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Reverie and the image making process

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Reverie
and
the image-making process

By
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11/20/99
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Artist's Statement

There are a variety of meanings for the art produced by contemporary artists. Obviously, the reason artists create artwork is because it is pleasing and satisfying to express emotions, establish shapes and colors, and handle the other elements to complete the work. Each stage has an authenticity as a creative act inspired by the artist’s sensitivity.

First of all, the artist creates a visual language, which has significant meaning, to convey what he wants to say in his work. The visual language is the instrument of communication for the artist. On occasion, the artist presents the concretion of symbols as personalized forms, which conveys the image of an idea. The artwork is arousing when it uncovers and indicates certain original aspects of objects in a symbolic form. Pleasure also arises from capturing meaning.

In the studio, the practical process activates visual representation. Brushstrokes are created on the canvas successively portraying the artist’s intention. Once the brushstrokes are there, they become the inception of a process, which continues until the painting is completed, even though the initial intention may have been to convey a different idea or feeling. Accordingly, the artist learns to represent an interaction between the artist and the artwork. The visual image created through this process may stimulate the artist emotionally, yet at the same time, requires many skills to produce the artwork physically. Thus every work becomes a part of the learning process for the artist.

There is also a sense of satisfaction when a viewer understands that he is brought into an aesthetic world created by the artist. Then, there is the influence of art on the viewer, the satisfaction from his emotions and the impact on his imagination.
All these offer the viewer an aesthetic experience which enhances his life in a way that is impossible to simulate by other genre.

The artwork and the viewer participate in a dialogue, in which each contributes a part of the experience. The dialogue between the artist and the artwork is similar to the interaction between the viewer and the artwork. The artwork presents a physical substance to the viewer and the viewer, who has an aesthetic experience, senses it as an object of aesthetic value.

I believe in the value of art making and its immanence to represent and to exist as an instrument for the transference of emotion from the artist to the viewer. The work of art is a creative and dynamic activity, in which the artist performs and reacts to the outcome of the effort as he proceeds to the next step in a sequence that finally comes to completion.
Background Review

I. The rock paintings of Tassili

Prehistoric art presents paintings in a great variety of styles. Some of them have the sense of spontaneous art, an art of pure diversion. They emerge from the depths of time, spirited by life, which shines from each object. The rock paintings of Tassili are very firmly part of my inspiration because of their colossal spirit. There are two subjects suggested by Tassili’s paintings: first, the relative emphasis on variant features of the depicted contents, and second, the relative degree of emphasis on the two-dimensional versus three-dimensional components of the picture.

What attracts me above all is the ensemble of visual images – the overall feeling that I try to impose on my works. Tassili’s paintings are completeness represented through visual forms. They convey the message in purely aesthetic terms. From the paintings on the cave walls of Paleolithic men, a record of the visual arts has continued to our own time. The art of Tassili has a meaning which was understood by all those who were part of that culture, and it is dominated by symbols which compose the structure of the works even when all details are not illustrated within it. The influence of symbols accentuates the tendency to perceive works of art as a plastic structure.

Tassili’s artists sought to understand space logically in accordance with their artistic sense. They tried to get the utmost out of their natural conditions. They painted on vast and uneven rock surfaces. The rough surfaces gave rise to form, to patterns of ornamentation, and even to an aesthetic response.
There exist numerous cases where the amount of positioning has been such that the immediate impression is a mass of engraved and painted objects. This encounter gave me the motivation and courage to discover hidden depths of prehistoric art and the ideals it depicts. I seek out these values in my works to transfer them selectively through new arrangements. I emphasize that the impression of primitiveness in my works can be explained by my efforts at visual representation of these concepts.

II. Tàpies

Antoni Tàpies is the foremost abstract painter in Spain that influences me to develop the technique, matière, in my paintings. His expressiveness through creating the pieces, especially dealing with physical substances, is an astonishing property. Tàpies was engaged with matière, that is, the physical materials with which he worked – with surfaces, textures, and substances. He applied various substances to his works such as powered marble, sand, and glue. He manipulated those materials to develop his own technique.

