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DEVELOPMENT OF THE ARTIST'S  
PAINTING AND PRINTS

by  
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CONTENTS	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	1
TOWARD THE REAL IN PAINTING	3
VIEWS OF THE PAINTINGS AND PRINTS	9
THE ARTIST AND THE FUTURE	23
TABLE OF REFERENCE OF PAINTINGS AND PRINTS	25
BIBLIOGRAPHY	26

INTRODUCTION

This thesis study has been a search into the development and meaning of the artist's paintings and prints. It has been an effort to interpret simply and enthusiastically the demands felt by the artist in abstraction.

Abstract art has always existed, but not until this century has it become known as such. Down through the ages we have seen that the creation of a work of art must of necessity grow and form a new image, actually it must be reborn, if it is to become real art.

Changes occur with each new civilization. The new enlightenment and refinement of taste naturally affects the development of art. Modern Art is a product of current culture. Abstract art is inevitable.

The artist has sought to discover some of the major criteria of art. In man's search for reality in life, he has found a need for perfection, pure form. Basic to all works of art is this something we call form. The artist destroys and reconstructs until this shape is constructed in its pureness.

The achievement of this art form is not exclusively produced through perception or construction. Aesthetic emotion is vital to the work of art. The spirit must take

part. Art must be felt.

In the final portion of the thesis, the artist has called attention to particular experiences stimulating the paintings and the construction of the forms therein. The paintings and prints are discussed in the order of their growth. It was strongly felt that there should be organic unity -- a relation of the parts to the whole -- in the paintings and prints. The artist is aware that these paintings and woodcuts are only a partial search for truth.

It is the task of the artist to continue to seek to express a clear vision of reality.

## CHAPTER I

## TOWARD THE REAL IN PAINTING

It is quite understandable that some people have objected to the name, abstract art. Yet abstract art has always existed. Art is not merely a means of enjoyment amidst an incomplete life, or a simple expression of that life even in its beautiful aspect. Mondrian says that art is the aesthetic establishment of complete life -- unity and equilibrium -- free from all oppression.

Abstract art is actually more concrete than naturalistic art. Abstract form is interpreted as the transforming or development of the initial idea into a new and living reality of its own. Abstraction means reducing particularities to their essential aspect. Sometimes the artist has to completely distort the representative idea. Perhaps Paul Klee best explains this purpose in distortion:

The creation of a work of art -- the growth of the crown of the tree -- must of necessity, as a result of entering into the specific dimensions of pictorial art, be accompanied by distortion of the natural form. For, therein, is nature reborn.<sup>1</sup>

The seed planted in the ground must die and become

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Klee, On Modern Art (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1948), p. 19.

completely transformed as its sprouts burst forth into a new, living shape. This relationship of new life in nature and painting, following distortion, is a basic concept accompanying the experience of the paintings observed in this thesis. Art is unconsciously and subconsciously drawn from nature, but, at the same time, transformed through the artist's imagination.

Through the years the culture of art has produced great transformations and abstraction of the natural form. Different periods have produced different conceptions and feelings. The never-failing sense of design that characterizes Egyptian Art reveals itself in the massive, angular structures of the pharaohs and pyramids. This striking tendency toward the abstract is apparent in the vast simplicity and dignity of form. Byzantine Art brought a new trend away from Greco-Roman naturalism toward a highly abstract expression. Painting of these Christians was reduced to one plane, with long stiff rows of figures shimmering in rich colors.

A new stimulation in life was reborn in the Renaissance in Italy. Cimabue attempted to change these Byzantine styles and to give painting new energy. But it was Giotto, his student, who began the trend toward a new naturalism, with the idea of constructing forms with direct reference to visual perception and spatial relationships.

From this time painting has progressed through great stages of inventiveness.

Such outstanding painters as Michelangelo, Titian, and Tintoretto opened up great potentialities of nature as material for the artist. The Dutch painters of the Seventeenth Century banned the old historical subjects and painted actualities from everyday life. Rembrandt, in his profound simplicity, captured the very depths of the spirit of the common folk.

