CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

CANVAS AS A MEDIA AND GROUND

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

by

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Janette Epstein
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ABSTRACT

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Master of Arts in Art

"Since man is a social being, it is important that he develop a means of communicating with others, including the deaf." 1

INTRODUCTION

Understanding art created in the past and present is like opening a window into the events as history and the thoughts of people. Art gives us a visual language just as expressive as a verbal language. Egyptian Hieroglyphics are not just artistic pictographs, but the signs of a once spoken language. The Hieroglyphics survived, the language did not.

The writings or drawings of the artists in the sand or on cave walls have been instrumental in the development and understanding of civilization. Paintings, sculptures,
architecture, great bridges, ships and pyramids have left a visual record of our past stronger than any spoken or written language.

The paintings and sculptures in this project are a record of my development as an artist. As a deaf student, I found art to be my strongest expressive language.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The purpose of this project was to explore and develop my interest in changing the canvas itself. I was interested in seeing what could happen when the canvas became the media.

To accomplish this, the difference between painting and sculpture in my work has somewhat diminished, in fact, almost disappeared. One influence in my work was an interest in bas relief.

In early times, before the discovery of paper by the Egyptians, it was found that painting and sculpture could be combined as relief; which suggested the third dimension with forms raised only slightly above the surface. Almost every culture has made relief sculpture in some form, from China to Mexico, from Alaska to Polynesia.2

My many feelings, thoughts and moods became the major emphasis in my work. Experiencing my thoughts depended on the weather, current happenings and personal contacts with family, friends and teachers.

During the past few years, I have gained some first hand experience in canvas media and found it exciting,
unique, and very stimulating. By studying the possibilities of using and combining natural and man-made materials in new and imaginative ways, it became very challenging. Actually, the materials helped me to tell the story in of each paintings.

In seeking a title for each of my canvases, my personal feelings and observations were most important. It is my hope that each person viewing my works will relate to them on a personal basis, in light of their own past experiences and emotions.

An original painting completed in the Fall of 1980, and titled "Eye of a Peacock's Tail" was my inspiration to continue experimenting with canvas collage materials. "Eye of a Peacock's Tail" was done in bright, hot colors so as to draw attention to the brilliant beauty of the male peacock's tail feathers.

One day, while actually examining some peacock feathers, I took some pictures to see if the camera could capture the beautiful design and iridescent colors. While focusing my camera, I became fascinated by the distortions it produced. My imagination ran wild with ideas for new projects which incorporating the extended and contrasting designs.

My first painting in this project, an "Overview of the Landscape", started out to be an interpretation of the strife involved in the American Civil War. At the same time, I felt mad and rebellious at the many difficulties I was encountering with my work. My media this time was a
piece of old tarp instead of the stretched canvas. It was faded brown in color and had been used as a floor covering by my family on the many camping trips they had taken. It was stained and ragged in spots; exactly the type of material which would allow me to vent my feelings. Tearing and cutting it to my heart's content, knowing that it had outlived its useful life and was destined for the junk heap, helped in taking out my frustrations on the material. I soon discovered that the Civil War was not to be found in my canvas, instead, the beauty of the California desert landscape began to become apparent. As I worked, my passions cooled and my canvas reflected the quiet tranquility of my thoughts and feelings.

TECHNIQUE AND MATERIALS

While it is true that almost everything created by nature and humans does have some odor, be it sweet or foul smelling, strong or faint, fresh or decayed, the idea challenged me to use odors to enhance my some paintings. Somehow the use of an old, soiled, tarp having a slight mildew smell seemed to create a problem which needed solving. I wondered, could natural food flavored materials alter the odor of mildew tarp. The direct use of perfumes were avoided because they were too artificial.

Some of the materials I used to stimulate the senses were: Bulgar wheat, vanilla extract food flavor, opaque resin liquids, white glue, oil stain, soil, varnish, acrylic, macrame yarns, and broken glass. Actually, I
stretched canvas, tarps and colored materials and these were stuffed in order to build two and three dimensional projections and reliefs.

By using these natural and man-made materials, it was possible to demonstrate in a specific manner my ideas and feelings through a form of abstract art. The past was brought into a modern setting as demonstrated in the "Pharaoh" and the "Egyptian Queen". It was also possible to effect a time period change by combining a new material like glass with the same cloth material used for the mummies. "Resources" exemplifies this concept.

The earth, the basic provider of food, clothing and shelter, provided strong motivation for many new projects. "Distorted Roots", "The Burrow", "Overview of the Landscape", "Rainbow Garden" and "Hanging Moss" are the earth, above and below. In order to bring natural materials to my canvases I used actual soil.

