Development of a Series of Geometric Shaped Canvas Paintings

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"Development Of a Series
Of Geometric Shaped Canvas Paintings"

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DEVELOPMENT OF A SERIES OF
GEOMETRIC SHAPED CANVAS PAINTINGS

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Candidate for the Master of Fine
Arts in the College of Fine and
Applied Arts of the Rochester
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Date: August 1, 1969
Advisor: Mr. Bornarth
DEDICATION

The writer wishes to dedicate this Thesis to his dear wife who struggled with him through the lean years, to his dear and devoted friends, Kenneth Bliss, Dick LeFevre and to his advisor, Mr. Bornarth who was always ready to help whenever help was needed.
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INTRODUCTION

The work done this summer represents the ideas I have concerning art. My search for a contemporary image has led to my current direction.

My work represents an optimistic view of the advances in technology and industry. I have found the industrial materials best suited for the results I want. I am concerned with the use of these materials and transforming this into art. It has been my desire to have each work represent itself.

The use of new materials, techniques and methods was exciting. This, in fact, outweighed the excitement of constructing the concepts. It is this area of discovery where the artist has come very close to the scientist.

It is feared, and perhaps with reason, that art of this nature will eventually make art obsolete. The ideas will be all that is important and the construction of the ideas will not be necessary. I will let you decide.

Although this summer is not my last summer at Rochester Institute of Technology, I feel it represents my total growth. I still want the guidance and criticism of my advisors as I attempt to venture into a new area during my last summer here. It has always been my contention that upon receiving the M.F.A., an artist should have developed his facilities and ideas to a point where he is ready to pursue his direction.
I. Purpose of the Thesis:
The purpose of this thesis is to explore the use of stretched canvas, and plastic, in a series of paintings and to develop the use of constructed geometric shapes in paintings done in relief.

II. Scope of the Thesis:
One of the main interests is in the development of a personal and contemporary image in my work. This involves the use of contemporary methods and materials. The juxtaposition of curves and planes is developed by stretching canvas over constructed frames and the use of plastic. Also, the use of geometric construction where a central theme is repeated and this repetition becomes a predominate characteristic. I would construct these in three dimensions, creating forms of relief. The effect of the work would depend on idea, competence, and execution. This would require the study of the methods of working with various materials. It would be necessary to acquaint myself with a substantial amount of relevant work, both historic and current. This I would do in a series of no less than seven major works.

III. Procedures:
The first step would be to organize my goals and purposes. Then I would research and study the various ways to work with the materials. It would be necessary to study past history, and contemporary works where geometric constructions are used.
The next step would involve experiments with various materials in juxtaposition to work in harmony with each other. After the study of these possibilities and limitations, I propose to construct the minimum of seven major works. The report will consist of the notes, sketches and photographs of the development of my study and the exhibition of my work - including preliminary works, studies and the final constructions.

IV. Alternate Proposals:

1. The Effects of Twentieth Century Art Movements on Present-Day Art Activity.

2. A series of paintings with a direct relationship to sculpture.
Background to the Thesis

The work done for my thesis represents the results of progressive decisions and approaches to my painting over the last four years.

The first summer of 1966 consisted of a series of paintings of a romantic nature. They were figurative with emphasis on involving myself into the work. This image of painting was the direct influence of the Post-Impressionists painters on my work.

I was influenced by Cezanne. And even at this time, there were hints of things to come, due to a burning desire to find a direction in which to use purer color and more simplified form.

Between this summer and the next, there was a major change in my directions. When I first saw works of Mondrian, Nicholson, and Gabo at the Knox Albright Gallery, a new direction was undertaken. I was so impressed by the works that I began to inject geometric shapes into my works, then later into geometric shaped canvases. My second summer, I combined balsa wood with canvas which gave my painting a relief appearance. This change was influenced by works of Nicholson.

Writing this paper has made me look into the reason I stopped pursuing an interest in paintings by the Post-Impressionists, and introducing a complete about face, changed to geometric shaped paintings. There were several events, as I look in retrospect, which helped change my direction; there I was in a city with buildings creating geometric patterns and strong color patterns which helped me to become aware of an order in my work. Now the
structures became more important to me than the image of myself as a painter.