A most mysterious ethereal quality characterizes Japanese Art, suggesting perfect poise and graciousness. Here is found a sensitive feeling for space relations.

It remained the destiny of Paul Cezanne to pave the way to a new abstractionism, apart from the decadent naturalism. He combined impressionism with values derived from the whole Renaissance tradition -- solidity, structure, organization of space -- and pioneered the wilderness toward modern painting.

By a study of the culture of art during the course of centuries, we see that abstract art is a product of the whole of civilization. Modern art thus developed out of the past through practice and experience. Culture is never static. Periods of progress and periods of regression produce an increasing development of expression in modern art.



What makes art good? Herbert Read is convinced that basic to all works of art is something we call form. The form of a work of art, he explains, is the shape it has taken. This shape is given by the artist. Now how can the artist know what is good form? The best works of art seem to be the ones with the best form, yet one form is better than another only because it satisfies certain conditions. Generally, these conditions are those which give our senses the most pleasure. The difficulty begins here for what pleases one person does not necessarily please another.

Forms of art are as varied as the forms of life, but the underlying principles of form and structure are the same. We see through the history of art that formal properties do not vary from country to country, or age to age. Herbert Read suggests that the elementary forms which men have instinctively given to their works of art are the same as the elementary forms which exist in nature. And by nature he means the whole organic process of life and movement which goes on in the universe, a process which includes man.

The artist must be motivated with an idea -- whether representational, analytical, emotional, or otherwise --, but it is not necessarily a work of art unless it has form, aesthetic value.

Abstract art has grown out of the abstraction of forms but is not simply abstraction. It is rather construction after decomposition of forms. However, a work of art is not exclusively produced by perception or construction. Aesthetic emotion is a vital factor in art. Both the plastic expression and the way a work is executed constitutes that "something" which evokes our emotion and makes it "art".

Art must have some reason for existing. The artist may call attention to aspects of nature not observed before. A water-color by John Marin brings vigor and surge of wind and water against rocks and trees without presenting a literal description. Piet Mondrian, on the other hand, has no subject matter which may be related, in an obvious way, to objects in the visible world. He is a believer in order, progress, and, above all, equilibrium. In his search for the expression of pure reality, Mondrian found it necessary to reduce natural forms to the constant elements of form and natural color to primary color.

Early in life Mondrian's environment in Holland conditioned him to paint the objects of ordinary vision; landscapes, houses, and even portraits with likeness. As he began to feel that reality could only be established through pure plasticity, his paintings became more limited in forms and colors in the interest of a larger unity.

As his motifs simplified, they evolved into combinations of straight ribbonlike areas of color -- usually of pure hue -- or of black on white backgrounds, all intersecting at ninety degrees. It has been said that Mondrian empties himself and his spectators by too complete a statement -- there is nothing left, no further questions. To quote Mondrian, he says:

It is my conviction that humanity, after centuries of culture, can accelerate its progress through the acquisition of a truer vision of reality. . . . At the moment, there is no need for art to create a reality of imagination based on appearances, events, or traditions. Art should not follow the intuitions relating to our life in time, but only those intuitions relating to true reality.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Piet Mondrian, Plastic Art and Pure Plastic Art (Wittenborn and Company, New York, 1945), p. 15.

CHAPTER II

VIEWS OF THE PAINTINGS AND PRINTS

Life is so full. With its immense experiences, it is little wonder that the artist is so anxious to express these mixtures of emotions. In creating a work of art Clive Bell introduces the way:

The starting point for all systems of aesthetics must be the personal experience of a peculiar emotion. The objects that provoke this emotion we call works of art. Every work produces a different emotion.<sup>3</sup>

In the accompanying view of the paintings the artist attempts to give a glimpse of the experiences inspiring the painting. It is hoped that the created forms move the spectator in such a way that he may feel the spirit of its creator. Clive Bell sets the pace for viewing the paintings:

The contemplation of natural objects is often the immediate cause of the artist's emotion. . . . No doubt, all of us, get a vision of material objects as pure forms. We see things as ends in themselves. . . . Who has not, once in his life, had a sudden vision of landscape as pure form? For once, instead of seeing it as fields and cottages, he has felt it as lines and colors. . . . Instead of recognizing its accidental and conditioned importance, we become aware of its essential reality, of the God in everything, of the universal in the

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<sup>3</sup>Clive Bell, Art (Frederick A. Stokes Company, New York, 1914), p. 6.

particular, of the all-prevading rhythm.<sup>4</sup>

The thesis paintings are exhibited in the order of their growth from the artist's experiences. The first four of these works were preludes to the thesis study and included simply as explanation of the stages of development of the artist.

During the period of time while working on the thesis, the artist began most of the paintings by drawing the tentative composition with bold, swift strokes in black paint directly on the canvas. Sketches were seldom referred to once the painting had begun. The artist liked to work fast, impulsively following contemplation of the area to be used and thinking about experiences and variations on these essential forms.

It was felt by the artist that the particular painting should remain secure within its own pictorial area and not extend beyond the limits of the canvas.

Each of the paintings relates its own mode of expression.

The first painting is called Cherokee. It was with wide-eyed amazement that the artist viewed the life and manner of the Cherokee Indians at their reservation in the mountains of North Carolina. Not expecting the Indians to conform to such traditional customs, it was

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid, p. 50, 52-53, 69.

a complete fascination to see a squaw in the village comfortably toting her papoose in the Indian fashion, on her back.

This oil painting, Cherokee, naturally found its place in the limit of earth, Indian coloring of burnt sienna, orange, ochres and black and white. No previous sketches were made, only mental impressions. The long, narrow vertical piece of upson board lent itself well to a standing figure of the squaw in side view with papoose. As the very realistic beginning changed into more solid, geometric shapes the artist felt her first conscious aesthetic experience taking place. The slight variation in grey-black ground behind the black forms of papoose shapes came as a happy incident, just as the curved forms of figures changed into more angular shapes, seeming to fit the space. The introduction of the head of an Indian chief in the foreground greatly enhanced the lower half of the painting. Actually the Indian motif has been disguised. The structure that is displayed is not the structure of the Indian picture, but rather the creation of new, happy images. Varieties and repetitions of shapes were enjoyed moving in and out on the visual plane. The artist felt a need to sharpen the edges of the afternoon's inspiring painting at another time. Since then, she has felt it more important to leave the painting in its



loose, more fluid state.

At first Collage No. 1 seems familiar in its modernity. The two sections of newsprint, a couple of thumb tacks, a piece of wrapping paper, unprinted news and oil paint are the materials used. Whether this construction was inspired by toy soldiers, a fortress, or city skyscrapers, its forms are exposed to indicate space flowing backward and upward and outward. Cut-out forms repeat colors or complement one another and reverse rhythms to start motions across the surface. The forms are simplified, using very few curves and emphasizing the vertical movement. The burnt sienna forms weave through the pattern to form a stabilizing force. The greens and greys are repeated in varying degrees to increase depth and a feeling of repose. The simplicity and oneness of the blue form is heightened by its singleness and intensity. This method of construction afforded a certain release and freedom to the artist that the brush alone could not give.

The bright, swirling forms of The Tempest are composed in a two dimensional manner on canvas. The shapes themselves are greatly broken and diffused by rapid, dry brush effects. Dynamic movement has been sought by opposing diagonal movement and by the texture. The painting was a long and revolutionary period of progress

from a more static stage of a still life to its more flaming, spontaneous period at present. So many underpaintings were applied to the canvas that it would be impossible to recall. The painting was in progress for some six months. It is evident that the artist finally reached a happy working stage as seen in the out-burst of reds opposing the ochres and browns. The need for cool contrast suggested the grey-blue and whites. This manner of working was more complicated and yet more meaningful to the artist after contemplation of its existence. The title was given the painting at the end, for the capacity for movement within the composition had greatly increased throughout the latter stages until it held its own in this most violent, forceful state.

