PAINTINGS AS ENVIRONMENTS

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

by

Oscar G. Murillo

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The abstract of Oscar G. Murillo is approved:

California State University, Northridge

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Illustrations

1. PROTOTYPES
   a. (38"x8"x3")
   b. (32"x8")

2. DAWN
   (49"x23"x7")

3. TEAR
   (57"x37"x9")

4. SEA CLOUDS
   (76"x36"x24")

5. SEA MIST
   (87"x51"x10")

6. SPANISH ELEGY
   (120"x40"x52")

7. NOON
   (120"x40"x52")

8. RAIN
   (109"x39"x9")
ABSTRACT

PAINTINGS AS ENVIRONMENTS

by

Oscar G. Murillo

Master of Arts in Painting

January, 1976

Statement of Intent

The intent of my performance is to produce a painting that surrounds or envelops real space and that an observer can enter, occupy and exit. I follow in the path of other artists concerned with the use of "real space" in their art works. My solution differs from others in my use of traditions and procedures that have been part of my training as a painter.
Definition and Nature of a Painting as an ENVIRONMENT

Allan Kaprow, in a letter to Barbara Berman reprinted in Berman's catalogue to Kaprow's exhibition at the Pasadena Museum of Art in 1967, defines an Environment as "...literally a surrounding to be entered into." Further definitions about the Environment as a work of art and tracings of its historical development can be found in Kaprow's own Assemblage, Environments and Happenings (1965, pp. 159, 160 and 165); William Seitz's The art of ASSEMBLAGE (1961, pp. 8-13); Rudi Blesh and Harriet Janis's Collage, Personalities, Concepts, Techniques (1967, pp. 268-269); Udu Kulturman's The New Sculpture: Environments and Assemblages (1968) and New Realism (1972); Germano Celant's Art Povera (1969) and Adrian Henri's Total Art: Environments, Happenings and Performance (1974, pp. 27-28); in which a relationship between the Environment and cubism, futurism, abstract expressionism and other artistic movements of this century are established. This relationship is seen as an attempt at bringing aspects of reality, i.e., environmental space, to two dimensional works of art, in particular painting.

I define my Paintings as Environments as paintings, that is, painted objects made out of shaped and formed

flat surfaces placed in an environmental exhibiting space and arranged to surround an area that will physically contain, partially or totally, an observer and that will provide for him psychologically and sensorially the feeling of being inside a painting.

The nature of my Paintings as Environments is that of a painting as an object or structure that provides the observer with the feeling of an enclosure that has been predetermined by an arrangement of surfaces or panels that remind one of walls, ceilings or floors that surround an area of space. The Paintings as Environments that I have constructed can be entered and exited, partially or totally, through entrances and exits provided for the observer. The entrance and exit lead the observer into feeling the experience of actually having been in a painting. The reality of this feeling of experience is determined by the movement, in entering and exiting, an observer is directed to take by the boundaries of the spatial enclosure.

This is just as with a collage, when actual samples of real materials bring the observer to realizing the reality and nature of the work.

Procedures, Materials and Techniques

The process of developing my Paintings as Environments is of organic and developmental nature. My works are the end product of a series of activities in which I
started with an abstract mental image or concept of an object I wanted to produce and transformed it into several concrete art objects with physical presence and reality.

My intention has been to produce a painting that makes use of color, texture, line, shape, form and environmental space for its form and content. The intended inclusion and integration of the space element is related to my effort to create an environmental painting large enough to give the observer the feeling of being enclosed in a painting. I discovered, at this stage of the process in constructing the objects for this performance, that just as in the production of other traditional and or experimental art objects, mine contained the problems of uniting form and content.

