

PAINTINGS CONCERNED WITH STUDY AND
INVESTIGATION IN PROPORTIONS
VALUES AND INTENSITIES

by


RAYMOND EUGENE LEVRA

A TERMINAL PROJECT

Presented to the Department of Drawing and Painting
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

June 1956

APPROVED


(Adviser for the Terminal Project)

M3 Gift (#9.30) Bd. 1.10

I have devoted the last two quarters to a series of drawings, paintings and lithographs concerned with the study and investigation of the "proportions within the areal break-up of the canvas, of value, and use of intensity."

In my last oral examination I was asked by what means I planned to carry out these aims. I realize that, at the time, I felt I would probably work out various color schemes concerned with value and intensity variances, and then do paintings based on these. At the time, I realized my need, but was uncertain as to how I would go about remedying my situation. What I did do is a little different from the rather "cut and dried" procedures I may have had in mind at the time.

My work, perhaps, is best divided into two large categories:

1. Work done directly from observation of nature
(still-life set-ups and landscapes).
2. Work done from observation of the working area of the canvas. (This is a segment started at the end of April.)

At the beginning of winter quarter my adviser, Mr. McCosh, suggested I start a small canvas based on direct observation of a still-life set-up. To aid in observing the true color and value range, a tube of rolled paper was used. This tube, held between

the eye and a chosen spot of color in one of the objects in the set-up, served to shut out local color and enabled me to judge more accurately the specific color with which I was concerned.

The procedure was to lay out the objects in the set-up on the canvas very simply using charcoal. Some of this drawing disappeared, and some remained as an integral part of the canvas. The layout was simply to fix for me the general area each object would fill. Then, using the tube to judge as accurately as possible the color needed, I mixed that tone and applied it directly to the canvas with a palette knife, trying to keep the size of that piece of color in scale to the size of the piece of color observed in the set-up. To really "play the game", I had to commit myself to making specific statements as to the nature of each of these pieces of color.

To begin with, the whole procedure seemed rather grueling. One took tube in hand, fastened aim on a spot of color, mentally decided what the nature of that spot was, as to value, hue and intensity, and then tried to mix this color exactly. My first mixture was invariably off. It was generally far too dark in value and far too pure or intense. As I went on by trial and error, I became aware that those colors I got, which worked, were very complex in make-up. They were lighter in value and lower in intensity than ones I would have used generally.

I made no attempt to model the objects on the canvas, as the areas were built up. The spots or pieces of color were kept fairly uniform in size.



FIRST "TUBE" PAINTING

12" x 16"

This painting I consider the keystone of my whole group of paintings. I found that by truly observing the specific nature of each color and by using them in this way, I had achieved a bright and rich painting. It was a convincing painting and it had a pleasing over-all scale and unity. For me, this whole color statement was a paradox. I had felt the more pure color I could cram into a given area, the richer and more vivid the result would be.

This observation of "the specific" rather than "the general" was pursued in drawing and lithography.

My subject matter during the whole of winter quarter and on into spring was set-ups of various fruit and vegetables. I chose these set-ups because I could arrange them to suit myself. I could place them in the light I wanted and could, to some degree, control the light. I chose to work by natural light. In this way I did not have sharply cast shadows that would occur from the high overhead lights in our studio. The color quality under natural light seemed to vary less since I tried to work on a certain set-up at approximately the same time each day.

