

1980

Expressionism for Painting Sports

John T. Graves

Eastern Illinois University

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EXPRESSIONISM

FOR PAINTING SPORTS
(TITLE)

BY

JOHN T. GRAVES

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS IN ART

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1980

YEAR

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EXPRESSIONISM FOR PAINTING SPORTS

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EXPRESSIONISM
FOR PAINTING SPORTS

BY

JOHN T. GRAVES

B. S. in Art Education, Eastern Illinois University, 1980

ABSTRACT OF A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in Art at the Graduate School
of Eastern Illinois University

CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1980

EXPRESSIONISM FOR PAINTING SPORTS

Graves, John T., M.A.

Eastern Illinois University, 1980

This thesis is an attempt to show that the Expressionistic style of painting lends itself to the Sports figure. The action and dynamic movement of the athlete can be easily portrayed by the slashing strokes and boldly suggested forms of Expressionism. By painting in this style the "feelings and emotions" of an event may be sensed. Sometimes the form is obviously exaggerated to emphasize this emotional quality or mood.

This paper discusses and illustrates the work of several sports artists who use Expressionism for their style of work. Leroy Neiman is probably the most famous of these, having worked for many companies including ABC's Wide World of Sports in covering the Olympic Games. Robert Handville, Coby Whitmore, and Jim Jonson are all illustrators who have all at one time or another worked for Sports Illustrated magazine. Carl Shull presently an art professor at Eastern Illinois University has experience working with the athlete from a series of paintings he did for Eastern's Physical Education Department in observance of the Diamond Jubilee Celebration in 1973.

The last chapter of the thesis is devoted to a discussion and analysis of my sports paintings with some attention to technique, materials used, preparation of the working surface, and determining composition.

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I wish to express my gratitude to Carl Shull for leading my sports expedition these past years and for being my advisor on this thesis. His influence and experience with the athlete as a subject matter have been invaluable.

Also a special thanks to Walter Sorge, who has helped me to finally loosen up my style and approach to painting and drawing, and to Lynn Trank for serving on my graduate committee.

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INTRODUCTION

My interest in sports began in childhood as it did for most boys, developing from Little League summer baseball to high school basketball. Experiencing a degree of success in basketball at the high school level, I gained further experience in collegiate basketball at Union University in Jackson, Tennessee and later earned a minor in Physical Education while at Eastern Illinois University in Charleston. Since then, I have been teaching some physical education classes as well as serving as assistant high school basketball coach off and on for six years. In one way or another, I have been involved in sports all of my life.

In college as my interest in art grew, it was only natural that my sports background and my art would eventually converge. I had experimented in sports as a subject matter while painting and working on a Special Certificate in Art Education. One of my favorite sports artists at this time was Leroy Neiman. Sports painting was intriguing, but my style lacked direction. It was at this time that I signed up for Painting III with Carl Shull, a professor in Art at Eastern Illinois University. He was working on a series of paintings depicting E.I.U.'s eleven different sports as a part of an exhibition and slide lecture presentation for Eastern's Physical Education Department in observance of the Diamond Jubilee Celebration at Eastern in 1973. Through Dr. Shull's influence from this project and by assisting him in exhibiting the paintings at Lantz gym, my interest in sports painting grew. By 1974, the year of my graduation from Eastern and the inception of my teaching career, I had painted eight or ten sports paintings.

In 1978, after four years of teaching, I decided to begin working on a Masters Degree in Art. Classes were taken during the summer months with an occasional class during the teaching year. Being still active in sports, I decided to begin where I had left off. With Dr. Shull as my advisor, Sports Art became my primary subject matter with ceramics as my second area of interest. It seemed natural to choose sports as a theme for my thesis.

This theme will be delineated from the perspective of my observation and experience, from an analysis of my work, from a description of sports artists who influenced my work, and from an analysis of these artists' styles and work.

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CHAPTER 1

AESTHETIC PERCEPTIONS IN ART AS DEMONSTRATED
THROUGH SPORTS AS AN ART FORM

There are few subjects that lend themselves more to dynamic movement than sports. The mechanics of most sporting events are such that the body is running, jumping, cutting, sliding, diving, throwing, or hitting. Given the components of balance, these activities lend themselves to some dynamic diagonal line forms of the body. Interesting angles of body and limbs form even more interesting positive/negative space immediately surrounding the form. When two or more figures are portrayed by the artist, the accumulation of combined forms often strengthens the dynamics of the composition. By taking a natural movement or composite of two or three figures involved in a play and rearranging their positions to increase the dynamic quality of the composition, more structure is given to the painting. This dynamic movement of athletics in space is often portrayed by painters in an expressionistic style.

While the portrayal of one athlete or the isolation of two or three figures involved in a play may be arranged to form a dynamic movement and space relationship, the addition of even more figures often creates the feeling of "mass movement." An example would be of the front line of the defense of a football team charging to rush the quarterback. The conglomeration of bodies and uniforms of equal color combine to develop this massive form and the movement is centered on a central figure. When a setting like this is attempted, the overall composition develops this sense of mass movement. Basketball and Ice Hockey also lend themselves to a mass movement composition.