My paintings of the third summer increased in size, as I made modular constructions using stretched canvas as a membrane over the wood structure. My influences now can be more related to the compositions of Mondrian. John Canaday summarizes part of Mondrian's art theory in the following way.

"Painting occupies a plane surface. The plane surface is integral with the physical psychological being of the painting. Hence, the plane surface must be respected, must be allowed to declare itself, must not be falsified by imitation of volume, by perspective. Painting must be as flat as the surface it is painted on."1

I became more and more aware of the city with its polished chrome extrusions, and the perfections of industrial surfaces.

My aim is to present a contemporary image with contemporary material. Works of Ruda, Stone, Hinman, and Valledor have had a great impact on me with their use of new materials and concepts.

So far in my writing, I have attempted to give some background to my present work. Now, I will break down my work descriptively into its most important elements.

Basically, my work concerns itself with geometry. Geometry helps in giving my work a feeling of order. It also helps to divert my work from nature and creates its own presence.

Woodham stated this in connection with the use of geometry in

a painting: "Geometry is simply a statement of its own space so quite self-sufficient, free from allusion to nature and its references."^2

The geometry used is not based on a set formula or mathematics, but rather, intuitively based on human knowledge that there are self-evident truths such as using solids, surface lines, and angles. Such geometry is found in Sylvia Stone's angled plastic forms.

This intuitive approach used is also shared by many others such as Frank Stella and Charles Hinman. The work I have done is usually based on an idea. The problem is to express it to make it apparent to the spectator. I feel that some of my concepts are too complicated. It is not necessary to have complicated ideas. LeWitt states:

"Logic may be sued to camouflage the real intent of the artist, to lull the viewer into a belief that he understands the work, or to infer a paradoxical situation (such as logic vs. illogic). The ideas need not be complex. Most ideas that are successful are ludicrously simple. Successful ideas generally have the appearance of simplicity because they seem inevitable."^3

Mondrian also speaks of this desire for simplicity:

"Painters striving for universality of expression have always simplified form. The simpler the form, the more nearly it is universal. Hence,


the simplest form of all, the rectangle, must constitute the sole form if painting is to achieve universality.\(^4\)

Color is probably the works most important element. There is no texture. There exists only form and color. I would like color to be an integral part of the form, so that form and color can be classed as content. Also, color accelerates the rhythm and changes our sense of space within and around the modulars. Bolus states:

"Variation of weight, illusions of density, of opening and shutting, are managed by the interaction of color."\(^5\)

The dynamics of the work depends on the color. The colors are not done because of a particular theory. They are used to fit the particular shape and complete the shape to my satisfaction. Margit Staber in her comments on Max Bill, discusses his color which fits my aim very closely.

"Of course, it is difficult to say much about these paintings in black and white reproduction, as color is vital strength. But at least we see in one composition the guiding system for color."\(^6\)

This summer, the paintings will be in the final stage when I reach the studio, the answer for this is that a year of study is involved not only with sketches, but to find those colors that

\(^4\) Canaday, Op Cit., p. 491.

\(^5\) British Sculpture, Op Cit., p. 17.

would work with a given shape. I feel that this is a very important part of these constructions.

Along with a serious study of the films of Noland-Poems and Newman, Noland spoke of color in relation to his work.

"The colors are arbitrary, but it comes from working with the color that is preceding it. The color does relate in some kind of way to the structure. For instance, the triangle stuck into a rectangle. This suggests certain kinds of color situations."  

This statement by Noland gave me the assurance and motivation needed. My work must be my own. Although, I've been influenced by many painters, there are still many directions with color which I will explore.

In my work this summer, I have been trying to find those colors from the primary colors, which will work in relationship with each other on a given shape, whether two dimensional or three dimensional. This in itself was a challenge to me as I found many new directions with great possibilities. This forced me to experiment with my choice of colors. In making these changes it was impossible to forget the importance of psychology of color and the strange effects in which, both the physical and emotional make up of man are involved.  

