San Fernando Valley State College

A FEW STARS AND SOME STRIPES

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

by

Robin Rector Krupp

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The abstract of Robin Rector Krupp is approved:

Committee Chairman

San Fernando Valley State College

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PREFACE.

I am writing this abstract with the hopes that it will make my paintings more accessible to the viewer who is familiar with my paintings and for the viewer who sees the paintings photographed in the abstract for the first time.

I found it difficult to know just what would make my paintings more accessible. I decided to write about my process of painting and my decisions about painting.

I tried to be as honest and as direct as I could.
I chose to use a conversational tone and loose paragraph form for the abstract because that seemed the most compatible with the way I operate. That tone and form seemed as easy and as honest as any method of writing is for me. I am not a writer; I am a painter. I have therefore presented my paintings before the text of this paper. The text would mean very little if the reader has not seen the paintings.

A great deal of this abstract deals with choices. That is because a great deal of my view of art, and I suppose life, deals with choices. Most of these choices are dealt with positively in painting, but even there I find choices which I make reluctantly.

"The only cats worth anything are the cats who take chances. Sometimes I play a song I never even heard before."

-- Thelonius Monk

I thank Walt Kelly for the title. I do thank Mr. Ernest J. Velardi, Jr., Mrs. Mary Ann Glantz, my parents Dr. and Mrs. Robert W. Rector, and my husband, E. C. Krupp, for all the good times and help.
ILLUSTRATIONS

The paintings are presented in chronological order.

1. Mrs. William Morris Goes to Niagara Falls (45" x 55")

2. Meet Me in St. Louis (45" x 56")

3. Adieu à Walt Disney (44-1/2" x 58")

4. Big Sky (22" diameter)

5. The Allusion to Fan Li's Boat II (20" diameter)

6. Sweet Pea, Child of Olive (20" diameter)

7. Phantom Seleucid Empire (20" diameter)

8. Birthday Present for Weenie (20" diameter)

9. Appaloosa from the Wild Animal Circus of 1914 (22" diameter)
Meet Me in St. Louis.
Adieu à Walt Disney
Big Sky
The Allusion to Fan Li's Boat II
Sweet Pea, Child of Olive
Phantom Seleucid Empire
Birthday Present for Weenie
Appaloosa from the Wild Animal Circus of 1914
THE SELECTION AND COLLECTION OF IMAGES.

I like the decisions which painting offers. Mainly sensual decisions.

I have been making decisions about images for a long time.

I have been collecting images for at least ten years. The images are collected because I realize that I care enough about each particular one so that I would be sorry if it were to be lost, thrown away, or simply to pass from my sight forever. They are collected because I do not trust my memory. I want their visual reminder.

When I find an image that I like and want to keep, I
do not necessarily say to myself, "This would be nice in a painting some day," but rather, "I like this. I want it around. I want to look and think about it some more."

Most of the images that I collect come from sources other than "fine art."

Some of the images were collected and then put into paintings which are included in this abstract and are from photographs which I took (the goat in the painting on page 1). Some are from other people's photographs (the three people in the painting on page 1 are from photographs taken by three different people). Some are from old postcards (the Eskimo in the kayak in the painting on page 4, the moose in the painting on page 7). Some are on postage stamps (the Eisenhower stamp in the painting on page 5, the vistas in the two stamps in the painting on page 7). Some are from drawings from photographs found in magazines (Antonin Artaud in the painting on page 2, a young actor in the painting on page 3). Some are the actual photographs from magazines (the girl on the two horses in the painting on page 9). Some are from actual objects (the spoon in the painting on page 4, the boats in the painting on page 5). Some are from old maps (the forms in the painting on page 7). Some are ornaments which I've found in books on decoration (the rippling ribbon in the painting on page 4, the
secret sign for the devil which is the central image in the painting on page 9). Some are from posters or advertisements (the man staring at the glass of beer mirage in the painting on page 6). Some are from plant books (the Miner's lettuce and iris in the painting on page 5, the sweet peas in the painting on page 6).

I would guess that the collection of images is always above fifty, yet probably under two hundred, but it is very difficult to estimate the number since some of them are in books.

Some of the images have been in the collection for six or eight or two years. Some have been around for one hour or one or two days.

I do not look at the whole collection unless I am ready to do a painting.

The collection is in a loose pile. It looks more like a rummage sale than a catalogue.

Sometimes an image gets rejected from the collection after some period of time. This simply means that I don't like it enough anymore. I may still like it but not in some more special sense.

