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The Dynamics of Figure Ground Relationships When the Ground Is Emphasized

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Eastern Illinois University

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THE DYNAMICS OF FIGURE GROUND RELATIONSHIPS

WHEN THE GROUND IS EMPHASIZED
(TITLE)

BY

Russell Dean Benjamin

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Arts

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1971
YEAR

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INTRODUCTION

Major emphasis has been given to the presentation of a one
man show in the Fine Arts Center during June of 1971. This show
included paintings, drawings, batiks, and prints in various media.
The written paper is presented as a partial fulfillment for the
Master of Arts degree. It is hoped that this record of my thoughts
will help students in the future who venture into this particular
area of art. By reading this paper they might possibly be able
to avoid some of the pitfalls that were encountered and which
seemed unavoidable. By reading and seeing what has been done
previously, they may be able to achieve far more in this direction
then what is attempted here.

I hope to show that valid art can be produced by working
with a main concern for the dynamics of figure-ground relationships.
Also, I hope to bring about some understanding of the subject since
very little work has been done in this specific area.

By putting into words what I have painted and thought I hope
to realize a new maturity in my education in art. I think these
thoughts will be reflected in my work by making it more worthwhile,
more thought-out, more forceful, and more valid.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Many artists today produce what are sometimes called works
concerning the relationship of planes. I have used planes that
relate to the surface and might suggest some space between them but only
suggest space. This is usually a sincere attempt on my part, to
produce movement and tension in a limited flat area, even though
it seems working in this very limited direction may be a bit
precarious. By precarious, I mean that many people not familiar
with some of the problems of figure ground relationships, might
feel that paintings with this subject matter are not worthy of
consideration or even that effort that has gone into them. I
hope that by further work and experimentation, the statement I
am trying to make will be much clearer. I feel I must make this
search for personal satisfaction. The reward will be an artistic
fulfillment and enrichment.

I feel my work has become better because of my year of graduate
school and because of the thesis required. I have been forced to
think why I paint this way, how to make it better and how to think
why I paint this way, how to make it better and how to realisticly
give myself constructive criticism to improve my painting.

My works are products of figure ground relationships produced
by experimentation and the placement of planes in an area limited
to the size of the canvas or working surface. These planes ar
sometimes thought-out to quite a finished state before the painting
is started. Sometimes areas are built up using a method very

similar to college. In these instance by using principles of
design, I try to produce a figure ground relationship that utilized
a feeling of movement or feeling of tension in a limited area.

In the past, I've tried quite extensively and often quite
forcibly to show my ideas with something concrete. Sometimes,
I feel I have conquered the principle of figure ground relationships
producing a tension in a limited area, sometimes, I feel the pro-
blem has conquered me.

By using figure-ground relationships and emphasizing the
ground, I have found an intriguing problem and one that will
lend itself to many different interpretations. The problem is
setting up conflicts between the figure and ground trying to
create a push pull effect or a tension and still have a painting
that is successful as a whole. Kandinsky said "It is the
spirit which chooses form from the storehouse of matter, and it
always chooses the form most expressive of itself."[1] Perhaps
this is the key to all abstract work and to the work I am trying
to accomplish.

---

[1]Wassily Kandinsky, quoted in Peter Selz, "The Aesthetic
Theories of Wassily Kandinsky and Their Relationship to the Origin
or Non-Objective Painting," Art Bulletin, June, 1957, pp. 27-136.

THE DYNAMICS OF FIGURE GROUND RELATIONSHIPS
WHEN THE GROUND IS EMPHASIZED

The _Figure-Ground_ relationship is a somewhat difficult as a subject because not many studies have been published in this area. There has been some good work done by Hoyt L. Sherman of Ohio State University and Gyorgy Kepes. It is their writings that have been a source for most of the information. During the time this subject has been under consideration it has been found that for complete understanding; perception, perspective, light theory, line, and many other basic principles must be understood. This paper will assume that these principles are understood but will be limited to _Figure Ground_ theory, _Spacial or Area Relationships_, and _Tension and Movement_ on the limited area of the canvas.

"Art seeks the point in space where the obvious and the remote coincide"[1]. Here Kepes has used the word space in reference to time. Throughout written work on art one finds references of artists and writers who have referred to space and spatial relationships without actually defining what they mean. I, too, have been very much tempted to use the word space. The meaning space is changing day by day. It does not mean the same today as it did fifteen or even ten years ago. Without an understanding of their point of view, the word space might be open to misuse and misinterpretation. In my painting space means to me the limited area of a canvas and two-dimensional areas or divisions within the canvas, the areas have relative position and

---

[1]Gyorgy Kepes, _The Visual Arts Today_ (Middletown, Connecticut; Wesleyan University Press, 1960), p. 103, cited by Jean Helion.

direction. I will continue to use the word space in quotations
but will refer to space as area or areas for clarity.

"The artist needs to be able to see the whole field at which
he is looking and to see it in such a way as to place the parts
in the whole through the referral of the parts to a focal point."[1]
Th s is basically perception. If an artist does not have perception,
h will most likely be unsuccessful in his aesthetic ventures.
"It is the field vision which is requisite to the achievement of
aesthetic space."[2]

Figure-Ground is a basic fundamental to perception.
In general, Figure refers to that which is primary in
attention within a given perception; Ground refers to
'environment" or field, in which the "object of primary
attention is situated.

Figure 1

GROUND ("environment")

FIGURE ("object")

[1] Hoyt L. Sherman, Drawing by Seeing (New York: Hinds, Hayden,
and Eldredge, 1947), pp. 75-76.

[2] Sherman, Drawing by Seeing, pp. 75-76

Two types of response in terms of the Figure-Ground structure are illustrated as follows: Response A shows the object-directed attitude of customary perception. The response is Figure-centered. Primary attention is given to the object within the stimulus field; environment (Ground) is secondary in attention. Response B represents the aesthetic perception, which is concerned with phenomenal relationships of components constituting the stimulus field. The aesthetic response tends to the Ground centered.

