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LIGHT AND LANDSCAPE

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Date: __________________________________
I. WHY LANDSCAPE? WHY NOT?

"We are surrounded with things which we have not made and which have a life and structure different from our own: trees, flowers, grasses, rivers, hills, clouds. For centuries they have inspired us with curiosity and awe. They have been objects of delight. We have recreated them in our imaginations to reflect our moods. And we have come to think of them as contributing to an idea which we have called nature. Landscape painting marks the stages in our conception of nature. Its rise and development since the middle ages is part of a cycle in which the human spirit attempted once more to create a harmony with its environment."

For some reason I have only painted landscapes thus far. Some abstraction has come into these but still it is obviously landscape.

My first answer to the question of why I paint landscapes would be the most obvious. I grew up in a rural area, therefore it is innate for me to do landscapes. Really? Well this seems just a little to simple for inquiring minds. More detail? O.K., I grew up in a rural are where there wasn't much to do but roam around a bit through the area. In the spring when I was very young it was great to go to the pond down the road and fish. Summers seemed unbearably hot but there was a couple of good years for blackberry picking. Falls were beautiful especially up around the old sugar bush where all the maples were in bloom. It was here I did my first on location painting.

Winter was fantastic, tromping around the woods in deep snow. Standing under birch trees and shaking them so all the snow fell on you and down your neck. I really felt in tune with nature when I would go down across the fields to where the beavers had flooded a stream, causing a miniature lake. Down there one could always find not only millions of bugs that didn't allow you to stand still for too long, but maybe a beaver that sometimes would be milling about, a couple of ducks that flew off as you approached and if your lucky a raccoon that was washing his face.

So this bit of nature observing and tromping could be the leading cause of my landscape paintings. Seems to be. I can't think of any other reason.
I think about possibly doing a still life, a portrait or something totally abstract, and it seems like it would be fun but I always do a landscape.

Then again, maybe as soon as I'm done with school I'll never do another landscape.

My initial idea of these landscape paintings was to do something massive. There is a great attractiveness when a painting in a room silently screams out at you, saying-huge, massive, overbearing. I would like my work to do that. Maybe everyone would.

A deep presence of nature is desired. A feeling of being there, you can hear the water flowing, the trees creaking, the wind blowing. You can feel the wind around you, smell the dirt. The greatest feeling, sitting out on the patio in the morning sun and listening to........nothing.

This is what I want, to give a feeling of huge presence, colors that are rich, deep, high contrast of the sun beating down, shadows, movement, spots. It feels the paintings have to be large to do this, very large. It doesn't seem fair, what if I don't want to do large paintings.

When I'm actually working this initial idea gets lost. Now concerns are directed to the paint, making of shapes, color choices, making things work. So this first grandiose idea is set into the background. While working on these other concerns, I lose sight of what my initial idea was.

As I paint more, my landscapes become less literal. There is no need, I eventually realize, to depict certain objects with more detail so the viewer is assured of what it is. This no longer seems necessary, and the idea of landscape is still completely preserved. There is always that compulsion to render things, pick at them, trying to make whatever it is look more like it should.

So while my work is tending toward the abstract it is still obviously landscape. Yet I think it can still go farther and still read as a landscape. But at this point I'm still not sure if that is really important. It may be I just like organic shapes, but any organic shape is probably going to be read as a landscape.
II. ACRYLIC VERSUS PASTEL

I've mostly painted in acrylic. It seems to suite my needs. Not only is it safe and easy but it dries quickly. I can change things by painting over them almost immediately. No waiting for drying. A lot of layering can be achieved quickly. Not that I'm in such a big hurry. I used to think I was a very patient person, and in most respects I think I am. But I've found when it comes to painting I seem to be somewhat impatient. Or stated more accurately by a professor, "an impatient eye", which is exactly what it is. I want to see results immediately. When I start something I want to finish it right away, though that isn't always possible. I believe it is a good idea to step back and take a break from it. Go back later and get a fresher look at it.

Acrylic allows you to achieve very smooth, flat planes. So one may tend to paint smooth, flat planes. I do get caught up in the paint itself. Its texture, how it goes onto the canvas, how clean an edge I can make. Then I realize what I'm doing and step back and say "what am I doing?". Often I lose my way to where it is I'm going. Finding a balance between getting caught up in the physical paint and stepping back to rethink what it is I intend, seems to be where success can be found.

To achieve a very "painted look" with acrylic, one must just work very fast before it dries. I find this a great way to work, fast. It doesn't give me a chance to think a lot about it which sometimes can be stifling. I can get some really nice things. By working fast I'm letting go and really loosening up.