As I continued working from the various vegetable and fruit set-ups, I admired more and more the rich color range they offered. It was interesting to me to note the subtle changes as the vegetables dried or sprouted (as the onions did). The colors were a challenge. Somehow nature seldomed offered a fruit or vegetable that was pure or intense color. This was most striking for me as I tried to work out the color for the tangerine in the first tube

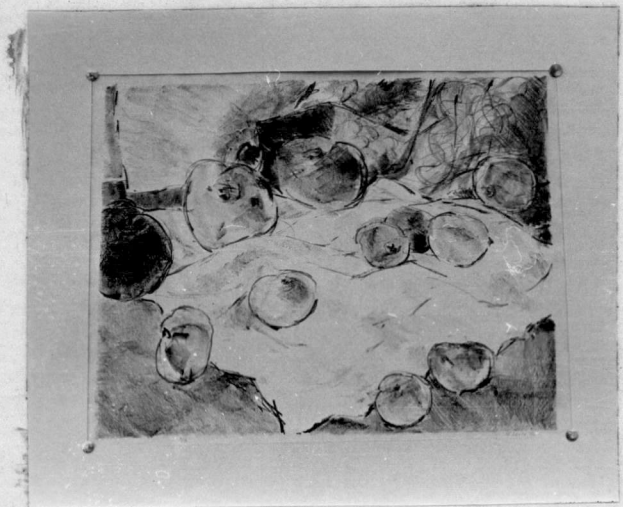
painting. It wasn't orange or red. After many tries, I finally got a complex mixture which made the specific statement I wanted about that tangerine.

At the same time as this painting I worked on a series of lithographs and drawings using the same or similar set-ups. My hope was to get a lithograph and drawing which had a color statement. At first it seemed odd to me that black and white could have color quality.

A lithograph depends upon very careful tuning of values to "come off". Too often previously, I generalized or made snap judgements as to the value statement of a given area. I came to realize that, to achieve what I desired, my lithographs must be very specific statements about value. The exact value of one area as compared to that in another. I must decide what is the darkest and what is the lightest area. What relation do the values of each area between dark and light have to each other? I came to see that, by building the areas on the stone, by specifically judging the exact nature of these areas and, by tuning one area to another, I could achieve the richness and color quality I hoped for.

My drawings at this time were developed along similar lines to the lithographs. In these, more than in the lithographs perhaps, I began to question what part "line" could take.

In all my work I have been interested in the "drawn quality"; by this I mean, what shapes are being drawn throughout the area of the canvas as you draw the specific shapes of the objects. These are the



LITHOGRAPH - SPECIFIC VALUE STATEMENT



LITHOGRAPH - HOW CAN LINE BE USED?



LITHOGRAPHS - ATTEMPTS AT USING
LINEAR AND VALUE STATEMENTS

shapes that are created simultaneously with the object shapes. They are the ones which form the framework, the woven construction within the painting or drawing. They are the means by which the painting may be read a second way. I became very interested in subtleties that may occur between tones of one area and another. I began to think of line and area in this way: First, they stated their color; Second, they formed not only the shape of the object, but also served as a portion of another, larger, secondary shape. These secondary shapes were more often felt than actually enscribed, but gave another means of seeing the drawing.

In my second oral I stated I wished to investigate, "proportions within the area of the canvas, the relationship of the proportions in depth, width, and length to the canvas." This was my way of expressing the need I felt for what may be called the composition of the canvas. I don't believe I have consciously thought of the overall structure of the painting area in exactly this manner since beginning work on my terminal project. I have come to believe that it is the grouping and adjusting of shapes, both described and felt, and of directions which make up this woven or well-knit thing which I termed composition. I always kept large divisions of the area in mind. I considered working from a center, or shifting the center, and the "ground-sky" relationship. I began to see that I could keep these large divisions without isolating or surrounding them. I could create shapes that were open and readable other ways. I saw that the exact way a line or shape was put down was important for either termination

could be usable as a part in building a general direction, or in creating a secondary shape.

The more I painted and drew, and as I felt more secure in the use of value and specific color statement, a new problem arose for me. How could I use line? How could I combine calligraphy and block treatment in the same canvas? What would be the proportion of each? I began adding leaves and branches to my set-ups. These added another aspect. I did not think of them in terms of texture, but as items which would add definite calligraphic terms.