Figure 2

A

B
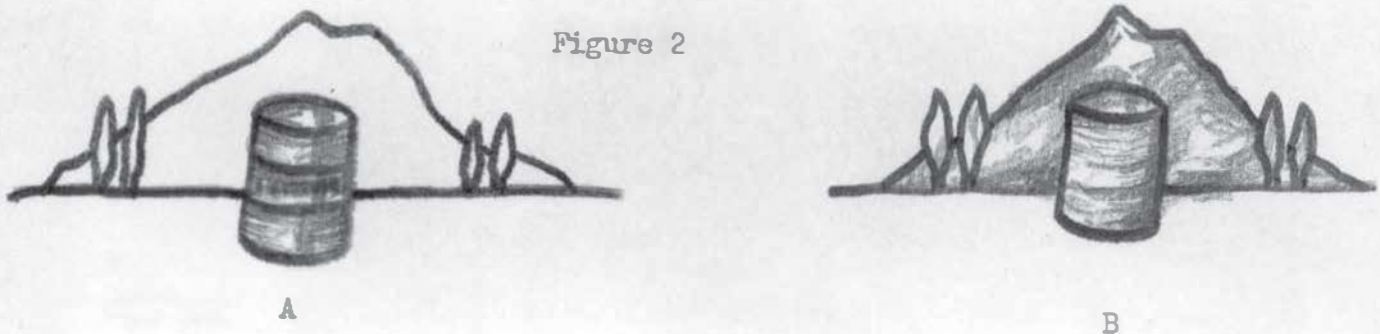
In aesthetic perception, attention is directed to the stimulus as a whole; in general, customary perception is object directed.[1]

The preceding paragraphs and illustrations have mentioned figure and ground in the usual manner. This paper is concerned with the aesthetic perception in which the ground is emphasized. This type of figure-ground relationships is as follows:

Figure 3

A

B

_____
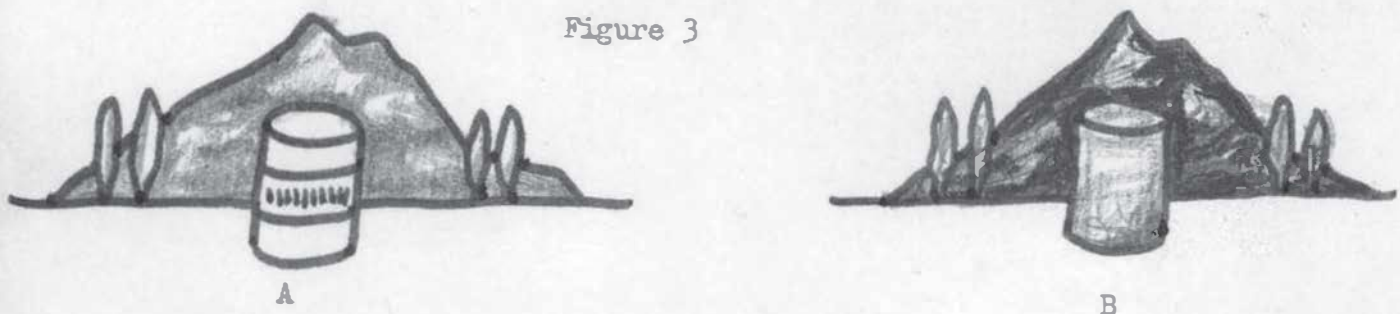
[1]Sherman, Drawing by Seeing, pp. 75-76.

Response "A" shows the ground-directed vision of non-customary perception. The response is Ground-centered. Primary attention is given to the stimulus field; the figure is secondary in attention. Response "B" still represents the aesthetic perception and is still concerned with the phenomenal relationships of components constituting the stimulus field. Here the aesthetic response has I an made Figure-centered by emphasizing the ground.

"Cézanne's concentric approach provided for initial end continued attention to Ground. The center of the visual field (FIGURE, in customary perception) was not primary to Cézanne's attention. In fact, in process this center tended to be an untouched area."[1] Here is a prime example of what I am trying to accomplish only Cézanne accomplished this in a more subtle and complex manner."

> Although Cézanne used the focal point as the center of attention in the stimulus field, his major emphasis, and action, was directed toward the periphery of the pictorial field. The central area, or focal point, emerged, and was "defined" via the development of peripheral modulations.[2]

"Cézanne's concern with "Ground-forming Figure is explicit he termed his 'personal aesthetic manner' - and in aesthetic vision in general. ('A method emerges at natures contact and develops by force of circumstance')"[3]

---

[1] Hoyt L. Sherman, Cézanne and Visual Form (Ohio: Ohio State University, 1952), p. 64.

[2] Sherman, Cézanne and Visual Form, p. 64.

[3] Sherman, Cézanne and Visual Form, p. 72.

When he (Cézanne) went off to his "motif." how often, according to his driver, would he not suddenly jump up in his carriage, take the man's arm and say: 'Look... at those blues, those blues under the pines..I He beamed in ectasy. And the man (the driver), who could only see trees and sky which seemed always the same to him...felt a weird force..emanating from Cézanne..[1]

Cézanne used blues quite a lot in his paintings and the blue he mentioned was the ground he could see under and behind the trees. When he painted he developed these colors in the ground to produce the figure. Cézanne had trained himself to see these things and the untrained driver could not.

Rembrandt also used the ground and emphasized it to bring out his figures. "The fundamental structure of Rembrandt's vision was almost identical to Cézanne's except that whereas Cézanne was concerned with color modulations, Rembrandt's perception was developed in terms of brightness modulations (chiarascuro)."[2]

The paintings done for this thesis were done without special concern for color. The colors were mostly in low key browns and earth colors. The interest was more in the pure formation of the Figure Ground relationships and dark and light contrast which is more similar to Rembrandt than Cézanne.

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[1]Sherman, Cézanne and Visual Form, pp. 21, 22.

[2]Sherman, Cézanne and Visual Form, pp. 72.

Dynamics of Tensions

To get the fullest possible value from any given shape on a canvas or painting surface; the space or area within it must somehow be made an active ingredient in the pattern. This can be done only by means of the lines or shapes that surround it or the lines and shapes that are inserted in it. This relationship may be described generally as a "tension" or series of tensions, across the painting area involved, which is generated by some visual unit, or units, in the immediate area. This effect can be detected rather easily in Figure 4, in which we realize that the tension is stronger between the horizontal lines than between the vertical ones. This is true because the horizontal lines are closer together and the vertical lines tend to act as boundaries.

