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NIGHTSTANDS

BY

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Date: 25/05/83
INTRODUCTION

A great deal of uninterrupted thought passes through our minds during the quiet moments before we enter the stages of sleep. The following sets of writings which make up the body of this report were taken from a bedside journal designed to capture these thoughts as they emerged. The important passages of reoccuring thought have been selected and researched acting as the main points of discussion. In an attempt to exhibit a playful combination between word definition and my own stream of conscious thought, I have included blocks of word information. These blocks are used to describe as well as define key points of interest.

Most of the writings were used in a direct manner in an attempt to retain a feeling for freshness and spontaneity. While reviewing the original manuscripts, I became interested in the various changes in mood which took place as time elapsed. In order to visually emphasize this shift in time, I have elected to use variations in type face. These variations do not correspond to a cohesive format. Taking the writings out of chronological order, I have added as well as edited parts in order to form a somewhat coherent grouping of interrelated thoughts.
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**Equilibrium:** A state of balance between two or more forces acting upon a body such that there is no change in the state of rest or motion of the body.

Drawing together common links in my imagery, I have uncovered a strong concern for the term equilibrium. This equilibrium is comprised of two major forces; simplicity and complexity. My interest was in fusing the reductive singularity of a non-objective color field space, with a multi-layered, eclectic, and personal pictorial language. The primary purpose of this synthesis was to achieve a balanced orchestration of language, in support of a common or universal singularity in terms of expression.

I have often seen the complexities in my imagery as a representation of intellect, or a symbolic culmination of all that I have learned as an academic artist. In this light, simplicity can be seen to represent a vision of the innate, a yearning for the primitive, or a quest for an intrinsic knowledge. The process of introspection forces us to make connections between our
art and so-called life. Through my image-making process, I have discovered two fundamental levels of operation. These levels further support my thoughts concerning equilibrium. The first level encompasses the tools of academia. These tools are combined with lessons in order and logic, producing systems from which to build and construct a visual world. The second level deals with a more innate or subconscious system of operation. Its illusive lack of structure became very interesting to me. Though I leaned toward this interest, I found that both levels stayed in fundamental balance, reinforcing equilibrium. This balance allows me to use what I have learned coupled with an intrinsic or less systemized tract of innate knowledge, resulting in a holistic balance of picture-making attitudes concerning the simple and the complex.

Modern man has become programmed to think logically. From the beginning of his education, he is taught to systemize his thought processes, reinforcing order and logic. It is my belief that our decisions do not always correspond to an ordered logic. We all have "thought clouds". These "clouds" are thoughts which are not a logical succession of acts arranged in perfect sequence. For example, the things we have experienced in a dream or from points in time that remain unfixed, are as real and important to us now as our most current experiences. Ralph Waldo Emerson stated that dreams possess poetic integrity and truth. He believed that in a dream we are not obligated to deal with pre-set systems of order and logic. We are given the freedom to experience anything that comes to mind. This freedom allows our true personality to
surface unencumbered from the confines of everyday control.¹

I became interested in this absence of chronological time and began exploring its timeless universe from the point of view of truth.

Truth:  1. The state or character of being true in relation to being, knowledge or speech.  
2. conformity to fact or reality. 3. that which is true, a statement or belief that corresponds to the reality.

We meet many irrational and ambiguous real situations in our lives. What is amusing to me is that people often complain when confronted with these same situations in a work of art. They seem to be using the premise that the work was made in order to explain or reassure man about the world. I do not believe art is made in order to explain or reassure. A work of art is a kind of consciousness. Just as in life, the world would not exist at all without the consciousness which perceives it. The same is true about a work of art. The things told about do not truly exist outside the tale. The reality of a work of art is dictated by its creator. The truths investigated are relative to a reality that is perceived by the artist. I am interested in the idea of a fundamental truth. A truth common to an enigmatical universe which exists beneath the surface of reality, as perceived by natural vision.

Anytime I presuppose something, I create a distance from the truth."²

Robert Rauschenberg.


As I continued my explorations, I began developing my own attitudes about working. I found working direct and with greater spontaneity would evoke an honesty that was coming closer to what I felt to be true. I began gathering found information which through an evolution became very selective. These more selective pieces of subject matter began to surface as a kind of quote, helping to reinforce concept by means of repetition (babies, fish, star motif, figs. 1-6). These elements were chosen and used initially for their visual excitement. At the same time they possessed an oblique and timeless quality that was slowly becoming an obsessive interest.

**Metaphysics:** The division of philosophy which includes ontology, or the science of being.

My preoccupation with the feeling of timelessness, developed into an interest in metaphysics and surrealism. I always shy away from the term surrealism, due to scars left by the blunders of the official Surrealist movement (primarily the painting discipline). Surrealism in painting, amounted to nothing more than a collection of witty fantasies, wet dreams, and agoraphobic nightmares from a meagerly stocked dream world. Its only merit was its subsequent influence on younger artists such as Jackson Pollock. "Only when its libertarian rhetoric helped to nudge Pollock and others into a new kind of irreverent abstraction, did the Surrealist mandate for painters seem to make wide creative sense."