The idea, the concept, and natural are so closely related, that they must be inseparable and of equal importance.

PROCEDURE AND PROCESS

In "Overview of the Landscape", tarp overlapping tarp, and cotton stuffing was used to make a relief. White glue was applied in order to hold the tarp in place and to protect it. Some of the material was cut into pieces and the threads were pulled to make strings. Three years later, oil stain and soil were also added to bring out
specific details.

I also experimented with new mediums such as: opaque resin liquids, vanilla flavor extract, and varnish for "Scented Landscape". The vanilla flavor scent stained the material and I did not realize that the extract had such a strong odor.

In "Hanging Moss", more strings were added to give the feeling of fullness.

In order to create the texture of "Distorted Roots", Bulgar wheat was also applied to the canvas. The decision to use macrame yarn came after viewing a gallery showing in Palm Springs. Experimentation led to even newer ways to use macrame yarn. Some of my ideas incorporated hook macrame yarn techniques. It was important to me that my painting made an impression on the viewer. Real satisfaction with my work became evident when opaque amber resin liquid was added to make the ground color more natural.

"The Burrow" is similar to "Distorted Roots" and combined most of the mediums that had been used in the other paintings.

The "Pharaoh" and the "Egyptian Queen", frames were covered with stretched canvas with overlapping canvas. I discontinued working on them for about a year because I could not figure out what was going wrong. Discussing my problem with a friend, he recommended that the figures be wrapped in shrouds. After adding a little opaque amber resin liquid, Bulgar wheat, soil and oil stain, and
macrame yarn, my canvases began to become realistic.

While using a dry paint brush to brush off the excess soil, I envisioned myself very much like an archeologist making their very first important discovery. My fingers shaped my project while my day-dreams went along for the ride. It was fun experiencing my creation.

"Rainbow Garden" was first planned as a pop art poster. A year later, oil stain was brushed over acrylic paint to antique the canvas.

"Resources" was started after a visit with my parents at Desert Hot Springs. My dad suggested that broken glass from a patio door might be used in my next art project. After filling the center of the painting with glass, the canvas became unusually heavy. It also looked dull. Adding Bulgar wheat and amber did not help. Mr. Lumbert, my graduate advisor, suggested leaving several raised area on the top and making the bottom area flat. His suggestion made a dramatic difference in the finished product.

CONCLUSION

Art is a part of everyday life not something that exists as a veneer or an escape from life.4

The authors of the above statement go on to say that art can be used to express what children (people) see, do, feel, think, and talk about everyday. In short, a way to communicate.

In creating an art work, the artist must be flexible in the choice of materials and styles. They must be free
to develop new ideas and use good principles of design in
order that the art work is to be acceptable.

I think that statements by artists are important from time to time,
not as an explanation of a particular work, but as a means of pointing a
direction or stating one's aims. The very personal nature of contemporary
art and the diverse styles has made this almost a necessity.

What I hope I have accomplished is a "reflection" of my feelings, thoughts and moods using canvas itself as a media. If I have been successful, my work will reinforce its own statement. The viewer will not need a lengthy explanation to understand the work.

Having placed these art works on exhibition, it was my sincere desire that they have been of some help to the novice in understanding abstract painting. If I have fulfilled these goals and objectives, other artists should find comfort in using these techniques in order to communicate personal thoughts and ideas. It is my personal hope that if given the choice, most people prefer to process their own ideas from what they see, smell, hear, touch, and taste. My canvases use three of the five senses (seeing, smelling, and touching).

Hopefully, by viewing these works one will be able to discover a clear statement of my aesthetic values at a very personal and emotional level.
FOOTNOTES


BIBLIOGRAPHY


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Overview of the Landscape

28" x 40"

1980
Overview of the Landscape

(close-up)
Scented Landscape

18" x 24"

1980
Scented Landscape

(close-up)
Hanging Moss

18" x 24"

1980
Hanging Moss

(close-up)
Distorted Roots

40" x 40"

1983
Distorted Roots

(close-up)
Pharaoh

24" x 48"

1983
Pharaoh

(close-up)
Egyptian Queen

24" x 48"

1983
Egyptian Queen (close-up)
Rainbow Garden

28" x 48"

1983
Rainbow Garden

(close-up)
Resources

30" x 48"

1983
Resources

(close-up)
The Burrow

54" x 72"

1983
The Burrow

(close-up)