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THE ARTIST'S EMOTIONAL RESPONSE TO ENVIRONMENT  
AS REFLECTED IN PAINTING

by

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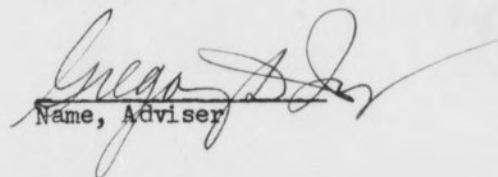
  
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## INTRODUCTION

This paper will describe the process of painting as being a consequence of the artist's individual emotional response to her environment. The artist's response is reflected in her work. The effect the response has on the process of painting is the major concern of the writer at this time. An attempt will be made to describe the beginning of the emotional response and how it leads to the process of painting. The observation is carried to the point at which a given painting began to take shape. The forming of an idea from such emotional response coincides with the impulse to paint.

The description of the process of painting will be made through an analysis of ten of the artist's paintings.

To illustrate the relations existing in the artist's approach to the creative process in painting and serigraphy, a description will be made of the experience with two serigraphs.

## ANALYSIS OF PROCESS OF PAINTING

In all activities when one is trying to become familiar or to understand, one is shaping, preparing something--a painting perhaps. Imre Reiner explains this preparation as it may occur in an artist by saying:

By the reception of something from outside myself the shape of a picture is prepared. Then follows the recognition of the proper medium, the struggle with the formative process, the over-coming of pretexts and habits and also of the danger implied in manual dexterity or the opposite danger which is no less crucial; clumsiness. From these regions of visible formative labour I gradually approach my harvest. Without being strictly conscious of these processes I achieve what I have been longing for--not what I have planned. To plan is not a fundamental prerequisite of art, it is this which distinguishes art from science. If a thought comes from the heart it comes quickly. . . . A painter need not plan but his painting must be well planned.<sup>1</sup>

The formations of activities occurring previous to the application of paint to a surface are the parts on which a painting is based. Daily happenings, impressions, directions of interest in people--their activities and motivations, are the things the artist is aware of and interested in. As a result, the subject expressed in a painting reflects an emotional response to a situation, or observation. To show how the artist's emotional response is reflected in her painting, a description and analysis of the process of painting is made.

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<sup>1</sup> Imre Reiner, Creative Desire (St. Gallen, Zollikofer and Company, 1945), p. 12.

The point of departure for the paintings considered here is an emotional response to an incident which provokes formulation and release of an accumulation of subjective forms to be described with paint. Drawings and sketches are rarely used in the procedure of painting. Sketches are made for visual notation to record fresh, new observations or for retention of an accumulation of ideas.

The sketch of The Crab was made after a long struggle with the subject, not at the time of observation. The struggle was both physically and emotionally real. It grew directly out of an actual encounter in which the artist was amazed and horrified by constant attempts of sand crabs to invade her resting place. The crabs were attracted by the light from the fire on the beach and were determined to arrive at their destination. The artist experienced a sense of fear toward the crab which influenced imaginative experiences related to the situation. The situation at the time demanded a sketch for the retention of the momentary impression and a release of tension. The accumulation of existing subjective emotions was formulated through the inter-action of the mind and imagination to be released into an essential objective form. The painting, begun the day after the sketch was made, took on new and different aspects. The sketch was referred to only in the beginning stage of painting. From that point until the painting was nearly completed, the artist was not consciously aware of the factors which combined to produce the painting.

Seeing takes place in relation to a point of view, a state of mind, and as a response through an emotional attitude. This must be taken into account when the artist is considering her painting. At different approaches, at various times, relationships are seen and reacted to differently. It is the intention of the artist to allow the painting to be just as flexible. To do this, a selection must be made as to kind, degree, and position of shapes, color, and subject. This allows for change in the work as it is being created and allows more freedom in approach to the viewer.

In the painting of The Crab the choice of color and arrangement of shapes was due to the experience and the emotional attitude. The artist feels that the dark blue-black-green color allows for greater range of imagination and less identification of form, also permitting change where it most frequently occurred in the responses within the artist. In areas where the attitude does not change so often, lighter color was used. Color limits the shapes in this painting as no linear pattern as such, exists.

In those paintings where a stronger emotional response to the subject existed, the color remains predominantly dark with contrast by the use of lighter values stabilizing the imagination with actuality.

Disintegration reflects response to a situation which seemed out of balance and moving apart. At the time of the action the artist was aware of a conflict due to a pre-conception of what the prevailing circumstances were to have provided, and the replacement of those ideas with responsive action to a relative situation. The manner of creating

the shapes to portray the response was to leave broken, free edges in such a way as to create the sensation of the shapes going apart, with intrusion of unidentified shape. This may be contrasted to the painting of The Theatre where the shapes are broken within but have definite edge limits. The shapes in both paintings, which are composed by definite color edges, are expressions of the existing conceptions which were incidents in the experience. They are identified and related in Disintegration, but remain apart because of the predominance of intruding relationships.

