Familia

Maria Emerson

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FAMILIA

by

Maria Santiago Emerson

Candidate for the Master of Fine Arts
of the Rochester Institute of Technology

Submitted: August 28, 1970

Advisor: Mr. Fred Myer
This is dedicated to my helpful and patient husband William, and to my mother.

I wish to acknowledge the help and friendship of Thomas Ratterman and Mr. Fred Myer.
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PREFACE

This thesis is in a dialogue or interview form; that is, a question followed by a response by the artist. This form was chosen because it is somewhat in character with the personal or conversational, which implies an intimacy. This I hope will allow me to be as sincere as possible. The questions are not to be presumed to elicit final answers; perhaps in time, with growth as a person and as an artist, these responses would be subject to revision.
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INTRODUCTION

In terms of an introduction and an answer to the question, "Why do you paint your family?" I would like to give my reasons for doing this thesis: "Familia".

In this thesis the family unit is used as the context for dealing with individual interiority. The individuals represented in the paintings are appropriately from my own family, since it is with these people that I first developed my ideas about life. Also by way of my relation to them was able to perceive something about their being.

The family relations, in my eyes, are seen as life exchange and generation and hopefully as a continuing process that opens to the larger scope of things: that is, the eventual regeneration and evolution of the life force.

A person gets to know who he is by reflecting on the deepest or most authentic experiences that he has had. These experiences and relationships work to form the individual's personality and also provide revelation about the self, through studying his responses during a deep experience—relationship.

In general he feels that those things that are found to be the most "true", "good", or "beautiful" lie in the deepest experiences he has had. It is logical for a person to try to understand or for an artist to
"mine" these experiences by reflection when he is interested in learning more about that which is ultimately true, good, or beautiful. In western civilization we call this ultimate God.

The reasons for my thesis and the way I have been painting can be clarified, if not with my words then by others whose words I respect. I have included Martin Buber's philosophy to enrich my own. I feel he articulates what personal relations and the art experience is for me. He expresses the type of personal spiritual relationships I want in my art.

Looking at my personal reflections, I ask if there could be a social viability to my private experience. As a solution, I have included Margaret Mead to add a broader social basis. With Mead, Buber becomes less private and a scientific dimension is established. Some words from Margaret Mead that I find compatible with my own:

...When we search for forms of communication that will be intelligible everywhere and seek figures of speech that will be meaningful to all peoples, we can come back to the human body. When we search for common ways of expressing similarity and difference, hierarchy and equality, vulnerability and strength, we can look to the human body. And when we search for ways of describing human relationships--dependency, autonomy, trust, cooperation, or ecstasy--we turn almost inevitably to the family. For within the family we can trace the fine intricacy of living--in the cherishing character of parenthood, the contrasts between father and mother, the differences between children of like and of
opposite sex, the chance that makes one brother stronger or one sister more beautiful than another, the ebb and flow of feeling, and the alteration of relationships as the child grows from infancy to adulthood and passes from his family of birth to found a family of his own.

As in our bodies we share our humanity, so also through the family we have a common heritage. This heritage provides us with a common language that survives and transcends all the differences in linguistic form, social organization, religious belief, and political ideology that divide men. And as men must now irrevocably perish or survive together, the task of each family is also the task of all humanity. This is to cherish the living, remember those who have gone before, and prepare for those who are not yet born. It is not sufficient for me to ask how I relate to my work, or how my work is meaningful to others, but also how I am enabled through my work to relate to all that exists. This larger scope is implied in Buber and Mead, but Teilhard de Chardin is able to provide a theological and evolutionary schema by which I can relate my private experiences in a larger context. This large schema gives me a sense of direction, value, and meaning as all theological systems should do.
QUESTION:

You seem to have a particular view of family life from your own experience but not everyone would agree that they had their deepest relationships in their own families. What does your work have to do with these people? Wouldn't you agree then that your basic premise is very personal or subjective?