Sometimes I become confused and don't know how I want to paint. I realize it is terrible that I become concerned about how I want to paint, with a certain technique or style. I should just paint, period. Feeling should be in it, just go with it. I know I like to draw very much, I like making lines and shapes. And I like to work fast, despite the fact I must continually reload my brush with paint which I find very annoying. It is this fact which makes pastels so appealing, having a continuous line in my hand. Besides making lines and working fast I also have the patience and desire for tedious slow things.
Often in life I sometimes feel I'm spreading myself too thin for liking to do too many different things.

Among this confusion as to how and why, I think I somehow achieved a cohesive body of work.

In the use of pastels I find much more freedom to make lines. I can continuously sketch without having to stop and get more medium. Just the activity of drawing with pastels help me when I go back to my paintings to loosen up more.

I've done some painting on paper which brings up the whole subject of our precious supports. I feel the paintings on paper are quite different from my paintings on canvas. The paper ones are much more spontaneous and they look as if they are being more reacted to. When I labor making a frame and stretching canvas over it, it acquires this precious quality that I don't want to mess it up (though I don't know how I would, I can always paint over it, right?). The paper is something I just bought and tacked up on the wall and doesn't have this precious quality to it, so I feel much more freedom to do what I want to it and its OK cause it's just paper.

The qualities of my smaller pieces, the ones on paper have some very strong qualities that is to be encouraged in the larger paintings.

Now I don't want to give the impression that I'm inhibited by all these things so that I'm scared to do anything. They are just observations about how and why I may do things a certain way.

When I think of pastels the first people to come to mind are Edgar Degas and Mary Cassatt. To me they are pastel, and give it it's fame. What they do with it is something I'm not inclined to do. If you look at a drawing by one of these artists, you will find in some cases the bold way they apply the pastel. There are places where the paper is untouched by the pastel. The paper shows through in a lot of places and it is twice as exciting when it's a brown or colored paper. I admire the bold strokes they use to indicate the edge of a dress or arm. Though I do admire these artist's pastels it doesn't seem to be what my pastels are about.
When I first started using pastels in undergraduate school I decided I didn't like them. They were messy, they dried out your hands, you had to be careful with the drawings so they wouldn't get smudged. Maybe all out of the reason of convenience, but that is what I decided.

But I came around, it seemed if you paint then you have to use pastels. And it seems like a good idea. It gets you away from painting and into some drawing.

My pastels aren't like Degas or Cassatts obviously. I feel I must cover the entire page with multiple layers.

Still continuing with a landscape theme my pastels have more freedom in them. That may be because of that whole precious support thing I discussed earlier, it may be the more fluency of drawing with the pastels. I'm sure it is both of these things. In my pastels more abstraction comes into the landscape. It's still easily identified as landscape but now you can't be sure whether it is snow or water, woods or grass.

I feel I really achieved this in my final pastel I did of the group. The colors are a magenta and orange which are not typical landscape colors, but they seem to work well together and suggest landscape. Usually each painting or drawing starts with some idea whether certain colors or shapes, or both that I want to use. With this drawing I had a preconceived color choice I wanted to do and set it in a location that is only identifiable to me.

Pastels allow me to push myself further and with what I learn in that medium, then I take that to my painting and try to push myself there. There is the feeling though that my paintings are always a step or two behind my drawings.
III. WHO INFLUENCES

There are so many things that influence a painter in some way or another; where they live, family, moods, friends, other artists, the weather, their health, the list could go on forever. Some people may not realize what influences them. I know some things that influence me, a main one is other artists and people around me.

In a studio situation where there are several people doing art, I think it would be interesting to study how everyone may or may not affect one another. Any person who goes into a museum and art gallery must be influenced by something in particular, but after they leave the building its likely they'll forget that initial excitement not long after they leave. And when you do leave your ready to run home and try out that way of thinking or working. By the time you get home you've lost some of it but it is still there. And it doesn't affect your work as much as you would have thought. Your work still looks like your work and doesn't change as dramatically as you thought it would.

Influences are on a much more subtle basis. They are not noticed immediately. One day in the studio I started noticing things that seemed to be influencing me. I think Dean's colors have influence me his first paintings are very colorful and I'm finding my colors are finally expanding, they don't seem to be the same old blues and greens that always dominated my paintings. I found myself painting a form that looked a lot like the aloe plants Laura has been painting. These aloe forms repeated in another spot having a more snaky feel to them which reminds me of the snake forms Lim is working on. These people in the studio have influence on me directly.