The integrations of forms into the composition of painting through subtle changes in value can set up a flowing pattern of design. Various fragments of different subjects can be combined into a pattern by the use of related values in tone or by the use of connecting lines to relate each fragment to the other. A pattern can also be set by the relationship of darks and lights in the painting which moves the eye through the composition.

Sports figures in rapid movement give a sense of fleeting impressions as they speed by or maneuver in and out of a pattern. These impressions on canvas show where a figure or an extension of the figure, such as a racket or a bat, has been as well as where it is. One way of painting the fleeting image is by repeated forms, sometimes in a gradual disintegration of the form or forms. Another way, as Leroy Neiman often does, is to carry the form of the figure back in a slashing stroke in the direction from which the form is advancing. These fleeting impressions develop a graceful sense of form in the composition.

Few forms are more graceful than ballet. I think the grace of ballet is related to the grace of sports. They both deal with movement, balance and timing. This could explain why many professional ball clubs in a variety of sports have their athletes practicing ballet in the off-season. Besides the features previously mentioned, ballet increases the athlete's footwork and timing as well as coordination and muscle tone.

As another example of the fleeting impression of an athlete in movement as a graceful flowing form, think of a basketball player as he reaches the top of his jump on a layup. His leg that last left the

floor would be fully extended downward as the opposite arm is almost fully extended upward, releasing the ball. Although the form is moving, it is frozen for a split second as the athlete hangs in the air at the top of his vertical climb, awaiting the inevitable descent downward as the laws of gravity appear temporarily defied.

The gracefulness of an athlete represents the development of athletic skills and coordination experienced only by an elite few who strive to achieve perfection and master the skills involved in their event.

It is the opinion of some that expressionism is the natural style for painting sports. ART FUNDAMENTALS THEORY and PRACTICE defines expressionism by stating, "Expressionistic art is art in which there is a desire to express what is 'Felt' rather than perceived or reasoned. Expressionistic form is defined by an obvious exaggeration of natural objects for the purpose of emphasizing an emotion, mood, or concept."¹

Dynamic form and the space relationships in which sports lends itself have already been discussed. The slashing lines of expressionism may be used to enhance the form of the athlete as he moves or as he is hit or tackled. The slashing lines and strong vibrant colors used explosively on the canvas enhance and build the strong emotional qualities of a sports event, so that the viewer feels and experiences the same emotional sensation that the athlete represented is experiencing, or so that the mood of the event is expressed.

As is characteristic of expressionism, the artist may exaggerate the forms to overemphasize this emotion or concept involved in the event.

¹ Otto G. Ocvirik, Robert O. Bone, Robert E. Stinson and Philip R. Wigg, ART FUNDAMENTALS THEORY and PRACTICE, p. 156.

For example, basketball players may be distorted to appear taller than normal to emphasize the colossal height of basketball players, or a lineman in football may be painted larger than normal to emphasize the massive structure of football players.

My philosophy of sports painting is that expressionism best represents sports because it deals directly with the emotional qualities of the sport as well as the emotional qualities of the viewer and because it best suits the needs of the artist to develop the structural qualities of the composition to represent the dynamic movement involved in sports.

CHAPTER 2

SPORTS ARTISTS OF PRESENT

The artists discussed in this chapter are those that influenced me to pursue the challenge of painting sports figures and influenced my perception of sports figures as an art form.

Leroy Neiman is probably the most well-known and successful sports artist of this decade. For years he has worked for a variety of companies, from Playboy magazine to ABC's "Wide World of Sports", including the '76 Olympic games at Munich. A round-by-round caption of the Ali-Frazier fight in Madison Square Garden, Arnold Palmer chipping to a wide green, Yogi Berra beside the dugout as he became the Met's manager, the Super Bowl game of '72 for Time magazine's cover, the Stanley Cup hockey games, the players of the Atlanta All-Star game depicted for the Major League Baseball Commission, and program illustrations for the Robert F. Kennedy Pro-Celebrity Tennis Tournament at Forest Hills are only a smattering of Neiman's sports-related subjects.

According to Victor J. Hammer, "Mr. Neiman was born in St. Paul, Minnesota and studied at the school of the Chicago Art Institute. During World War II, he spent three years as an enlisted artist in the European Theatre. When he returned to Chicago, he taught drawing on the Art Institute faculty from 1950 to 1960. Three years in Rome and Paris followed, and by then an enormous technical faculty and superb draftsmanship enabled him to project instantaneous observations. Mr. Neiman is an Impressionist of the dramatic movement, and his live drawing-sessions on TV sports events demonstrate his ability to capture the

split-second image."²

Nick Meglin states, "Neiman is an artist of his time: His bold, incomplete line and his impatient, frenzied rush of vivid color are symbolic of the frenetic, transient age we live in, and it is precisely this approach that lends itself so readily to the subject of sports. A Neiman sports scene doesn't capture a moment in time, it captures a moment of recollection. More like, 'Yes, I saw O.J. Simpson run like that many times,' rather than 'Oh, that's O.J. Simpson in the Bills-Raider game.' This quality assaults the emotional sense of many sports fans, who consider Neiman the quintessential sports illustrator."³

What has inspired me the most in Neiman's work is his casual, yet purposeful and exact, treatment of form. He paints sparingly, only as he deems necessary for identification with that particular form, as well as with a certain individual in some cases. From his paintings, I have learned to appreciate this casual treatment of form. In his work, the background seems to serve two purposes, sometimes contrasting to the figure forming an outline of the subject and, at other times, blending in with and actually becoming part of the form. This casual treatment of form and the use of strong color patterns produces an aesthetically pleasing, yet dynamic and visually exciting painting. Although the subject matter maintains primary importance, the entire composition receives equal attention with respect to surface enrichment. In this way, Neiman maintains the aesthetic appearance of freshness. Neiman is totally involved with both his painting technique and his subjects.

