

TERMINAL PROJECT REPORT

A SERIES OF PAINTINGS

by

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OBJECTIVE: A series of paintings employing forms derived from abstraction of details of nature.

For a prolonged period after graduation I delved into symmetries, complicated planes, integration of detail, pictures using the grid system, paintings involving flat pattern, a mild form of cubism, paintings using only varied intensities of similar color to denote depth or projection and other approaches.

These investigations at the time appeared unrewarding and there was very little sense of satisfaction for the paths of investigation seemed to keep bending back upon themselves instead of leading me forward. Finally I realized that I must take inventory of myself. Why was I uninterested in the problems that the majority of the students around me were interested in? Why did I often find it difficult to understand constructive criticisms of the work on my easel at the moment? Why was I painting?

In the final question I found my answer. I was painting for the pleasure of creating, a projection of self, be it good or bad. I was neither an accomplished colorist nor an orderly precisionist and I hated to admit that many technical details escaped my understanding yet I found myself attempting to employ devices and means apparently useful to others but

relatively meaningless to me. At times the frustration prior to this self-analysis established a wall between instructors and myself but I am sure the instructors were no more disturbed by what they found on my easel than I was with my lack of direction.

From the time I was a small boy turning over strangely formed pebbles on some creek bottom, I have had an unending interest in the surface character and form of stones, driftwood, roots and other expressive fragments of nature.

A strange formation of joined branches cut from a cherry tree on the campus determined the direction of my terminal project. I found my interest was alive. I wanted to paint it positively and in a manner that reflected my feeling for the material.

Since then I have reverted occasionally for the space of two or three drawings or paintings to past manners or approaches hoping to discover something overlooked that I could utilize and incorporate in the individual approach which I felt was developing.

Through limited investigation and careless approach to subject matter I found the majority of my paintings suffering the lack of underlying structure, improperly distributed areas of color, and inconsistencies developing because of failure to recognize the possibilities of the subject matter.

Driftwood in its seemingly natural haphazard arrangement

has often suggested to me a similarity to the human form and gesture. This relationship I hoped to express in painting, but I failed to see the underlying orders that exist. My first attempts were nothing more than caricatures, exaggerations of salient characteristics of driftwood and humans combined, in short, cartoons. These first attempts were highly disappointing and persistently so for they invariably took on twisted human form losing character as either driftwood or normal beings and always appearing in a dream-like situation both unreal and unconvincing.

It was suggested that I set up a still life of driftwood forms and work from it. The three terms of work following the suggestion produced most of the work that I find acceptable for presentation. Nearly all of my lithographs are the result of one driftwood and rock still life many times rearranged to make a more penetrating study of construction. When weather permitted I worked directly from driftwood in its natural positions along the riverbanks and the coast. In many instances I found the natural forms suggestive of human characteristics without forcing or attempting to imply that those characteristics existed. From then on I stopped forcing a relationship that did not exist and began noticing that the driftwood possessed interlocking and overlapping forms that established a definite order often determined by the terrain. While attempting to transfer these observations

to the picture plane with emphasis on the driftwood, the driftwood reversed order and frequently influenced my treatment of the surrounding areas.

There is a definite satisfaction that I have experienced as a result of the investigations made of the forms of nature, and after two years I feel no lack of interest but hope to continue my study of this unlimited and engrossing material.

The contrast that exists between my first and more recent paintings has shown me the fallacy of attempting to present convincingly that which I have not investigated thoroughly from textural structural and color content. The exacting nature of lithography helped me to study subjects more carefully as erasures on stone may mar the print. Frankly I hated to see both print and paper wasted. The results of careful study were increased knowledge of my subject, greater confidence in my presentation of subject matter, and more consistency of structural quality.

Shortly after starting the work on my terminal project the necessity for clarification of color, primarily the pigment itself, developed a coordinate to my project. My color had a tendency to become muddy. This I believed was due to over painting before the under paint had dried sufficiently. In an attempt to work as rapidly as I desired I experimented with several media.

Water colors with casein developed many chalky results because of this desire to work too rapidly, but where sufficient time was allowed for proper drying between applications of color, results were good.

Inks with water colors had a tendency to fall out of character with each other. When used while the paper surface was wet their differences too often over-emphasized certain areas. In short I found them difficult to control both as to color statement and in blending.

When I used ink on an oil painted surface I did not run into the lack of adhesion that I expected but wherever inks occurred, they had a tendency to appear harsh and crystalline in the darks and either mat or become too transparent in the lights. Often the inks were destroyed by the colors beneath.

A plastic paint (Bocour) I tried and found unsatisfactory in many ways. Although the colors remained bright even where mixed together, they handled like syrup with a cold shine that destroyed soft warm tones often desired. When mixed with oil paints they dried as rapidly as I hoped for but after a painting was set aside for a few days the sections of the painting containing larger proportions of oil color would dry out mat in contrast to the glossy more plastic areas. Often it was difficult to predict other results as well for the plastic had a tendency to over-power some of the oils particularly the earth colors. Alizarins and pthalocyanines could usually hold their own.

