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# A Ritualized Approach to a Series of Mixed Media Watercolor Paintings

Richard K. Miller

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A RITUALIZED APPROACH TO A SERIES OF  
MIXED MEDIA WATERCOLOR  
PAINTINGS

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Graduate Faculty  
Central Washington State College

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

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by  
Richard K. Miller

July, 1969

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## CHAPTER I

### THE PROBLEM AND DEFINITION OF TERMS USED

In the last half century, watercolor painting has probably been one of the least innovative of media. Until the last few years little had been done regarding the formulation of new techniques for watercolor or multi-media experiments. A mixed media approach is not new, of course, since medieval tempera painters sealed their work with varnish, but it has only been in the last few years that the mixed approach has been revitalized.

The history of water-paints, similar to present day poster-paints and watercolors, goes back many centuries before the Christian era. The Egyptian, Greek and Roman artists used binders made of vegetable gums, hide glue, milk products (casein), and many other sticky materials which could be thinned in water. One should not assume that there is anything inherent in any of the water techniques which restricts these media to sketchy spontaneity or to a weak visual impact (14:161).

Because the ancients were involved in an extremely structured order regarding the execution of their art, (usually based on religious canon), it suggested to this investigator that he might utilize a similar approach and institute a limited ritual procedure to be observed during the development of the thesis problem.

#### I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. The thesis problem involved the development of a series of watercolor paintings within a ritualistic format; the standardization of approach resulted in the development

of a personal iconography. This iconography was secondary to the total work however. The thesis involved the development of a series of paintings with identical preparations and preliminary developmental stages, all of which, at a certain point in development, became totally dependent regarding further work on an intuitive development and a reliance upon epiphanic insights for completion.

The media used were those common to drawing and watercolor painting. In addition to the media restriction and the ritualistic preparation, the investigator, as previously stated, attempted to develop his own personal form vocabulary or iconography. The study included an evaluation of the total and of individual pieces plus the conclusions that the investigator came to as a result of the thesis problems. Color was not restricted and was intuitive.

Importance of the study. The importance of the study involved the idea that a painter develops his own personal form vocabulary as he works and if this is intuited rather than consciously manipulated, greater success will be observed. The investigator also regards as important the idea that the total painting is more significant than any of its parts. This idea allows the existence of an attitude of concern for individual parts. Reduction or simplification of method and approach are involved in the study. The investigator must note that the works come from eclecticism, experience, observation, memory, dream, fantasy, and ritual 'magic'. (The magic will be discussed later in the body of the thesis.)



## II. DEFINITION OF TERMS USED

Automatism. "The principle of creation without the interference of thought, the act that constitutes a deliberately sought method of procedure, the unfettered stroke of the brush or pencil, with no direction, will, or control exercised by conscious mind" (18:60).

Bayless Watercolor Method. The Bayless method is a method of watercolor painting utilizing multi-layer of transparent watercolor glaze. This glaze is made up of watercolor pigment which has added binder in the form of Elmer's glue. This binder not only makes the colors more transparent, but also makes the pigment more water-soluble. Because of the added water-soluble glue the surface can be removed by the use of a wet sponge. By adding and subtracting pigment a very lush transparent surface can be developed.

Epiphany. "A manifestation, sometimes, an apparition, as of God; usually, a manifestation of Christ as divine. An appearance of manifestation especially of a deity. (a) a sudden intuitive perception of or insight into the reality or essential meaning of something, usually initiated by simple, homely, or commonplace occurrence or experience. (b) a literary work or section of a work presenting, insight" (17:480).

Ground. Ground will be the white butcher paper that was stretched on the watercolor stretcher board.

Icon. "Icon - a sign representation that stands for its object by virtue of a resemblance or analogy to it. Also, likeness,

image, figure. Iconic = executed according to a convention or tradition, likeness, image, portrait, semblance, similitude, simile.

1. An image, figure, or representation; a portrait; a picture, or illustration in a book; especially applied to the 'figures' of animals, plants, etc. in books of Natural History. 2. An image in the solid, a monumental figure; a statue icon or resemblance by imagerie" (17:706).

Magic or the Practice of Magic. "I am too much of a skeptic myself to believe in an individual artist's ability to practice magic in our midst. Magic, to be effective, must in my opinion be a product of a certain state of social consciousness; it is one of the symptoms of a mass psychosis. But the art critic does not necessarily use the term "magic" in a strictly anthropological sense; and I do admit, and I think we must all admit, that the self not only has depths of darkness as yet unexplored and uncharted, but even channels of communication with forces that are collective and archaic. We have only to dig deep enough into the individual to discover the universal, the Urmensch -- or one of the Jungian archetypes that determine the character of our fantasies" (15:123).

Ritual. "The form or forms of conducting worship, especially as established by tradition or by sacerdotal prescription; religious ceremonial. Ritual is regarded as of paramount importance in primitive and polytheistic religions. Sacrifices, mimetic dances, processions, and plays, mysteries, games, ordeals and feasts are the chief acts of early public ritual" (17:1237).

Sfumato. "Neutral, 'dead' tones were much used by the old masters, as in the 'Sfumato' of Leonardo, and again in the use of white laid over dark ground by which the varying thickness of the white layer over the warm, dark undertone resulted in half-tones, the so-called optical grays. This offered a simple means of plastic modeling" (3:169).