²Victor J. Hammer, Leroy Neiman, Hammer Galleries, p. 1.

³Nick Meglin, "Leroy Neiman", American Artist, Volume 41, Issue 420, July 1977, pp. 36-37.

He captures the grandeur, excitement, and color of sporting events. His paintings preserve the excitement of the moment in vivid racing colors. One feels, after careful inspection of several Neiman products, that he has an intense understanding, as well as an intimate knowledge, of the event being portrayed. He also exhibits an uncanny ability to select and convey the essence of the game and/or to choose the most important play of the game to recreate. In the opinion of some, these qualities make Leroy Neiman a sports artist of great stature and accomplishment.

Following are several of Leroy Neiman's pictures which are used to demonstrate his vibrant interpretation of sports events.

Figure #1
Leroy Neiman
Black Shirts from the series The Devaney Era
serigraph
21 x 26

Figure #2
Leroy Neiman
National Champions
from the series The Devaney Era
serigraph
21 x 26



Figure #3
Leroy Neiman
Smash
serigraph
16 x 11



Figure #4
Leroy Neiman
Baseball
serigraph
34 3/4 x 23 3/4



Robert Handville is a sports artist (illustrator) that works for Sports Illustrated magazine. As Britannica Dictionary defines illustration: "il·lus·tra·tion: noun 1. that which illustrates, as an example, comparison, anecdote, etc., by which a subject or statement is elucidated or explained. 2. A print, drawing, or picture of any kind inserted in written or printed text to elucidate or adorn it. 3. The act or art of illustrating." Murray Tinkelman states, "The key word is 'elucidate,' for Handville does precisely that: he clarifies a specific editorial concept. Rather than regarding this responsibility as a limitation, he considers it a challenge that in no way compromises his art."⁴

This is a very interesting philosophy of art illustration, for I sometimes get the feeling that fellow art people often think that art and illustration in the area of sports are two entirely different areas, and I feel, as does Handville, that the two most certainly can and do exist in at least a similar category. Studies of Handville's illustrations have greatly influenced my approach to Sports Art. I find myself, in preparation for a painting, making preliminary sketches, combining photos, or rearranging subject matter to form a type of play or situation in an athletic event. The charisma of an individual athlete is often the primary subject matter, and the other figures usually become secondary. Quite often the viewer should recognize the individual involved and associate him with a particular aspect of a sport he is representing, as in Tony Espisito as the Chicago Black Hawks' Goalie in Espisito Defends, Figure #20. The viewer is not only to feel the

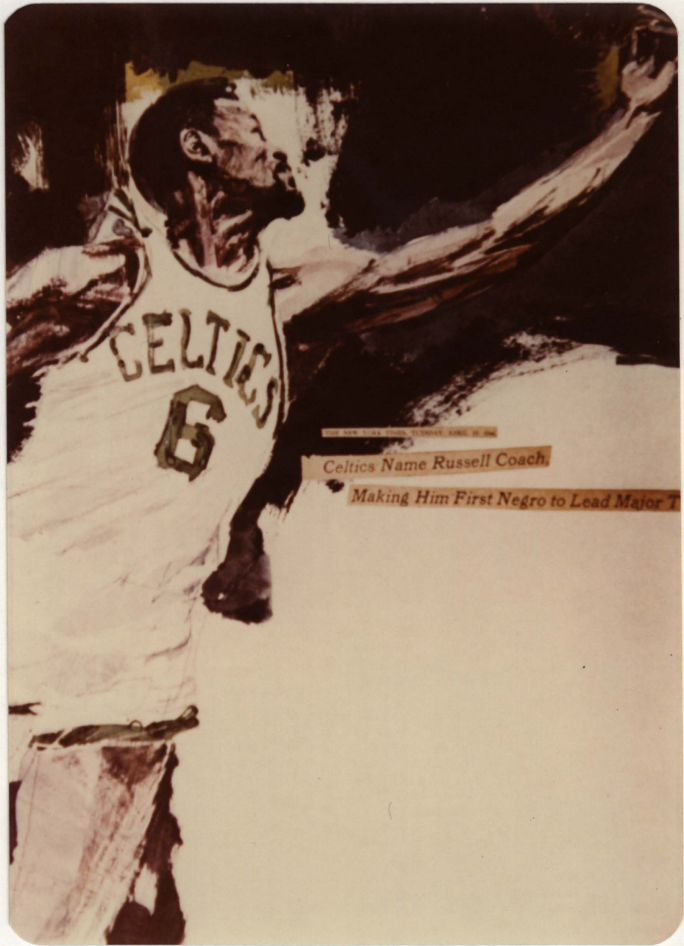
⁴Murray Tinkelman, "Robert Handville" in American Artist, Volume 41, Issue 420, July 1977, p. 56.

warrior-like appearance of the goalie as a knight in armor, but also to recognize him as Tony Espisito, goalie for the Chicago Black Hawks.