Tàpies’ paintings feature a range of materials and techniques. There are scratch marks on the surface of the painting, in the accumulation or distortion of the paint, or the grains of sand and marble dust. The matière is applied in movement to allow contours, phantom objects, and even figures to emerge. His concepts in art have varied with the patches of paint, fingerprints, attempts at writing, the cuts – and hollow spaces where the matière is absent. Through this he creates his own presentational style.
'It might be more effective to show a heap of sand containing an infinite number of grains, each of them equal in size, than to make any amount of speeches about human equality'\textsuperscript{1} says Tàpies. This at once defines the immanence of all ideas in the life of matière, which is a major concern in his painting.

\textsuperscript{1} Věra Lihartová, Tàpies, (Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publisher, New York, 1972), p. 5
Thesis Project

I. Visual language

1. Symbols

During the past two years, I had a productive time and explored my visual language of painting, experiencing creative ways of visual representation. That exploration was important to reach value and depth in my painting. Knowing how to create visual language was crucial in seeking suitable ways to reflect shades of meaning. So each element of visual language develops in an effort to create an object that is self-contained. This idea has evolved from my earlier painting, *The Time* series.

The underlying emphasis of art-school training in the later twentieth century moved from ‘Discover ways to render and create form’ towards ‘Discover and develop the artistic persona that best suits you’ - any formal means might be yours for the taking, if only you could make it part of a coherent persona act. This consideration on character motivates my choice of objects and images, among a multitude of elements.

The painting is a complex image made up of many pictorial objects observed in a variety of ways. There is a vigor of imagination and intuition, the choice of image, and a selection of things that come to my mind. An image is captured in my mind with a motif made up of personal preferences, borrowings, and resemblances. I also regard an image as a solidification of an imaginative act summoning the objects from the imagination. There is a proper vividness about evocation which favors arousal and inspires the faculties.

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2 Julian Bell, *What is Painting?*, (Thames and Hudson Inc., New York, 1999), p. 131
Myself, as an image-maker, is involved in representation because the term itself is a physical metaphor for a mental state which belongs to individuality. That is why I continue to work using symbolic images, since this way I am free to get at the correct nuance I want to project. I have experimented with various methods to discover my personal means of symbolization. Symbolizing is a way of experiencing the act of representation, as if it were a concrete effort of compacting whatever is to be represented. It is that entity that shapes what I have within myself, forming it into signs and likenesses. It is a direct goal to develop a style exclusively my own.

This exclusive style comes from the depths of my mind and has no absolute form or identity, so I give it one according to my imagination and intuition. I believe symbolizing objects with my own language is meaningful. If feeling and emotion are to be depicted, a symbol must be created to embody them as the vehicle for their communication between me and the objects. It points the mind towards denotation and dialogue. It is, equally, the relation between the mental image and meaning.

First of all, I have to relate the objects to something with combinations or parts of things. The form-interest changes with each individual, with the potential and the feature, for it characterizes my ability to respond spontaneously to the inner self with forms. I select the things that come to my mind: human figures, nests, clouds, leaves, rocks, and smoke. They seem to have an ideal shape and language which inspire me. I often feel like I am a translator. Many of my objects are intimate in my vision.

I have the pictorial imagination which one might call the imagination of visual design. I picture the images moving over the surface. A symbol of organic forms is combined with geometric forms. I create the symbols through my personal vision.
A continual experiment for design, refined shapes. Design is extremely important to acquire a clarity of organization by drawing. The advantage of a drawing process is that it is possible to obtain various ideas related to one formal design. At first, I put drawing paper in front of me and then start to sketch until shapes and marks impose themselves in a meaningful way. I usually use a crayon for drawing because of its density. Once the crayon is on the paper, it can be confirmed, changed and drawn again. This sequence happens a number of times. Basically everything I have done is a product of my interest in symbolizing. Also, testing ideas on a smaller scale is a useful experiment for working on a larger canvas.

