Pepperoni on one half, mushrooms on the other

Tobi Miller

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To successfully find a balance between one's emotional and one's rational being, and having it be a feeling flow of subtleties, is a goal worth pursuing. Hopefully my painting will serve as a vehicle in reaching this delicate balance. In essence, I will be attempting to have my work show this struggle and hopefully a personal victory or two.

Tobi Miller
There are many travels one must make in order to reach a feeling of complacency and balance. You can be purely analytical or overly intuitive in determining what the best paths to take are in order to reach that fine totality. Painting is an extension of myself, and therefore is the best means for communicating, organizing, and reorganizing thoughts, ideas and feelings - and to work to juxtapose them all until a delicate balance of these extremes is reached.

Painting is the quickest way for me to make a statement. Changes can happen fast, on canvas or paper. It is a search for some meaning to my experiences and the creation of a reality from them on a flat surface.

Beginning anything is easy. You are not yet aware of all that is there for you to understand. In the beginning, when I painted, I totally ignored the connection of my reason or my emotion to the canvas or the paint. The colors were there, very bold, as was the form, but there was no tension, no drama, tenderness - any variation of feeling or concern.

"The final test of a painting, theirs, mine, or any other is: does the painter's emotion come across?"

Realizations are always reached after the fact. So it was with my work. I was putting forth a lot of energy, but there was no organization or discrimination as to what needed,
or did not need to be there. I've watched myself become more vital through my painting and drawing. It is funny and a bit strange to see where I have been before and where I am now. The fears have only been discovered as they disappear. I was comfortable being in a place where there was no need to confront myself in any way. The fear of expressing mood, or any change in feeling, was described only when I began to actually touch upon myself. Allowing myself to react to my own emotions through my work, and in my own personal growth as well, meant a re-evaluation of values; deciding which would stay, or change, and which I would totally disregard.

My work has consciously become a place for me to visually fool around with myself. Exploring: the realization that change is not harmful but helps in getting you from one place to another, hopefully a higher place. With each change I've become that much closer to my work. The paint to the canvas has become a pure, personal endeavor rather than just a process.

As I continued to paint, my color became gray, grays and color, gray upon color, gray and gray; the subtleties of gray were wonderful and extremely enticing. Only edges of color were visible and were very precious. I felt for the first time a true calmness become part of me. After a time my level of
consciousness changed, slowly but easily. The concentration I needed on having my thoughts reach the canvas did not have to be so directed. When the energy flows smoothly, a good tension develops between me and what I'm doing. It allows for a total relaxation of the mind and all that is within me escapes without any pressure.

Later, I began to work smaller, on paper. At this point I was anxious and needed changes to happen faster. Paper allows for an easier flow of the materials. My brush strokes were loose and a repeated movement of pencil and paint became necessary in developing several planar surfaces. Using pencils led me to line and I started to explore the possibilities of using the line with layers of paint to create these planes. Subtlety was still a major concern, but now not only the subtlety of color was important, but the subtlety of structure, of line with color, was equally important.

It was a strange battle. I enjoyed being loose and needed to let myself feel that way for some time, but I felt ready now to bring in a bit of structure - some boundaries to that freeness. The tendencies toward extremeness, then, made it so that the lines became very strong. The subtleties were harsh and much less sublime. Each time a change takes place, one has to allow for a certain amount of time for it to be comfortable with everything else that has been there. The
change from color to gray; introducing line; introducing gold; and using all of these to create a particular unity and overall subtleness.

These past few months have been used to establish over and over again, a genuine feeling of tranquillity, of subtle energy, by gently playing with structure and feeling. My intellect tells me to do things one way, my emotions say to do it another way. I'm slowly learning to let each have its own place and at the same time mesh and rest easily with one another.
"Some degree of insight into reality is shared by all artists, whatever means and materials they employ. The artist must be able to translate his feeling into the medium of his choice, for to explore the nature of the medium is part of the understanding of nature, as well as part of the process of creation."
The naivete of not knowing what is there to try and to experiment with keeps things very simple and easy. Paint on canvas is probably the simplest place to begin. The pureness of strokes of paint on a large canvas is a very attractive thing to me as a painter, but there is always frustration in remaining in one place for too long a time - staying with but paint and canvas - and there is desire for change. With new thoughts to be conceptualized, then rendered visually, come new ways of getting there. Paint on canvas has become paint, gold enamel, pencils, on canvas and paper - all simple ways to obtain personal, sometimes complex, essences. It happens in the manipulation of these things.