When Handville is studying his subject matter for an assignment, he makes sketches and takes photos, a characteristic very helpful in painting the athlete. Tinkelman states that, "To say Handville's paintings are boldly executed is an understatement. Colors collide, and paint runs freely or is applied with forceful brush strokes. Like the subjects they describe, the art has a sense of immediacy and power. Explosive as it may be his technique never interferes with the storytelling function of the painting. Handville is an illustrator."⁵ Following is one of Handville's illustrations for Sports Illustrated magazine.

⁵Ibid., p. 60.

Figure #5
Robert Handville
Celtics Name Russell Coach,
Making Him First Negro To Lead Major Team
1966
inks and collage
20 x 30



Celtics Name Russell Coach

Making Him First Negro to Lead Major T

Coby Whitmore, who was a successful illustrator of beautiful women in romance stories for 30 years, has recently been producing some fine sports paintings. He uses acrylics on linen canvas in an expressionistic style. His warm palette of color frequently slashes the canvas, leaving parts of the charcoal sketch to show through, revealing an important part of the form, or drawing attention to a certain area. Whitmore employs a dynamic expressionistic approach of color yet achieves a very graceful and delicate form. His experience as an illustrator is evident in his work. Any sports fan can easily recognize the personalities he portrays. It is this quality of mixing illustration with expressionistic painting that I have pursued in several of my own paintings, especially in my painting of The Hit, as Gary Fencik demonstrates tackling for the Chicago Bears.

Next are two examples of Whitmore's paintings showing the graceful form of the athlete.

Figure #6
Coby Whitmore
Hubie Green: Follow Through
1977
acrylic and oil
33 x 24



Figure #7
Coby Whitmore
Hitting A Drop Shot
1963
acrylic and oil
24 x 34



Another sports artist, or illustrator if you prefer, who has a unique approach is Jim Jonson. He is obsessed with the kinetics of sports. The viewer feels personally the energy and power of the event portrayed. If a theme were used to describe his work, it would have to be "MOTION." Jonson uses a multiple image rather than trying to freeze the subject in a crucial gesture. One sees where the subject is, was, and is going. He is also involved in trying to portray the instant of total acceleration or maximum effort of the athlete, and he attempts to transfer this feeling to the viewer.

To Jonson, it is not important that one recognize the athlete being portrayed, but rather he feel the sensation of being that athlete or at least feel he is watching that particular activity taking place in front of his eyes. Jonson is more interested in developing the gesture and motion of athletics than documenting a particular athlete. He uses a calligraphic line predominantly in his work--moving in, out, and around the subject. The line dances around, sometimes trailing off and then reappearing again, often to outline or draw attention to a particular area. His paintings are very much alive as he sometimes leaves raw canvas exposed next to a bold impasto. He uses delicate washes contrasting areas where the brush strokes are very apparent and direct.

Jonson's technique is very much expressionistic, but his end result is quite often borderline abstraction. He has a unique way of using geometric forms of a sports arena as part of the compositional structure and framework of his work. For instance, he incorporates the hurdles, the rings, the yard markers and other sports apparatus as an integral part of his painting. The tonal values in the paintings are nearly equal, and he uses a few contrasts of light and dark color to

draw attention to a certain area.

Murray Tinkelman, writing for American Artist, states: "his cinematic approach, utilizing the multiple image, is a logical extension of the tradition in 1912 by Marcel Duchamp in his *Nude Descending a Staircase*."⁶

Jonson says of himself: "My concepts are best when they come quickly; often I complete a painting in 3 or 4 hours. I have learned to trust my instincts."⁷

Jim Jonson has developed the freshest, most alive and breathing style of the artists discussed. My own newly-conceived approach to sports art, as witnessed in the most recent ink washes, is primarily concerned with motion and feeling while incorporating the entire painting surface into one visual representation of motion, feeling, and gesture while trying to be aesthetically conscious of the form and overall composition as an intriguing development of value and form and balance.

Most impressive is Jonson's ability to use a truly expressionistic style and yet present to the viewer a very "real" feeling of what the athlete is experiencing at that particular instant.

Five of Jonson's paintings emphasizing feeling and motion are shown as examples of his work.

⁶Murray Tinkelman, "Jim Jonson," American Artist, Vol. 41, Issue 420, July 1977, p. 75.

⁷Ibid., p. 76.

Figure #8
Jim Jonson
Long Jumper
1971
oil crayon and acrylic
15 x 12



Figure #9
Jim Jonson
The Hurdlers
1970
acrylic
20 x 24



Figure #10
Jim Jonson
Gymnast
1971
oil crayon and acrylic
12 1/4 x 11



Figure #11
Jim Jonson
Football
acrylic



Figure #12
Jim Jonson
detail of Last Lap
1970
acrylic
36 x 48



The final artist alluded to is Carl Shull, professor of Art at Eastern Illinois University. Dr. Shull painted a series of sports on behalf of the department of Physical Education for men at Eastern. The paintings represent the eleven intercollegiate sports offered on Eastern's campus. Tom Katsimpalis, athletic director at Eastern at the time of the exhibition, stated that the paintings have "great motion, force and strength."⁸

Shull paints in the expressionistic style. In his sports paintings, the brush stroke's strong slashing quality is clearly evidenced. Five of the paintings from the Diamond Jubilee exhibition are displayed on the following pages.