When I go into the studio to actually start a painting, I look through the entire collection of images. I
choose a specific set of images which might go into the painting that I am about to start. This process of the individual image choice is a very important time in the process of painting. Some of the images in a particular set may have been chosen the day before, but the final selection of the image set immediately precedes the painting itself. Then the images are organized and a pencil drawing is done on the canvas to show placement, or actual objects are placed on the canvas. The choice of the image set and their placement on the canvas is the most crucial time in a painting. I am more intent upon the possibilities of the specific painting than at any other time. It is almost terrifying to be interrupted during that process.

Probably more than three-fourths of the specific image set does not end up in the specific painting. Most of the images will go back into the collection of images and will be shuffled again. The image might be used in the next painting, maybe never, maybe in a painting two years from now.

If I were asked to describe the structure of a painting which will be done tomorrow, I couldn't. This is primarily true because I have not made the final selection of images, and the structure of the painting depends on those images.
There is usually one image that is more important than the other images in a painting's specific image set. It may be that this particular image directly excited me enough to start the painting in the first place. This image is very important to the organization of the painting. Often it is the largest image in the painting. In the painting on page 5, the plant form at the lower right--Miner's Lettuce--was the most important image in the set. In the painting on page 4, the spoon was the most important image of the set. The sweet pea form was the most important image in the painting on page 6.

The implication of the imagery is important in each choice of image.

I am saying something about flowers when I choose a flower, something about smiling faces when I choose a smiling face, something about floating ribbons when I choose a floating ribbon. But in each instance I am also drawn to that image because of its particular shape. I do not choose to depict sweet peas simply because I like all sweet peas, but rather because of the particular form of a particular plant at a particular time.

The images are no less important to me after they've been put into a painting. No spirit has been distilled
and put into my work. I am not trying to improve on the object. Even if I could, I am not trying to steal their souls.

What do all the images in the particular set do? They add up to indicate some attitude, some posture, some emotional melancholy or confusion, some balancing acrobatic juggling act, some glee, or something else that I haven't been able to name yet. Sometimes the sum of the images and the mood that they evoke surprises me. Sometimes it takes days or weeks for me to see the mood that really is contained in the work.

I believe that everything has something to do with that mood. But politics probably have the least to do with it.
EMPTY SPACES, COLOR.

There have always been different levels of information. There are different levels of information in anything, everything.

There have always been empty spaces in my paintings, although I did not consciously view those areas that way until the past few years. I prefer to refer to these areas as "empty spaces" rather than "negative space." The space is empty of images, but it always has at least two identifying aspects which distinguish one painting's empty space from another painting's
empty space. These two aspects are the shape of the space, which has varied in every painting that I have ever done, and the color, which has not always varied from painting to painting.

These empty spaces are positive rests, pauses in time and rhythm, which are extremely crucial in the structure and success of my most recent work. These spaces contain a different level of information.

When I first started painting, the empty spaces were black enamel, then for at least a year they were blank canvas, then canvas painted silver, then flat areas of enamel paint and then flat areas of acrylic paint. All the paintings photographed for this abstract include flat areas of acrylic.

When I started using enamels in the sequence mentioned above, something happened. I began to change the color of the empty space for almost every painting. Thus, from that point on, the empty space of any individual painting usually differed from the empty space of any other painting in both aspects, that is, in both shape and color.

The empty space in each painting is usually the largest single area in the painting. The color of that space helps to distinguish one work from another. However, I
do not refer to a painting such as the work photographed on page 4 as "the grey painting" or by its title, "Big Sky," but as "the painting with the spoon."

I do not choose color for the empty space to convey spatial relationships, rather I choose a certain color because it helps to convey a certain mood to me.

I usually mix the acrylic color for the empty space immediately before I start to paint, but only after I have chosen the image set and drawn some of those images on the canvas. The structure of the painting, and therefore the shape of the empty space, has been decided but may still change. The color is then mixed with a specific painting, a specific set of images, in mind.

The color of the empty space is usually an "off" color, tinted, and belongs to a middle value range. Sometimes there may be two empty space colors such as the two shades of yellow in the paintings on page 6, and the light blue and lavender in the painting on page 1.

The empty space is painted in with the chosen color quite early in the progression of a painting. There is no doubt that the choice of color for the empty space affects every other color choice in the painting.
STRUCTURE, CHANGE.

The placement of the images determines the shape of the empty spaces for the most part.

I tend to take more chances (which is good) in the placement of images, and therefore of empty space, when I paint on round canvases than when I paint on
The initial decisions about the compositional structure of each painting are determined by the images which I have chosen. The most important image is usually the biggest and most important in the structure. Other images are added along with the principle image but usually after that image has been placed on the canvas.