My search for unity between form and content led me to explore and experiment with various types of structures, materials and techniques. I explored closed, open, soft, rigid, geometric and free formed structures. The materials I worked with included aluminum tubing, burlap, cardboard, canvas, carpeting, cord, muslin, paper, plastic, resin, string and wood. I experimented with lamination of cardboard, muslin, resin and wood, painting on stretched and unstretched canvas, or muslin, applique of dyed muslin onto contrasting colored backgrounds, brush painting, dyeing, stamping, overpainting and underpainting, painting from the front and back, letting the paint filter through
the fabric and reworking surfaces to enrich them.

I used acrylic pigments for the practical reasons that they provide color selection, fast drying, permanency, and because they could be applied without the priming necessary to keep the ground support from rotting as with oil paints. I used acrylic medium and water as extenders and for the transparent qualities that enriched color by cooling, warming, darkening, and lightening tone value. I also used acrylic latex flat white paint for its opaque qualities as a thickener and lighten dark tones. For the final application of paint, I brushed on stripes of contrasting colors and varying widths to give definition and structure to the painted surface.

Giving unity to the form and content of my Paintings as Environments was important to me in that I was interested in developing painting forms that departed from the traditional rectangular and flat format. I wanted to change to a format that enveloped space in a painterly frame of reference. My research led me to shaped paintings and the realization that I wanted to work with shaped flat planes but in a different way. I wanted to compose and construct my paintings so that they would be shaped vertically, horizontally and in depth as well as relief, and that could be exhibited suspended or self supporting against a wall, away from the wall, suspended from the ceiling, on the floor or leaning against the wall.
I constructed a cylindrical painting that actually enclosed an area of space large enough for an observer to enter. This form had several presentation possibilities, but I chose to suspend it from the ceiling and enter it from its underside.

The concave and convex surfaces I chose as the format for my Paintings as Environments prompted the use of string, cord, yard and the floating of doweling sticks in front of a background surface. This, I believe, resolved the problems of my stated intention to incorporate environmental space into my paintings, giving them spatial reality just as bits of actual material give more reality to collages and perforations add spatial reality to sculptures. The cord, string and yard that I have used in my works serve both a decorative and a structural purpose. Decoratively, they add color, texture, value and spatial contrast to the surface, wood and fabric of the background and provide a three dimensional illusion on a two dimensional plane. Structurally, the cord and string add the third dimension to the paintings changing the flat surfaces into concave and convex planes, and held so through tension. The cord and string add to the overall composition of the works in that they create a front plane that emphasizes physical space by the optical illusions derived from the configurations they form by themselves, the cast shadows created by external lighting, and by appearing to
blend with the background as a flat line and then reasserting themselves as detached lines in front of the painted surfaces.

Concluding Statement

The experimental nature of my Paintings as Environments directed my activities towards a redefinition and expansion of my concepts about what paintings are. My training as a painter influenced the methods, selections and decisions I undertook and made. I relate my work to that of other artists that have concerned themselves with giving their works reality by using "real space". In this I follow Robert Motherwell's statement: "Every...painter carries the whole culture of modern painting in his head." My academic forming as a painter, my experiences during the activities for my performance and the response to the presentation of my work lead me to add to that statement the influence of other cultures of painting prior to the modern and outside of the European stream. I also see my work in relation to Juan Gris's statement:

Los plagarios imitan aspectos conocidos de las obras artisticas del pasado sin penetrar en su estetica ni en los grandes medios que precedieron

su ordenacion, pues ninguna obra llamada a conver­tirse en clasica puede asemejarse a las obras clasicas que la antecedieron. En arte como en biologia hay herencia, pero no identidad.

The Paintings as Environments I have produced for this performance I offer as proof of solutions arrived at as part of a continuing effort in the culture of all painting, past, modern and present, primitive and academic, traditional and experimental, to expand the definition of what a painting is and its eventual historical understand­ing and acceptance.

Bibliography

Berman, Barbara, Kaprow, Catalogue to an Exhibition sponsored by the Art Alliance of the Pasadena Museum, Pasadena Art Museum, Pasadena, Ca., 1967.