Figure 4

This can be confirmed by comparing the varying intensities of tension in the area enclosed in different compartment of Figure 5.
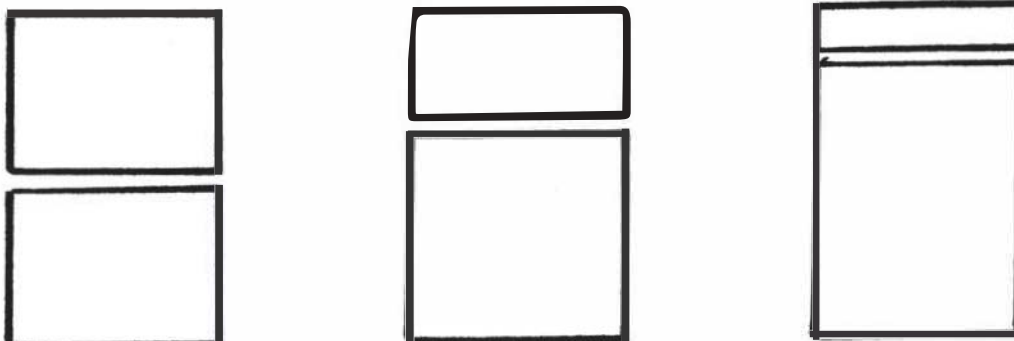
Figure 5

The various spots that have been placed in the squares of Figures 6 and 7 add a set of still stronger tensions to those created by the four boundary lines, and it is still these tensions, far more than spots, that diminish the apparent emptiness of the unadorned sqares.
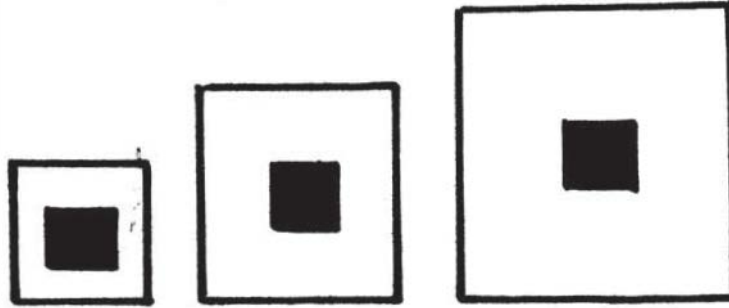
Figure 6

In Figure 7, our eyes are so busy jumping from one point of interest to another that they do not notice how much empty area still surrounds these points.
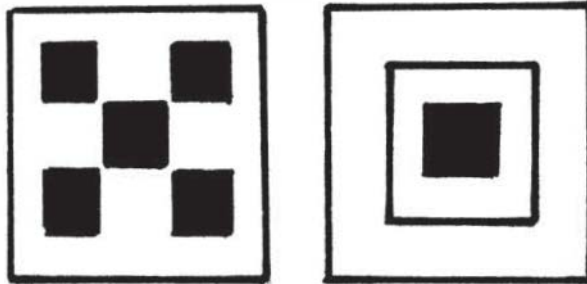
Figure 7

I try to create tension by alternation of figure and ground. When I do this the ground becomes the most important area in the painting.

General Discussion of the Paintings

One of the motivating aims for this paper is to depict an economical statement embellished with all the overtones, and under-tones, of complexity necessary to make these images concrete and vital statements.

The paintings were almost always developed so the areas and nuances in the beginning stages were the key areas in the final, more developed result. In this way the paintings had to be somewhat pre-conceived. I do not consciously advocate forcing any portion of the whole beyond its immediate state of development.

Primarily, the considerations of planes was centered in figures emerging or receding from the emphasized ground. The figure tends to float in an atmosphere of the emphasized ground activating both the figure and ground areas and setting one in conflict with the other.

The figure in many of the paintings at times may be ambiguous. The figure and ground may seem to interchange and will produce conflict. This interchanging is called alternation and is often referred to in studies relating to the psychology of perception. In the instances of ambiguity between the figure and ground the usual experience is that at one moment a dark figure will emerge from a light ground, at another the light figure emerges from the dark ground.

In some paintings where radial arms are extending from the figures both dark tones and light tones have been used. These

also produce an ambiguity and produce a sense of depth or perspective in the painting.

The Painting - "Transparent Fragments"

The Painting - "Transparent Fragments

"Transparent Fragments" is a water color that was completed
in the summer of 1970. This was one of the first steps in the
development of what may be called a style to be noticed in the later
paintings. In this painting a harsh division of the total area
into three smaller areas somewhat hurts the painting as a whole.
My intention in setting up the divisions was to create tension
between the three by using different shapes and sizes, also using
tonal variations in each of the separate areas helps to set up
a conflict or tension between the areas. The collage area at the
bottom was done with brown wrapping paper adherred with full strength
gloss medium. The gloss medium that spread out beyond the collage
served as a permanent resist when the last washes were added to
the nearly finished painting.

To achieve the divisional lines, tape of different widths was
laid out on the paper leaving some gaps between the tape strips.
Forms in the upper two divisions and other areas of the painting
were achieved by arranging a desired and varied pattern with one
and one half inch masking tape. The tape was cut and torn to the
desired shape then adhered to the paper. After the complete design
was laid out with the tape the paper was completely washed with
water. The first wash of color was then applied. This wash was
going to be the light in the composition and was used over the entire
surface to give a general tone. After the first wash, other pigments
were applied rapidly but with control. Darks were worked around

the tape resist so as to emphasize the shapes by strong contrast
when the tape was removed. All the desired washes were applied
with a conscious effort to keep transparency and freshness in the
painting. When the painting reached a certain point that I was
satisfied with, I allowed the painting to start to dry.