Both aspects take in how we interpret art, (color and shape). This same feeling was shared by Casimir Malevich

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7 Lane and Slate, "Frank Stella", The New Abstraction. (1967), Film.
8 Faber Birren, Monument to Color. (New York, 1938), p. 12.
and Theo van Doesburg. Doesburg's work is based on the simple form of the rectangle, and the primary colors. Whereas, Malevich proceeds to drop all disturbing elements from the picture, all that remained would be the simplest geometric form - the square on the pure surface. Even with Malevich's procedures, he was searching for the pure emotion in art which is there. It depends on the relationship of the color used to the shape.

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Materials

In expressing my ideas, it was necessary to use the right material or combination of materials. My interest in industrial surfaces proposed new methods and techniques. Before, I was using what was considered traditional art materials, now the brush, paint knife gives way to the spray paint, oils become acrylics and lacquers. Balsa wood becomes clear plexiglass, the illusion of space becomes actual physical depth, and the aluminum stripping becomes an integral part of the painting.

The plexiglass is effective for my work because it produces the results I want. There is a clear flawless surface. Vasa speaks of this approach to his art.

"I am working with mechanically applied industrial finishes, because no classical medium can give me this fine surface. Through this process, I can eliminate the presence of the artist in his work, leaving only the idea and the concept to be experienced by the observer without other distraction." 11

I feel that the usage of new material require many small drawings and each should be completed within itself, or show an esthetic completeness.

"Each is more than a study, for each is a complete statement, an end within itself." 12

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PAINTING NO. 1

This painting or design comes from a series of sketches beginning with a series of lines, which are developed into organized units. This painting is the beginning of the body of work for this summer.

I am using basically two of the primary colors, red and yellow. The red violet comes from the secondary group. With these colors I started experimenting with various forms, which created different relations to each other to serve the composition of the whole. Such geometrical composition is an old principle which Cezanne gave new life.

After working up the design in black and white, Color-Aide paper was used for color study which did not create any problems. The finished painting did not present a serious problem, but one that was noticeable, the yellow areas did not appear to be the same color. I did not stop here to examine why, because I knew this would occur again with a different set of colors. It did occur on the third painting. My findings are based on diffused light along with the difference in weight of the two colors in question.
Painting No. 1
Photograph No. 1
PAINTING NO. 2

This painting represents a study of color. The most important element in this series is color. The dynamics of the work depends on the color. Just because two or more colors will work along side each other in a vertical or horizontal line, does not mean they will work on a curved surface of a geometric shaped canvas made up of modular units. This will be proven as we move further into the paintings as illustrated.

The frame for Painting A will be made from 1" x 3" pine striping with quarter round molding glued to the top surface to prevent a three inch print of the wood frame (on the finished surface) which would otherwise show on the painted surface. Unprimed canvas will be stretched over the frame and primed with Liquitex glass medium. The primed area was divided with masking tape and painted with color.

For this particular painting, the color study was based on colors with black. First, no assortment of the primary colors with black is disagreeable: but between these assortments, there exists a generic difference of harmony. For a study of this nature, the rectangle had to be used, as so the vibration would be more effective for study. Using another shape would change the relationship of the colors and change the amount of vibrations produced.
Painting No. 2
PAINTING NO. 3

Painting No. 3 is similar to Painting No. 2-A study of color. The colors experimented with had to have as nearly as possible, the same intensity; green and violet were used. The green rectangle was placed inside of the violet rectangle hoping that I would receive one of the two modifications; red or yellow, which I did. I received the red modification, but only after I had received a halo of white to yellow green around the green area. When the yellow green had reached its fullest intensity, you have then a red halo just opposite the green.

The yellow green will seem as if it is flashing off and on until the red appears.

The stretching and priming of the canvas is the same as with the preceding paintings.
Painting No. 3
Photograph No. 3
PAINTING NO. 4

Painting No. 4 was an investigation into the effects produced by color combinations on a flat surface against the effects produced on a three dimensional structure. This painting created a few problems. The color combination made up from Color-Aide paper did not work on a flat surface or a three dimensional structure.

I wanted to use red and green, so I had to reverse the procedures I had started to use.