Another influence is verbal which is the most confusing kind. Talking about my work can be difficult, I don't always know what it is I want to do. When others talk about my work it can have two different effects. One is they talk about the painting and what it is I may be trying to do. What they say sounds almost exactly about what I may be doing. They seem to have cleared up any cloudiness I may have had in my mind and I go on painting happily with a clearer idea.

The second kind of verbal influence is when someone talks to me
about things that don't seem related at all to what I'm doing or they may even seem to be trying to talk me away from what I was doing to something else.

One time a fellow student came in my studio and started to talk about composition. Now composition was one thing I thought I had down. This person started to suggest that I start a painting with straight lines that are randomly placed along with some horizontals and verticals and possibly a diagonal, and then to work from this. If this person knew how much I love to draw on the canvas with organic lines wandering across the surface creating shapes and spaces, they might not have tried to sell me on his own "goods". This person's own work clearly has some very geometric attributes.

So anyway, I was left feeling confused, infuriated and rejected. It was another moment when I lost any idea I may have had of what I may have been trying to accomplish. At this point I just wanted to go home and consider a career change.

In the end despite any influences, it all comes down to what it is I, and only I, want to do. It boils down to taking in all these different opinions and suggestions and deciding for myself what it is I want to do. I've finally realized that I can beat myself down trying to do something my family will like, or the professors will like or what society will like. These inhibitors will always be there, but I at least know I can disregard what they may have to say, but not so much to spite them for that can be self defeating.
IV. OTHER LANDSCAPE PAINTERS

I can't say any landscape painting previous to the twentieth century really excites me. Courbet and Turner did some ground breaking in their paintings, but more recent works seem to be more appealing to me.

I saw a catalog of the Japanese landscape painter Asoma. He had incredibly vibrant and raw colors in his landscapes with a tendency toward abstraction which were really interesting and made me think.

But I can most closely relate to the Group of Seven. This group of painters have been mentioned to me several times concerning my work. Upon looking them up in the library I saw why. Their paintings said much more than just landscape. March of this year I finally got to go to Toronto, Canada and see this Group of Seven in the Art Gallery of Ontario. The Gallery had a whole separate room for these painters. I was very impressed. Especially some pieces by Lawren Harris caught my eye.

Many Canadians feel that the Group of Seven were the first to paint Canada as it really is. At the beginning of this century Canada was a great undeveloped resource. The Group of Seven saw this and went out and painted. They left the comfort of their studio and went out to the wilderness despite storms, rain, sleet and snow, for their inspiration.

In 1907 the Canadian Art Club was formed, their aim was "to produce something that shall be strong and vital and big, like our Northwest land." Thirteen years later the Group of Seven was formed and these works could have also been their aim as well. The search for a Canadian identity was not the purpose of one group alone, there were many artists in Canada interested in developing a national art form.

When the Group of Seven formed in 1920 they had hopes of their work and ideas being recognized. They felt a vital, relevant art was important in the developing of a new strong nation. The popular belief is that the Group was met with much criticism during their early shows, but the reviews were nearly all favorable.
Fifty years later proved that the Group had attained their goals. They achieved much success, the works being significant as one of the basic symbols of Canadian culture. ²

I see the Group of Seven's paintings as refreshing, they are not meek, little landscapes, they are bold and give a true sense of nature. Though my own paintings may be nothing like theirs, the Group says landscape and painting to me.
There are many artists who are not landscape painters that I admire. I tend to like many things. Just the fact that someone made the effort to do whatever it is they've done, gives them credit. Some things really strike me as being really good and looking at it is extremely pleasing. Jasper Johns has some paintings that do that for me. Again, Degas' works are incredible. Rothko's color field paintings of stacked rectangles set on a contrasting colored background, I love to look at. Joan Mitchell has done some interesting things though I'm not sure yet what to think about them. I appreciate Jackson Pollock's paintings just for the way he did them. The list of artists could go on and on. I guess my point is there are many people who are doing and have done so many neat things. I look at these works and want to do these things myself. But of course I can't do that, well I could, but it's hard to say how long I could get away with it. So I go back to my studio and keep doing whatever it is I'm doing.

Looking at all these other artists isn't in vain of course. You need to keep up with what is happening, what is going on around yourself. Otherwise you could just paint in circles so to speak. Not that if a person never looked at other work they couldn't be a successful painter, but I don't think it hurts to look around. Now what exactly determines a successful painter is another subject altogether.

I read some paragraphs and looked at some reproductions of Jack Youngerman's and they seem to speak about my own work. Critics have compared his clean and vibrantly colored minimal abstractions to Georgia O'Keefe's late nature images while others see them more related to the bold cutouts of Matisse's last years.