The tape was now ready for the first step of removal. I
removed the tape where I wanted the edge to be rough and uneven,
while the paper was damp. Some of the surface of the paper was
intentionally removed by the tape to give a different texture to the
paper. When all the tape that I wanted to remove at this stage was
removed, the painting was allowed to dry throughly. The painting dries
very rapidly when the water for painting is mixed with gloss
medium. The gloss medium also gives the paper a hard smooth surface.
The remainder of the tape was removed and revealed a stark white
figure. The stark white of the figure against the ground was
bothersome in that the figure and ground seemed to be unintegrated.
The contrast of the pure white against the darks made too distinct
a division in the painting. I decided to use one common wash over
the entire area of the painting in hope that it would pull all
the areas and figures together by giving them a common color or
tint. The color I chose for the common wash was a very weak
celery green. I washed the entire painting then picked out
several areas and worked the color over more for a stronger tint.
Here I found the gloss medium to be helpful again. It can be worked
over after once dried, and successive layers will not remove the

previous layers of pigment. The integrating wash worked well
and I was satisfied with the water-color and felt it was finished.

Materials

This watercolor is $18\frac{1}{2}$ inches long by 14 inches, not including
the mat. The paper was 180 pound watercolor paper. The paper
was stretched on a drawing board with $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch masking tape. The
blocked out areas were made by cutting and tearing $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch tape
and 3/4 inch tape and adhering them to the paper.

The long thin area of the painting is filled with a collage
of brown paper scraps adhered with Polymer Liquitex Gloss Medium.
Grumbacher tube water colors were used and were mixed with water
and Ploymer Gloss Medium to help keep the colors full strength.

A razor blade was needed to cut the masking tape and the
brushes used were two number twelve sable watercolor brushes and
one watercolor mop.

PLATE I
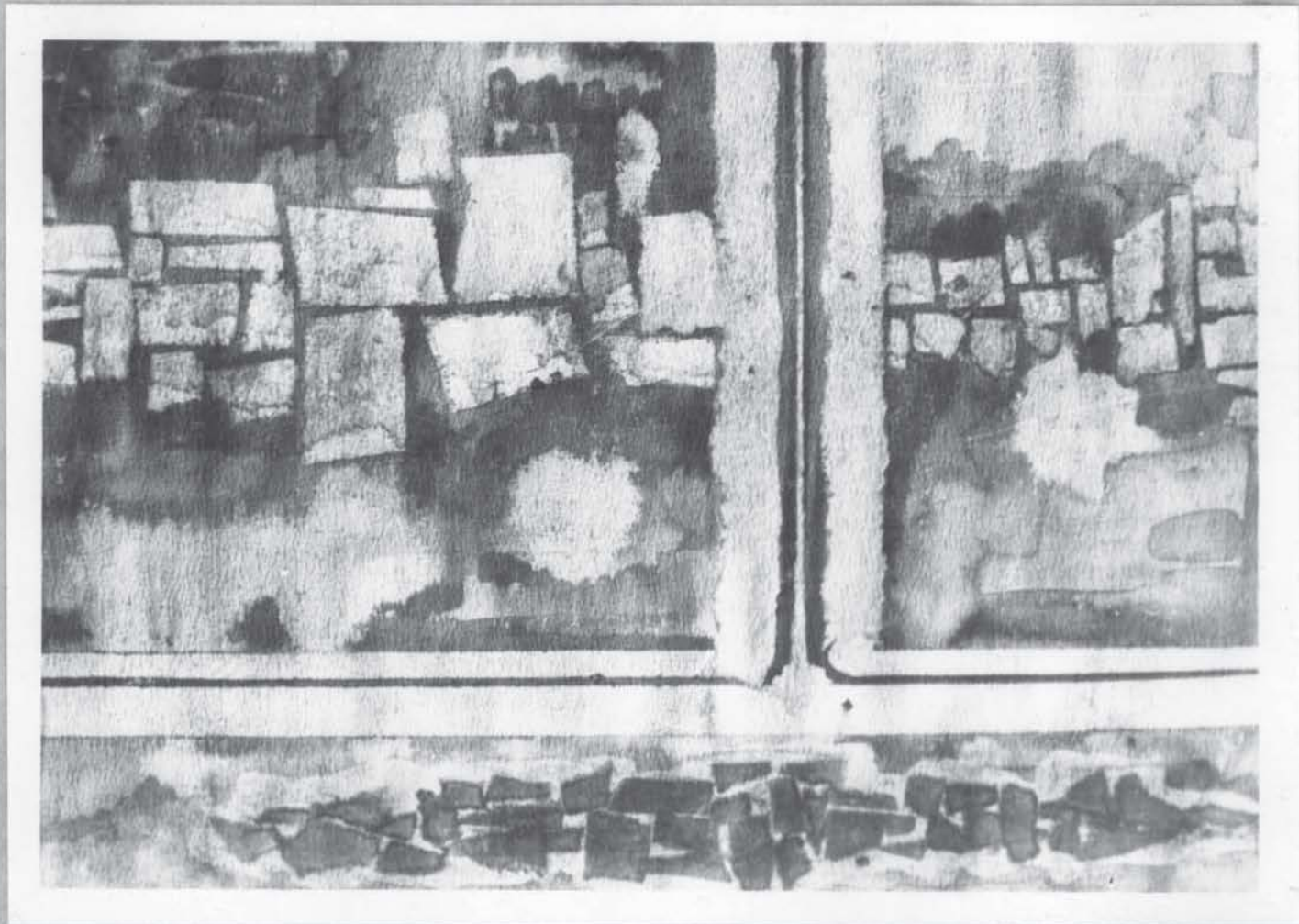
The Painting - "The Cave"

The Painting - "The Cave"

This painting is very much similar to a watercolor done
in the summer of 1970. I consciously tried to repeat the image
of the watercolor. The name "The Cave" was given to the painting
because it seemed to me I was looking out of the mouth of a cave
when I looked at it. The collage ground of the painting is very
smooth and well adherred. The material I used was brown wrapping
paper which I cut very near the size of the canvas. I worked
from the outside of the canvas first to develop a ground that
almost completely surrounds the lighter figure. I used a mixture
of Elmers glue and water for the adhesive. The paper was soaked
completely then slightly blotted. I painted the Elmers glue mixture
under the paper then placed the paper on the canvas while the canvas
lay flat. I smoothed the paper out as smooth as possible with
a brayer and then let the paper dry very thoroughly. After the
paper was dry, I put on washes of brown and green liquitex mixed
with gloss medium and water. I gave the painting several coats
of this wash in the selected areas. After the painting dried,
I repeated the process of adding the paper over the top of the
paper already on the canvas. I again worked washes over the paper.
I used paper towel to smooth out the paint while it was still
wet. Dark washes were worked behind light shapes to give the
ground more depth. The movement set up in the painting was
accomplished by the use of dominant diagonal lines, variation in
shapes and by the use of dark areas against light areas. In order

to automatically integrate the ground and figure, I used a subtle green-gray wash over the entire canvas.