RESPONSE:

Yes, it is true that my family relationships were particular and personal but through the particular we can reach that which is more abstract or universal. In Martin Buber's words: "The feeling of exclusiveness he would be able to find only in relation, the feeling of universality only through it".2

It is possible that a person would not have their deepest or "peak experiences"3 in their family, but the family as a basic unit still is the first opportunity for the human organism to encounter other people and relationships. Historically, variations of the family have always reverted back to the family unit,

Again and again, in spite of proposals for change and actual experiments, human societies have reaffirmed their dependence on the family as the basic unit of human living—the family of father, mother, and children.4

So the family unit has affirmed itself as a universal phenomenon throughout history, but from this we cannot talk about what the quality of the relationships within the family should be. In her wisdom Mead also says:

In our contemporary world no one can think or work with a single picture of what a family is. No one can fit all human behavior, all thought
and feeling, into a single pattern.\(^5\)

The point I have made then is that for me personally the family relationship has been where I have had my first and deepest experiences, and others may have had the same opportunity. However, the real issue which is common to all is that of the strength of some deep personal relationship with another. This relationship is a revealing means to wisdom, to the universal, to truth, beauty, and goodness.
QUESTION:
Could you elaborate on what you mean by a deep relationship as distinguished from any other relationship, and how this is revealing of wisdom or knowledge?

RESPONSE:
My notions on relationship are a simplified version of Martin Buber's, "I--Thou" philosophy. To get a firmer idea about relationships it would be good to read his beautiful book, *I and Thou*. However for purposes of clarification, I'll talk about Buber's distinctions: "I-Thou" and "I It".6

Let us compare the deep relationship of an I-Thou encounter--that is, person to person--and the other relationships of the world of I-It. Anyone, when objectified or treated as a thing rather than a person is relegated to the world of I-It.

When a man says I-It to the world he is not speaking with his whole being. In modern terminology he is not together, and before he can say I-Thou to the world he has to get together. He has to gather himself up to say Thou and meet the world.

For Buber, living is meeting or standing in relation to. A world that is used rather than met is a world of just things. When we experience or perceive, think, measure, analyse, enumerate, and classify (all useful realities of our existence), we establish the world of I-It, the world of experience, item knowledge,
and orderliness. Part of the basic truth of the human world is that "...only It can be arranged in order. Only when things, from being our Thou, become our It, can they be co-ordinated. The Thou knows no system of co-ordination."\(^3\) We do not get item knowledge but grow in wisdom.

It is by relationship then that we are integrated. That which stands in relation to us is not known by its parts or orderly divisions but rather met in its mysterious togetherness or whole being. Relationship, speaking the primary word, I-Thou, is an act of my being, "...indeed, the act of my being."\(^9\) So in addition and as an alternative to actions of our partial being, we can say with out whole being, I-Thou, and establish the world of relation, "...the unreliable, perilous world of relation which has neither density nor duration and cannot be surveyed."\(^10\)

According to Buber, if lines of relations could be drawn and extended they would meet at one vanishing point, in the eternal or ultimate Thou (God).

Every particular Thou is a glimpse through to the eternal Thou; by means of every particular Thou the primary word addresses the eternal Thou. Through this mediation of the Thou of all beings fulfillment, and non-fulfillment, of relations comes to them: the inborn Thou is realized in each relation and consummated in none. It is consummated only in the direct relation with the Thou that by its nature cannot become an It.\(^11\)
Gabriel Marcel is also a good source on relationships. The I-Thou theme is scattered throughout his work as well. He has additional light to shed on being with others. He emphasizes that our being is one of participation, or communion with others. This is very much like Buber's relation with a Thou. Marcel similarly posits that the ultimate Thou can be revealed by this communion with others.

His thoughts on knowledge can add to what has already been stated about wisdom. Marcel says that by communion or I-Thou relations another aspect of knowledge is revealed, and that is self knowledge. In fact relation is our only means to self knowledge.

'I' only knows itself as such in the face of a 'thou'. Apart from my relation to the 'thou', I am not aware of myself as a unique self at all---I am a mere bundle of sensations, series of experiences, or logical thinking subject. What Marcel means is that "...the thou gives me to myself".