A paint that could be used as a water color, caesin or oil media (Tri-Tec) I thought for a time was the complete solution to the elimination of muddy color. It is highly adaptable to nearly everything I tried.

As a water color I found it difficult to obtain transparencies but it could be done if care was used in the amount of color in the water vehicle; if too much color were used either chalky spots or caesin characteristics would appear.

As a casein or oil I was completely satisfied with Tri-Tec. The drying was rapid and one color over another could be applied in a minute without danger of the two mixing and taking on a muddy character. On the palet they could be mixed readily with the liquid medium sold by the company producing Tri-Tec. Whether applied with brush or knife the results were what I might expect from oil without having to wait for a long period between color applications.

In a short time I ran into one difficulty that made me feel that I would have to limit the medium to paper, cardboard or masonite as the canvases that I had used were flaking when the canvas was roughly treated. Varying the type of canvas sizing seemed to be of no advantage but finally I found two methods of preparing the ground so that checking or flaking was eliminated even though I rolled the canvas after the painting dried. By taking some Tri-Tec liquid painting medium and covering the original canvas sizing then letting it dry I

obtained greater adhesion. I also mixed small quantities of Tri-Tec with oil colors, obtaining a fast drying color readily mixed with turpentine and varnish vehicle that has not flaked during the two years I have been using it.

In studying the variety of painting media I increased my understanding of color so that I not only found a medium which suited my personal way of painting but eliminated some weak points previously unrecognized -- color vitality and controlled color range. With additional emphasis upon the crispness of value and color, I hope to acquire with this medium the directness of statement I feel is present in my lithographs and water colors.

The medium that I have chosen and find so versatile I realize may not be so readily acceptable by another student, but the emphasis which I have learned to place upon thorough investigation of media and subject material should, I feel, be worthy of any student's consideration.

COMMENTS ON PICTURES

NOTE: The majority of my work does not represent a steady progression painting to painting; I have usually worked on two or three paintings simultaneously with some taking many months to complete.



"Still Life with Horn Bird"

This painting was intended to be of blue-violet tonality. In my original sketch I found the picture divided in half vertically with several directional lines converging at the approximate center and on the vertical axis. The nature of the pitcher seemed to hold the eye at that point of convergence. In an effort to shift the axis I made two major additions: the bird of horn which established a directional movement carrying to either side of center and made a semi-circular enclosure creating another center, and the yellow mango on the left was added to complete the movement made by the tail of the bird and to create a color area to balance the vegetables and fruit on the right.



"Still Life with Pineapple"

I let the pineapple which sat on a plain white cloth dictate the treatment of foreground and background planes. The background has an orderly arrangement to repeat the order of the skin nodes, the cloth of the foreground treated in linear manner echoing the reverse plane of the picture. The spots of color and value difference within the closed areas of the linearly treated cloth is a reversal of the order of the lights and darks of the pineapple skin.



"DAFFODILS and WILD FLOWERS"

This I considered the best of my ink and water color experiments. I feel I captured the rhythm, the compression and expansion of the still life set up but even in this better one of a series the inks retained their harshness and set up a conflict between the two media used.



A Series of 'On the Spot' Water Colors

These were unplanned other than choice of spot from which to paint and choice of subject matter. Their overall consistency seems to me to be the result of a growing interest in this type of material and the spontaneity they reflect I believe issues from the fact that there was no predetermined idea as to how I was going to paint or in what manner they should be painted. Rather I had a blank sheet of paper, a pleasing situation, paints with which to record my impressions and a subconscious that had filed away years of instruction. I did not try to dictate the shape, content or nature of areas but let the sweep of the subject matter flow effortlessly onto the paper.





A Series of Lithographs

The spontaneity of the water colors was their vitality and I hoped to carry that over into lithographs of stone and driftwood and yet make a careful analysis of the structural characteristics of the subject and its relation to its normal surroundings. Here I ran into the difficulties of limited material out of context and learning some of the technical aspects of lithography. After unconscious directives to obtain spontaneous results, openness and transitional steps in color and value, I found myself confronted with the necessity for very conscious effort and consideration of structural directional aspects, the adjustment of forms to space, the building up of values without filling in, and the challenge of making the product rhythmical and spontaneous in appearance. This work was primarily conceived as an investigation that would give me greater familiarity with my chosen subject matter plus, perhaps, producing some sketches that I could use in the development of paintings. In both respects, in part, I am satisfied.



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"Nude Sleeping"

The solidity of form impressed me more than the softer surface characteristics and this painting underwent many changes during its development. First the background was filled with intricate detail which instead of emphasizing the mass of the figure, distracted the attention. Scraping back to the canvas I made an open linear drawing that became lost in an effort to find relationships existing outside the figure. Returning to the original impression of solid form I broke the painting down to a series of canted projecting and receding planes, again not finding the solidity I desired and falling into the pseudo-cubism of relationships existing only within closed areas without complements elsewhere in the painting. At this stage I again made sketches with the attitude of approaching a bare canvas. The best solution to my problem seemed to be one of three horizontal panels of value from light to dark with the half tone panel of the figure displacing large portions of the light and dark panels to intensify the suggestion of mass or volume. Color application followed the simple horizontal pattern rather than creating contradictions or establishing new pattern, cool in the light, warm in the half tone, cool in the dark with high intensity color in the dark to counteract a sensation of extreme depth that had a tendency to tip the picture back in contradiction to the two dimensional plane of the canvas.

