #8-Untitled/Oil Crayon

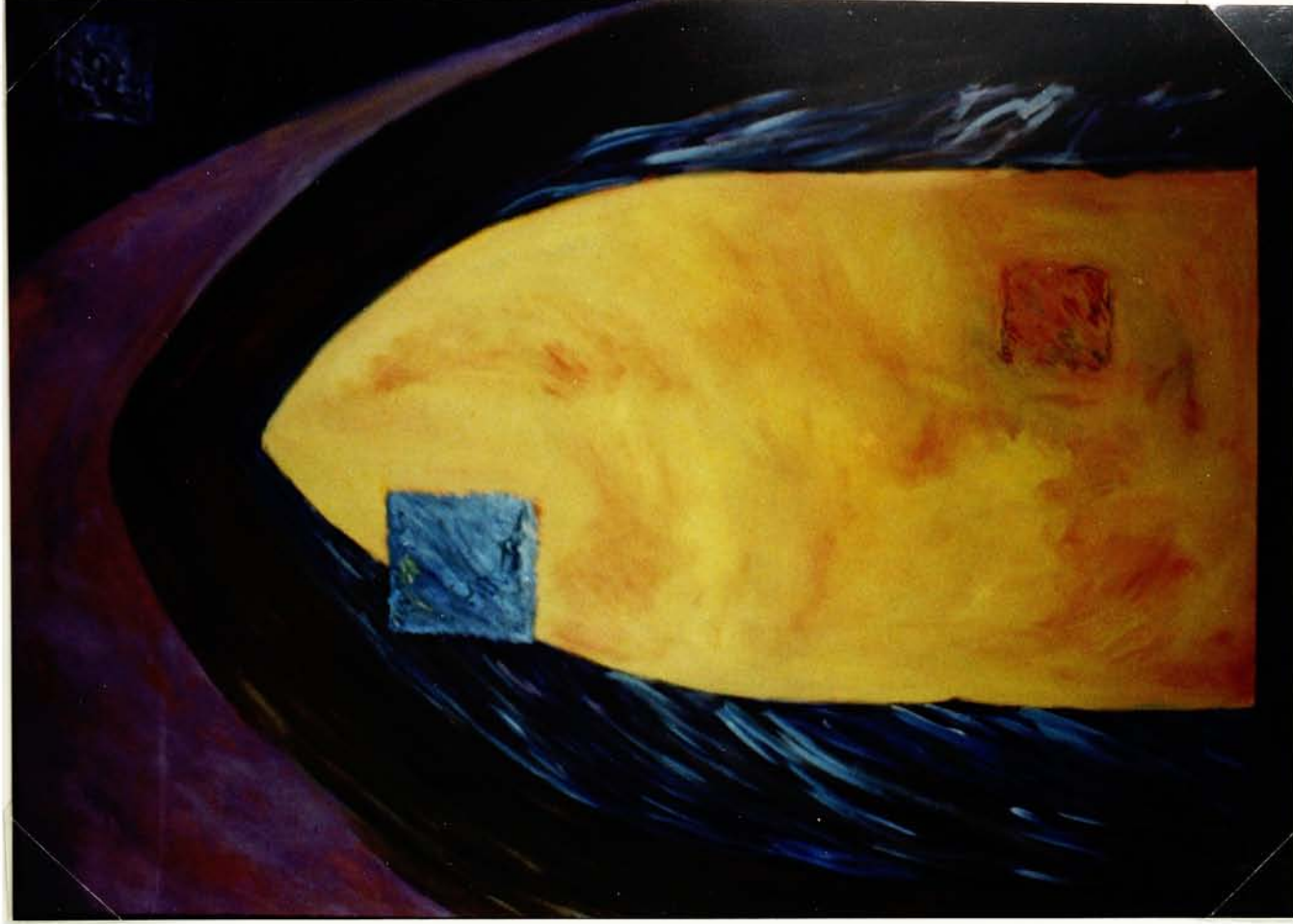


Illustration #10-Floating Square#4/Acrylic

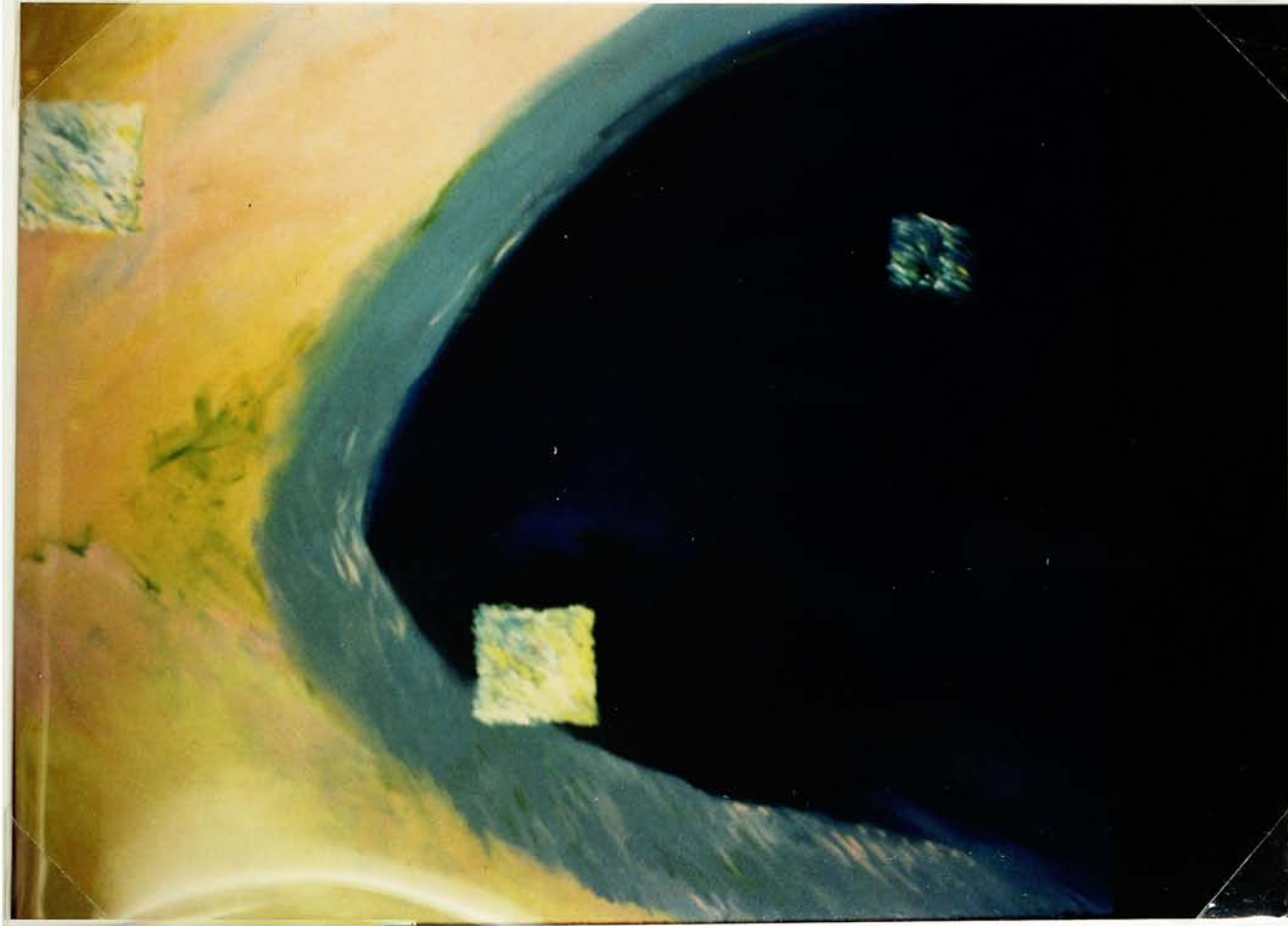


Illustration #9-Floating Square#2/Acrylic

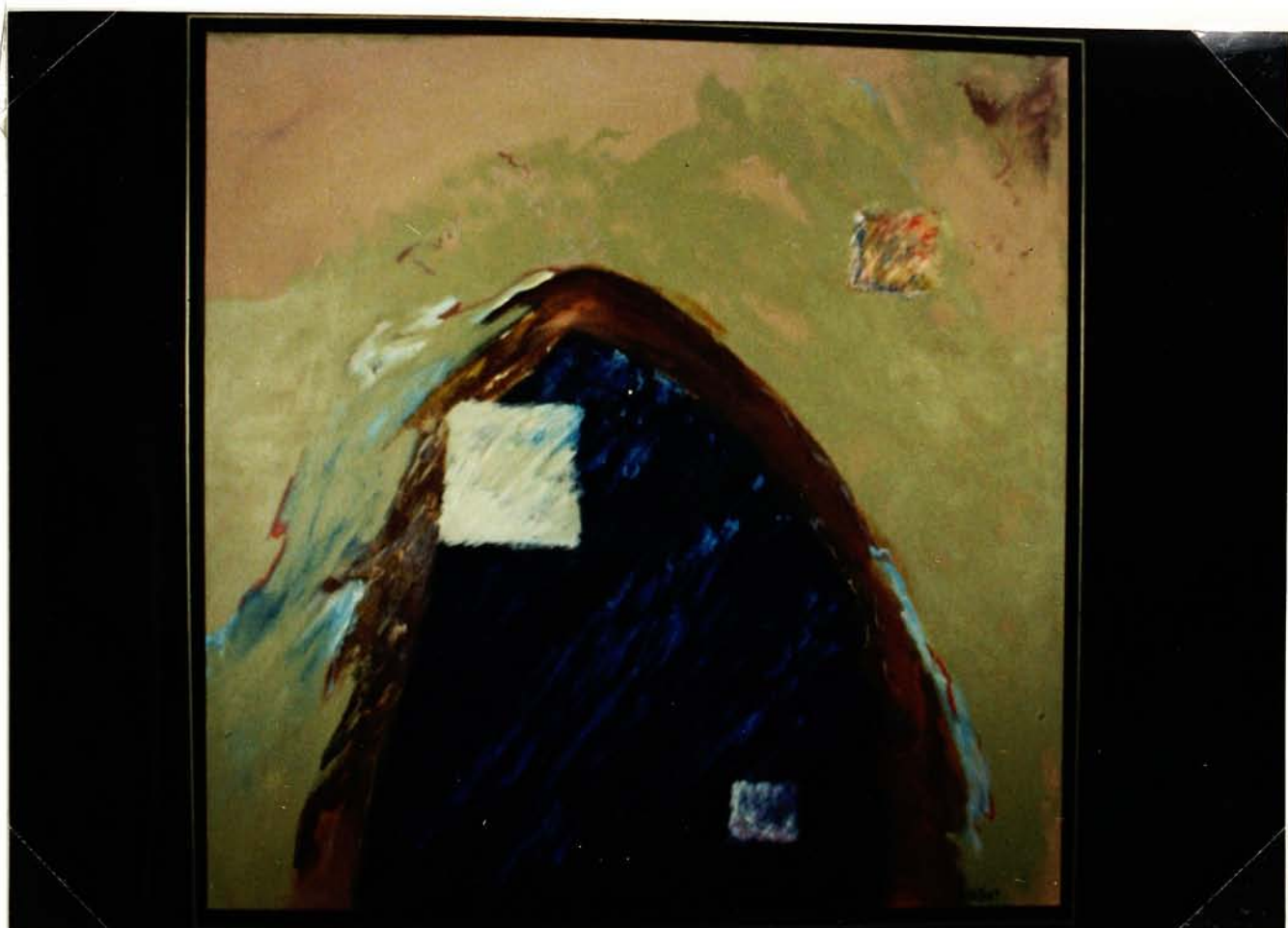


Illustration #11-Floating Square#3/Acrylic

Conclusions

'Energy of the Soul' has been a personal exploration. Readings in Theosophy, psychology, art history and philosophy have aided in the formation of concepts. Experimentation in the technical aspects of drawing, printmaking and papermaking, have been essential. The search has taken me far and has laid a firm foundation to reach further.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Wassily Kandinsky, Concerning the Spiritual in Art, (NY, George Wittenborn Inc. 1947) p. 53.

² Jose Arguelles, The Transformative Vision: Reflections of the Nature and History of Human Expression, (NY, Random House 1975)

³ P.D. Ouspensky, In Search of the Miraculous, (NY, Harcourt and Brace 1949)

⁴ Ezra Pound, Blast I, (July 1914)

⁵ Paul Klee, Paul Klee Notebooks: Vol I. The Thinking Eye, (London, Lund Humphries, 1956) p. 37.

⁶ Willard Huntington Wright, Modern Painting-It's Tendency and Meaning, (NY, London, John Lane Company 1915). p 325.

⁷ Paul Klee, Paul Klee Notebooks: Vol I. The Thinking Eye. (London, Lund Humphries 1956) p. 511.

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