

San Fernando Valley State College

VISUAL POETIC EXPRESSION
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An abstract submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Art

by

Marcia Garfield Isaacs

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The abstract of Marcia Garfield Isaacs
is approved:

Committee Chairman

San Fernando Valley State College

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I. PAINTING AS POETIC EXPRESSION

The paintings exhibited for the artistic performance are visual forms of poetic expression. This expression is highly personalized and directly related to the artist's emotional response to nature. The color, rhythmic movement of the brush strokes, the tactile and visual textures, and the qualities of pigment all work together within the composition toward a unification of form, image, and expression.

II. THE ORIGIN OF ART LIES IN NATURE

The painting is achieved through figurative imagery. Although subject matter is important as a source of inspiration, it becomes secondary once it is translated into the painting. The subject could be a figure, a still life, or a landscape...but only the painting itself is important. The subject matter is only significant as the initiator of a response.

According to Hans Hofmann's philosophy of painting, the origin of art lies in nature. Whether a painter works directly from a landscape, the figure, from

memory, or from imagination "nature is always the source of his creative impulses."¹ Although Hofmann is generally thought of as an abstract painter, a philosophy of nature underlies every aspect of his art.

To quote Hans Hofmann, "We must stay above and not below nature."² Nature is a point of departure for personal expression of the artist. The objects of the landscape are absorbed through light, shadow, texture and color to create more interesting shapes than those offered by the objects. The paintings reflect the artist's close identification with the elements of nature. The feeling of the moods, textures and colors in the landscape are transmitted through the artist's brush on the canvas, creating the total image. Through the choice of subject matter, and the proximity to the subject, the uniqueness of the painting is developed.

III. THE PERCEPTION OF THE UNIVERSE

Hofmann's belief that creative observation of nature should draw on hearing and touch as well as on the

¹William C. Seitz, Hans Hofmann The Museum of Modern Art (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., C. 1963), pp. 11.

²Frederick S. Wright, Hans Hofmann (University of California Press, California C. 1957), pp. 23.

uncanonized senses of space and movement has had a vital impact on my work.

It would appear that the more successful paintings attempted in this project reflect a quality of immediacy in the expressionism which is filtered through a direct involvement with the landscape. I have discovered it is important to attempt to become a part of the landscape by actually setting up the easel amongst the brush, rocks or trees.....even getting my toes wet in the stream. Close physical contact with the subject in mind strengthens the involvement and expression of the mood transmitted by paint on canvas.

Hofmann speaks of an "inner vision". This is his term for such consciously enriched perceptions with which I, too, have become personally involved.

According to Hofmann, it is a synthesis of all avenues of communication from environment to man³.

Reality, appearance, effect, empathy, are all perceived by the artist. [Unlike the scientist, whose concept of nature becomes increasingly divorced from

³Seitz, op. cit., pp. 14.

sensory experience, the artist above all must be a perceiving subject. This perception is a basic element in my paintings: "All our experiences culminate in the perception of the universe as a whole with man at its center.."⁴ The painter is a part of nature, incapable of escaping from it. His first responsibility, therefore, is to learn to see. Claude Monet, in his desire to paint the world as his eyes responded to it, tried to free vision from memory and emotion. If such unconstrained eyesight could be achieved, Hofmann would consider it insufficient for the artist; a reduction of nature to "the mere stimulus of the optic nerve by light."⁵ The emphasis then, in my work is a reflection of an "inner vision." This approach is based on the sensitive perception of the forms in nature, interpreted through psychic, emotional and visual experience. Past traditions in art are absorbed and the stimulus of present environment and attitudes results in a personal philosophy and style being developed.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

IV. THE EXPRESSIVE PROCESS

The paintings completed combine or relate decorative and expressive qualities. The resulting decorative pattern takes its organization from nature and the artist's perception of the subject or environment. The expressive qualities flow from the artist's personality and the subconscious impact of the subject matter on the artist. The expressive qualities in the painting become the dominant aspect of the work; the decorative aspects are secondary. The artist's awareness of and sensitivity to the environment are the source of the expressionistic qualities.

Herbert Read explains this style as:

"A form of art that gives primacy to the artist's emotional reactions to experience. The artist tries to depict not the objective reality of the world, but the subjective reality of the feelings which objects and events arouse in his psyche, or self."⁶

The paintings reflect an intense personal expression that is characterized primarily by colors and pigmentation. The colors reflect an attitude or feeling about the form, rather than recording the actual color of the subject. Thus, color departs

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Department of Art of the University of California, Los Angeles. Looking at Modern Painting. (Eureka Press, Los Angeles. C. 1957.) pp. 29

from the visual image and becomes expressive.

As in non-objective or pure painting, color evokes simultaneously a plastic and a psychological effect. Color in itself is light. In nature, light creates the color; in my paintings, color creates light. Every color shade emanates a very characteristic light which reflects an emotional reaction to the experience.

The luminous quality of the work relies upon the light-emanating characteristics of every color and upon the relation of these particular characteristics of color in juxtaposition. The relation is the product of the artist's creating, according to Hofmann, the "product of a hypersensitive creative mind." This relation produces a new quality of higher order, either in the form of tensions, when we deal with the compositional demand of integrated form or intervals, or when we deal with color relations.

[The act and gesture of painting are a form of intuitive expression, combining both "psychic automatism" and a physical activity with the energy and fury of a lyric poem or musical composition.] But even the most exuberant of the paintings reflect

formal relationships and an awareness of the art elements developed from previous learning experiences.

Through the gesture of applying paint, the force of the brush against the canvas, the quantity of paint on the brush, there is an emotive flow of the paint. The gesture is free, stemming from the subject. There is a spontaneity in the artist's application of paint to canvas, resulting in a direct expression of the feeling of the landscape.

For me, painting is a process of discovery. As the painting itself develops, much of the application of paint is determined by what is already on the canvas. There is an involvement with the relationships of color against color, line against shape, the emergence of forms as they relate to other forms, and the variation in textural qualities and brush strokes.

The pigment enhances the object and adds to the expressive quality of the work through its gesture, texture and color. Quick brush strokes are used, overlaying wet into wet paint, to capture the mood and the space of the landscape. The brush strokes

are related to the visual textures and patterns found in the landscape. Short, thin strokes often reflect the textures and patterns of grass; solid, rough strokes display the bark or trunk of a tree; broad overlays of paint express water reflecting the lights and colors of the area.

Oil on canvas is the material used in my figurative statements. The use of oil pigment on canvas provides an ability of the brush and paint to react against a pliable surface so that the brush in my hand is alive, vibrating, moving, pushing, and pulling against a taut plane. The size of each painting is related to an expressive feeling about the subject. The size also affects the intuitive qualities of the work and the intimacy of expression.

V. CONCLUSION

All creative possibilities are left open to the imagination, inventiveness and sensibility of the artist; and the selective capabilities of the mind become the essence for further growth and development of the artistic image. Being inexhaustible, life and nature continue to stimulate the creative impulse.

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APPENDIX

The attached photographs of the exhibited works illustrate the concepts described in this Abstract.