The creation of forms and lines brings a balance to the whole picture. I intend to combine the abstract and the concrete, vague shapes and substantial objects, but not in either extreme. By employing this method of work, I hope to evoke a kind of visual reverie in which the images and symbols are beyond my immediate control but come from within a more universal and ancient layer of shape. However, I realize visual language becomes more significant and ideal once forms are refined. In detail, some objects are illustrated in profile or sections to present a mystical image. I impose intentional pose and gesture on the objects in such a way that they become allegory. I select familiar items by sketching their movements and interactions. The objects have been situated to engross the mind in the paintings. The symbols are interpreted in terms of the concrete objects, and that is partly why certain things such as human figures or nests are represented.
As I mention above, human figures are also designed as a silhouette so that the
detail can be excluded. Nests are the symbol of creativity that I work with. It is
abstracted, as a mass shaped by curved line. It is very stable and divisible in an
interesting number of ways. Leaves are a symbol of peace akin to the function of the
nests. Other forms, for instance rock, smoke, and the vague shapes, imply the images
envisioning the visual reverie. Specifically, I have made the abstract shapes visible in
some paintings to represent ideas about ambiguity, so that the atmosphere is being
acknowledged as well as my feeling.

I am satisfied when I look at my work and sense that the image is isolated and that
the isolated symbols are placed on a unified background. Eventually, organizing the
visual imagery seems more effective and more fulfilling to me. They are figurative and
narrative symbols with clear intent. I want to portray my paintings in a convincing way. I
try to get as much as I can into them, and make them as dense as possible.

2. Composition

Without good composition, a painting has no power to convey its meaning and
also fails to attract the eye. Composition must serve to organize the objects of the
painting and connect them to one another, so that they can accomplish the preconceived
idea in the painting.

Once the idea of my work has emerged, I usually start by arranging my visual
language, the clarified symbols, into a significant order. I proceed to build the balance of
the shapes and the division of space in a manner consistent with my visual language.
The combination of forms is visually arranged in a two-dimensional format to reveal the images intuitively.

Space is crucial in unifying the pictorial elements with clarity. Each painting is a different arrangement with a motion of the various forms. I need an ordered unity and balance of the pictorial elements. First, each object may have to move and modify its contours to suit the space. The space has to be flexible until balance is achieved. This is a way of configuration.

Emphasis is needed to bring the composition to a dramatic climax. Emphasis depends upon the most eloquent presentation of the part of the composition that has been assigned the dominant position within the painting. All the elements of the composition perform the role of a single climax in my paintings. As a matter of fact, emphases in the paintings are distributed almost equally throughout the paintings. The objects become ‘figures’ of the moment.

The visual language of the paintings is the essential component used to produce my works, but the way in which I compose these elements distinguishes one work from another. I combine these same elements in a different way to express my emotion. I also try to experience diversity, which requires that I have to be more adaptable for the composition of the work.

Consequently, every element in the work of art should be the medium of the artist’s intended representational, or expressive meaning, and the unity of selected elements which gives the work its meaning. For instance, the concrete and the abstract are logically unrelated subjects, but they may be unified by the meaning I denote them.

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3 Frederic Taubes, *You Don’t Know What You Like*, (Dodd, Mead & Company, New York, 1942), p. 76
Therefore, the viewer who approaches my works must be able to recognize the harmony before he appreciates their significance. In my paintings, unity and meaning are closely related.

3. Theme

Painting is the breath of life opening up the closed road to the imaginative object in my mind, being illustrated with its own theme. I have something in mind, and I wanted to illumine it and project its reflection on the canvas. I always have a fascination for reverie and poetic emotion, and they are carried spontaneously along by its own animation. I believe that a painting could be like a window to my mental image and I could see the similar scene placed on my paintings.

I represent the image on the canvas so it has some kind of a potential theme. I don't mean the word 'theme' as a narrative, it is the emotion of my painting. To attend to the theme is to accept that there is a stretch of imagination that has a certain kind of emotion. It makes the image appear actively which is reaction in the painting I was trying to portray. Every inflection of the figures start to make that reaction, for I supply each character with its necessary attributes. Poets 'painted pictures' in the reader's mind. Horace's words in the first century – *ut pictura poesis*, 'as in painting so in poetry – became the great catch-phrase of both arts, defining each project reciprocally.4

I expect that the peace and harmony are placed on the surface akin to the emotion of lyric poetry. My surface becomes more abundant, and the reaction is used in the projection of my reverie.