In the actual handling of these drawings I liked working on a water color type paper with litho crayons. These I use flat to build up areas and also for drawn lines. I soon found I preferred using a mixture of tone and wash. Lines were drawn with crayons or with india ink and a nib pen. The washes are applied with a large chinese brush or with the side of the litho crayon that has been dipped in water. Later I found I could get another line quality by using a small flexible pointed chinese brush.

The suitability of each of these different applications becomes increasingly important to me. It makes a difference to me when I drop the brush after doing a wash area to pick up a pen to draw a line. The awareness of the material and tool makes me aware that I must know precisely what I am doing. This awareness is elusive at times. Often I have found myself modeling a form when my desire was to make a color statement. By modeling, I mean drawing the form by use of light and dark in an attempt to give a three dimensional effect to the object.

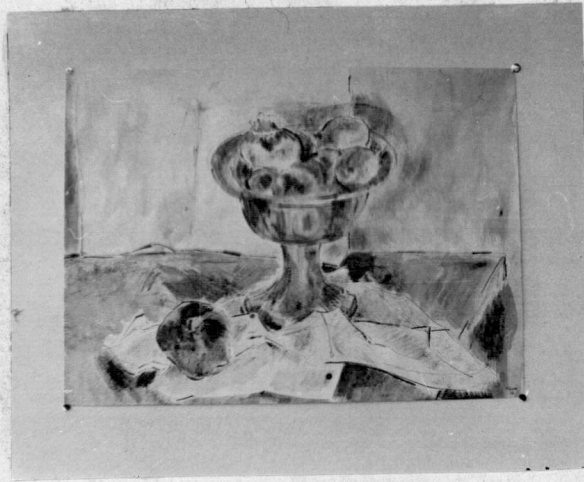


DRAWINGS - FOLIAGE TO GIVE A DEFINITE

CALLIGRAPHIC STATEMENT



DRAWINGS - WASHES AND LINE



DRAWINGS - WASH, TONE AND LINE



DRAWING - WASH, TONE AND LINE

In modeling you are concerned with light as it falls upon an object in the sense of its being dark on the shadow side and light in the high light. If the concern is for this aspect of light, any attempt at a specific color statement becomes confused because of the light and dark occurring simultaneously upon each object. If you are concerned with the aspect of light in a color sense you are hoping to use the color which occurs because of light and not the high light and shading which is brought about when light falls on an object. This difficulty pursued me in my work until I realized that a definite stand on my part would help me get rid of it. When I did lapse into modeling, the total effect was often colorless for I lost the chance to use change in value to give me color. In modeling each object light to dark, it was exceedingly difficult to see what was the darkest and lightest object. The whole work had light fluttering throughout. This, by no means, made a statement that light was falling on objects of various colors. In one painting this modeled approach resulted in the effect that color was not used to make a statement, but that color was sprayed over a modeled surface as an afterthought. My interest was not in modeling but in the use of color. I therefore attempted to discount modeling.

In addition to the "tube" painting I have tried another means of applying paint to the surface. This was painting into a wet ground. These were generally completed in one day so that the ground remained wet throughout. The unity achieved in this way is interesting for each color scrubbed into the ground has the added point of containing a bit

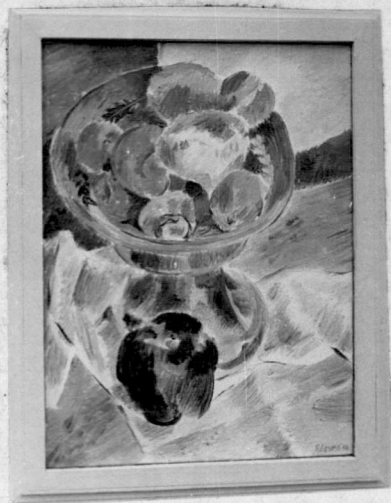
of ground color. Technically this might also be desirable, for the canvas becomes a single woven surface with less probable chance of cracking than may occur with many coats one over the other. The brightness that seems a definite part of these is also interesting to me. These were still based on specific statements of color and value, and were an out-growth of the observations of the "tube" painting. I was, in addition, interested in the manner of handling and the effect obtained. I tried three variations: on white grounds, warm grounds (a sand color), and on a cool ground (a soft grayed green). These I have kept light in value. I tried working on a warmer, deeper value and found the whole color statement achieved was distasteful to me.