Self-presence and the presence of a thou are two sides of one coming-to-presence which is the creative achievement of human communion.

Marcel realizes that the other can be reduced to an It but concentrates his work on such realities as love, hope or fidelity. These are full experiences which center on the Thou.

The uncharacterizable presence which I discover in love, hope, or fidelity, reveals something to me which cannot be revealed to sense perception, logical thought, or objectified knowledge. To the extent that I succeed in expressing this
unique dimension of being, I may be said to
know what I could not otherwise know and there-
fore this expression is undoubtedly a sort of
knowledge of being.\textsuperscript{15}

Another man, Abraham H. Maslow, talks about "peak
experience"\textsuperscript{16} in his book, \textit{Toward A Psychology of Being}.
The peak experience has a lot in common with Buber's
I-Thou relationship. The peak experiences are described
as a moment of highest happiness and fulfillment: his
example was a love relation. During this special moment
the person is integrated and can perceive a part of the
world as a surrogate for the world as a whole. Only in
perceiving this wholeness is the person able to see the
value of the world or the "values of Being".\textsuperscript{17} The list
of values he was able to gather includes the previous
examples of truth, beauty, and goodness and the following
list as well: wholeness, perfection, completion, justice,
aliveness, richness, simplicity, uniqueness, effortless-
ness, playfulness, and self-sufficiency.

It is interesting that many of these values in their
ultimate form have been used to describe the attributes
of God.
QUESTION:

When you paint your family haven't they then become objectified in the work and become part of the world of I-It?

RESPONSE:

To use the family members as just subject matter or objects in painting may render them over to the world of I-It; but in that case, you wouldn't have a work of art. A successful painting has the ability to communicate or give up its reality to a receptive viewer. This could be accomplished only when to begin with the artist has tried to make manifest or set up in paint the personal relations he has known.

Buber's thoughts on art seem to indicate that the whole matter of art is one of relation—let me quote several of his passages to make this point. He talks about the eternal source of art in this way:

...a man is faced by a form which desires to be made through him into a work. This form is no offspring of his soul, but is an appearance which steps up to it and demands of it the effective power. The man is concerned with an act of his being. If he carries it through, if he speaks the primary word out of his being to the form which appears, then the effective power streams out, and the work arises.

Buber does not deny but affirms that a work of art as well as other relationships work back and forth between the world of I and the world of Thou, for example:

To produce is to draw forth, to invent is to find, to shape is to discover. In bodying forth I disclose. I lead the form across—into the world of It. The work produced is
a thing among things, able to be experienced and described as a sum of qualities. But from time to time it can face the receptive beholder in its whole embodied form.19

And again:

In the work of art realization in one sense means loss of reality in another. Genuine contemplation is over in a short time; now the life in nature, that first unlocked itself to me in the mystery of mutual action, can again be described, taken to pieces, and classified—the meeting-point of manifold systems of laws.20

The artist needs others to make a painting even more complete, to meet the painting that quietly stands before them.

So too in art: form is disclosed to the artist as he looks at what is over against him. He banishes it to be a 'structure'. This 'structure' is not in a world of gods, but in this great world of men. It is certainly 'there', even if no human eye seeks it out; but it is asleep. The Chinese poet tells how men did not wish to hear the tune he played on his jade flute; then he played it to the gods, and they inclined their ears; since then men also listened to the tune; thus he went from the gods to those whom the 'structure' cannot dispense with. It longs as in a dream for the meeting with man, that for a timeless moment he may lift the ban and clasp the form. Then he comes on his way, and experiences what there is to be experienced: it is made in this way, or this is expressed in it, or its qualities are such and such, and further, it takes this place in the scheme of things.

It is not as though scientific and aesthetic understanding were not necessary; but they are necessary to man that he may do his work with precision and plunge it in the truth of relation, which is above the understanding and gathers it up in itself.21
QUESTION:

According to your thesis, painting people-relationships appears to be the proper subject of art. What does this imply about landscapes, vases of flowers and other subject matter for painting that is evidenced in a long history of art?