A direct meeting of the artist with a flock of ducks introduced this idea of the painting, the Waddlings. Ink sketches were made of the waddling creatures as they searched for crumbs in the grass and sometimes bothered to look up and wobble around the artist. They were as white as if they had bobbed right out of the bath. The artist fought for many months trying to retain the realistic image of the ducks, and still group the formal elements so that each in its place was right and none clashed with the other. The layman would no doubt



pronounce the devastating words, "But that isn't a bit like ducks."

The artist felt the need to continue to shift weights around the composition, eventually losing all appearance of ducks, until there was a balance in form and color. The white and lighter forms seem to dominate the blues and mauves. The black gives force in movement. This oil color relationship provided a new opening for the artist in its associations of mauves, blues and ochres. The particular duck forms emerged into new images. These images, in the abstract now, may be called constructions. Observing that the subject walked with short, swaying steps -- somewhat clumsy -- the painting evolved this characteristic nature. Thus, the naming followed the association which prompted the painting.

Artist's Attic, an oil painting on beaver board, began as an exercise limiting the artist to one color and its variations in light and dark. Thus, the mixtures of yellows with black resulted in the greens. The structure of this painting is closely allied to that of Collage No. 1. The tall, vertical and diagonal forms fell naturally into place, over-lapping and moving back and forth on varied levels across the horizontal plane. There is more simplicity and repetition of like forms in this study than in Collage No. 1 and elimination of circular movement

entirely. These more dramatic forms give the appearance of standing free in space in front of the deeply receding tan and cool yellow grounds. Dynamic movement is captured by the interplay of more contrasting diagonal forms.

Perhaps the circumstances surrounding the artist a good bit of the time unconsciously found place in this painting. It began its formation in a friend's studio amid familiar easels and dismounted picture frames and old art magazines. Its completion took place in the artist's studio, which is actually the attic. Some friends are reminded of a classroom when they see it. Others think of spring time. Could it be a combination of all these forces?

The next painting is Sand Dock. Moving out towards Shackleford Banks from the mainland near Beaufort, North Carolina offered a magnificent view of the weather beaten shoreline. The gnarled, twisted old trees distorted by the wind and waters, the forsaken row boats on the beach, and bits of a remaining dock made one feel a little melancholy until he looked above to the clear, blue sky and moved along the rippling waters to the Banks. The artist made a sketch of this spot and was interested in several water-color attempts before doing the oil painting.

Sand Dock was a lengthy series of steps in building, destroying and rebuilding some of the lines,

forms and colors in order to achieve an over-all unity. Most of the browns have been destroyed, yellows toned into pale ochres and pinks and blues. Cadmium red light was introduced about mid-way the life of the painting as the blues became more intensified. A vast simplification was demanded of the upper central area to give rest to the vibrant, windy boat abstractions in the lower part of the composition as opposing the tumultuous tree areas at the top. It is a moving, somewhat distorted structure, fitting to the nature of its inspiration.

We Three is the second in a series of three oil paintings studying yellow, copper and brown combinations. The first painting was a non-objective painting using equal rectangles and playing various colors against each other. This particular painting is more varied in construction, using triangles and curves. This representation of figures was drawn directly on the board with black paint with very little sketching before the painting. The discovery of the rich copper color in the first painting led to an enthusiastic approach to this particular combination of hues. Color is given full range and rather evenly distributed, with the end result of a cheery nature. Heavy black lines were used for the purpose of emphasizing and uniting the whole structure. The painting was finished with application of only one

layer of paint with only a few changes. There was a definite feeling of joy while painting We Three, no doubt a fascination in the color. Perhaps it could have been pursued further. After looking at the painting for a period of time it appears compact and a bit full.