Similitude. "Likeness; resemblance . . . a thing that is like or the match or counterpart of another; semblance image, likening or comparison; parable or allegory" (17:1328).

## CHAPTER II

## BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Ritual and repetition have long been observable in art as well as life from the beginning of time. In the Bayless watercolor method used by this investigator, repetition of technique and application was persistently evident. It rapidly became apparent that this investigator adapted to and depended upon the discipline of a ritualized approach to painting. The ritual, however, does not eliminate the need or desire for spontaneity or intuitiveness in the creative act.

The performance is more than an actualization in appearance only, a sham reality; it is also more than a symbolical actualization, it is a mystical one. In it something invisible and inactual takes beautiful, actual, holy form. The participants in the rite are convinced that the action actualizes and effects a definite beautification, brings about an order of things higher than that in which they customarily live (4:14).

The ritual is related not only to this investigator's art, but to life. The pressure for change, the fast pace of contemporary life and the preoccupation with innovation consistently causes this individual concern and a tendency to question and pause. It is this sort of retrenching -- going back for personal values that begins to assure this investigator a kind of stability and security, in this chaotic, fast-paced world. The repetition then of past things begins to take on ritual form as the self desires security. The need for security does not mean there will be a lack of invention or change, either.

It therefore might be noted that this personal art expression is related indirectly or directly to life, even survival as Herbert Read has stated in Icon and Idea:

. . . far from being a playful activity, an expenditure of surplus energy, as earlier theorists have supposed, art, at the dawn of human culture, was a key to survival -- a sharpening of faculties essential to the struggle for existence. Art, in my opinion, has remained a key to survival. However much of it may have been smothered in false idealism and intellectual sophistication, it is still the activity by means of which our sensation is kept alert, our imagination kept vivid, our power of reasoning kept keen (15:32).

As stated previously, the repetition or ritual preoccupation need not be considered a negative thing that would hold up creativity, for if one assumes the point of view that variation can occur with certain limitations, numerous possibilities can be seen for the achievement of many different ends; repetition is of course only one of these possibilities.

But repetition by alternation need not be of self-identical elements or clusters of elements merely. It can be by grades, or harmonious variations of the same elements. Through differing, harmonious colors, such as colors which are members of the same family -- hue, but differing in value and intensity, constitute an effective diversifying, as well as a unifying agent. In such unities, neither complementary nor contrasting elements are admitted, the explication of the whole being carried out entirely by gradations of the same elements (6:49).

There are a variety of possibilities involved in this repetition. Repetition further involved can be alternate repetition and as Fallico states in Art and Existentialism:

Alternate repetition gives birth to the elementary theme, unit, or motif, which can, in turn, become an element that can be repeated in alternation or in any of several other ways. Clusters of alternate repetitions of the same elements can, in turn, become more complex units which can be repeated variously. This too, is a phenomenon observable in art as well as life (6:49).

In addition to viewing art as quite serious to personal life philosophy, it is also necessary to note that art is playful as well, in its relation to ritual. Playful in the sense that all play is ritualized, as stated in John Huizinga's book on man playing, Homo Ludens.

All play moves and has its being within a playground marked off beforehand either materially or ideally, deliberately or as a matter of course. Just as there is no formal difference between play and ritual, so the 'consecrated spot' cannot be formally distinguished from the playground. The arena, the card table, the stage, the magic circle, the temple, the screen, the tennis court, the court of justice, etc., all are in form and function playground, i.e., forbidden spots, isolated, hedged round, hallowed, within which special rules obtain. All are temporary world within the ordinary world, dedicated to the performance of an act apart. Inside the play-ground an absolute and peculiar order reigns. Here we come across another very positive feature of play: it creates order, is order. Into an imperfect world and into the confusion of life it brings a temporary, a limited perfection. Play demands order absolute and supreme. The least deviation from it "spoils the game", robs it of its character and makes it worthless. The profound affinity between play and order is perhaps why play, as we noted in passing seems to lie to such a large extent in the field of aesthetics. Play has a tendency to be beautiful. It may be that this aesthetic factor is identical with the impulse to create orderly form, which animates play in all its aspects. The words we use to denote the elements of play belong for the most part to aesthetics, terms with which we try to describe the effects of beauty: tension, poise, balance, contrast, variation, solution, resolution, etc. Play casts a spell over us, it is 'enchanting', 'captivating'. It is invested

with the noblest qualities we are capable of perceiving in things, rhythm and harmony (9:10).

Ritual then may be observed to generate variation and repetition through rhythm and harmony, stability and instability; alternation in form, theme, unit or motif; variation in color, hue or value or intensity. This means simply that ritual, play, art and life are totally interinvolved and inseparable.

The human need for individuality and freedom for expression of any personal vision need not preclude eclectic borrowing. This borrowing can result in greater achievements when it is well digested. Through repetition many borrowed ideas, methods or philosophies may become absorbed into the artist's own personal backlog of information.