⁸Department of Physical Education for Men, Sports Art, p. 1.

Figure #13
Carl Shull
Tennis
1973
acrylic



Figure #15
Carl Shull
Baseball
1973
acrylic



Figure #16
Carl Shull
Golf
1973
acrylic



Figure #17
Carl Shull
Basketball
1973
acrylic



CHAPTER 3

DESCRIPTION OF WORK

An expressionistic approach to subject matter has been most useful in enabling me to capture a vital and dynamic movement in this sports series. The materials used are canvas, water color paper, masonite, acrylics, water color, pencil and ink, and a feather for applying ink.

The following is an account of the preparation of the working surface of my paintings. Canvas was stretched over wooden frames and stapled tightly. Then gesso was used as a primer to tighten the canvas. By sanding the dried primer and applying additional coats and repeating this process as often as necessary, a smooth painting surface was achieved. For the use of masonite as a painting surface, a latex primer was applied in the same manner. Water color paper was prepared by first taping the paper down to a strong drawing board by using a water tape. The paper was then brushed with water until totally saturated, then left to dry overnight. This process was repeated twice. The paper dried tight and did not buckle while being painted.

The ink washes should have been prepared in the same manner as water color paper; however, this precaution was not taken. As a result, the paper did buckle to a certain extent. In water color, as well as pencil and ink washes, the paper was usually first brushed with pure water in certain areas so that when ink or pigment was applied, it washed out and blended, producing a fluid pattern somewhat controllable and partly spontaneous.

In preparation for a sports painting, the first step is to determine the composition. Several factors influenced and determined this

approach. If painting a particular athlete, all available photographs or magazine prints are accumulated. If possible, photographs of the subject are taken and sketches of the subject in action are made. If the sport being represented is available, first-hand recording of the event is best. It is beneficial to the development of an artist's perceptive skills, as well as his constructive skills, to sketch of work where the event may be evidenced first-hand, and the full impact of the event, emotional as well as constructive, may be recorded fresh. Then, using as many of the photos and sketches as necessary, a preliminary sketch for the painting is made. If depicting a specific athlete or if the identity of the athlete is a concern, a gesture that the athlete can be identified with is included and, in the composition, those physical qualities people attribute to that particular athlete are shown. If the composition needs additional figures for emphasis or strength, other clippings, pictures or sketches may be used. Sometimes it helps to have several different positions or arrangements for one painting in sketch form. These help determine which is to be transferred to canvas or other working surface.

The following questions concern the preliminary sketches: Does the overall composition have a dynamic form relating directly to the action and movement of athletics? Does this form work with the formal structure of the composition? Does the space surrounding this form compliment the form? Other concerns in these preliminary sketches are: to reduce the sketch to a value system by means of shading, thereby directing the attention to the tonal qualities and the variations available to that sketch and trying to develop a contrast of values so that the composition not only has variety and interesting

relationships of lights and darks, but also uses value to emphasize a particular section of the composition. For instance, the primary subject will usually contrast with the background to appear as the primary figure in the composition. The same is true if more than one figure is involved in the primary action of the composition. The sketch must relate action or movement to capture the dynamic quality of sports; it must be successful as a value drawing with enough interest and variety to hold one's interest; the sketch must represent what is being portrayed, whether it is a particular individual or merely the generalized form of a figure representing that event; and the form and space must work together to form an overall dynamic composition. From these criteria, what general form is to be used and what values are to be given to each particular form or section of the composition are determined.

Next, the color scheme of the painting is selected. Usually, a hue that will reflect the mood of the event or the emotions of the figures involved in the composition is used. Sometimes the representational color is used; for instance, green for grass or the color of a uniform painted so that the public relates it to a certain team. Often color that reflects a mood or emotion involved in an event may be selected. This is the more expressionistic approach. Color tone is matched with the values of the sketch. If a certain area has contrasting values, then contrasting colors to represent it on canvas are used.

Observations from eight years of involvement in Sports Art support a belief that a loose approach to sports painting is fresher than a rigid style. Through appreciation of various artists' work, it is my opinion that expressionism is the most suitable style of art for

representing the dynamics of action and movement. By losing the rigidity and tightness of form, either by blending it with the background or merely just sketching part of the figure, the form becomes more dynamic and, by integrating the background with the figure or figures, the composition seems aesthetically richer. The more enrichment of the working surface, the more unity the composition seems to achieve. It is easier to loosen up an approach to a sports composition if photos and clippings are used only as an aid in preliminary sketches. The actual sketching on the canvas should be a direct result of observing the athletes in action. Recent pencil and ink washes, as done on location of the event, will support this belief. The pencil was used first to establish the general composition and proportions. Then a feather was used on a somewhat saturated surface (with water brushed in some specific and some general areas) applying ink in wash form where saturated and in line form where not. These works were completed in one or two hours at the most. Some detail may be evidenced in places, but the emphasis is on enrichment of the surface and overall composition. These ink washes are the most expressionistic and, therefore, possibly the freshest work in this series, although the painting of Downhill Skier, figure #32, and its expressionistic style relate a similar fresh quality.