After trying several paintings on the white and colored grounds, and also after trying to make drawings on colored papers introducing white as a definite light and not as a background, I began thinking quite a lot, "What could I do with whites?" About this time I saw a painting by Jean Baptiste Oudry, "The White Duck" (1686-1755). This work was an arrangement of all white objects.

I felt I might better learn to control intensity if I denied myself the use of pure color.

The set-up I arranged was of eggs, garlic and various white cloths and papers against a light panel and cloth.

The painting was begun on a ground of white lead and zinc white applied to a sized canvas with a spatula and then smoothed out. I incised the overall design into this ground. After the first few attempts, I soon realized I had been far more successful in arranging



12" x 16"



18" x 24"

PAINTINGS ON "WET GROUND"

the set-up than I was in painting it. The nature of the set-up was based on very subtle relations between the areas and objects. At first I simply couldn't see any differences. Each time I looked the whole effect was different. My first attempts were too dark in value and too intense in color. As in the "tube" paintings, I soon realized the colors were complex in make-up and very close and subtle in value range. My first thoughts were that every thing looked either blue or yellow. I spent many hours simply staring at the set-up. I decided there were certainly easier subjects to work with. The very light key and the color completely eluded me. Slowly by small changes on the canvas, I began to see what the subject really was. I was amazed at the range in color possible in such a very light value. In this painting values I used previously for my lightest areas were far too dark for the darkest values. The whole set-up was a challenge to observe. There was no room for general statements. The whole set-up relied on specific statements of color and value change in a key I had never before encountered.

I luckily had an overall arrangement in my canvas that seemed to work. My biggest task was to see the subtlety I had arranged.

In my second canvas I used somewhat the same objects adding a sprig of Oregon grape. This gave me an area of deeper value range and less elusive color to see the rest of the set-up against.

As I finish these paintings I am more able to cope with the observation of what is in the set-ups. My need is now to tune some of the cool darker colors to achieve more vibrancy and to knit some of the



40" x 40"



18" x 24"

TWO EXAMPLES OF "WHITE" PAINTINGS

areas together so that the objects in the first painting particularly appear less as decorative details and more as integral parts of the whole.

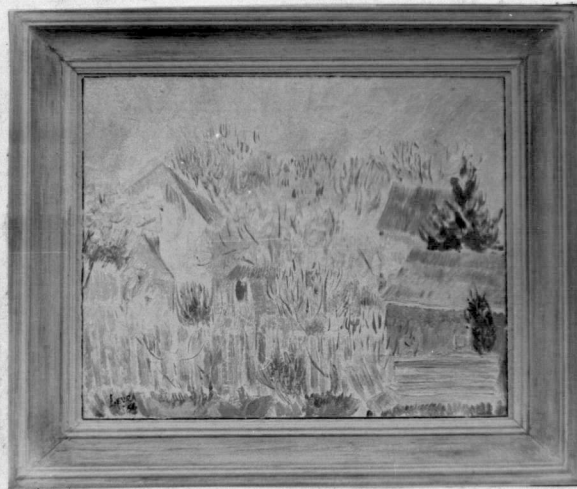
At the beginning of April and during the spell of beautiful weather this spring, while I was in the midst of my struggle with the "white" paintings, Mr. McCosh suggested I might enjoy working with the general idea of "Spring". I wanted to branch out after my long interest in still-lives and I also wanted to see what problems would arise in landscape work. I would be working with a subject I could not arrange before hand. I would have to observe and choose from this large sweep of nature what I desired and needed for a painting.