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4 Susan Sontag. p. 51.
The painters of the Surrealist movement held a prudent distance from Surrealism's contentious ideas of blurring the lines between the intended and the unintended. Their technical virtuosity endorsed craftsmenship, while limiting the chance of happy accidents. "Surrealism has always courted accidents, welcomed the uninvited, and flattered disorderly presenses."\(^5\) My link to Surrealism was not with the manner and style from which they executed their beliefs, but rather with an indigenous mood or atmosphere exhibited in their work. I was of the mind to believe that Surrealism held a spiritual link with the ambiguous universe I was so desperately in search of.

"The arts in which Surrealism has come into its own are prose fiction (as content mainly, but much more abundant and more complex thematically than that claimed by painting), theater, the arts of Assemblage, and--most triumphantly--photography."\(^6\)

While most of the pedigreed Surrealist candidates (painting, prose, and poetry) have all but dropped out of the race, photography, by its nature will continue to be a prime contender. Apparently, photography is the only artform that is natively surreal. "Surrealism lies at the heart of the photographic enterprise: in the very creation of a duplicate world, of a reality in the second degree, narrower but more dramatic than the one perceived by natural vision."\(^7\)


\(^6\) Susan Sontag. p. 51.

\(^7\) Susan Sontag. p. 69.
It was this interest in photography's native surreality that turned me toward the utility and accessibility of photography. I began analyzing its effect on my imagery. I soon discovered that a large portion of my visual language had been acquired by means of photovision. "Photographs seem, in a world littered with photographic relics, to have the status of found objects—unpremeditated slices of the world. Thus, they trade simultaneously on the prestige of art and the magic of the real."  

As I began further investigation of my interests in the notions of timelessness, I began to study the work of other artists who exhibited similar concerns. In doing so I drew from the energy of two artists who served as great inspiration for my creative search.

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Joseph Cornell (1903-1972)

"Joseph Cornell's art is a diagram of the organic universe, endlessly allusive, joining in a single emotional tone the distant and the dissimilar." My primary link with Cornell was his concern for the extraction of time. His extended fugue on time was directed by his attitudes toward the preservation of culture. History was a great influence to him. His primary interest in history wasn't just on its sequence development and process. Cornell was searching for a way in which the continuity of the past could be mapped out and sufficient connections or linkages could be established. His attempts to reinstate culture, by the association of objects were very similar to my interests in the idea of a common truth. His fusion of artifacts from past and present cultures, were a great influence on me. I began investigating the juxtaposition of varied elements with the intent of reaching a similar feeling of association and emotional continuity. (fig. 3-5). In giving new life to objects from time past, Cornell shares with me an interest in the timeless. I admire his success in objectifying the past. Cornell treated the past not as a history of styles from which to make connections, but rather as a complex treasure chest of subjects from which to abstract.10


10 Brain O'Doherty. p. 268.
Mark Rothko (1903-1970)

"Mark Rothko's art voices an absolute spoken in terms of eternity, and a sensation often spoken of in terms of time." My link with Mark Rothko is his treatment of space and his reductive means of achieving mood and emotion. His color fields were an attempt to refine dialogue to a single word. Though reductive and singular, Rothko's work takes on an intrinsic plurality. The viewer is given immense possibilities of mood, without the confinement of a set context. His painting utters a single word insistantly. When it is viewed, everyone hears it differently.

I share with Rothko the idea of conflict and balance. The persistent repetition of his interest in light and color, stretched out for over thirty years. Kierkegaard describes true repetition as eternity. In this light, Rothko's repetition of concept parallels my interest in the extraction of time. The idea of an eternity created by the infinite repetition of a conception leads us to an escape from time. This pursuit is then balanced by conflicting changes in mood. The moods caused by light and color change from canvas to canvas, finding a way to destroy repetition, and reinstate the notion of time as recollection. This affirmation of varied moods exalts notions of time and destroys any dreams of timelessness.

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"I became a painter because I wanted to raise painting to the level of poignancy of music and poetry."13

One of my most important connections with Mark Rothko is his yearning for another place in time. He was not a colorist in the sense that he was detained by its immediate properties. His color is after something else. I share with him, a belief in another level of reality; a reality that encompasses a common singularity in terms of truth. Rothko recognized the possibilities of a light and color that would survive the destruction of painting, opening the way into a universe in which the individual mind reveals and recognizes itself.14

My interests in Cornell and Rothko may appear to be a visual dichotomy in regard to manner and form. This dichotomy returns me to the idea of equilibrium. Cornell's influence might be best represented in my development of an eclectic visual language. This influence rests in support of my interest in the complex. Mark Rothko's work influenced my investigations of a common truth, supporting my compulsion for reduction and simplicity. Though Rothko and Cornell's investigations were channeled through different avenues of approach, I discovered that I shared with them a number of common interests.

Both artists shared an interest in the idea of a universal truth. Cornell's complex association of objects joined together the distant and the dissimilar, in an attempt to exhibit cultural continuity. Rothko's interest in a universal truth was portrayed by his devout faith in light and color.