If an artist may say nothing except what he has invented by his own sole efforts, it stands to reason he will be poor in ideas. If he could take what he wants wherever he could find it, as Euripides and Dante and Michaelangelo and Shakespeare and Bach were free, his larder would always be full and his cookery might be worth tasting. This however, will not be enough unless the freedom so won is used. Let all such artists as understand one another, therefore, plagiarize each other's work like men. Let each borrow his friends' best ideas and try to improve on them . . . or if he cannot improve on his friends ideas, at least let him borrow them, it will do him good to try fitting them into works of his own, and it will be an advertisement for the creditor (2:325-326).

The incentive for this study was based on and developed from the watercolor methods of Dr. B. Stephen Bayless, Professor of Art, Central Washington State College. The investigator, influenced by the technique of Dr. Bayless and his students, is personally indebted to them and holds them in high regard and esteem; without

the exposure and influence of their approach, the study would not have been possible in its present form.



## CHAPTER III

## THE RITUAL PREPARATIONS FOR THE STUDY

When confronted with the bare watercolor board, the variety of approaches to the painting are so vast that it can be very baffling. Concerned with a certain precise idea of purity, the investigator decided to be, as much as possible, totally concerned with 'pure' watercolor method or technique. The preliminary idea of purist watercolor was rather unrealistic for as the thesis developed, it became apparent that in certain instances, the artist simply had to do something quite different as far as media or technique were concerned, that continuation of the work might occur; this varied with the media used, such as graphite or opaque water paints. Actually, there should be no limitation placed on media, just those common to drawing and water painting. Once the decision came to allow mixed media, the attention of this candidate turned to the approach to the painting again. It was then decided that a kind of purity, for this was deemed an important value at that time, would be achieved by a rather standardized approach to all the paintings.

This standardization began to take on all the aspects of a sort of ritual. This ritual was to become indispensable to the investigator, and in an almost primitive way the artist began to depend on the 'magic' of the ritual to assure the success of the painting: this is merely another way of saying that the candidate believed that a marriage of art with an excellence of craft was essential if

the result was to be a finished and successful work of art. It was ultimately evident that the artist had developed a peculiar personal iconography partly due to the ritualized approach.

Ritual I. (The materials). One of the most satisfying aspects of the creative experience, for this investigator, involved the preparations prior to the actual painting. Inherent in these preliminaries was a developed personal ritual coupled with a pride in the execution of this ritual homage to craft, as well as art. Necessarily, the process involved in these preparations will be described so that anyone might following the order which is vital to an excellence of craftsmanship.

The following list will include the vital materials:

- a. tempera masonite 4' x 8' x 1/8"
- b. cedar 1" x 2"
- c. finishing nails
- d. Elmer's glue
- e. sandpaper 00 grade
- f. hammer
- g. center punch
- h. measuring tape (10 ft.)
- i. staple gun
- j. Stanley Miter machine
- k. large heavy table 4' x 8'
- l. butcher paper 48" wide
- m. brown gum tape
- n. large sponge (imitation or natural)
- o. small natural sponge
- p. brushes
  - a. number 20 oil
  - b. number 16 oil
  - c. number 3/4 watercolor
  - d. number 1 1/2 watercolor
- q. artists transparent watercolor (a wide assortment of colors)
- r. gouache color (a wide assortment of colors)
- s. poster tempera (red, yellow, orange, black and white)
- t. Higgin's India Ink (black)
- u. graphite drawing lead #2 and #4

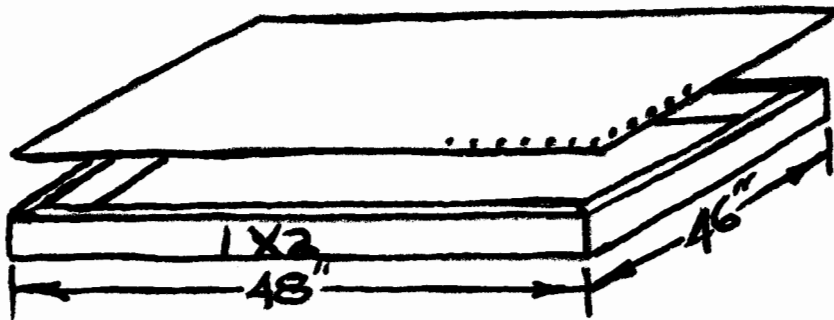
- v. charcoal pencil (hand)
- w. Liquitex Matte Varnish
- x. large used tomato can (#10 can)

The purchase of these materials for the watercolor stretcher board prior to construction involved, for the sake of the ritual, a degree of looking around for quality materials and good prices, as well as particularly helpful salespeople. It was difficult to acquire precise cutting or handling of awkward sizes. It was wise to purchase a hammer, center punch, measuring rule (10'), staple gun, and a Stanley miter machine. This machine was attached to a large heavy table for purposes of stability. Tempered masonite 1/8" thick worked best for stretcher boards, mainly because it was less prone to absorb water and did not warp when soaked repeatedly with water. Cedar 1" x 2" was used because of its light weight. The ground was white 48" wide butcher paper, which could be purchased from paper companies.

The materials that were purchased at the building supply store were (a) 4' x 8' tempered masonite cut into two pieces 46" x 48". The rectangle can be a different length but not to exceed the width of the paper, less one inch; (b) cedar 1" x 2" with length long enough to frame the two pieces of masonite; (c) finishing nails that would not split the cedar wood, at least one pound; (d) Elmer's glue which was used in large amounts, and last, two pieces of 00 sandpaper.