I tried several canvases in my back yard of somewhat the same subject area. One problem that immediately arose was what is to be the relation of line and area? I tried two paintings of the same view. One was color areas and no linear statement. The second was, I hoped, to be entirely a linear statement. The line, however, I allowed to mass to form area. These resulted more in textural statements which I felt I could not use. If I allowed the texture to state the roof, how could the same type of thing make the sky statement or foliage statement? This problem occurred before when I introduced foliage into set-ups. My statements as to other objects would be specific while those about the foliage would be generalized. This seemed to answer one question at least; area and line must be used as they are suitable to the subject drawn with them. A painting could be both of these or either one so long as the statement remains plausible in the end - so long as each statement is specific.

10a



18" x 22"



12" x 16"

SPRING LANDSCAPES ON "WET GROUNDS"



24" x 36"



24" x 30"



20" x 30"



24" x 50"



24" x 36"

"SPRING LANDSCAPES"

Aside from the problems, the landscapes were a pleasure to do. They seemed a reasonable extension of my previous work. My interest in observation was further intensified. I soon discovered the greens in the foliage were hardly green when one mixed them. They were again very complex colors much like those encountered in the still-life set-ups. I found myself relying on cadmium orange and ultramarine violet and on low intensity yellows. I also realized the value of the sky was very often darker than I thought when first looking at the area.

I enjoyed working on the landscapes. I was happy in the change of seasons, and wished to express this enjoyment in the paintings. This enjoyment is certainly one answer to why we paint.

My most recent work has been a series of drawings, paintings and lithographs in which I have worked from the observation of the elements on the canvas and not from direct observation of nature.

These were started by arbitrarily making a few marks or washing a few areas of color on the canvas. From that point I became as specifically interested in what was on the canvas as I had been interested in what was in the still life or in the landscape. They are being done to help me decide and use, to let me know and realize what I have on the canvas. I have no idea when I begin. I draw to get the idea. The idea or subject is not tacked onto the canvas, it grows from the elements within the canvas. I keep working without recognizing subject matter as long as possible. My interest is in the shapes, tones and color as it develops. Each change or addition is an effort to enhance these shapes or colors. It has been extremely difficult not to



20" x 40" India Ink on Canvas



40" x 48" Oil

OBSERVATIONS OF THE ELEMENTS
ON THE CANVAS



24" x 36"



30" x 40"

DRAWINGS, INDIA INK ON PAPER



LITHOGRAPH - OBSERVATIONS OF ELEMENTS
ON THE CANVAS

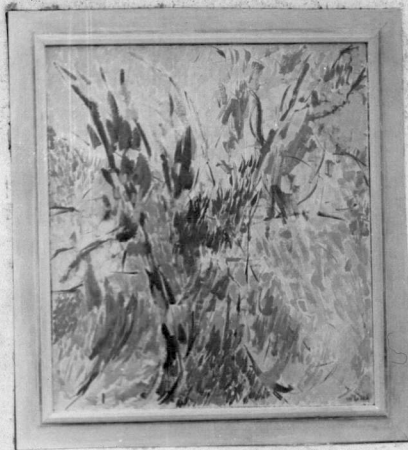
consider certain things; for instance, the ground-sky relationship is always felt. Naturally factors of color and value learned and discovered previously will be carried over. Two of these paintings were based on ultramarine violet, cadmium orange and burnt sienna. I wished to see what these colors would do. My interest in the orange and violet was aroused when painting the landscapes where I saw how useful they were to me. One painting is made entirely with these three colors while, in the other, I felt a need as I went along to add a green (veridian) and a yellow to the mixtures. The important thing is to draw and allow the idea to grow.

These are becoming a great help in clarifying to me what it is I actually have in the canvas to work with, not, what will I do now to change this, but what have I to do with.

In a second larger "tube" painting, the set-up chosen made use of deeper values and stronger color than the white painting. This was started after the beginning phases of the "observed" paintings were under way.