Red and green are the modifications of blue and violet using red and green as the experimental colors and using violet as the base from which to start. To receive the vibration needed I added more blue to violet which increased the vibrations. The orange and yellow stripe was removed by enlarging the red area. Then, the blue violet stripe was placed between the red and green areas. The changes made in the color can be seen in the photograph of the painting.
Sketch No.4

1" = 4" (out line size) or 4" equals 5 ft drawing distance total = 25 ft total
Painting No. 4
Photograph No.4
PAINTING NO. 5

Painting No. 5 was done on a rather large scale. The dimensions are five feet both vertical and horizontal. To construct this painting the design was divided into three modulars. These modulars are bolted together to make moving much easier.

Two colors were to be used, but the shape demanded a third color to give the bottom a feeling of distance. Yellow was my choice from many colors because it would not only work as a third color, but it gives a slight vibration when placed along side the red violet. The red violet is classed as a modification of red and yellow.
Painting No. 5
Photograph No. 5
PAINTING NO. 6

A painting of this nature is a combination of plexiglass and quarter inch plywood, framed with aluminum stripping. This painted structure gives the feeling of an added dimension. This is due to the painted back surface of the plexiglass which permits you to see through the front surface to the painted rear surface, or you are exploring the inside of a solid. This is another dimension. The wood structures are fastened with screws to the plexiglass, the plexiglass is then fastened to a wooden frame with aluminum stripping.

This painting is a new venture for me. It was very exciting and challenging as it presented many problems along with many possibilities.

The problems I encountered was with the plywood and the aluminum. On the next structure of this nature, I will use 2" x 2" for the square wooden structure.

This painting is made up of three different environments being brought together to create one unit - the wood and plexiglass each have its own environment, the paint on the back of the plexiglass reflects to the viewer his own environment.

The procedures here are the same, such as, the usage of graph paper in the complete planning.
Painting No. 6
Photograph No.6
PAINTING NO. 7

Painting No. 7 planned in the usual manner, made use of graph paper and Color-Aide paper. The frame for this painting is made from 1" x 3" and 1" x 4" white pine. There are two modulars bolted together to complete the total design. The purpose of the angle used on the green modular is to raise color vibration. This did not work as planned, so the third color was added, which brought about the results wanted.

The results of the addition may be seen in the photograph of the painting.
Painting No. 7
Photograph No. 7
Conclusion

I have, in the background to the thesis, tried to express verbally the nature of what I am trying to do in my work. I feel that greater insight into the thesis can be obtained by reviewing the photographs of my work and the section, "The Development of Sketches."

For my work, this thesis has been most rewarding. Not so much because of what I have done, but what lies ahead as I continue my experimenting with the relation between shape and color which will cause many challenging problems. Although my sketches and color studies were complete at the beginning of the summer term, I had many problems arise while executing the body of work. The problems were basically with color, as I had planned each painting, making a color study in which I did not leave any allowance for error which might arise from using different materials on the large paintings.

Many of the paintings were planned to be three dimensional structures, but my choice of colors gave the same or more luminosity on a flat surface; here, I stopped, reexamined what I was doing. Because my paintings were half goemetric and half illusionistic, Malevich had reached this point with his work because he was dissatisfied with earlier results. I did not want my work to have the character of decorative patterns, but to have a sense of genuine elementary purity. I was at this point when I began to rely on Chevzul's "Law of Simultaneous Contrast of Colours," and the formula
which represents it, along with Josef Alber's *The Interaction of Color*. Here, I found Albers referring to Chevreul's research in the area of "Laws of Contrast of Color" and the Weber-Fechner Law. With this in mind, I proceeded on with my work which was a very rewarding experience.

The discoveries to come in continuing my work with the new materials coming out of science and industry will be most exciting. People often feel work of this nature is cold and impersonal to the artist. This could be because there is more of a demand for participation by the viewer.

"More time must be spent in immediate experience of a detail-less work, for the viewer is used to focusing on details and absorbing an impression of the piece with the help of these details. Secondly, the time spent looking at my empty work, or one with a minimum of action, seems infinitely longer than action-and detail-filled time. This time element, of course, is psychological, but it allows the artist an alternative to an extension of the serial method."  

I am looking forward to executing many new pieces of work from new materials.

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