Delight is the third, and perhaps, most rewarding of the three oil paintings in copper and browns. This course burlap had been tackled several times attempting to apply paint on the ground layer. On the first day of school, the burlap frame found its place on the easel. The artist was fresh and eager to venture into a new work. Having learned from the first two paintings the need for more space, the artist decided to contrast the large brown section with the even larger cream area. A few medium and smaller areas were drawn in with black paint. The oranges, ochres and browns seemed evident. The painting was transformed in such a short time that the artist was little aware of what was taking place until the impulse to stop made itself clear to her. The instinctive good feeling and unconscious delight of the artist is quite evident. Delight is much more stable and consistent in pattern than We Three. To the artist, it has achieved that higher spiritual quality, oblivious of any calculated moves.

One will immediately notice the entirely different

spirit of this painting. Serenity is calm, clear and steady in light. It is like the sandy beach on a sunny afternoon when hardly a wave is rippling out of tune with the whole body of water. In a way, it gives the impression of a dream. The color is very high in key, using no black, but subtle greys, yellows, pink, blues and whites. The horizontal forms continue to appear and reappear half submerged, half seen in the midst of this tranquil space. No form or color seems to dominate. There is a feeling of unity and simplicity. The process of this painting was that of numerous layers of underpainting in bright lacquer paints, flat house paint, and oil paints, followed by as many layers of over painting until just enough of the underlying tones appeared to give it this placid, peaceful, quiet, calm effect. It is pertinent that the painting formed these characteristics on a cool, breezy summer afternoon as the artist was anticipating a heightened emotional experience.

The Nativity painting was created from the artist's own Christmas card. At first, the painting was little more than a replica of the Christmas idea. The canvas was put aside for several months. During this period when this painting was in its dormant state, the artist found new vitality and inspiration in the insistent repetition of this phrase found in Exodus:

Moreover you shall make the tabernacle with ten curtains of fine twined linen and blue and purple and scarlet stuff; with cherubim skilfully worked shall you make them.<sup>5</sup>

Such exquisite beauty and tone brought to mind these relations for the painting. The painting began to come to life. Its growth became forceful and united through the grouping of blue, purples, and scarlets.

The Nativity was transformed into its new, vital state almost as quickly as the aesthetic experience appeared in Cherokee, once the bud appeared above ground. Both paintings are tall, verticals, using symbols of people. One can readily see the spontaneity and more brilliant character of The Nativity in contrast to the more conforming earth colors in Cherokee, each appropriate to its spirit. The manner of working was complicated yet intuitive. It was not until the end of the formation that the structure was fully realized. The insistent narrow vertical forms traveling across the center of the painting needed the strong horizontal blue and pink forms at the base. The deep green must have been introduced as a means of reducing the luscious effect obtained by the combinations of violets and pinks. Offsetting the areas with bold black seemed to sustain the dynamic quality portrayed in the painting. The

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<sup>5</sup>Exodus, The Holy Bible, R.S.V. (Thomas Nelson and Sons, New York, 1952), Exodus 26:1, p. 83.



intense richness of this experience has brought newness to the artist's means of expression.

Perhaps a highlight in the artist's abundant measure of rich experiences occurred while at the Beaufort School of Fine Arts. The delight of the water, fishermen, boats and nets, quaint old forts and lodgings and old folk, wild ponies, the massive sand-dunes and marshes and sea and sky are only part of these experiences.

Many changes have taken place in the growth of this painting, Mending Nets. The emotional response of the artist entirely shifted and appeared to be governed by the painting itself. The painting began in a horizontal composition as pure abstract forms in subdued blues and browns intended to balance a large space with other projecting forms. As this idea faded, the artist's attention was drawn to an ink sketch of fishermen mending their nets amid docks and shrimp boats. The painting reverted to a vertical position and immediately became sunny and gay. Since the artist had a tendency to crowd the dimensions of the canvas it was desirous to maintain the spaciousness originally planned. The oil painting began anew with this intense yellow, raising the tone of the painting a great deal more than any of her other works. The greens and blues

began to merge with lavenders leaving the red forms to balance the massive yellows. From the point of introducing the yellow until the painting was nearly completed, the artist was unaware of the factors which combined to produce the painting. Again, the artist was completely given to the fulfillment of the painting.