Youngerman was interested in organic forms relating not to specific objects, but to "living things in general". His forms suggested leaves, plants and flames. The first works were powerful, ragged-edge images which as one critic put it "seemed to burst beyond the limits of the canvas". Later, still using raw, brilliant colors, he simplified and flattened his forms prompting comparisons with Matisse's cutouts.
Youngerman's interest in organic forms relating not to specific objects, but to "living things in general", is closely related to what I think about when I paint. I want an organic form, it doesn't matter if it is a flower, leaf or whatever.

There are many people who interest me. Some inspire me in my own work, some I just like to look at, and a few seem closely related to what it is I'm doing.
VI. COLOR

Color is a whole other subject that deserves some pondering. It is a very large part of painting for obvious reasons. Choosing, mixing, amounts, subject. Who can possibly decide. It basically boils down to what looks right. A person can do all the scientific color computing, complimentary crafting, shade selection the he or she may want, but for me it's basically a what looks good or right, technique.

I go to the canvas with color being the foremost thing in my mind, making it work. But in the activity of painting I lose sight of what I may have been considering as far as color is concerned.

In the beginning it seemed my paintings were green or blue, or a combination of the two. Green being for summer scenes and blue for snowy winter scenes. My goal in beginning graduate school was to get away from those two colors. So I embarked on a series of autumn looking pieces displaying oranges and yellows. And after buying a tube of purple paint I found purple creeping into my work. By my second year color and hues and shades became imperative things. I think about creating all these incredible shades and hues that will enhance the painting so much it will boggle the mind...but once again this initial thought loses its way in the activity.

One way to help achieve my colors is by layering. Paint goes on top of other layers of paint, creating new colors, letting old colors show through. A certain quality of richness is created.

At one point I wasn't sure what colors I wanted in my works. One of my paintings had a color that was conceived as an artificial color, so there was the consideration of whether I wanted natural colors, those found in nature, or paintings with a more unnatural color theme to them. At the time I decided I wanted more earthy colors, rich, deep, dark colors. Now I don't believe one needs to have a set way of painting, if I want an earthy painting I'll paint one, if I want a more personal color choice, I'll go in that direction.

I did one painting that I felt was of a very different color theme. There was a lot of pastel type colors brought into it. Overall it was what I call my "light" painting. In the beginning I was very excited about it.
Just that the colors seemed so different to me, I felt it was a tremendous breakthrough and at one point decided all my future works were to be in this manner. But I went on to other things that had yet some different colors and now I look back at that "light" painting and consider it one of my least favorite ones.

Something else I'm known for is my deep, dark shadows. I've had shadows that just drop right out of the canvas. I seem to like these really dark areas that have almost no color to them. I've gotten away from these shadows by consciously putting more color and less dark into them. There is still something I like about those deep, dark places that have a mystery about them. You don't know what is in that dark place, if you were out walking in the forest you would think twice about looking to see what was in there.

Color is one of the foremost things that keep painting exciting for me. I can always try a different color, or familiar colors in different amounts, each painting is always a new beginning.
VII. SHAPE

To discuss the creation of shapes in my paintings is simple. I just enjoy making these shapes on the canvas.

I love the large shapes that encompass the entire surface, but when I think of my shapes, I'm thinking of those 'spots' of color that sometimes seem to float in space. They could be representing flowers or leaves, but I'm not thinking of what it is exactly I'm creating other than a thing that appears to be airborne or dangling. A kind of patterning results which has become typical in my works. I really enjoy these shapes so I continue to do them, I think they give some dynamics to the work.

