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### Figurative painting; an abstract-expressionist view

Stephen F. McGuinness  
*The University of Montana*

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"Figurative Painting;  
An Abstract-Expressionist View"

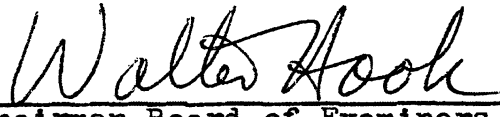
By

Stephen F. McGuinness      B.F.A.  
Rhode Island School Of Design 1963

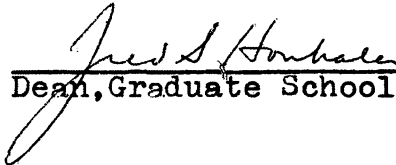
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University of Montana      1968

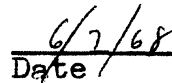
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" 'For soule is forme, and doth the body make' wrote Spenser in his Hymne In Honour of Beautie, echoing the words of the Florentine Neoplatonists, and although in life the evidence for the doctrine is inconclusive, it is perfectly applicable to art. The nude remains the most complete example of the transmutation of matter into form."

Sir Kenneth Clark: The Nude, A Study In Ideal Form Part I, "The Naked And The Nude"

Just as the artisans of ancient Greece sought after an ideal personification of human nature, so the entire body of serious creative activity since the fourth century B.C. has been and still is searching for newer and better means of representing the human figure in all of its manifestations; i.e., the innumerable activities and conditions to which the body is subjected. Some artists have chosen to emphasize the carnal aspect, some the spiritual, and in many cases great artists have succeeded in presenting us with both simultaneously. In every phase of this search for the perfect, there is a coexistent awareness of the imperfect. da Vinci's studies of crippled individuals; Breughel's and Bosch's fascination for the deformed; point to a recurrent motif in the development of Western art which, if recognized for what it is, i.e., close observation, leads one to detect a feeling of compassion at work.

This compassion or empathy for the unfortunate stems from a transhistorical awareness of the fortunate or "beautiful." It is a growing belief now that there is no absolute beauty be it truth, pleasure, or whatever. Clark continues in his discussion of the nude to say, in reference to the Aphrodite of Melos, "Even now we realize that she is not a work of the heroic age of Pheidias, and is perhaps somewhat lacking in the modern merit of 'sensibility,' she remains one of the most splendid physical ideals of humanity, and the noblest refutation of contemporary cant that a work of art must 'express its own epoch.' "

In fact, might not a work of art express a feeling for a previous era which becomes extant again in the present one? For example, the tremendous interest of artists four or five years ago in the advertising art of the late nineteenth century produced an intense flurry of activity known as "Camp." In its own ephemeral way, Camp analyzes and re-evaluates certain design preferences, albeit generic, and a very definite aesthetic consciousness. The aim of this project will be the presentation of the figure as thematic material for painting, in terms of the working methods of the Abstract-Expressionists. That is to say, an evaluation of the myriad aspects of the human form using as a presentational format the loose

brushy technique and occasional collage elements popularized by American painting of the late Forties and early Fifties.

Included in this Thesis Project are seven drawings which are not intended to be studies for any of the paintings, but should serve more as adjuncts or augmentative episodes between the paintings. By using a number of drawing materials in the paintings themselves, the drawings become more concrete extensions and connections from one painting to another. It may be useful here to point out that in my way of painting, a great deal of care is taken in the preparation of the canvas as well as the careful selection and use of materials. Certain elements of the painter's craft such as solvents, varnishes, mediums, etc., have been specifically chosen to afford the best possible physical results, and to aid in the execution of figurative paintings. It is quite important when setting out to produce a series of paintings and drawings based upon such a universal concept as the human figure, that certain criteria be kept in mind... Just any approximation of the human form is not enough to fulfill the nature of this project which represents the culmination of combined efforts directed toward the terminal degree in studio endeavor. There is no excuse for a bad figure. One which is too nondescript to transmit any but the basest

considerations of the human experience would be an affront on the educated viewer as well as evidence that the artist has not presented his best, or that he is incompetent. Since parts of these paintings are controlled in character and others loosely tied to the main theme through color, texture, direction, etc., there could arise some discrepancy between what is necessary to maintain the feeling of the work, and what would damage that feeling. The method of working, however, will carry the differences together and unite opposing factors within the same pictorial space. A large drag of color, for instance, may serve as a connective force between a freely painted area and a reclining figure carefully drawn in charcoal. Controlled directional elements can and do override many internalized or highly descriptive representational components. The artist may choose to omit, completely or otherwise, whole existing portions of work to arrive at a more suitable answer than he had previously decided upon.

It is the purpose, then, of this Terminal Project in Painting to combine antithetical elements of existing visual phenomena and to integrate these elements in terms of the figurative aspects of the human condition.



