The fact that the majority of the paintings are done in oil on linen canvas is a positive indication that the artist prefers this painting medium. Exploration of casein, egg tempera, lacquer, enamels and water-color on varied panels provide the artist with added delight in oils. The palette knife method of applying paint has almost been excluded from the artist's methods of painting for the reason that it often hinders the visibility of pure form. Preference for large, flat bristle brushes and large canvas is evident in the painting.

The artist's enthusiasm with the medium of woodcuts and linoleumcuts was kindled during the latter days of the thesis study. Inspired by the woodcuts of Adja Yunkers, Seong Moy and Louis Schanker, the artist found great delight in the feel of wood and in the effects achieved by each new print and color combination. Views of the artist's experiments reveal that Wind-borne, At Dusk, and The Sacrifice are combination linoleumcuts and



woodcuts prepared with very fluid line designs.

Contemplation is a more expansive woodcut overprinted with a fine string print. Witches Dance and Regeneration are bold woodcuts, using the natural grain of the wood, and offering a happy balance between the concrete expression of a theme and their symbolic abstractions. Each woodcut has been explored in a number of varied color combinations. The discovery that the woodcut form of printing is more adaptable to robust, free, non-cliche' techniques has given the artist an entirely new adventure in the arts.

It has been a major concern of the artist to organize the plastic elements of her painting and printing in the best possible manner. It is believed that there must be organic unity in painting and printing -- a structure in which the parts are related to the whole. For a work of art is unified when its pictorial message is integrated with the picture plane and the medium chosen is suitable to its fulfillment.

## CHAPTER III

## THE ARTIST AND THE FUTURE

We see that man does not live by bread alone but yearns for the food of the spirit as well. It is this inner life, the life of the spirit, that gives man this never-ending search for infinite good, for perfection. The exalted feeling of a painting may give him a lift in this direction. Life is greatly enriched by these experiences, most especially for the artist.

Yet, how can one proclaim these joyous moments to others? It is a most difficult task to explain to someone an aesthetic experience or describe how the artist sees. It seems that everyone must experience these feelings of ecstasy for himself, following that continual stumbling and rising again. Each individual no doubt sees in a different light, but each is growing.

The eye of the artist, as well as the observer, can only see when the mind is receptive. There must be the desire to see, and thus, the person will receive life in full measures. As we have shown, life is greatly enriched by means of the arts, and art likewise enhances life, for those who earnestly seek quality. Man is still seeking truth with each new experience. No doubt it will

require continuous experiencing and looking at life itself, looking at new art inventions to open our sights to broader horizons.

The artist himself does not see it all. His paintings are incomplete to a certain extent. He must continue to explore and invent, never becoming complacent, and examine that which passes his way. Paul Klee points to the continuing goal of the artist:

Nothing can be rushed. It must grow, it should grow of itself, and if the time ever comes for that work -- then so much the better!

We must go on seeking it!

We have found parts, but not the whole!

We still lack the ultimate power, for:  
the people are not with us.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Paul Klee, On Modern Art (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1948), p. 54-55.

## TABLE OF REFERENCE TO PAINTINGS AND PRINTS

NAMES OF PAINTINGS	PAGE
1. Cherokee	10
2. Collage No. 1	12
3. The Tempest	12
4. Waddlings	13
5. Artist's Attic	14
6. Sand Dock	15
7. We Three	16
8. Delight	17
9. Serenity	18
10. The Nativity	18
11. Mending Nets	20

## NAMES OF PRINTS

1. Wind-borne	21
2. The Sacrifice	21
3. Witches Dance	22
4. At Dusk	21
5. Contemplation	22
6. Regeneration	22

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COPIES OF PRINTS



"Wind-borae"

held 1955





"The Sacrifice"

Child 1956



"Witches Dance"

Wald 1956



Hubb 1956

4th Hubb



*"Regeneration"*

*Saul 1956*









"Contemplation"

Auld 1-'56