The end of the 1" x 2" cedar was placed in the clamps on the miter machine and the first 45° angle was sawed, measuring from the long side of the angle down the length of the cedar 1" x 2" to equal

the first length of the masonite board; the second  $45^{\circ}$  cut was made with the angle in proper relation to the first cut. This procedure is continued until all sides are cut. When this was completed, a long and short board were placed together in the vise of the miter machine, using a small amount of Elmer's glue; then two finishing nails were nailed in each side at the ends. When this was completed the other two of the four 1" x 2"'s were also completed. Finally a short and a long of the already nailed cedar pieces were clamped together and nailed making it into a complete rectangle. This is repeated on the fourth and final angle. After the cedar rectangle had been completed the piece of masonite was placed on top of the cedar frame and nailed. The nails were spaced about every four inches. After the masonite board has been nailed down a center punch was used to sink the nails into the surface of the board. Last, a piece of 00 sandpaper was used to sand down all rough edges.



When stretching paper onto the stretcher board the paper was cut wide enough so that there would be a 1/2 inch overhang on the four sides of the board. With a large sponge (4" x 7" x 3") and a large used tomato can full of water, the masonite board was soaked. The large paper was placed flat on the board making sure that there was a 1/2" overhang on all sides. Now the paper was covered with water and allowed to expand and soak up the water. This took about fifteen minutes. After the paper had expanded with water, wiping with a very wet sponge removed all bubbles and wrinkles. The edges of the paper were folded over onto the sides of the stretcher board and taped down with gum paper tape, making sure the tape was not overly wet, which might prevent it from sticking. This was done on all four sides, folding over all corners. After the paper had been taped down it was stapled along the side every four inches; the paper should not pull from underneath the tape. Always allow the stretched paper to dry before starting to paint. Drying times vary according to humidity, temperature, and various other conditions.

Ritual II. (The preliminary techniques). The attention to craftsmanship was but one part of the ritual involved in this investigation. With the completion of board and papers, the next vital step in the painting ritual could begin.

Throughout this study, preliminary doodles or drawing developed as a personal impetus towards the creative experience. This candidate loosened up and completely covered the surface of the paper with a preliminary washdrawing usually in a light yellow color. It seemed

very necessary to the candidate that the initial coverings for this surface 'ground' be light in value and apparently random in application.

A scribble can represent a great number of objects that would look very different to an analytic spectator . . . (4:7).

The artist, too has to face chaos in his work before unconscious scanning brings about the integration of his work as well as his own personality (4:5).

The random scribble was of course dependent on the washy nature of the medium at this point. In some instances the media alone really started the work and sometimes seemed to have a life of its own.

The medium by frustrating the artist's purely conscious intentions, allows him to contact more submerged parts of his own personality and draw them up for conscious contemplation. A new idea will inevitably be modified through its impact on the resisting medium and conversely impose entirely new uses on the medium. In the end, by their mutual impact both idea and medium will be realized in a more profound manner. The idea will be purified of preconceived and manneristic elements unrelated to the rest of the personality and become enriched by unconscious phantasies that were excluded from the initial conception (4:57).

In a further discussion of the use of media to develop a sort of random doodle drawing it seems pertinent to quote The Hidden Order of Art by Ehrenzweig:

A truly nervous seemingly uncontrolled 'handwriting' that resists all deliberate mannerisms and tricks is highly valued by artists and art lovers. In some mysterious way it expresses the artist's personality better than his more considered compositions. Is this because these undifferentiated textures conceal unconscious symbols which are for ever beyond conscious interpretation? If, as I believe, the seemingly chaotic structure of handwriting conceals some hidden

unconscious order, such order is destroyed as soon as it is imitated by a conscious effort, a fact which is bound to throw grave doubt on the overconfidence of restorers who do not hesitate to reproduce the master's brush work in a highly deliberate way (4:8-9).

The doodles were continued layer upon layer in the same tone or slight varied tints of same color. Gradually other colors often were introduced and the layers began to develop a surface of some depth and richness. Forms then faintly began to evolve and were clarified or adjusted or modified until a particular direction began to appear that seemed likely for development. This process, which is one of adding and subtracting, involves as often as not that intuition or insight that cannot be looked for, but just happens. This step in the making of a painting is one of frustration and agony.

Taking back from the work on a conscious level what has been projected into it on an unconscious level is perhaps a most fruitful and painful result of creativity (4:57).

Ritual III. (The development of forms). The development of the forms and the reduction of the composition due to the recognizing of certain images or personal icons, led to the decision as to whether to allow them their existence. This leaving or selection took place prior to resolving the piece. If these icons or images in any way became too precious or domineering and distracted from the desired total, then they ultimately were washed out. Following the washing away of the 'offending' image, new things were realized and the work took on a new fresh appearance. This washing out was usually done in a

bathtub and led to continual jibes from oil painters regarding the 'bathtub school'. However, the bathtub was ideal for washing, having variation in flow from a light spray to a gentle sponging. Again the painting must dry thoroughly after each washing. If interesting images were found or icons developed, the use of a different medium, such as graphite, might be introduced with a different kind of drawing than the preliminary wash drawings. The differences were partly due to the limitations of the particular work or problem, as well as this investigator's differing attitudes. The ritual washing away and attendant re-drawing occurred again and again in every individual area, as well as in each different work. This investigator also continuously used transparent watercolor and water-soluble glue as media, only occasionally using opaque passages for contrast.