The paint still remains dominant on the canvas. Pencils are easier for me to move on smaller more definite spaces. I have to be more careful in not letting the pencil lose its intent on large canvases. The surface and the amount of space dictates what will be used.

I've become very particular with the golds I use. I have found the nature of their lusters to be varied. I have found a gold leaf liquid with an enamel base, which carries a rich tone that isn't harsh or brassy as was the gold powder I had been using with the polymer medium. Gold is royalty, to me, and I treat as such. It changes with light and physical movement and I find the beauty of
it singularly responsible for the elegances of my surfaces.

I am working now with various papers. The simplicity of being with paper and pencil requires simple and relaxed thought right now. Doing my work still becomes a struggle at times because my mind is not always at that place, but when thought and process and materials all combine easily with one another, it is quite pleasing.
"At the time of making a picture, I want not to know what I'm doing; a picture should be made with feeling, not with knowing. I hold my mind and my work free from any association foreign to the act of painting. I am thoroughly inspired and agitated by the actions themselves, which the development of painting continuously requires. From the beginning, this puts me in a positive mood, which I must persistently follow until the picture has found realization through the paint. This seems simple, but it is actually the fruit of long research."
The necessity for me to record thoughts and ideas on paper rather than only upon large canvases was a realization that allowed for a whole new release of energy. Working has actually allowed me to have ideas that seem to be stopped on large canvases. The flow of line is easier to accommodate on a small surface. My eye is bound to only that paper. Whatever movement of line and color has been created, the focus has been that much more intense. I am there completely. On the other hand, I feel overwhelmed and separate from the paint and what it tends to do on the canvas. Actually though, the two are not to be compared. They are two very different approaches and each incorporates a unique train of thought.

There is a tension between painting and drawing that is important to consider. The pencil lines, which tend to dominate the paint in the drawings, become a nice contrast to the paint on the canvas. For a long time, I had considered my drawings to be but a beginning for a large painting. Yet I learned that each is its own means to a very unique end. The line of a pencil moving across a painted canvas surface has such a different feel than a pencil moving on paper. The drawings are one thing, the paintings another. Each can be responded to on its own merits. Yet there is at times a sharing. Certain transferrances are possible,
and a sweet rapport has developed with canvas to paper and likewise, paper to canvas, as I move between them.

My work requires a delicate combination, or better yet, culmination of energies. I don't begin with a definite sense of procedure. Willem DeKoonig states it as being, "a free association from the start to the finished state. Procedure is a continual change." I work the way I do in order that I may elicit particular feelings.

"Before his canvas the artist responds to his subjective needs and to the image he has created through a series of trials and errors like life itself. At the point of his most exquisite awareness, he begins to see out of the mist of his unconscious certain, recurring insights, such as specific colors, shapes, and the personalized handwriting of his brush..."  

Colors grow on one another as does line. Some stay, some leave, though very quietly. I do not stop until I'm pleased or comfortable with what I've done. It is the lack of procedure and the surprise element which that entails that is so beautiful. But emotion must be there.

I thoroughly enjoy the somewhat haphazard way I work. It has become an intriguing challenge. It can be a long slow process to the point where the paint says it's where it wants to be or the line says it should stop. That is where the true connection for me to my work begins. I'll organize myself somewhat - the grays, the line, the lusters, are very important for me, I don't wish to abuse them. Layers
begin to build up. It is extremely important to only let very special things remain, and let the rest slowly dissolve into the surface.

At times working is not hard at all; it just happens. That doesn't satisfy me as much. Having to work strenuously to get good results lets me see my own confusion and shows me how to work it out. That is how I learn. Many times I need to be there before the paint. I need to preconceive. That discipline causes a tightness, of course, and stops a certain looseness that flows more easily when I'm unaware. Learning to capitalize upon this "unprocedure" which, at fortunate times, causes gains to occur nearly automatically yet not without struggle, is where my concerns lie right now. I have a new confidence in my approach to my painting. Yet a touch of the old fear - the excitement of the uncertain - remains. This, I think, is not bad.
FOOTNOTES

(The New American Library Inc., 1970)

(Doubleday and Company Inc., N.Y., 1963)


Painting #1, acrylic and pencil on canvas, 4'6" x 6'
Painting #2, acrylic and pencil on canvas, 4'6" x 6'
Painting #3, acrylic and pencil on canvas, 4'6" x 5'
Drawing #1, acrylic and pencil on paper, 2'6" x 22"