I share with Rothko and Cornell a link to Surrealism. The organization of Cornell's Pictorial language takes on the tradition of collage as altered by the Surrealists. "His images exhibit psychological scenarios whose subject and object is enigma, whose syntax is dislocation and whose temporal context is dream." To Rothko, the Surrealist tradition of the "poetic picture" became significant in dissolving Cubist structure with atmosphere. Sharing the influences of Surrealism, Rothko's sensitizing of the total surface gives his work intense metaphorical potential. In its alloverness, his atmosphere acknowledges the surface as flat yet makes an infinite depth accessible.16

Process: 1. A detailed method of doing something. 2. A series of measures or changes. 3. A progressive course.

Stones aim smooth talking to me and water will wipe off age find registration too bad for compensation scraperbars wooden leather render our thoughts heartful core mistaken processing transition rub up buff down counteretch transition dial a brew butt heads pressure set two lumps rocking horse lithotine too long too short transition gulp and several butchers aprons tie KU leather proof newsprint image aftermath felt deletions common to apples oranges snakeslip fountain colored sets jazz expresso chemistry push Daniel Smith toward help light grain transition saints open heavy pallet no tack modify grease Griffen power up full impression re-etch places ragtime arches over bedframes refinished running for the mustard break ribbons like the holding drawers too full completion contemplation deducting punches transition glint.


The evaluation of an artist's achievement seems to depend to some extent on a comparison between the work of art and nature."¹⁷ This comparison can be traced historically to two major points of view. One is that the artist deserves praise for faithfully copying nature in his work. Evidence of this can be traced back to as early as the sixth century B.C. Greek myth regards Daedalus as the creator of works which were endowed not just with movement, but also with speech. The second point of view is based in accordance with Plato's theory that art should surpass the model of nature (my interest rests here). Plato believed that by improving on the model of nature, an artist succeeds in realizing an "ideal" beauty in his work.¹⁸

The term ideal is defined as that which exists only as a concept of the mind; a standard of supreme perfection. This unequivocal standard rests magically in the subjective mind of its beholder.

"Magic: 1. The art or pretence of seeking to control events by the use of spell, charms, etc. 2. An unexplainable influence; enchantment.

In my opinion, the stronger the belief in the "magical" function of an image, the less important is the nature of that image. For example, in a certain phase in the development of children's play, the child has little interest in the intrinsic properties of a toy. The effects of imagination are so great that a stick becomes a hobbyhorse, a box is turned into a ship, or a broom into a gun. The same magical transformations are applicable to a work of art.


¹⁸ Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz. pp. 61-67.
In my development of Reconstruction Cultural 2, my emphasis was on taking objects out of context and reinstating their function to fit my pictorial needs. (Example, baby inside fish, figure 4). It is my belief that when a high degree of magic power is attributed to an object, its resemblance to nature is rarely of decisive importance.19

The understanding of this magical transformation is greatly affected by man's inclination to equate the picture and the original it depicts. The artist's development of his own symbolic language may bridge a gap between the viewer's perception of the picture and the depicted. As stated earlier, man's reliance on order and logic often inhibits his will to understand things which are not readily accessible to his preestablished systems of understanding. It is my belief that the understanding of an artist's true intent is not always necessary in the appreciation of the work of art. However, I do feel it is important for the viewer to be educated to the language of art in order to better understand and judge artistic achievement. "A picture lives by companionship, expanding and quickening the eyes of the observer. It dies by the same token. It is therefore a risky act to send it out into the world. How often it must be impaired by the eyes of the unfeeling and the cruelty of the impotent, who extend their affliction universally."20


THE AMERICAN SUBLIME

How does one stand
To behold the sublime,
To confront the mockers,
The mickey mockers
And plated pairs?

When General Jackson
Posed for his statue
He knew how one feels.
Shall a man go barefoot
Blinking and blank?

But how does one feel?
One grows used to the weather,
The landscape and that;
And the sublime comes down
To the spirit itself,

The spirit and space,
The empty spirit
In vacant space.
What wine does one drink?
What bread does one eat?

Wallace Stevens, 1935
Fig. 1 Two Portraits in Red and Green - 29" x 42" - 1983
(Media listed in Appendix)
Fig. 2

Untitled - 22" x 33" - 1983
(Media listed in Appendix)
Fig. 6

Untitled - 22" x 33" - 1983
(Media Listed in Appendix)
APPENDIX

List of Media:

1. Figure 1: Acrylic paint, found objects on paper.
2. Figure 2: Color xerox transfer material, found objects, serigraphy on paper.
3. Figure 3: Color xerox transfer material, found objects, lithography, prisma color, rice paper with polyurethane, serigraphy on paper.
4. Figure 4: Color xerox transfer material, found objects, lithography, prisma color, rice paper with polyurethane, serigraphy on paper.
5. Figure 5: Acrylic paint, Acrylic enamel spray paint, color xerox transfer material, found objects, gold leaf, lithography, prisma color, rice paper with polyurethane, serigraphy on paper.
6. Figure 6: Acrylic paint, Acrylic enamel spray paint, color xerox transfer material, found objects, gold leaf, lithography, prisma color, serigraphy on paper.
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


