San Fernando Valley State College

IN PURSUIT OF WONDER

An abstract submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in

Painting

by

Lyla Crossman

May, 1973
The abstract of Lyla Grossman is approved.

San Fernando Valley State College

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I. THE MASTER'S PROGRAM

Introduction

As undergraduates with an art major, many of us developed our potential for expressing a meaningful graphic image. We were exposed to a variety of artistic materials, preliminary studies in art history, and the creative process underlying the art works of our fellow students. This introduction to the world of art was an enriching learning experience. My Bachelor's degree in Art Education completed such a learning experience but exposed a need for more knowledge of self in making the art object and a more thorough answer to the questions: "Why art?"; "Does contemporary man need art?". We therefore return to a graduate art program for faith as well as knowledge. If we do not believe in art, we cannot teach art.

The Master's Program offers the student a significant examination of his personal creative activity. Particularly important is the dialogue with the art professors whose approach to art varies from recognizing art as a compulsive act to art as a concept. The student's exposure to the art community is rewarding for the person who has been working in the isolated studio. Art exhibits within the college and in the surrounding community, statements by living artists, and a substantial art library all add
to a more comprehensive understanding of the artist in his environment today.

Statement of Purpose

As a beginning graduate student we present a statement of purpose. Throughout the program I presented three statements which indicated the growth or change of attitude most relevant to the creative process. The first statement, written in 1968, illustrates the artist's need for order and/or harmony.

Summer, 1968

The essence of individual expression can only be a personal view of one's environment.

In spite of the chaos of this century, we have nevertheless been given exceptional opportunity to solve problems. It is in this environment that the artist's need to create order is particularly strong. An affirmative statement comes from this need.

I have chosen nature, the landscape, as a (point of reference for my paintings) because of nature's (innate quality) of harmony. (Inspired by nature,) I shall attempt to create images well composed emphasizing an almost technical or craftsmanlike approach to aesthetic relationships with artistic concern for (effective contrasts of light and dark,) (rich and varied color ideas,) (sensitive linear and textural expression.)

I plan to work in oils and water color learning the unique qualities of both painting experiences.

With my art I hope to communicate and reaffirm that there is indeed (order,) (meaning) and (perhaps) beauty in our existence.
The second statement deals with the relationship of the artist and the observer—art as communication.

Fall, 1968

We paint a message. In a large oil painting we shout the message. In a water color we whisper the message: 'Is anybody there?' or 'Please, give me your hand.'—the first message of the infant or the last message of the dying. We paint to be received by another person. When received, the communication is complete and the response is an absolute (which is art) rather than a compromise (which is not art). In my paintings (I have attempted to visually express this need for contact and commitment.)

All paintings are gifts. Visual imagery in color is the painter's symbolic means of presenting his gift. The paintings, or communication, prove we exist. We (and all we produce) are only what we are to others.

Our age of exploding population and electronic technology has caused man's individual spirit to appear lost. At this time in history let the artist accept his unique potential to record that man's spirit (a gift) still exists and is in great need of being received.

Finally, the third statement (chosen for the theme of my Artistic Performance) concerns spiritual awareness or the need to define art in terms of spiritual celebrations.

Winter, 1969

'Exhausted by longing, the spirit of man strives perpetually to surrender its burden through wonder.'*

This Artistic Performance is an attempt to pursue wonder through the art of painting.

We define vision as the sense by which light and color are apprehended. It is hoped that my paintings will be viewed as (visual expressions celebrating light and color—those elements that animate man’s spiritual existence.)

The Courses

In order to be more specific in working towards order, communication and spiritual awareness in my art, I approached all of my courses with the question, "What is a painting?"

Studio Problems—The painting as individual expression.

Painting, like music, is a language, well ordered, which is used to express emotional responses that are beyond the power of words or acts.

Painting is a personal creation of man and as soon as the artist picks up the brush, he is making an object for another man to see. He shares his reality, revelation, or protest with the viewer. Painting, as all art, is conditional upon the viewer responding to the work. (My art work has principally evolved within a two dimensional graphic statement of light, color and gesture.)