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4 Julian Bell, *What is Painting?*, (Thames and Hudson Inc., New York, 1999), p. 96
'Reverie' and 'lyrical mind' are words commonly applied to my pictures. People look at my work and recognize that my paintings have dream-like qualities. This kind of imagery most people know only when they indulge in reverie.

In the title of all these pictures is a connotation representing the atmosphere of the scene, *Daydreaming*, *In Hope*, and *Yearning*. These titles are a visual narrative for the imagery. I am tempted to translate: They are talking to each other, staring somewhere, hoping for the better world, taking a respite, yearning toward utopia, and feeling the wind.
II. Technique

Working on the canvas

A painter may synthesize form, line, color, and texture to produce an artwork in a proper way to depict subjective reaction through personal experience. The physical influence always emerges when people appreciate the work of art as an aesthetic object. The perceived qualities of the physical surface contribute to the sensuous quality of a painting. Therefore, the physical substances focus on the artist’s intention requiring the manipulation of materials. Actually, painting on canvas allows me to explore the features of form, line, color, and texture.

At first, I considered a good sketch as a stable foundation and if it went well, the final ‘emotional haul’ would be an effective representation. But it pauses right at the groundwork and leaves fulfillment to the other activities. The sketch is an actual motion of the composition of my works, organizing or correcting the elements of my visual language in an orderly fashion. The nascent figures, which simulate the final visual imagery, emerge from the random outlines on the canvas.

The physical quality of a painting is made up of a variety of elements, and my works contain all of them harmoniously. The most prominent element is the paint quality, often referred to as matière. Matière bespeaks the surface effects of a painting. It is synonymous with texture, brush stroke and the appearance of outlines.5 In most of my paintings, there is texture given to a thick layer and a rough surface that take on the character of a relief. It is the matière which is literally embodied in the layer of surface, the outline of an object, or the blob of colors.

5 Frederic Taubes, You Don’t Know What You Like, (Dodd, Mead & Company, New York, 1942), p.42
The ingredients for making matière are acrylic gel, pumice gel, sand, and mortar. These elements supply the dense and fluid surface. The matière accepts all kinds of vibrations, from shapes to deep motion. Matière is also suitable for the purpose of preserving the traces of transitory strokes and the delicate balance of materialized presence. So to speak, the relief projecting from the flat surface of canvas evokes the carnal presence of images. Occasionally, coarse materials have been added to the pigments. Each figure is raised separately in low relief to enhance their physical presence. The figures possess engraved contours that define their shapes. The tools I used for those solid contours were a knife and my finger because they are more suited to the matière. My interest in projecting technique is rooted in my attempt to establish the identities of images rather than detailed representations of figures. However, not all objects are isolated within their given contours. Some figures are depicted as an interrelation with their surroundings due to the difference or sameness of a color tone and texture.

In the art making process, coloring is a crucial step to provide the eye joy, satisfaction, and stimulation. The visual representation may be described as a grouping of colors in which each individual color plays a role as an instrument in a harmonious ensemble. The colors complement each other for harmony, emphasis or contrast. Good color combination results from a personal or sensitive choice, a color that is original, and that will give the utmost outcome.
The intention of my color choice is to subdue the emotion of my paintings. The various tonalities of secondary colors used in my works are mostly earth tone applied in full strength with intermixed color. This fluid pigment is applied in a very special manner. I am tempted to consider a way of expressing an idea, or at least a sign of spiritual activity. Therefore, I depict figures by manipulating their volumes and applying color with exuberant brushstrokes and this is strongly evident in my work. This image depiction may highlight the figures on a solid surface.