It may be of interest to look into the media that the watercolorist uses. Many of these paints have been in use since the beginning of recorded history.

It may be useful to consider the water media in two main groups, namely those which form films which can be easily dissolved again when water is applied to them, and those which when dry are resistant to resolution in water. In the first group are such paints as transparent watercolor (aquarelle), gouache, size or distemper colors, and various so-called poster paints. These gums or glues or starch products as binders, which do not undergo any chemical change when they dry or when they dissolve. Rather, they dry only by the evaporation of the water content of the paint and may be dissolved by the addition of some water to the dry material. In the second group are the various tempered paints, which change their chemical composition as they dry and so become relatively water resistant after they harden. The binders of these paints usually consist of a combination of an adhesive material, and water (14:162).



In addition to the watercolor media most commonly used, a water soluble transparent glue was mixed with the colored pigments so that greater transparency, luminosity and flexibility may be obtained. It was much easier to wash away a color loaded with glue binder than it was to wash away the plain watercolor which often dyes or stains the paper. Sometimes opaque gouache was used to set off luminous watercolor areas. It also might be introduced at a point when something new was needed to get the painting "moving" again. Very often graphite drawing served as a fresh approach or a revitalizer at a point when an epiphany didn't occur!

Attempts to consciously force a sudden epiphany or insight or concern for mysterious insights, is common to all creative work. These intuitions from the inner self are the opposite of the intellect and are the workings of the subconscious which is the dream work of the human mind. Anton Ehrenzweig has stated:

In true intuition the normal differentiation of time and space is suspended and events and objects can freely interpenetrate. Such intuition is needed in order to overcome any contradictions and inconsistencies that will still exist in our fragmented picture of the world (4:132).

To become involved in an elaboration of the discussion on the unconscious and the conscious in creativity was not the purpose of this paper, but certain relationships must be noted so that each step in creativity might be a little clearer. "In creativity, outer and inner reality will always be organized together by the same indivisible process" (4:5). In a discussion dealing with reality and

with consciousness, Collingwood stated:

The activity of consciousness, we have seen converts impression into idea, that is, crude sensation into imagination. Regarded as name for certain kind or level of experience, the words consciousness and imagination are synonymous: they stand for the same thing, namely, the level of experience at which this conversion occurs. But within a single experience of this kind there is a distinction between that which effects the conversion and that which has undergone it. Consciousness is the first of these, imagination is second. Imagination is thus the new form which feeling takes when transformed by the activity of consciousness . . . Consciousness is not something other than thought; it is thought itself; but it is a level of thought which is not yet intellect (2:215).

Those subtle processes of the human mind which are involved in the discovery or intuiting of a painting are involved in adding and subtracting but also in construction from reductive processes. The reductiveness can be considered as ritual a method as abstraction or simplification, both of which seemed interrelated somehow.

The same position and concern is always faced with each new painting. The ritual preoccupation with these same problems can be called a renewal of the original problem rather than a variation on a theme. This repetition need not be considered negatively. John Hultberg stated:

If my painting appears repetitive, lacking in inventive variations or wide connotations, perhaps this is because I want some kind of icon-like stability instead. As the plaque of despair and dishonor spreads I find it necessary to retrench instead of seeking new escapes . . . . Now that the values of the outside world have become meaningless for me I rejoice that I find in painting a way to create my own earth (10:57).

In addition to the ritual involvement in technique, preparation and procedure and the concern for simplification it will be necessary to consider ritual and rite per se, as being vital to the art. The ritual enacted simultaneous with or involved in the creation of the work of art need not imply stiltedness or an absence of intuition or epiphany. The ritual procedure merely is enacted to assure the success of the work and to prepare the proper climate in which creativity might take place. Man from earliest times considered art not as an amusement or a means of self expression, but part of the rites and ceremonies seeking reassurance in birth, death, fertility and the propitiation of evil forces. He sought reinforcement, confidence and success from magic. Man has always utilized rites of repetition which were originated in the past, enacted in the present and thus assured the future; provided of course, that the proper ritual was enacted: so might one involved in any ritualistic endeavor -- religious, artistic, or whatever, be assured by the enactment of the proper ritual. Success, whether in the hunt, the arts, or the appeasement of a god, depends upon the enactment of the proper ritual; this is a peculiar personal idiosyncrasy of this investigator. Failure of a work to jell could be attributed to faulty or haphazard ritual, one might rationalize, in which case the rite would begin anew, and aim at correctness. Ritual and rite in art, from the very earliest times, has involved a certain amount of generalization reduction, or simplification. In a discussion of the early cave painters, Larousse has stated that:

The generalization was required in order to make the magic effective . . . there is another reason for the simplification; the law so essential to man, of the least amount of effort also drives him to seek a type once and for all and only needs to be reproduced. It is an acquisition entrusted to the memory almost a form of automatism (11:185).

The artist, thus releases himself, by this simplification, from the responsibility of having to constantly create a new vocabulary of form and is able to more easily solve problems of composition and surface. The reduction functioning as a limit or restriction is but a further aspect of the ritual preparation.