Initially when I go to start a new work I usually have something in mind. It may be a image that I’ve photographed or something from memory which lately is more likely the case. An idea from memory is an area I hope to expand on later, but for some of my recent pieces the ideas were from memories recent and in the past. Since I am so landscape oriented the memories are of a particular spot or place. I may have been thinking of a certain place for a few days or a certain idea can just pop into my mind. If an idea is in my mind for a few days then eventually it will get put on paper. Usually there is an aspect about the location that interests me enough to want to paint or draw it. My painting By the Way, was a place that had been in my mind from a trip I had taken through Vermont and New Hampshire. I’m not even sure which state it was in, but there was a river that went along the road and many rocks and stones were in it. In my mind I could see this place with all these rocks, that continued on and on, thousands of rocks, and many soft colors came to mind. I do a sketch from memory. I guess this is where shapes become important, for that is all I’m making when I draw. A detailed sketch isn’t necessary, just a starting point of what I’d like to see in the painting or pastel drawing. So I draw, making shapes for rocks, for areas of greenery, water, and sky. I end up with a basic layout. I may not like the composition or feel of the first one so I’ll do others until I find one I like. Onto the canvas I repeat the sketch. I like the drawing on the canvas so much I hate to paint over it.
But I paint in all the areas with basically the color I will want for that particular area. After everything is filled in I continue to paint and paint and paint. During this time things are liable to change and vary from the sketch. I may decide this or that may not look right. Sometimes just changing the color helps, other times a whole area may need work, enlarging or changing a shape. Everything is a shape when I look at it. After some paint has built up, and I think everyone agrees the more the better, the hardest part of painting is approaching. Deciding when a painting is finished or not is a difficult thing for me to decide. Some people believe their paintings are never finished, they may always go back and do something more to it. I like to finish something. I may stop working on something and set it aside because I’m tired of working on it or not sure what to do next. But I will either go back and do a little something to it, or decide it is done and will never touch it again.
VIII. HOW IT TIES TOGETHER

Along with all the previous things I've discussed there is a matter of complexity and simplicity. Or rather, complexity versus simplicity. Initially I love simplicity, the simpler life can be the better. So if I can make a simple statement that is interesting, all the better. But then I think it may be too simple, it needs more substance. To the other end I go with complexity. I like complexity also, it is great having to study a piece and look at all the things going on in it. But again, oh dear, is it too complex? Is it burning my retinas out? I'm getting dizzy. Is there any unity?

This all goes back to some previous ideas; in my section on influences I needed to decide what I wanted to do, and under my section on color I decided I don't need to have a set way of doing things. I can have a complex painting or a simple one. It depends on what I feel like doing at that time.

I don't think there is something specific I'm getting at, for example; a style, color, technique or idea. I'm just trying to create something, or things, that say something. Not necessarily to me, or to everyone, or just to one other person, but to somebody.

I have no deep rooted history or behavioral traits that cause me to paint or draw what I do. So at the risk of sounding to boring to be one who creates art, I must give a good reason of why I do. But I can't. It's something that started in grade school that I seem to do well and enjoy. I've continued this through my life. It doesn't dominate my life, but it is a big part of it. And if I can continue with it as a part of my life and possibly bring it into some other peoples lives, then great.
IX. NOW THAT IT'S DONE

I don't know if I can actually say anything specific about how I feel, now that my paintings are completed and displayed, but more on a broader basis that encompasses the past two years.

What do I think now that I have gotten this far?

I think...ah...I think it takes a lot to impress me...yet the littlest things can excite me excessively. It must be an inherent trait, for I remember my father showing me a colored paper clip asking if I'd seen one before. Well, yes I had but did not really think about it. Dad thought it was pretty neat how they were making these paper clips in different colors. And...they are neat. The average person probably doesn't get excited by office supplies. I do.

I think...it hasn't hit me yet that I've almost completed two years of graduate school and may be receiving a masters. I seem only twelve years old so how can this be? These milestones in life are slipping by barely being noticed...graduation, college, first car, graduation, marriage, graduate school...no time to notice, got to go to work, celebrate next time. This is another milestone that is slipping by. Shows over, write the paper, done.

I think...essentially...that having been able to paint for two years and having it culminate to a series of work which is hung in a show...is great!

One of the reasons I went on for two more years of school was to further develop my work. In undergraduate school I felt I had barely scratched the surface of painting. So having two more years of a much more intense program, I feel I have dug much deeper into myself and this art thing.

This was not the only reason for going on but one of the biggest. I think I've gained something significant in the developing of my work. It has also given me more time to think about what I would like to do when I finally finish going to school.

These most recent works are something I've grown toward in the past few years. At times it has seem a slow growth and others a more rapid one.
I've learned a lot about what it is I may be trying to achieve though I may never really find that out. Now that I have a chance to take a breath and look at what I've done, I realize that you never stop growing and changing, that my work will probably always change and develop, or at least I hope so. By looking at these particular pieces I'm thinking of what next it is I want to do. What I've done in these prompts me to take some of that, whether it be the color, technique or idea, and going on to the next thing.

Having these particular pieces up create a need to want to do so much more. Going to any gallery space or museum and seeing work up makes me want to run home and do stuff. There seems so much I want to do and try it's overwhelming. I hope this feeling stays with me.

I think the main thing I feel about this work I have exhibited is I want to do more, try different things, do a lot. The days are too short though. But it is nice to know I have the rest of my life to do this.
NOTES


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