I began the graduate classes in painting with some content based upon the landscape. This subject matter, always bordering on the abstract, was rejected almost immediately for a total abstract expression. A harmony, possibly inspired by nature, was worked for in several studies dealing with a painterly motif. The
concept of motif was developed first with color and value and later in line.

I have always been interested in making any graphic image (still life, landscape, etc.) come alive, breathe so to speak. In order to do this I consciously set out to light the painting in order to make it sing or endow it with life. It became apparent that I would have difficulty resolving lights against darks within the same painting. To solve this problem I worked colored imagery with black only, colored imagery with white only, and some dark and light imagery within the same work. (See pages 20 and 21.) Grey paintings were rarely satisfactory. It appeared that the black had been used to act as a stage setting for the colored imagery, and though more dramatic and richer in symbolism, the black paintings were put aside for the white stage setting as a more atmospheric and free spirit content.

During the painting courses inconsistency in linear expression with the abstract shapes created problems. The result was a semester's independent study in drawing to develop a personal statement in line alone. A second semester of independent study led to a more comprehensive study of the anatomy of a painting.

Independent Study

Working with pen, pencil, crayon, pastel, palette knife and brush I investigated a variety of linear
statements. It became obvious that line acted as shape for me in that the linear expression was lyrical and intuitive. Some of these studies suggested the importance of surface quality. In the past I had been aware of the significance of texture relating to paint quality. During the Independent Study I experimented with thick oils, washes, water colors and inks in order to develop surface qualities which met with the content of my work. The illustration on page 18 indicates future linear studies created for interest in surface almost exclusively.

Concurrent with pure line drawings, I combined the line with colored shapes, particularly with inks and collage. (See pages 14 and 16.)

Auditing a comprehensive course in color theory I realized my choice of color was almost entirely psychological rather than optical. I became aware of dominance provided by low or high key color and relating this to my work, I chose a high key palette due to my concern for light. The paintings usually involved a strong contrast of hues (often primary colors) suggesting jovial qualities and childlike simplicity.

The choice in composition relates to the way we visualize the world. A non-structural composition was consistent with my content. When art becomes color oriented it tends to lose its sense of structure and the space becomes selective and often decorative rather than
three dimensional.

Scale was always a major concern. Working large or small surfaces required a continued search for an evanescent, refined, and intimate expression. The mat and glass were needed for a window presentation. Gallery 3 (a small gallery) glassed as a window was selected for my Artistic Performance not only for the intimacy suitable for many of my smaller paintings but for the symbolism of the window. The typical gallery with a door offers a tangible passageway. The open door invites the viewer into the aesthetic experience. The window can and often is passed by. Gallery 3 leaves responsibility with the viewer.

The Independent Study introduced me to a variety of new materials. With interest in light and therefore transparency I worked with cellophanes, inks, collage, light weight and transparent papers, water colors and oils. Gouache proved unsatisfactory because of its opaque qualities. The addition of cobalt drier to the oil medium allowed me the spontaniety in my oil paintings that I had previously enjoyed with water color. Working oils on paper rather than canvas proved successful.

History, Philosophy and Criticism of Art

Whatever the field of concentration in higher education, the college or university must ultimately deal with human nature and civilization. State colleges,
responsible for future teachers and educational policy, are fully aware of the importance of the arts. The courses required by all graduate art students, History and Philosophy of Art and Art Analysis and Criticism, are invaluable as appraisals of the students' special undertakings in the light of man's total condition. Not only do these courses involve the student in philosophy and history of art but they also suggest further research in psychology, religion, and sociology.

From a personal point of view, psychology and the visual arts was especially interesting because art itself is a type of behavior, as is art criticism. My paper on Paul Klee (often referred to as the father of contemporary painting) helped me gain insight into my own work. Further assets resulting from these classes came from the graduate students who brought a variety of interests and knowledge (including stage design, the film, weaving and sculpture) into the classroom.