When one sees an object or image there is so much information available that it seems necessary to simplify and this leads to a need to capture the essence of the object. With this reduction there is of course the tendency toward stylization. The new shapes thus created will gradually depart more and more from the model until they are not more than obscure signs for it. The reduced shapes that became a part of this investigator's permanent vocabulary might be called his personal icon. This icon may have originated in nature or anywhere, for that matter. The art that comes from this simplification is abstraction, of course, which is more an art of the mind than the eye, but we begin by seeing or feeling and then think or interpret the results.

What we 'see' is not the 'thing' itself, but a happening, the emission of light or the reflection of it . . . the world that we can experience directly is made up of patterns of color and edges of things, and it is the effect these have on us that we talk, and write about or portray (5:6).

These happenings or experiences are of course thoroughly individual and personal. This investigator chose to develop his own vocabulary of icons. The individual experience cannot really ever be anyone else's but if the personal vocabulary or icon is repeated often enough the image will be liable to outside interpretation, or communication; the art need not necessarily be selfish.

In the right aesthetic climate, even unimaginative repetition, imitation and rigid cliches need not act as straightjackets inhibiting the play of the imagination. Artistic traditions which bind the artist both in content and form can give him more freedom than the forced over-originality of our times. Byzantine icons are fixed both in form and content. In the Byzantine Museum at Athens one can see the same icon repeated in many examples, one looking like an almost exact copy of the other. Yet what difference in power! Because we come to know the common schema of the composition, the slightest deviation will be all the more telling and expressive (4:116).

It was this investigator's discovery that each time his painting started from the same basic doodles or drawings which were begun in light color and progressed to darker shades which were controlled to avoid muddiness. This method of beginning seemed to be ritualistic in nature; it was a point of departure, some place to start. With ritual the artist feels some amount of security in a field that does not lend itself to security, namely the aesthetic experience. The validity of ritual and repetition need not be questioned then, for it may actually enhance communication in one sense rather than restrain it. One need not feel that the development of a personal vocabulary or iconography would be limiting to

the experiencing of a work or that the work would become boring, for though the form and approach be standardized, each piece founded in epiphany would be different.

Ritual can, of course, only apply to those things controllable by the investigator consciously, for epiphany or creativity are the wished for result of ritual; one prepares for the point of creation. It is difficult to control the time required to develop the work to the point where this epiphany, thought or idea can occur.

## CHAPTER IV

## THE STUDY AND RESULTS OF THE INDIVIDUAL EXPERIMENTS

The ritual preparation facilitates the expression. The expression is an event to be experienced.

The first of the thesis paintings was Jungle Lava and Rock (Fig. 1) which consisted of large flowing organic shapes in dark colors with a red linear bar running through as an opposing force. The ground was kept clear and simple; the original forms when started were predominately in the center. By forcing the linear red to all outer sides the painting became a total working unity by having large blocks of negative space in gray. In this work the palette was kept to three dominant colors, which helped maintain the free simple approach to this work. This painting was awarded fourth place in the 1968 Yakima Show, Artists of North Central Washington.

The second work which was painted was the Charger (Fig. 2). This painting was much more complex in its conception, playing hard edged linear forms against large blocks of solid color with deep shadows of forms just showing through the background. This set off a well defined foreground against a deep receding ground with very forceful bold form. The Don Quixote-like form was set off with a light wash of yellow which brings it very boldly to the foreground. By drawing into the finished painting with graphite emphasis was



Figure 1. Jungle Lava and Rock 46" x 56"



Figure 2. Charger 48" x 34"



reinforced on the leading figures, making them stand out even more boldly than before. The ground was kept simple and transparent, so that light makes the painting glow with life, which is one of the main effects this candidate has tried to achieve throughout this series. Like conventional watercolor the transparency was consciously maintained throughout all of the works in this thesis. The candidate did try using opaque color but found they didn't work for him, mainly because the ground was lost, which for him is losing much of the charm of the painting. This painting can be viewed as a form within a rectangle and this central form glows with its own internal light. At times the lower third can be read as a form advancing in front of the central 'lighted' area or also as just the overall deep lavender background. There is also a certain feeling that the two lavender areas are slowly drawing together and many cover up the center area altogether if it doesn't keep a constant glow on.

The third painting of the thesis was Internal Workings (Fig. 3). Large bony shapes were painted onto a light ground. The forms were in the foreground and the surface was kept very simple with a minimum of washing. The human forms did show up early in the painting and were very hard of edge with a stiffness which was not to the artist's liking. However, by taking a small sponge and feathering the edges of the foreground the harshness was taken away.

Leonardo da Vinci enriched the art of painting through his half-dark, a special kind of illumination which gave to forms a deliberate importance in terms of light and shadow. The effects of the 'dead colors' he used for very fine gradations from light to dark (Sfumato) (3:339).

The use of the sfumato effect on the main figures, quieted and softened the figures to the point where they fit into and tied in closely with background. Large areas of the background were blocked in with a dark red which was over painted about fifteen times, until the surface looked like finished leather.

The inner coal-like glowing was much desired and was more obvious when used in this contained form pattern. The ambiguity of the 'side-of-beef' like form that can either be in front or a hole in the purple ground was desirable. The dark blue-black forms seem to read as the internal bones of the reddish form.