In the painting of The Cats the artist's attitude toward the animal may be easily observed. The cats are very individualistically portrayed. Certain characteristics are brought out--playfulness, sulkiness, inattentiveness, viciousness, meekness, contemplation. The position and area of shape and color define the feeling toward The Cats. The characteristics observed in one cat at different times by the artist, stimulated the desire to portray the various characteristics separately but related within a whole. The painting may be considered an unfinished work as the interest in the experience ceased, leaving no further demand for expression.

The artist is often able to recognize fault seen in her work, but unable to do anything about it, if the fault has a meaning and significance to the work which would be lost by correction. This is recognized and is of value later, if not in that particular painting.

Each painting is approached and the expression brought forth in its own unique way. Certain methods and materials are used over



and over, but in revealing and unique relationships to each subject. During the process of creating an image in the objective form of painting, the artist is aware to varying degrees of the emotions and ideas being expressed. The painting exists as a whole in relation to the expression of an emotional response but is only a part in the continuous development of painting.

In working out problems, the artist does not always accept, or work with demands which seem to be made by her environment. The situation may be reversed and the artist makes demands and shares the control by consciously or unconsciously adjusting emotional conditions to fit into a changing arrangement of living and working.

The environmental situation instigating the painting of The Theatre changed as the painting was being done. The emotional response to the situation also changed. This is reflected in the painting through the treatment of the diagonal shapes directed toward the accumulation of shapes enclosed to the right. Although the emphasis of movement is directed to the right, not all of it is carried through to that end. This contrast expresses the initial response as reflected in the painting. The blue-black color, allowing participation from other areas, integrates the expression of the situation as it first existed with the later development. Perhaps some observed facts from the situation will make the analysis clearer. Patronage to a theatre controls its economy and existence. The film-stories attract the people. The controlling factors--management, film, locality, people, were not in harmony. The theatre was to be closed. But a different management

which was able to perceive the various controlling factors and make some essential adjustments kept the theatre in operation. When these developments occurred, the painting was in progress, and as the artist learned of these facts, her response toward the situation changed, causing the expression in the painting to change. This diversity is the essential quality of expression in the painting.

Truth in painting may arise at this point. Many changes occur that affect the emotional response expressed in a painting, as treatment of activities is made in the world of the mind, imagination, and emotion. Everyone sees differently. As truth exists in ways of seeing, there is truth in all observation. There may be as many truths existing for an object as there are different relationships affecting it. Truth existing in a painting, as in observation, is divergent, conflicting and not always clear. The painting is not a conclusive, unchanging statement for the artist, as it is impossible to state or express an emotional truth that will actually remain unchanged in its relationships and still be in direct, honest contact with the painter at all times. No observation or responses remain the same long enough.

The above statement may be made because of the truth of experience in a circumstance of observing the same object at different times or from different locations. At one time it will appear to have definite characteristics that will not prevail at other times.<sup>2</sup> This applies

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<sup>2</sup>Imre Reiner, Creative Desire (St. Gallen, Zollikofer and Company, 1945), p. 8.

to the relationship of colors and shapes in a painting which change from the observed situation through the action of the artist's inner world and from there into the painted expression. Before existing in their present form, Disintegration, The Theatre, and Candlelight went through several changing and contrasting expressions due to changes in the emotions, which were caused by life situations. However when the artist has arrived at the desired expression the intention and the realization are congenial.

The painting titled Candlelight began as an experiment using shadows as subject matter. The painting retained the experimental qualities until the artist reacted to the form of the painting. When this happened the idea was formulated for the completion of the painting. The emotional response to the painting was a sensation of being caught in a tangled web of shadows. The completed painting expresses the web-like structure seen in shadows, but eliminates the feeling of being caught. The outcome of this painting may be contrasted with the unfinished painting of The Cats.

In Wind in Rain no particular experience of wind in rain is portrayed. An observation of sailboats brought about the feeling toward the expression of the storm. The colors were worked out in relation to the idea, not as in the case of The Crab, unconsciously assembled in relation to their meaning to portray the feeling as it existed during the process of painting. The broken linear pattern portrays the movement observed in the motions of a sailboat controlled by the wind. The

combination of this observation with an impression of wind in rain resulted in the desire for expression in a painting.

Both Wind in Rain and Sand Dunes portray space in a way that has not been used in the paintings discussed previously. The shapes in both are created by line on a background. The artist feels that although this allows for freedom in the response to the subject, it does not permit as much diversity in imagination as the more adjustable shapes created by less defined edges and over-lapping of color as used in the paintings of The Crab, Disintegration, The Theatre, and to a lesser degree, The Corner.