In retrospect, it appears my earlier works were more illustrative than expressionistic. In these paintings, the figure is isolated by a strong contrast of values from the background area and the negative space immediately surrounding the subject.

In Pistol Pete, figure #18, the pallid skin tone and light-colored hair of Pete Maravich project him forward from the recessive

dark background. The dark skin tone of Willis Reed of the Knicks blends, for the most part, with the background, labeling him as secondary in this situation. Pete has caught his man off guard and is in the process of releasing his shot. The crowd is painted as a blur softly fading into the depths of the stadium. From experience as a player in a crowded, large stadium, this is how the players see the crowd--no individual faces--just bodies in the stands. As the game begins, quite often the lights from the stands are dimmed so that the players can only see the first two or three rows. Also, quite often as the light sources focus primarily on the playing floor and the stands are "toned down", the lights shine straight overhead, producing shadows on the floor and sometimes on the players. This is something that only someone on the gym floor would fully be aware of. This is overemphasized on Pistol Pete's lower legs to enhance the feeling of depth and the bending of the knees. For the same purpose, shading is evident on the underneath side of the elbows and under the chin as well as around the ball.

Dr. J., illustration #19, was painted several years later as a sequel to Pistol Pete. That is why the approach is basically the same. Although the statement is the same, Dr. J. is obviously treated with more of an attempt at enriching the surface of the flesh and the uniform with contrasting values and colors. This was the only deliberate variance in these two paintings. They are as shown.

Figure #18
John Graves
Pistol Pete
1973
acrylic on masonite
24 x 36



Figure #19
John Graves
Dr. J.
1978
acrylic
24 x 36



In figure #20, Espisito Defends, the style may be more illustrative than expressive. The goalie is presented in one of his more fully extended positions in the act of blocking the puck and defending the goal in a hockey game. Foreshortening, rather than shading, is used on the legs and arms to project depth. Color is used in a flatter manner, except for the detail of the decorations, numbers and stripes. By contrasting values with figure and background, the goalie is isolated and projected forward. The glove has a patterned texture as opposed to the more intriguing textures and patterns shaped in the large kneepads. The ice arena was first painted blue with red boundaries; then several very thinned-down washes of white were applied over this to better simulate an ice arena. Espisito Defends and a detail from it are pictured on the following pages.

Figure #20
John Graves
Espisito Defends
1978
acrylic
36 x 34

Figure #21
(detail of above)



As the style gradually develops, there is an effort to become more expressive by experimenting with techniques of application and by varying the degree to which a figure is completed and the degree of detail that is applied. In The Hit, figure #22, there is an effort to capture the moment of contact; several elements emphasize this.

A contrast of figure and background is still present and probably more dynamic in this painting than any other. The background is painted with explosive vibrant color; also the brush strokes lend a dynamic sensation--all originating from the core of the victim. The yardage markers perspectively lead to the center figure.

The outline of the trio of figures forms a triangle pushing upwards, as does the hit itself. The tackle has knocked the man backwards and, as he is leaning or falling backwards, he is driven upwards. He is also about to be assaulted with another surprise hit from behind, bending him forward before the trio of figures are to again engage the ground. This is another one of those "special feelings" one can only appreciate fully having witnessed it personally.

The viewer may get some clue to this sensation from the grimace on number 46's face as he is about to make the secondary contact, totally immobilize the ball carrier, and possibly, by catching him off guard, pop the ball out of his grasp. The two football paintings are shown as follows.