RESPONSE:

There are many relationships, all mysterious activities of life and art. Relationships are formed between people as well as between people and the objects they have created. There is relation between people and the world of nature. All these encounters could be the proper subject matter for art.

With sensitivity a man can draw forth the reality of a flower and establish an I-Thou relationship. If I may project my plans for the immediate future, I would say that I am most interested in drawing and painting plants. I have been growing some and living with them, and from time to time believe I catch a glimpse of a relation. It is in character with my thesis to meet the world of nature as well as people.

To relegate I-Thou relations to people, leaves out much of God's creation. God gathers the whole world up in himself and is in all things, "...There is no such thing as seeking God, for there is nothing in which he could not be found". 22

By saying Thou to a friend, to a river, to a piece of pottery, we establish relation and through this
relation meet God and the whole world in him.

Man is able to speak the primary words of relation. Man is the spokesman while the rest of nature remains mute. At times man is able to awaken the mute world from its sleep and something is revealed.

That living wholeness and unity of the tree, which denies itself to the sharpest glance of the mere investigator and discloses itself to the glance of one who says Thou, is there when he, the sayer of Thou, is there: it is he who vouchsafes to the tree that it manifest this unity and wholeness; and now the tree which is in being manifests them. Our habits of thought make it difficult for us to see that here, awakened by our attitude, something lights up and approaches us from the course of being. In the sphere we are talking of we have to do justice, in complete candour, to the reality which discloses itself to us. I should like to describe this large sphere, stretching from stones to stars, as that of the pre-threshold or preliminal, i.e. the stage before the threshold.
QUESTION:

Can you give some alternative other than Buber for understanding being in the world, and being an artist in the world?

RESPONSE:

We can look at other men's reflections and different wordings, but my inquiries lead me to the same realities. Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Martin Heidegger make distinctions about life that sometime run parallel to Buber's thinking and often come to the same truths. Let us look at these men briefly.

Merleau-Ponty talks of man as a body situated in the world, and in dialogue with the world through his body.

The world is my field of existence and my subjectivity does not transcend my existence. My existence is bodily existence, and my body is a dialogue with the world.24

This existence is one of openness which allows a dialogue with the rest of being to occur.

The subject enters the world as a question, and the world always has the character of a reply.25

This intimacy with the world is similar to Buber's I-Thou relationship. The very personal encounter with the world is further indicated by this quote from Merleau-Ponty:

No more is it a question of speaking of space and light; the question is to make space and light, which are there speak to us.26

We are able to be open to the world because our bodies are made of the same "stuff"27 as the rest of the
world. It is with a particular openness that a painter can change his experience of the world into a painting.

'Nature is on the inside', says Cezanne. Quality, light, color, depth, which are there before us, are there only because they awaken an echo in our body and because the body welcomes them. Things have an internal equivalent in me; they arouse in me a carnal formula of their presence. Why shouldn't these (correspondences) in their turn give rise to some (external) visible shape in which anyone else would recognize those motifs which support his own inspection of the world.28

Martin Heidegger begins his philosophic inquiries with man or "Dasein"29 because man is the basis for inquiry, man is the being that can question himself.

Instead of talking first about knowledge, we should talk about the human reality through which there is the ground of the possibility of knowledge. Man is Dasein, there-being, the there of being, the being through which being is revealed.30

Heidegger describes existence as "standing out toward",31 "standing open for",32 and "stepping out to".33 He makes it very clear that our being in the world is not just a spatial proximity to others and to the rest of being. "'Dasein' evidently is not in the world in the same way as a match is in a box."34 Dasein is a directed presence, directed by concern, familiarity, acquaintance, sharing, communion, and relation.

Our interactions with things are "concernful dealing with things".35 Being with others is a "certain communion",36 and "mutual relation".37 This mutual
relation and being together is constituted by our concern for and sharing of one world.