The emotional response to relative conditions observed and expressed in The Corner were of a tension and competitiveness existing within various elements. In a small area a wide scope of influence and interest exists. The warmth toward the locality and an awareness of several contrasting points of view, results in the environmental response expressed in the painting. When an awareness exists of divergent interests within experiences in which the artist is involved, the result is a desire for expressing that quality as soon as possible to release pressure from within. Once expressed, it is no longer a problem demanding attention. The release may be expected at various points within a development. It depends on the artist's emotional control at the time which is also dependent on environmental and emotional qualities already existing.

The fact that some paintings were done in oil and some in casein was due to dissatisfaction with each medium. However, there is no strong desire to work with oil paint. It is used only when dissatisfaction

arises from the use of casein which can be settled at the time through a change in medium. When this takes place a choice, in compliance with the medium, has to be made of existing ideas which the artist wants to express. The idea portrayed in The Corner, an oil painting, had been developing over a long period of time. When the decision to use oil was made this idea presented itself as being adaptable to the medium. After this difficulty, the procedure of painting was similar to that of other painting.

In the painting of Spring the linear movement created by the treatment of the shapes and colors suggests the swift entrance and departure of that season. It quickly reaches its height in the flowering plant life. The blossoms, seeming to appear suddenly, attract the attention of all observers. The painting expresses this suddenness by the relationship of the over-lapping colors and the directional movement of the shapes. The artist decided which colors to use and the location of shapes from observation of various blossoms in relation to their growth. Spring is the least significant painting to the artist as it represents little development in arriving at what the artist intended in expression of subject or technique.

The emotional response expressed in the painting of Booths resulted from the realization of a difference created by present conditions in an area of booths which had not existed to the artist before. The color is an expression of the attitude of the artist to those conditions. However, the color composes shapes which are from a previous response. The combination of these elements results in the

creation of a sensation which exists only in response to the painting. This painting indicates a different direction in the expression of the artist's response to her environment. It has had no further development in a painting.

## EXPRESSION IN SERIGRAPHY

The idea rather than the material occupies the foreground of the intention of the artist during the creative process. Through observation, experience, and study of the techniques the artist becomes familiar with and understands the medium and its uses in relation to desired expressions. The integration of materials and ideas is attained to a degree in the serigraph print, Nestle, to permit the artist to approach the process of printing with the idea rather than with the techniques of materials involved. This results in an expression which may be compared to the process of painting Candlelight. The response leading to the final expression in both occurred while the work was in progress.

The final expression in Nestle was formulated as the various colors were separately applied to the screen. The pressure of the screen on the paper, creating values and shapes observed by the artist, suggested the integration of the idea and techniques to the formulation of the expression. Until this experience with the process, serigraphy had been over-involved with method and technique. These began to be absorbed in the completion of the print, Alerted, when the artist did not follow a plan but began working on the print through a responsive expression derived from the activity.

The artist may come to a conclusion that the graphic medium of serigraphy is a means of expressing a creative process. The process

of printing only differs from the process of painting in the artist's approach to methods and materials. When this adjustment is made, the emotional response and expression in painting has its counterpart in serigraphy; truth to character and identity of expression and materials is retained.



## CONCLUSION

The analysis of the process of painting produced an awareness and a study of the development and presentation of ideas expressed in the paintings.

The process of painting involves all activities which are preparations for a painting--the formulation of ideas, the application of paint to a surface, and the expression of a completed painting. This process does not follow a plan. It occurs through the artist's personal reaction as a painter.

The paintings are the objective expressions of subjective formulations. The transfer made during the process of painting provides for a later awareness of environmental conditions which provoke interest from the artist. The response of the artist is intellectual, physical, and emotional. The response to an experience is integrated with previous experiences and with the inter-action of the inner world of mind, imagination, and emotion with the outside world. The responses from this activity accumulate until a particular incident provokes the release into the necessary objective form of painting.

The artist's personal painting techniques and the idea she desires to express in painting are not separate experiences. It is at times impossible to determine which occurs first. Through numerous experiences in painting, the artist evolves a way of painting that best expresses the ideas as they relate to her personal reaction. In the

paintings discussed here there has been the primary interest of the painter to apply paint with a palette knife to create broken, free edges and visible over-lapping forms. This treatment of casein was a gradual development resulting from a desire to permit the meaning and form of the painting to be as free as possible; to be congenial with the constant change in all relationships involved in the process of painting.

These paintings under discussion do not exist as a beginning nor an end, but as a phase in the development of the artist as a person and as a painter.

## TABLE OF REFERENCE TO PAINTINGS, SERIGRAPHS, AND DRAWING

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