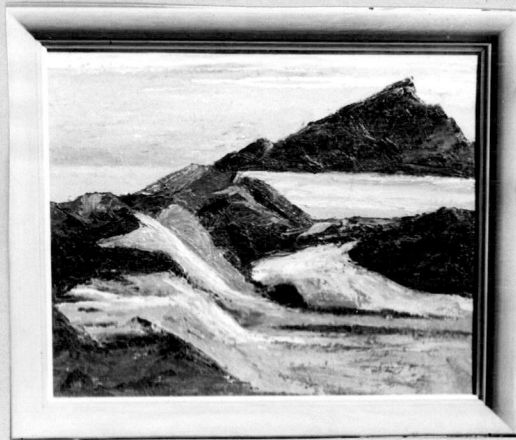


"Beach Lip with Dead Brush"

During one trip to the coast I was driving at night and as I rounded the brow of a hill I glanced down toward the surf line and saw for one fleeting moment the twisted verticals of trees silvery grey and naked in moonlight against what appeared in contrast as warm darkness. I will not say that my painting is 'factual' in many respects for the situation was carried for a long time in my mind only as a blurred image but after working extensively with similar subject matter for quite some time, I felt I would like to try to capture the essence of the situation. First I established four planes of horizontal depth, three major verticals and two diagonal directions tentatively sketching in the rough character of the cliff and a portion of the coastline with the largest area, the fourth plane or sky, contacting references to each of the other planes so as to create an affinity for each other. I tried to increase that affinity by the introduction of blue-green or gray-green in all areas.

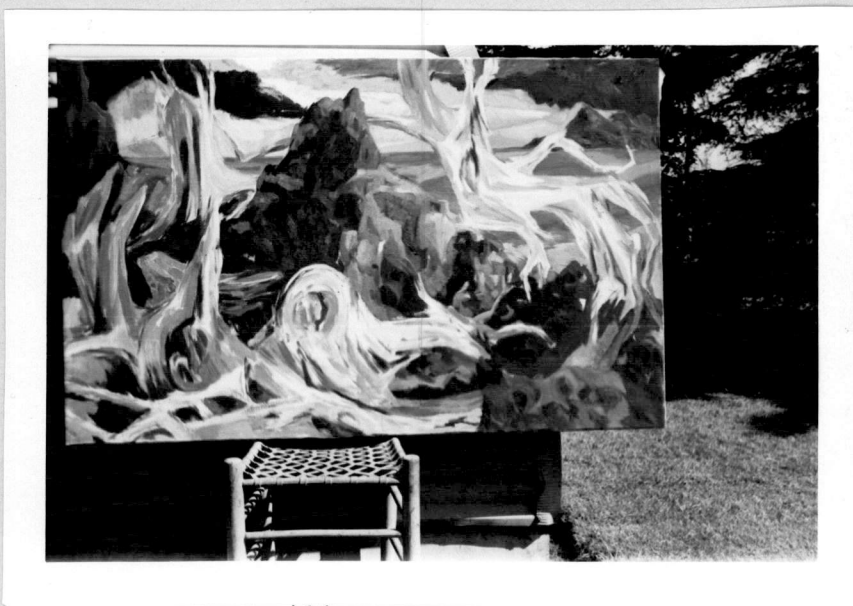
The lack of a positive feeling toward this painting, other than basic structural frame work and subject, gave me considerable difficulty. In an attempt to find a chromatic parallel to my response to the situation, I found myself constantly breaking up areas with color and value and then

having to resimplify them. Finally the obvious was brought to my attention. The painting's basic structure had created a closed area that was giving no access to other areas. One relatively simple change in the rear plane erased the major difficulty and allowed visual passage from the area giving more contrast and balance throughout. Two snapshots are shown: (A) before the change and (B) after the change.



"Logs and Rocky Beach"

Observing the strength of some of the large masses in my lithographs I made this first as a sketch of an imaginative situation then painted it in dark and light areas of raw umber and grey-violet, later creating color variation within areas, adjusting the values and intensities until I found them pleasing.



This is the first major painting after extensive investigation, worked directly from lithographic studies. I found it difficult to transpose value to color and because of working in scale much larger than customary, I found myself frequently introducing an over abundance of detail that destroyed forms and detracted from major divisions and statements. The necessity for simplification was quickly seen and this painting proceeded rapidly although with some difficulty in striking a happy medium between over statement and understatement of color and value areas. At various stages this picture had a tendency to be too sketchy or too closed, too busy and in turn too inactive for the subject. I feel that this also was due in part to my unfamiliarity with a large canvas.