In the painting Den of The Fire Breather (Fig. 4) it was found that the hard solid form was dissolving into smaller and more ambiguous shapes; color seemed to run through the design rather than being isolated in any individual form. At first it did bother the investigator that there were no large solid forms, but the more the painting was viewed, the more satisfying this quality became. It was apparent that seeing a group of forms was important. The viewer began to look at the complete work as a whole rather than just some of its parts. Not only is there form but an importance of surface. Collingwood best put it:

It was well known that in listening to music we not only hear the noises of which the 'music', that is to say the sequences and combinations of audible sounds, actually consists; we also enjoy imaginary experiences which do not belong to the region of sound at all, notably visual and motor experiences. Everybody knows, too, that poetry has the power of bringing before us not only the sounds which constitute the audible fabric of the 'poem', but other



Figure 3. Internal Workings 52" x 48"



Figure 4. Den of The Fire Breather  
48" x 47"

sounds, and sights, and tactile and motor experiences, and at times even scents, all of which we possess, when we listen to poetry, in imagination (2:147-148).

From Deep in the Rock (Fig. 5) developed from one single wash down; from that point drawing with graphite was used to develop the painting. This work is a marked departure from the rest of the series, as the forms were developed not from the original doodles, but from original drawings on the washed out ground. Painting was added after the graphite drawing to develop depth and definition. The colors used in this study were more refined and did not tend to come forward like many of the other paintings in the series. Again, a smaller design was used rather than just one central image. Ambiguity played its part as forms exchanged position with each other in the foreground and background.

In The Eyes Of Our God (Fig. 6) was the first painting in the series in which a stained ground was used for definition. Much of the design or form was originally part of the background. With a small natural sponge the main body of the form was left in relief. When removing the pigment from the surface it was impossible to totally remove all of the translucent paint from the ground. The surface that was left and its surface texture was dependent on how thick the paint was applied and how much glue was mixed with the paint at the time of application. The design from the beginning seemed linear, so nothing was done to deter this linear dominance. Again the ground was deliberately left light so that it would glow with internal light.



Figure 5. From Deep In The Rock 36" x 30"



Figure 6. In the Eyes of Our Gods 32" x 40"

It has been this investigator's finding that the color and feeling of a given work is enriched if the ground light is not covered by solid pigment.

The airy vague background of Greece and Back Again (Fig. 7) seems to fall far behind the foreground figure of the head with helmet. This was a play with the main figure and its background; the head rides visually high above the ground, making depth an important part of the painting. In this head figure it was the intention to try to develop a translucent figure of a rather ghost-like existence. The atmospheric qualities of the painting were achieved by keeping the ground light and removing much of the watercolor pigment from the paper, leaving the paper with a light stain where the pigment had been. The design was kept deliberately linear to maintain the feeling of open airiness. The Acropolis in the background with blood running off its slopes seems to add to the mysterious effect of the painting. The Acropolis also serves as the horizon line in the painting.

In The Death of the Red Bird (Fig. 8) much of the original handwriting still shows through from the original ground, making an interesting point of departure.

While the artist's conscious attention may be occupied with shaping the large-scale composition his (unconscious) spontaneity will add the countless handy articulate inflections that make up his personal handwriting. Any switch of conscious attention towards these minute distortions, scribbles and textures would interfere with their apparent lack of structure. It would infuse a measure of good gestalt into them and so rob them of their



Figure 7. Greece and Back Again 48 1/2 x 39"



Figure 8. The Death of the Red Bird  
60" x 47"

most precious quality, that impression of unstructured chaos on which their emotional impact (and therefore also their unconscious order and significance) depends. We cannot define their hidden organization and order any more than we can decipher their unconscious symbolism. Their content and formal principle or organization are truly unconscious (4:29).

This open ground beginning makes an interesting design, mainly because it utilizes all of the surface even beyond the edges. In the beginning of this series it was necessary to force the structured forms to the outer edges; it seemed to become less of a preoccupation by the end of the series.

Ride A Rocket (Fig. 9) was developed from a central image, predominantly dark in its colors. The figures in the center fell into the background and the flowing red served as a light glaze over the main object. The ground was again kept very light with little built up surface. In this painting opposites in color were used for stark definition from ground to subject. Different shades of red were used in the glaze over the main form to create a feeling of depth pulling the viewer forward and then back. It was the candidate's feeling that this painting did not work well from the design standpoint. However, it did work well regarding color and the differentiation of complex surface opposing a simple under-stated background. The work can be regarded as a simple ganglia-like form within the rectangle or it can be considered as two swept-wing forms, perhaps one the image and the other its shadow. However, a contradiction occurs for the shadow is red which forces it to advance in front of the brown form and at the same time the transparency make it recede slightly. This



painting was accomplished very rapidly and took only one evening.

Oriental Landscape (Fig. 10) is one of the least defined of the paintings. The forms are left rather obscure so that easy picture reading doesn't happen. The light areas are purposely atmospheric so that a cloudy or fog-like essence is achieved. These floating shapes infer mountains and the overall texture is ground cover that is mossy or lichen-like. The visual parchment dryness is relieved by the essence of moist atmospheric cloud forms.