Figure #22
John Graves
The Hit
1979
acrylic
54 x 42

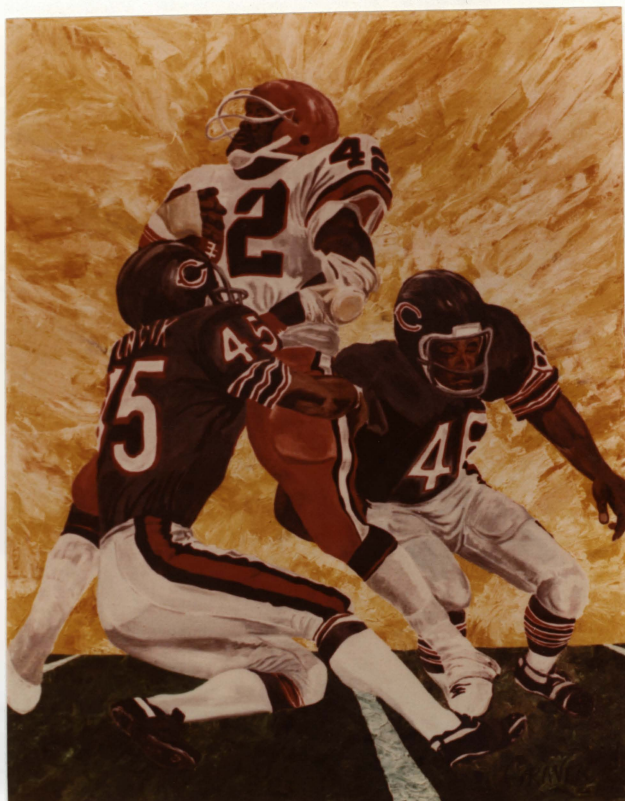


Figure #23
John Graves
The Pivot
1979
acrylic
48 x 36



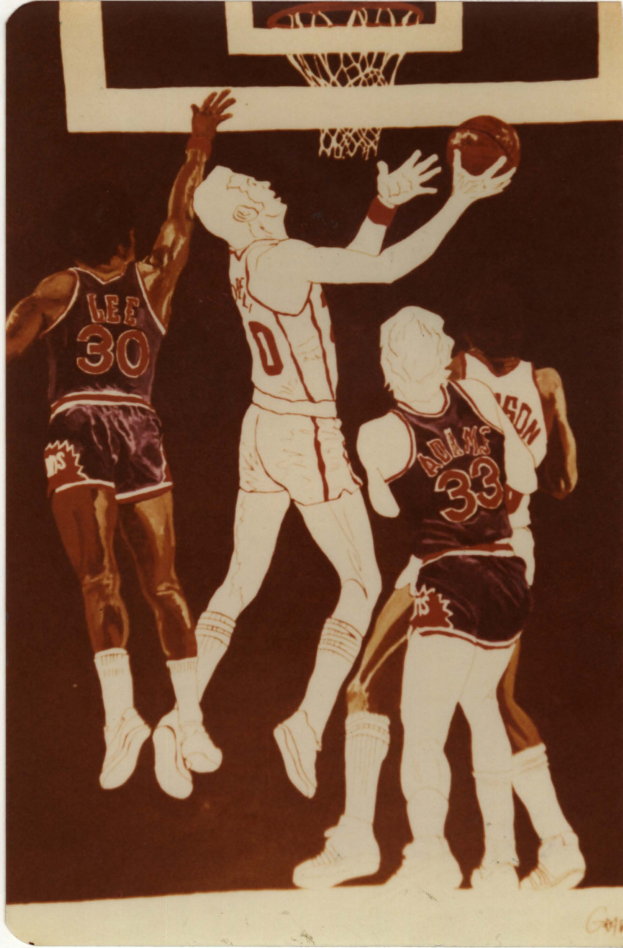
The Pivot, figure #24, introduces some innovative qualities on canvas for this style of painting.

As any football fan knows, Walter Payton, presently of the Chicago Bears, is one of the most elusive runners with his quick, strong pivots and cuts. His lateral feints compliment his toughness and speed to make him one of the best runners in the history of football. This painting might simulate what a defender must see as Walter is pivoting past him. In analysing the painting, the feeling of movement is produced by: (1) developing transparencies of the body so that all views of the pivot may be viewed at once; (2) leaving the colors flat so not much detail would be perceived in the split second it takes Walter Payton to fake and cut away; and (3) revolving the circular background shapes behind the figures, keeping the entire canvas moving as well as enriching the surface of the background. The white areas of the uniform in this painting contrast to the darker earthy tones developing a pattern design through value.

In Positioning and Poise, figure #24, color is reduced to its simplest form as a vehicle of expression. Line and form build the visual qualities of this basketball scene. Color is used as a form of chiarascuro to strongly suggest the positive and negative space relationships that each body adds to the total composition. This strong contrast of values of the white bodies and the white floor and backboard to that of the darker colors creates a strong pattern design. The contours of the figures create a very active positive and negative shaping with no two areas alike. The white backboard and gym floor serve to connect the white forms of the players as well as frame the primary area of interest. In this play, the two players at the right

of the picture are of vital importance, for without the blocking and screening out (just as in football) of Alvin Adams, the shot could still be defended even though Gionelli has seemingly out-maneuvered Butch Lee for the easy reverse layup. This is evidenced on the following page.

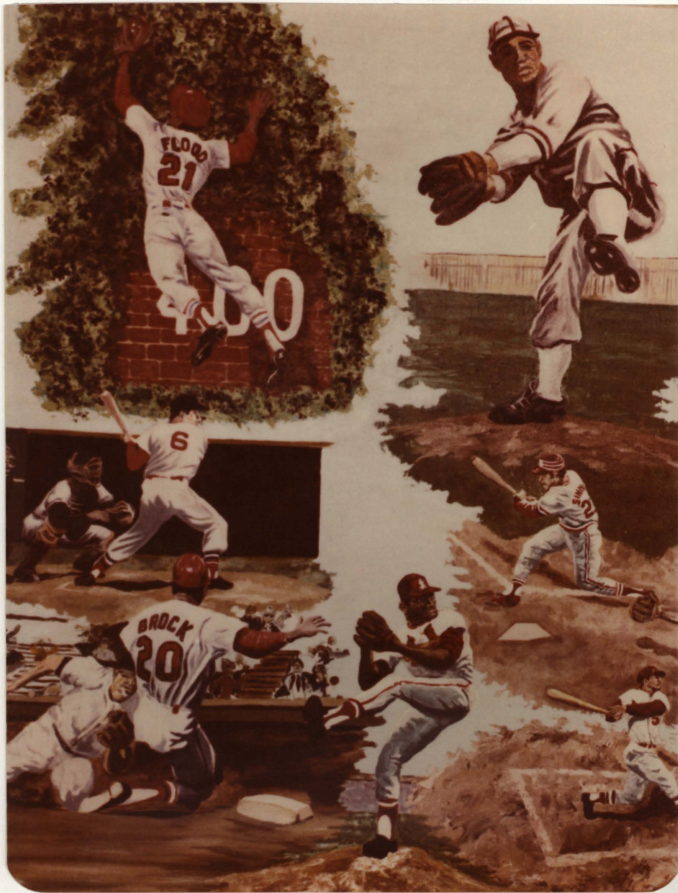
Figure #24
John Graves
Positioning and Poise
1979
acrylic
60 x 42