In this second "tube" painting I again felt the need to work directly from observation of the set-up. After the experiences of the first "tube" painting, the white paintings, landscapes and "observation" paintings, I felt much more confident in my ability to see and use the material in the set-up. The secondary shapes within the areas fell into place and were drawn much easier than usual, perhaps because I was more conscious of a need for them.

Throughout the painting I tried "exploding" the color. I mixed a



#1 40" x 40"



#2 40" x 40"

TWO PAINTINGS BASED ON ULTRAMARINE VIOLET,
CADMIUM ORANGE AND BURNT SIENNA.
GREEN AND YELLOW LATER ADDED IN #1.



40" x 40"

SECOND "TUBE" PAINTING - "EXPLODED COLOR"

a basic color-hue and value needed for a given area. Then I warmed a portion of it, and cooled a portion. Then I mixed these two (warmed and cooled) to get a fourth color. Thus I had four possible parts going together to make up a whole area. By doing this throughout the painting, it was possible for these separate parts to work together to create secondary shapes and also to state object shapes. A given area could give the overall effect of perhaps yellow while being composed of areas of subtle color change. There is an added vibrancy because of the warm and cool areas working together. Parts have a chance to unite; a secondary means is given by which the painting may be seen.

I have been teaching a children's class and an adult class at the Eugene Art Center since last fall. These classes have given me the opportunity, in many instances, to clarify some of my thinking and problems. It has been interesting to me to realize that so few people take the opportunity to properly observe that which is about them. They all see, of course, in the accepted sense of the word. All too often their attempts are generalizations. We often work from set-ups similar to ones I use when painting. Many times I have explained a point to myself while attempting an explanation to a class member. So very often the things I take for granted or pass over take on a new and fuller meaning to me as I try to express verbally ideas I have worked with in painting. These verbal attempts seem to become simple and more concise as I go on with an explanation. So often something I feel is crystal clear becomes foggy when said. Various attempts at trying to explain to a student have given new meanings to me.

Things observed and noted:

Perhaps these may seem too primary to note. To me they have been important discoveries.

The arrangement of a still life set-up is an integral part of the painting. I find I have to carefully include in the set-up factors I wish to use in the painting. I began to plan and use light, half-tone, dark relationships to complete a natural cycle. I found I needed a piece of white to give a definite light area and to serve as a basis for comparison of other values. I found a definite dark object completed the range, so that I might see not only what was the dark part of a light or half-tone object, but what was the effect of the light on a dark.

My work the last two quarters has shown me I can paint while denying myself the use of pure or intense color. Observation and the attempt to make specific statements has shown me that it is more often color complexity and sympathy one with the other that achieves the richness I desire.

I believe the most beneficial thing in my last period of work is an enhanced ability to observe. I had so long generalized that it is personally very important to be able to understand in some small way things as they are. I have learned to be more patient; to build a drawing or painting. I most often start with the lightest possible statement, slowly developing these by adjusting the value range.

In a painting I feel I am trying to cope with a situation, trying to understand the situation more fully. I can't say I solve a painting

for there is probably no one solution. A painting or drawing, I feel, should be an integrated whole. I enjoy knowing what I am specifically trying to say.

In closing, I have had a wonderful experience of discovery. I am not always quite certain how to use these things I find. I have enlarged my ability to see, and do feel more certain in my judgements. With more experience I may be able to weed out and retain certain aspects and use these again.

I feel now that time is very important. I am happy to have reached a goal, but feel I have had just a glimpse of what is possible. I have tried many paintings and several ways of working with the hope that the more I do, the more mistakes I'll make, and the more I'll learn. I have come to believe that each experience is a stepping stone to another. The developments from the "tube" painting to the "wet ground" paintings to the landscapes and so on were natural and were done as the need arose for them.

TYPED BY: Bette Hall Levra
(Mrs. Raymond E. Levra)