An important aspect of Heidegger's work is the particular attention he gives to language as the conveyor of being. He says that, "language is the house of being".\(^{38}\) Man the questioner inquires about the meaning of all the beings he encounters. Man gives voice to the question of being. Through man's questionin and his language being can be revealed. Heidegger gives a special role to the artist, specifically to the poet who uses language in his poetry to reveal being.

The poet is the voice of the holy. Poetic experience is the revelation of the trans-phenomenal depth of Dasein,...he who has ears, hears...\(^{39}\)
QUESTION:

You mentioned that a broader understanding could be gotten from the work of Teilhard de Chardin. Could you give an explanation of his schema?

RESPONSE:

One of Chardin's basic premises is that from the beginning of evolution there was and there continues to be both a "within", and a "without" to all things. Both realities of life, mind as well as matter will continue to progress to the super-human, or point where man's humanity is perfected and united. For Chardin evolution has a reason, a direction and a goal.

He takes scientific data on evolution and pushes it a step further. He tries to put man's experience of the world into perspective by asking, what could be the significance and meaning of all our data. Chardin reinterprets Christianity in the light of evolution. Even if we reject Christ and substitute another word, there is much to be learned from Chardin's schema because it is based on the facts of evolution and the interpretation of these facts is the work of an intellectually disciplined man. In his Preface to the Phenomenon of Man, he says,

If this book is to be properly understood, it must be read not as a work on metaphysics, still less as a sort of theological essay, but purely and simply as a scientific treatise...

This book deals with man solely as a phenomenon; but it also deals with the whole phenomenon of man.
I have included a diagram that describes the main lines of his evolutionary thought and will try to give a rudimentary explanation of his speculation.

The ascent from "Alpha" (the beginning) to "Omega" (the end) is an ascent of consciousness. It is a process of becoming. It is a process of life re-organizing itself and complicating itself into more complex forms as well as ever more consciousness.

The very first stirrings in the microscopic beginning of life indicated a within or a mind, as well as the without of matter. This may have been a very elementary and diffused consciousness but gradually these forms and consciousness grew more complicated. This process is due to a natural turning within or "involution" of the world towards itself in order to understand itself.

This turning within reached its critical point with man, who was the creature that was able to reflect, or to know that one knows. Chardin uses the word "hominisation" to describe the process by which proto-human stock became man, and man is still becoming more truly human: The Omega or end point is "ultra hominisation". I'd like to repeat that this growing consciousness in man is a turning inward or involution. It is a growing self-consciousness and interiority. It is getting oneself together and establishing a center. It is a "personalisation".
...the reflective psychic centre, once turned in upon itself, can only subsist by means of a double movement which is in reality one and the same. It centres itself further on itself by penetration into a new space, and at the same time it centres the rest of the world around itself by the establishment of an ever more coherent and better organised perspective in the realities which surround it. We are not dealing with an immutably fixed focus but with a vortex which grows deeper as it sucks up the fluid at the heart of which it was born. The ego only persists by becoming ever more itself. So man becomes a person in and through personalisation.48

Man continued to interiorize, to develop his self consciousness and a language emerged. Man became the articulator for all of being. From the Christian point of view, the next critical point in evolution was when God sent his Word, Christ. This was the supreme articulation. Christ actually took human form and by this form was the expression of man's future and gave it shape and unity. He entered creation in order to direct and nourish consciousness and psychic evolution to the destiny Omega, to himself, the beginning and the end. This meeting point is where man fulfills his humanity. This is where all human consciousness converges. This convergence is a synthesis of all centres in perfect unity with "...God, the Centre of centres".49

Chardin's scheme of the within and the without of all creation and his idea of the ascent of consciousness to God are very meaningful in themselves and also in light of Martin Buber's thought. The within, personalisation
and consciousness are very much in harmony with Buber's I-Thou relationships. Chardin's idea of personalisation and the notion of all others as centers, reinforces Buber's concept of the other as a Thou rather than an It. Both of these men's speculation lead ultimately to God.