The brush soaks up the acrylic or oil colors and is wiped all over the canvas to build the foundation of the painting and the bristles of the brush attempt to reveal the texture. I eliminate unnecessary lines and details. Then I dramatically emphasize the texture and decorative qualities. The highlight, usually using light tones, appears to have been worked into the pigment with a sponge-brush or a palette-knife technique. It is applied in crisp little strokes that stand out from the canvas. In the broad space, I employ the principles of contrast and gradation freely. Some figures are also presented in profile with monotones to eliminate aggressive qualities and create an ambiguous tension between figures. My work is picturesque with its interplay of colored pattern. The result of my work depends primarily upon the ensemble between colors and texture. I suggest spatial qualities by the value of color and intensity, with proportional relationships. The physical appearance of the pigmented surface has not only an expressive function, but also links intimately with the aspect of the picture as the image depiction – a new life for the objects. Out of the combination of these elements will emerge the mood of the painting.
To explore further in my experiences formulated from developing this technique, I produced three small works to explore an idea of scale. Scale is another important aspect in the art making process. A group of three framed works allow me to do the same thing but in a smaller scale. The change to small scale is a faster process, so I experimented in a shorter amount of time using the best designs. The small scale works occupy a much more personal viewing space. Otherwise, the broad surface of the paintings, even though often actively painted, heighten the isolation of the image, dislocating it and suggesting ambiguous placement. The larger canvases made me imagine, in a broader scope. The above is one of the fundamental constants of my work, and occasionally modified, accenting or diminishing the place it assumes in a painting.
III. The Feedback

The sensuous arousal

The successfulness of paintings relies on how it is perceived. In light of this, perception is very much a part of the aesthetic experience. A viewer has to perceive the authenticity of the paintings, not only the visual representation but also an expression of the unseen feelings and creative power that a painter has fulfilled within the paintings. There is also a property about the aesthetic experience, which stimulates the faculties and favors mental alertness. In short, one of the most important functions of successful works of art is emotion arousal. This is the moment a dialogue begins.

The following is a description I expect as a response from the viewers, including myself. Kandinsky stated, 'A work of art consists of two elements, the inner and the outer. The inner is the emotion in the soul of the artists; this emotion has the capacity to evoke a similar emotion in the observer. The sequence is: emotion (in the artist) – the sensed – the artwork – the sensed – emotion (in the observer).'

Whenever anything interests us, we tend to become absorbed in it while the interest lasts. Aesthetic contemplation is one of the activities, which especially tends to invite absorption. For the time being we tend to be engrossed with the aesthetic object upon which attracts attention to itself. The viewers contemplate the paintings and they perceive them as pure forms in certain relations to each other, and feel emotion from them as such.

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These are the moments of inspiration followed by the desire to express what has been felt. All of us, at one time or another, have gotten a vision from material objects to be perceived as pure forms. On occasion, the art works gain ‘prime obsession’ in their totality. An engrossing activity of the mind with its own impetus is the most significant at the moment.

I seek beauty and establish a painting as a window to a mental image, to irradiate things with my senses and project the image to other people’s minds. My paintings are an accumulation of my imagination filled with dreamy, poetic sentiment. The paintings become, for the viewer’s imagination, a resembled space for responses within themselves, a conceptual canvas. As imagination enters the scene, at a higher level of the emotion, it begins the processing and an aesthetic emotion occurs in our minds. I believe this is the reason that art exists as an instrument for the transference of emotional states from the artist to the viewer.
Conclusion

Cézanne is reported to have said, “The painting is finished when the painter realizes his intentions.”\(^7\) It is clear that this thesis project contributes as a catalyst to establish the idea of my creative activity. I make efforts to progress, and to establish intensity in my works. The paintings that make up my thesis project are representative of a consistent area of study and are exemplar of the ideas I have about art and art making in particular. The entire process confirms the rule that my visual representation conveys the authenticity.

In the past two years, I have sought out an authentic value of the art making process. I discovered during finalization of my work, that the evolution of my painting ability is the result of exploration, and evolution, in the art making process and from my personal experience as a painter. Thus, this discovery promotes the realization of my art world. There is an important aspect of my efforts to evoke a powerful creative urgency and to touch on the depth of my capacity for feelings that are exposed in visual representation.

Bibliography


Figure 1. Daydreaming 1, Mixed media, 84" x 84"
Figure 2. Daydreaming II, Mixed media, 74" x 74"
Figure 3. Yearning, Mixed media, 49" x 49"
Figure 4. In Hope, Mixed media, 75" x 75"
Figure 5. Untitled I, Mixed media, 13" x 13"
Figure 6. Untitled II, Mixed media, 13" x 13"
Figure 7. Untitled III, Mixed media, 13" x 13"