This painting seemed to be the easiest of the painting presented in the thesis. I think the sheer simplicity of the composition and the flatness of the surface made it one of the most successful of all the paintings presented.

Materials

This painting is 33 inches long and 26 inches wide. The stretcher bars are 1 x 2 redwood. There are ten inch braces in each corner for added support.

The canvas was a heavy grade cotton canvas that had been previously painted. It was sanded and primed with Gesso. The paint used was Liquitex acrylic polymer emulsion with Liquitex gloss medium. The collage work in the ground of the painting was done with brown wrapping paper. Elmers glue mixed fifty-fifty with water was used for the adhesive. The framing used on the painting is white pine 1½ inch lattice.

The Painting - "Planes of Browns"

PLATE 11

PLATE 11

The Painting - "Planes of Browns"

The painting "Planes of Browns" is closely related to a series of drawings I had worked on. The basic problem here was setting up tensions in areas inside the area of the canvas. The name "Planes of Browns" came from the dominant nuances and the planes of various sizes and shapes in the painting. The planes of the painting are laid out with various types of paper. The large central planes on the canvas were made from a sheet of student rade drawing paper which proved to be a good surface to work on. The other planes were made of torn brown and white wrapping paper and smaller pieces of the drawing paper used for the large planes. The paper was adhered with a mixture of Elmers glue mixed fifty-fifty with water. The paper was first soaked in water then blotted, the mixture was then painted under and over the paper.

After the planes or figures were established, the next step was to start putting in the washes. The washes were painted with care taken not to cover the collage planes, except that light washes were used over the paper for variation. The planes were made to stand out through contrast or by working behind them with darker washes. A dark band or ground for the lighter plane was developed so that it would extend across the complete width of the canvas and behind the forms. The band was placed just below the halfway division of the canvas. This produced a 'tension' by calling attention to the variation in the size of the two large light visual units above and below this dark band. The variations in the size of the smaller visual units produced more tension or interest

In the dark divisional band. The light nuances of the smaller planes
against the darks of the band produced another type of tension
b making the light visual units advance over the dark band. The
dark band seems to recede and the light figures or planes advance,
and at the same time press against each other and both seek to push
foreward to the picture plane which contains this tension.

There now seemed to be differences in depths of the planes
and this was what I wanted, but the problem now was that the planes
were separated too far. This problem also developed in the painting
"Feathers Found." I solved both problems in a similar way. I
superimposed radial arms extending from the dark band and in some
cases from the light figures in the band. The arms were painted
with light acrylic washes. These arms created tension by their
ambiguous character. Behind the light shapes they are ground
but when pulled out into arms they become figures and thus emphasize
the effect of tension. For the final touches of the painting, I
added a tracery effect by painting light lines near the arms with
acrylic and also drawing with laundry markers and felt tip pens.
I used the felt tip pen also to accent the edges of some of the
figures. I felt the felt tip pen on the painting needed protection
so I sprayed fixative over the painting. The fixative made the
colors get brighter and more rich in tones. I added several more
coats of the fixative and when that was completed I felt the painting
was done.

Materials

This is the smallest of the paintings discussed in this thesis.
The painting is 14 inches wide and $19\frac{1}{2}$ inches long. The stretcher

bars are made of 1 x 2 white pine. Due to the small size of the painting no braces were needed. All corners were joined with corrugated fasteners.

The canvas used was good quality pre-primed cotton fabric by Sax. There was no particular reason I used this canvas but the smoothness of its surface made a good ground for the collage work. The paint used was Liquitex acrylic polymer emulsion with Liquitex gloss medium. The collage work was adherred with Elmers glue and water mixed fifty-fifty on some parts, and gloss medium mixed fifty-fifty with water. I used the Elmers glue mixture for large paper pieces because it felt to be less expensive and compatible with acrylic media. Gloss medium mixture was used for the smaller pieces. The materials used for the collage work were student grade drawing paper by Sax and brown wrapping paper. A tracery effect was achieved with a laundry marker and a felt tip pen. The frame was made of $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch lattice andpainted flat black.