The majority of my decisions about structure are made with a specific canvas shape and size and a specific set of images in mind. However, a minority of decisions result from instinctively stopping while painting and then looking closely at the work. Perhaps an area which I originally imagined as entirely brick red will end up being three areas of brick red divided by images, or that same area might become two areas of brick red, one area of peach, and one of tan. A zebra which was originally imagined as black and white striped could become red, black, silver, and white striped.

I am willing to change initial visions if something warrants it.

I do often imagine a system which is rigid. I get tired or bored with it and then change it somewhere. Thus choices occur after other choices. Some choices seem to dictate other choices.
Very few things ever get painted out. Some things get more complicated (such as the zebras mentioned above) and some get more simplified (such as the black ram's head in the painting on page 9, which was originally drawn in as a line drawing).

One of the problems with some choices seeming to dictate other choices is that if I chose to change a color that had already been painted there would be an accompanying build-up of paint. This is usually dissatisfying to me, and therefore I am reluctant to make that change. Very few color areas get changed.

Many of the specific images which have been chosen for a specific work do get rearranged many times. Usually these are "less important" or supplementary images. Working with collage gives me more choice in that process of rearrangement.

Up until very recently, the top of the painting, when stretched on a hoop, was determined by the clasp. Now the top or the bottom of a painting could contain the clasp. I have never done a painting where the clasp was on the side.

Each hoop has a clasp with a screw and wing nut. These are either on the right or left side of the hoop and that cannot be reversed due to other factors. I consider
the location of the screw and wing nut in planning the structure of each painting.
CHANCES, SIZE, DECORATION.

This year, the small round paintings (20" or 22" circles) are easier, more fun, and more exciting than the larger paintings of last year (45" by 57" or thereabouts). I enjoy the intimacy of the smaller scale.

While I am impressed by the scale of the large paintings after their completion, I feel more free with the small paintings. More free to take chances.

A great many of the chances which I took were in surface
decoration. They included potato prints, letter and picture printing sets, linoleum block prints that I had made for textile prints, silk screen prints I had made, textile blocks from India, transfer-type letters, transfer-type trees and music notation, which are all systems of transferring one image onto another. I also applied gold leaf, magazine cut-outs, photographs, postcards, stamps, gummed decals, butterfly wings, jacaranda seeds, xeroxed photographs, and origami papers directly to the canvas.

Originally these surface decorations were afterthoughts. I enjoyed them immensely but did not take them seriously enough for them to become integral parts of the paintings. This is the case with the large paintings photographed on pages 1 and 2.

At some point, I was encouraged to answer affirmatively to the question, "If that adornment is the part of painting that you like best, shouldn't you do more of that?"

The printed letters in my work are never treated as words, rarely treated as letters. When I use the letter "X" it usually has the connotations of kisses, crosses, or simply nice form.

If I found hoops that were twice as large as the ones
I am using presently, I would not use them. A circle which is that large is too cumbersome.

I like turning the painting around and not having a corner to knock a bottle of paint off the table onto the floor.
VIEWING THE PAINTINGS.

I hope that the viewer enjoys my paintings.

I hope that the viewer doesn't worry too much about what the artist is "trying to say."

I am not asking the viewer to recognize the image or the source of the image. If I have painted Mrs. William Morris or Antonin Artaud into a painting, I do not expect that the viewer will recognize these people. The identity of the person makes very little difference in the painting.

I would tell the viewer the sources of the imagery if the viewer is interested in that information. For
instance, in the painting on page 1, Mrs. William Morris is from a photograph by an anonymous photographer, circa 1860, and can be found in Robert Schmutzler's book, Art Nouveau. The girl's face in the top circle is from a New York billboard photographed by my husband. The face in the bottom circle is from the wedding poster of a friend. The palm trees were inspired by a painting by Paul Gaugin. The goat was in the San Diego Zoo. The large flower prints at the bottom of the painting are from linoleum blocks which I did for a textile class.

My paintings are done for comfortable places. This may mean that they are done for homes rather than galleries, but this doesn't necessarily have to be true. A gallery can be comfortable and warm. The gallery which housed these paintings for the master's exhibit was made comfortable through the use of rugs, plants, flowers, and arrangements of objects.

All of the hoop paintings were painted in a flat position rather than on an easel. This is necessary because I used enamel paint and that will run if the surface is tilted. While the paintings can be viewed in a flat position by leaning over them or getting on a chair and looking down at them on the floor, I do not think that this is the best way of viewing them. I do think
that they should be hung where a viewer can press his nose up against them if he wants to and where he can also get at least six feet away at least (then he can run). I would prefer a viewing area where it would be possible to be twenty feet away from the work as well as twenty inches away.

The paintings were hung quite low for the master's exhibit so that the viewer would sit or kneel to see the work. If the room should be comfortable, why shouldn't the viewer be comfortable?