The Surface of Mars: An Aerial View (Fig. 11) was to be similar in approach to the Den of the Fire Breather; the total page was used with small ambiguous shapes flowing out past the frame. The viewer is forced to look closely at the surface to be able to see individual forms, mainly because the total was meant to be seen and not just its parts. Many of the forms used in this painting can be seen in previous paintings but in much more bold application. This painting is a coalition of many ideas held in place by a flowing wash of a light transparent yellow glaze. The yellow serves as the catalyst holding the ambiguous shape together.

When the painting Three Depths To Follow (Fig. 12) was started, the original plan of first doodling or writing was followed; however, after the surface was completely covered with progressively darker color, it was washed down with a large sponge until very little color was left. Next the same process was done the second time and repeated a third. When the surface was dry, a one and one-half inch brush with white tempera was used to draw further, using a dry brush approach.



Figure 9. Ride A Rocket 32" x 24"



Figure 10. Oriental Landscape 33" x 24"

After covering about one-third of the surface with the white, a small natural sponge was used to remove the paint from the surface down to natural ground. Organic shapes were cut into the surface, coming from outside the frame into the central portion of the surface. The forms that were beginning to appear created a strong tension. There exists a main top form that could be pushing in towards the bottom or the bottom form could be holding up the top. It is this tension of a static kind that seemed to give this work power. It seemed vital to get away from contained space and move into a more open composition.



Figure 11. Surface of Mars: An Aerial View  
48" x 36"



Figure 12. Three Depths To Follow 52" x 46"

## CHAPTER V

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The thesis involved a series of watercolor paintings with a ritualized approach at the beginning of each painting. The developmental stages in all the experiments began the same way, but at a certain point in the development became totally dependent on intuition or upon epiphanic insights for completion. Throughout this study the candidate's intention has been to show the paintings as a whole rather than just the sum of its parts. It was, from the beginning, important to show the craft involved in the making of a work of art. It has been shown that the doodles or handwriting helped to develop a particular painting. Doodles are still a valid part of this investigator's vocabulary and until this phase of personal development is thoroughly worked out and absorbed into the candidate's program, it will still be of value. It is to be noted that ultimately various methods for beginning a work must be investigated. This is not to say that the present ritual becomes obsolete or redundant, but rather that new rituals will be instituted for further developments. The pattern may stay the same, but the component parts or desired results will vary. The media and techniques will probably remain much the same, for no dissatisfaction exists with the achieved effects such as contrasts of line versus form, of opacity versus transparency, or of shallow space versus deep space. The present method of the revealing of form could give way to a more conscious imposition of

forms. It is assumed that the greater the personal intuition and personal iconography and the more confidence in approach or execution, the more likely the possibility spontaneity. This may seem contradictory to the concern for epiphany, but need not be so considered.

Reductive tendencies are still important and would undoubtedly persist. The security or stability found in repetition and reduction still have validity to this investigator. Like the painter, Hultberg, this need for security in a world of change at accelerated paces, is vital to this personality. Change for the sake of change alone does not seem valid to this candidate.

To state that the ritual assures the success of the work is of course a statement in a lighter vein, but does not invalidate the attitude. This humor is particularly necessary when the ritual does not result in a successful painting. Some of the paintings in the study have a certain incompleteness about them, but at the stages that this occurred it seemed that completeness was not always of positive value. While some are not necessarily complete there are some which are purposely left less focused. Many of those works that appear less precise or differentiated are not necessarily to be considered incomplete or unfinished. The concern for a kind of variousness of interpretation or view is often sought, that each time the work is looked at it may appear new or fresh, or even different. This difference is still contained within a sort of sameness, so no inconsistency exists. The study has been of importance to this investigator for it has necessitated personal analysis and this involved

acceptance and rejection of various factors. This pressure to conscious choice has been important to growth. Much of the development in the study will remain as part of the investigator's personal program.

The possibilities involved in ritual and repetition in the development of an individual work, or in a series of paintings, are limitless. A future concern for repetition seems inevitable, for the study has only begun to approach the limitless possibilities now foreseen.

Individualism conceives a man if he were God, a self-contained and self-sufficient creative power whose only task is to be himself and to exhibit his nature in whatever works are appropriate to it. But a man, in his art as in everything else, is a finite being. Everything that he does is done in relation to others like himself. As artist, he is a speaker; but a man speaks as he has been taught; he speaks the tongue in which he was born. The painter did not invent the idea of painting pictures or the pigments and brushes with which he paints them. Even the most precocious poet hears and reads poetry before he writes it. Moreover, just as every artist stands in relation to other artists from whom he has acquired his art, so he stands in relation to some audience to whom he addresses it. The child learning his mother tongue, as we have seen, learns simultaneously to be a speaker and to be a listener; he listens to others speaking, and speaks to others listening. It is the same with artists. They become poets or painters or musicians not by some process of development from within, as they grow beards; but by living in a society where these languages are current. Like other speakers, they speak to those who understand. The aesthetic activity is the activity of speaking. Speech is speech only so far as it is both spoken and heard. A man may, no doubt, speak to himself and be his own hearer; but what he says to himself is in principle capable of being said to any one sharing his language. As a finite being, man becomes aware of himself as a person only so far as he finds himself standing in relation to others of whom he simultaneously becomes aware as persons. And there

is no point in his life at which a man has finished becoming aware of himself as a person (2:316-317).



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