PLATE III
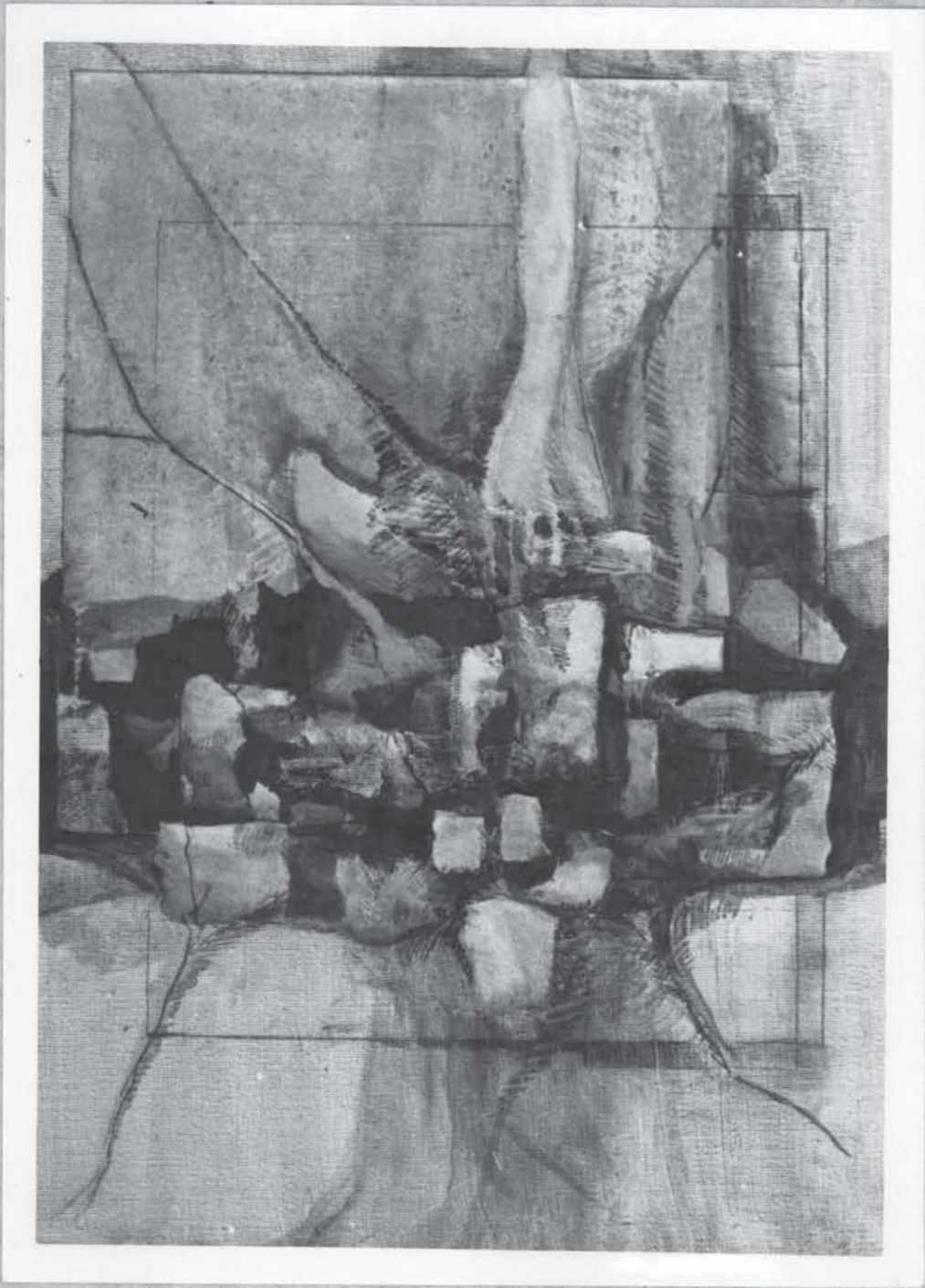
The Painting - "Feathers Found"

The Painting - "Feathers Found"

The name "Feathers Found" is not particularly important. I was told it had colors very similar to those of a cock pheasant and someone mentioned the superimposed shape had a feathery atmosphere. The basic idea of the painting is figure ground relationships with the ground emphasized. The collage surface is one of the chief ideas I borrowed from my watercolors. I worked out the ground by tearing brown wrapping paper and arranging it on the panel in such a way to bring out the desired figure. The method I have found most successful for adhering the paper is to use Elmers glue mixed fifty-fifty with water. The brown paper strips are soaked in water then blotted. I paint the mixture of glue where the paper is to be placed then I place the paper on the panel. I like to smooth the paper out either by hand or with a large brayer. I then paint the glue mixture over the surface of the paper. The paper will dry better if the panel is laid flat on a surface such as the floor.

After the general size of the figure and ground had been established, I began to work in an application of washes over the desired areas. I desired to have some extremely dark areas for contrast so I applied liquitex black as smoothly as possible. In order to make a variation in the black areas I used Liquitex gloss medium over some of the black areas. The effect this gave was glossy black next to flat black. At this point, I felt almost

finished but was not quite happy with the stark white figure compared
to the subtle washes and strong blacks on brown. I decided to turn
it to the wall and try to forget it awhile. During the next week
I did drawings and worked on other paintings until I could no longer
remember exactly what the painting looked like. The time spent
away from the painting seemed to work for me. I could see the
painting as a unit and the big weaknesses were quite evident. The
figure and the ground seemed to be completely separate now; that
is, there was no desired tension between the two. I needed some-
thing to integrate or give relationship to the two parts.

From the drawings I had been working on, I borrowed an idea.
I decided upon superimposing a figure I had drawn with the idea
of setting up tensions between dark and light areas, and conflict
between large and small shapes. Now I was more interested in using
the borrowed shape to help integrate the previously worked-out figure
and ground. I tore brown and white wrapping paper into small
pieces and adhered them to the canvas. With this I achieved
an integration of form plus an interesting textural pattern.
I used washes over the small pieces of paper and developed the
color key I desired. By using radial arms coming from the super-
imposed shape, painted with acrylic wash, I felt the forms were
pulled together even more. This pulled the dark background of
the small light shapes out over the larger light shapes. I also
used lines painted in with black acrylic to achieve a kind of tracery
or lined effect. When this was finished the feeling that the
painting was too busy came to me. I then put in areas of white
over some of the superimposed figure, this seemed to give it a

more simple and transparent illusion and kept it from being com-
pletely on the surface. By adding these things, I was able to produce a
vigor and freshness in the painting that I had lost in the preceding
stage.

Materials

This painting is 38 inches by 31 inches wide, which
is a medium size painting. The stretcher bars are made of 1 x 2
white pine. I put ten inch pieces of white pine in the two opposite
corners of the stretcher. The braces in the corner will help prevent
warping of the stretched panel.

The canvas used was good quality pre-primed cotton fabric
by Sax. I used this canvas because I desired a very smooth ground.
In addition to the pre-priming, I used a thin coat of Gesso and
sanded it slightly. The paint used was Liquitex acrylic polymer
emulsion with Liquitex gloss medium in some areas. The collage
work in the painting was done with brown and white wrapping paper.
I used Elmers glue mixed fifty-fifty with water for an adhesive and
sizing. The painting was then framed with aluminum cabinet edging.
I chose this framing material because its soft luster would not
distract from the painting, and it seemed appropriate for this
type of painting.