One of the attractions that Chardin's work has for me personally, is his particular form of evolutionism. He dedicates his book, The Divine Milieu, "For those who love the world". Who could help being inspired when seeing the world with his perspectives. And he isn't the only vantage point. From the view of many others who are intimate with the world we can see all forms and matter imbued with life. Artists have often seen life and beauty where other men haven't even looked. Beauty can be seen even in very common things from our experience. The artist with openness and his special language of paint is able to point to these realities of life and beauty.

The themes that are recurrent in this paper are the ideas of an intimate world, personal relationships as revealing, the existence of truth, beauty and goodness as well as other realities in all things, and the ability of man to grasp these realities and reveal them and by this action reach the ultimate reality, God. A particular notion, however, that is important to notice
is the position of man in the midst of all this reality of being. Man is the articulator for being.

Man gifted with language can question and reflect on the personal encounters he has had with the world. From this interaction with being and contemplation of being, man is able to articulate the meaning of being. Through language being can be revealed.

In Chardin's schema even God through his Word, Christ, takes the special role of articulator for man. He does this to give guidance to the rising consciousness of man. This privileged role of spokesman is essential to our future physchic development and evolution to our destiny.

With Christ as the example, man continues in his role of articulator for the rest of being. The human spokesman becomes closer to the reality of being and with inspiration actually aids in guiding being along the path of evolution.
A FINAL QUESTION AS ASKED OF MYSELF:

Who is the artist then, I ask, with his specialized language of clay, music, film, or paint; if not a revealer of being. The artist is a unique articulator and holds a privileged and holy position in being. Can we infer an obligation from the artist, as well, in exchange for the gift of his talent?
This may be the appropriate time to look at my paintings. I have included, by the way, certain black and white photos taken from Ken Heyman's (the photographer) and Margaret Mead's wonderful book: Family. I became intrigued by Heyman's shots of families not his own. He was able to bridge the gap and relate to these people. I feel, in Margaret Mead's words about his photography,

A single scene---...could be taken from the particular spatial and temporal context in which it was embedded, and a set of such pictures could be placed in the quite different context of their common humanity.

My own paintings were partially inspired by photographs from my family album. Through the process of painting, the images departed from the exclusive dictates of the photographs, and I hope were able to go beyond it. The pictures are arranged in chronological order and show the progression of my ideas from September 1969 to August 1970.

Probably the most noticeable feature is the continued complication of the composition by the use of both two and three dimensional aspects, and by further division of the picture plane. Another aspect is the development of color. Bright color was used throughout, however the later introduction of more neutrals served to emphasize the brighter colors, as well as support the "mood" of the painting.
The application of the paint varies: washes, impastos with a palette knife, spraying with aerosol paints, drawing and scraping all often within the same painting. The different parts of each painting were given special attention as having an individuality of sorts. This accounts for the diversified paint applications as well as the various media used: for example, oil, acrylics, acrylic mediums and glazes, acrylic fluorescent paint, metallic silver and gold sprays, metallic foils and silver leaf, oil pastels, charcoal, pencil, chalk, and magic marking pens.

The metal framing that is used on most of the paintings relate to the metallic paint used and also function as additional structure to contain the loose and diversified paint application within the picture.

I've hesitated from answering all the plausible questions about meaning, symbolism, my private vocabulary, the graphic implications of the paintings, etc. The answer to these questions should be inherent in the painting if one looks sufficiently hard. I feel that too much analysis would only impair the viewer's vision. All that has been said in this paper will hopefully contribute to the reader's disposition about my work, and make any further explanation of the paintings unnecessary. Painting being a special language in itself has its own means of communicating.
Directs psychic evolution

Omega point is Ultra Hominisation

Hominisation proto human stock became more human and still is becoming

Reflection of becoming and end

Christ is beginning and end

GOD

Man is articulator for being

Man

SPEAKS the WORD

Critical point

Self consciousness

Elementary Material Particles & their Energies

within / without or mind / matter

Process of Becoming

Beginning - Alpha

Ascent of Consciousness or Evolution

End - Omega

OMEGA

CONVERGENCE
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