The collage-type arrangement of figures in Cardinals Past, figure #25, interrelates in places and stands isolated in some instances to form a type of pattern design to the composition. The athletes pictured have been of great importance to the St. Louis Cardinals franchise these past years. They are represented in an active sequence of events that has each athlete best representing that part of the baseball game that he was best noted for. Pictured in the painting are Lou Brock, Curt Flood, Stan Musial, Dizzy Dean, Ted Simmons, Roger Maris and Bob Gibson. In the detail of the painting, figure #26, overlapping may be evidenced. This was a means of visually relating the different scenes so that the eye moves around the painting. Both are shown as follows.

Figure #25
John Graves
Cardinal s Past
1979
acrylic
36 x 32

Figure #26
detail of Cardinal s Past



In Temporarily Mobile, figure #27, water color lends itself to a moderate means of color application. This was especially effective on the background, grass, and grandstands which gradually "haze out," not being of primary importance to the composition. A contrast of value is used to draw attention to the figures. This is evident in all three figures, but is more defined in the contrast of the primary figure in the foreground with that of the background figures. The contrast also brings the ball carrier forward as the darker values of the defensive men recede them further behind the ball carrier. This may be observed as follows.

Figure #27
John Graves
detail of Temporarily Mobile
1979
watercolor
20 x 16



The later works are pencil and ink. The ink is used in wash form and is applied in line form with a feather to achieve a more fluid line. The end result is a more highly worked composition with respect to surface enrichment and line quality. The forms are more interesting than in some of the previous paintings. The background often blends in to become part of the figure and at other times serves merely to enhance the surface quality and further develop the composition. These washes may possibly capture the dynamic movement of sports (basketball, in this case) in an expressionistic manner by a basically uninhibited freedom of line. The was quality helps sacrifice rigid forms for surface enrichment. The ink drawings are illustrated in figures #28 through #31.

Figure #28
John Graves
Free Throw
1980
ink
14 x 21



Figure #29
John Graves
Jump Shot
1980
ink
18 x 15



Figure #30
John Graves
Lay Up
1980
ink
26 x 20



Figure #31
John Graves
Defensive Stance
1980
ink
18 x 14



In the last painting of the sports series, Downhill Skier, figure # 32, the style is maturing as the feeling of movement is captured. Contrasting colors from a cool palette of blues and white are mixed to paint the background and the snow, contrasting with the warm colors of the skier. By suggesting movement from body parts which are slightly suggested in slashing strokes defining the color more than the form of the moving part of the skier, the figure seems to be moving downhill with the arms and the ski poles working independently for still more speed and movement. Color is loosely applied and, in some places, overlaps the form to reveal a slight suggestion of underlying color and form. This color was gradually worked from a translucent wash to the stronger intensity of full color. To further enhance the surface texture of the painting as well as give the sensation of spraying snow, the form and the entire composition have been spattered with white paint in an upward direction, projected by the skier. It seems that this expressionistic approach is the most natural way to paint a snow skier. This painting of action and movement is as follows.

Figure #32
John Graves
Downhill Skier
1980
acrylic
60 x 44



This sports study has been an adventure in Expressionism. It started as merely an attempt to represent action and movement in athletic events as well as the challenge that sports presented as subject matter. As more was learned about expressionism and about drawing and painting the action of the athlete, the dynamic possibilities of sports painting were realized. A background in sports helps to understand the mechanics involved in sporting events and an interest in drawing the figure makes the challenge more realistic. However, the writing of this thesis has been the climax of all the studies, all of the sketching and painting and the formulating of ideas, as well as the development of a style of art with sports as the theme.

A certain degree of success from these past years of working on sports paintings can be experienced and an appreciation of the work on anatomy and figure drawing, but, as far as expressionistic discoveries are concerned, it may be merely the beginning. A small amount of satisfaction from the handling of gesture and form involved in sports may be appreciated; however, there is considerable work to do yet on painting the emotions involved in a sports event and representing the mood of that event. Color and its application with respect to line quality is the next component of expressionism to be developed. Writing a thesis on sports art initiates formulation of a philosophy in that area of work. This, with an evaluation of experiences gained, add direction and insight to the goals of painting the sports figure. Most importantly, it serves as motivation to continue the challenge of painting sports in the expressionistic style.

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