PLATE IV
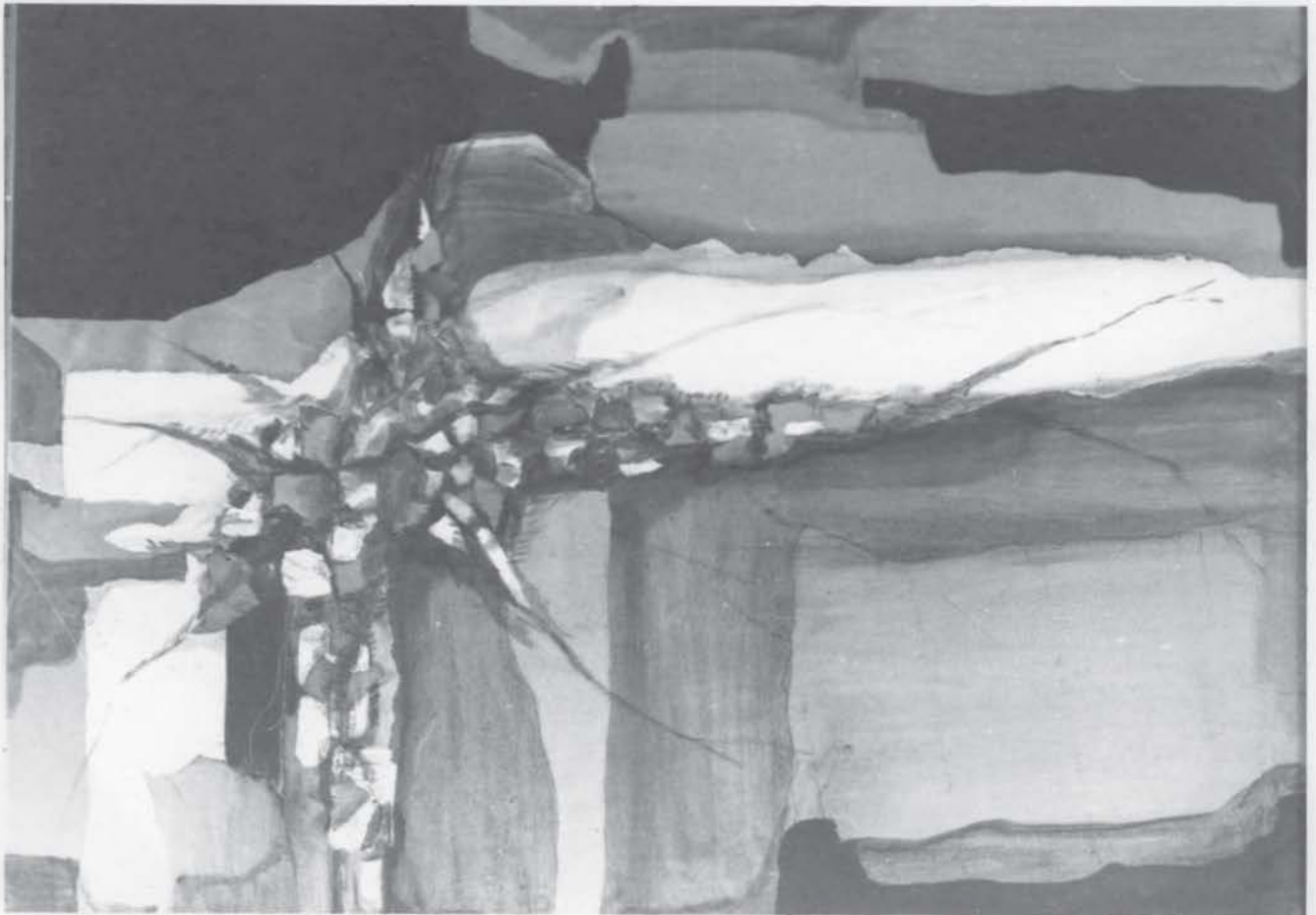
The Painting - "Reflections"

The Painting - "Reflections"

In the summer of 1970, I did a water color very much like the acrylic painting "Reflections." The water color was more realistic but the similarity is apparent. It is easy to see why I have named the painting "Reflections." I have tried to correlate reflective images in the supposed water at the bottom one-third of the painting to the upward moving shapes that dominate the top two-thirds of the painting. I used harsh straight horizontal lines that vary in thickness and distance from one another to show perspective in ground distance and reflection. An overall texture on the canvas especially the lower two-thirds heightens the illusion of reflection. The color is not an especially important part of the painting, the ground had dominant browns and greens while the figures were made of warm colors -- red, oranges, and quite a lot of yellow.

The first step in this painting was adherring the tissue paper to the panel. Here I chose Craft Tissue which has very good color that will bleed very nicely. It also adheres easily to the panel with a mixture of Liquitex polymer gloss medium mixed about fifty-fifty with water. To achieve the textural effect that I wanted I used a one inch bristle brush and adhered the tissue by using horizontal strokes over several parts of the tissue, then painted the entire surface of the tissue with horizontal strokes. This makes the tissue wrinkle and overlap

producing a delicate texture. In the meantime, the color in the tissue bled and produced areas of light and dark pigment. Now I layed in colors that were predominately red, orange, and yellow over the entire painting. Some of the colors were washed, some painted in fairly heavy.

After the panel had thoroughly dired, I layed out my desired design with masking tape. Each time I put in an upward shape I would put in a correlating downward shape. On the downward shape I used a shorter piece of tape with a more severe angle. Upon axamining the tape it seemed to be too regular, too repetivo, since all the tape was the same width. To remedy this I cut several very thin strips of tape and placed them at irregular intervals between the larger strips. These I also correlated with the lower one-third of the painting.

Now I worked with green and brown washes over the entire area. The painting was kept quite wet during the entire process. Nearer the horizon line the browns were made darker in value and heavier by painting not quite so wet. While the lower one-third, or the reflective pool of the painting was still wet the edges of the tape were turned up slightly. The turning up of the tape allowed some of the wash to run under the edges and made irregular outlines to the shapes. The painting was allowed to dry thoroughly and then the tape was removed.