Evaluation

An artist must be curious. His mind is at work seeking new ways to express old ideas by analyzing his art in relation to contemporary art in its total cultural environment. In pursuing the graphic image the artist expresses a personal view of the world, an individual orientation; but the art object is new—varies and must continue to excite both the artist and the viewer. In
order to do this, new theories, compositions, materials and techniques must constantly be explored. The teacher stimulates the need for further exploration.

For the lucky ones, life presents continuing challenges for growth and awareness. The Master’s Program in art, a unique challenge, offers a feast for the intellect and a haunting and magical experience for the emotions.

To my dedicated professors Ernest Velardi, Jr., Saul Bernstein, and Dolores Yonker, many thanks.
II. THE PAINTINGS

Introduction

Do you like the paintings?

Yes, but what does it all mean?

I know--it's fun to do and it's like the stars in the sky.

--Neil Grossman

My work has been referred to as human, lyrical, poetic, atmospheric, and spiritual. To bring the spiritual down to earth, we make a painting (our own flowers, objects, illusions). To put the work in context the frame or mat is used to symbolize the window. The window is visual. We see in or out.

The artist is an observer--rarely a participant. Sensitive to his surrounding environment he longs to be a part of it but because of his nature he can only record it. The artist, because he plays the role of the observer, is often free, almost unattached to the world because of his personal vision of it. He chooses images from nature, reality, and dream for content. I have tried to paint an attitude.

An attitude is illusive and like dream it is non-structural. It has no beginning or end. Often my work reflects echoes of images by repeating a color or line less prominent or farther away from the main image. The graphic forms revealed by my illusions are fragmented--
movements floating, a splash of white, a gesture of color suggesting a moment in time, fragile yet longing to be dynamic, prolonged and significant.

Why illusion in art? Because it describes another nature of man. Art illuminates life. It also illuminates man's need for illusion. Wonder in the aesthetic sense, in an object made, allows man the belief, if only for a moment, that his illusions can be made real. Art then becomes a moment of faith. The artist in creating the painting and the viewer in beholding the painting are born again in the presence of wonder.
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<th>Illustration Description</th>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Ink and collage on illustration board</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Oil on illustration board</td>
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<td>Ink and collage on illustration board</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Water color on paper</td>
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<td>Ink on paper</td>
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<td>13.</td>
<td>Water color on paper</td>
<td>4&quot; x 6&quot;</td>
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"... a music of vision
as pure as the music of hearing,
an art of the pure human encounter..."

--John Taylor
"How static then appears the waking world!"

--Henry Miller
Where would the world be
without a handful of flowers?
"... as though the song were sufficient comment on the human lot."

--John Yohannan
If we let in all of the light, we would go blind—so we look through windows.
To find, to keep
The essence of every living form is not my concern.
The essence of man's spirit is, only because it appears lost.
"... the moment burnt bright and perfect,
... then almost instantly it was gone, broken, washed away..."

--Christy Brown
**Summary**

A spiritual awareness is a part of our existence as individuals and needs to be reaffirmed as our faith in life needs to be reaffirmed. My paintings are visual expressions, simple gestures of this affirmation. They are born out of individual need. To say such expressions are profound or their content is greatly significant to society is false.

The art object offers neither truth, goodness, nor profit, as these values are measured in the world - it offers only a clear vision of the joy, the despair, the mystery, and the possibility of meaning or of meaninglessness of our existence.*

The uniqueness of man is his ability to respond—to react. The painting can be a minute response to almost anything in the environment or a total response. I hope my paintings indicate to the viewer that man is still capable of intellectual and emotional response. He is still vital—therefore still alive.

Postscript to Summary

As I observed the broken paintings after the earthquake, I felt that the art objects themselves could only be a representation of the painting experience. To "pursue wonder" by ordering color, gesture, and light offered a taste of the excitement of creating and thoroughly enriched my life. The paintings became the only means for sharing this creative experience. When the art object is shattered, we are left with our lives, a portion of which can be defined in our potential for exploring beauty. Art requires universal truths. Paintings are only symbols for man's need to create and behold.

Lyla Grossman

March, 1971