A wash was now mixed using a gray-green pigment mixed with about seventy-five percent gloss medium and twenty-five percent

water. Now the reflective pool was washed in a broken pattern
with horizontal strokes. The broken pattern was used in order
to have bright reflective areas coming through the duller re-
flective areas. I also used the wash on the uppermost two-thirds
of the painting. Here a few of the upward moving shapes or only
portions of the shapes were washes over. Now an almost solid
horizontal lines of the wash would heighten the illusion
of water. Also the additional layer of gloss medium would help
give a watery effect. This is a good painting to illustrate the
dynamics of figure ground relationships when the ground is emphasized
since the final stages of the painting were only concerned with
the ground.

Materials

This painting is 40 inches long and $31\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide, which
would be considered a medium sized painting. The stretcher bars
are made of 1 x 2 white pine. I did not use braces in the stretcher
frame but added strength to the frame by using more corrugated
fasteners than usual.

The canvas used was a coarse unprimed canvas by Sax. I
primed the canvas with two coats of Satin-flex white latex paint.
The base of the painted surface is Craft-Tissue and was adhered
with Liquitex acrylic gloss medium. The light areas were masked
with 3/4 inch masking tape. The paint used for the underpainting,
washes, and impasto areas was Liquitex acrylic polymer. The framing
used was $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch white pine lattice. I chose this framing because
of its smooth texture and because it readily accepts acrylic washes
for a stain.

PLATE V

PLATE V
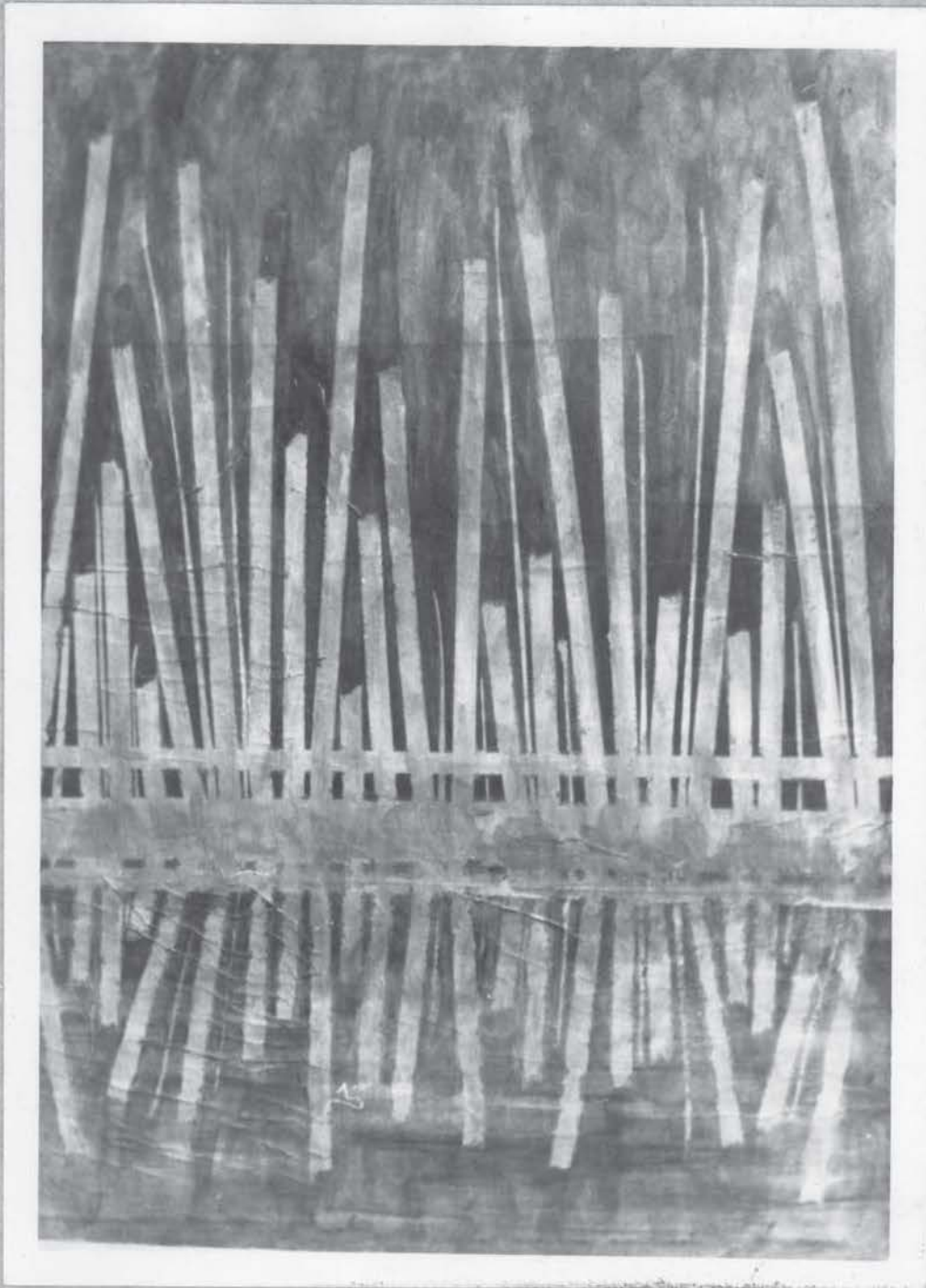
CONCLUSION

These paintings have given valuable experience to my development as an artist and have opened new fields of inquiry which I have long wished to investigate. These fields of inquiry are further study of figure ground relationship, use of design principles in painting, and concern for color modulations. The problem of figure ground relationships has been a troublesome problem in my art work. I have always had some problems with abstract work in that it was difficult for me to set up ways to paint areas in the painting in the most advantageous way. Also, I have problems in creating the proper tensions between the desired shapes. With these paintings, I have finally begun to delve into these problems. With even more experimentation in the future, I hope to solve additional problems and make further aesthetic progress.

I now feel that I am able to produce valid art with the main concern being figure-ground relationships. It is hoped that this paper might help some other student who may venture into this area of art. In this paper one may be able to see what has been previously done and with the understanding gained from the paper may achieve far more in this direction.

I believe this paper has been a definite factor in any improvement I have made during my year of graduate work. It is hoped it will be one factor that will help bring a new maturity to my work. I feel this has been a search for personal satisfaction and the reward is an artistic fulfillment and enrichment.

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