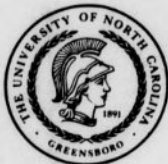


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COOKE, ALTHEA CAROL P. A Transcendental Geometry.(1976)
Directed by: Gilbert Carpenter. Pp. 6

The painting problems investigated dealt with transitivity of ground and shape, and the efforts to synthesize the empirical and transcendent.

Appreciable effect was gained through the use of spraying techniques and constructive devices.

A TRANSCENDENTAL GEOMETRY

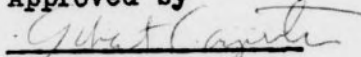
by

Althea C. Cooke

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts

Greensboro
1976

Approved by



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Date

Dec 9, 1976

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Art and life should not be divorced. Art objects are objects in the real world. Yet, I cannot agree with recent artists, like Frank Stella, who believe that in a painting, "Only what can be seen there is there."¹ A painting can have transcendent content, but not in the sense of something "other." The content must be "in", and "between", and in relation to the viewer.

Therefore, in my own painting, I attempt a synthesis between the empirical and the transcendent. In this synthesis, I meld the subjective and objective. Building on the Slavic mysticism of Malevich and the French rationalism of Duchamp, I mitigate strict geometry with atmospheric automatism.

I accept the art object as object but transcend that objecthood. First, the objecthood is emphasized by maintaining the surface skin of the board, riding the surface, articulating its literalness. Then an ambience is created with bivalent indeterminate grounds. This ambience is created specifically by switching transitivity of ground and shape. Ground becomes shape and moves to the front, yet retains a possible reading of ground. In some of my work, this reading goes both ways and forms a continuum. In a few works, the change is in one direction, primarily. Close value, chromatic equality, or perceptual ambiguity related to geometry effect these changes. Whatever the method, the result is energy change, and the inert physical

object is transcended.

In synthesizing apparent dialectical opposites, a new dialectic is introduced, one that in its multivalence creates a vital presentness. Something seems to happen that is more than optical illusion or esthetic enjoyment. The energy change is a hint of the reality that lies behind appearances. In this changing, the issue of time is operative. To obtain conviction, the viewer must be drawn from his space-time into the space-time of the painting. Effective in this regard is the use of the surface skin of the board, the stretcher frame backing reversed(in some cases) to reiterate the viewer's real space and his sequential time,i.e., his natural world. Then by using multivalent ground readings, or shapes that seem contained,yet move noumenally, the viewer is drawn into a space that is of the surface but transcends it. Thus the aggressive empirical is usurped, and using its own devices, transcended.

This perceptual possibility is illustrated by the common practice of looking into a clear pond: One can either look at the surface of the pond,-the reflections of the sky there,or one can look under the surface into the depths of the pool. As one's eye "switches", one ponders how or what is happening in the eye or brain. This pondering of the visual experience is important. As Barnett Newman said, "Only the pure idea has meaning. Everything else has everything else."²

But, perhaps,"pondering" is inexact. Certainly what is required is not deductive thinking. My paintings are records

of time-space bracketed. In them, the viewer can escape his usual sense of the inevitable march of time, and the given measurements of his real space.

Thus, while attempting cosmic scope, I try to escape the Tolstoyian trap, for what happens, happens in and with the viewer, and is not an illustration of my sense of the transcendent.

If the viewer, assisted by the painting, can escape what Husserl called the "natural standpoint",³ the natural way of looking, and begin to think about his visual experience, he may indeed transcend apparent reality and find what Mondrian called "pure reality,"⁴ and Malevich called "pure feeling."⁵

My present aims in painting are the results of many influences, over a long period of time. Western painters important to me would begin with Malevich: His white square on white ground paintings are of the highest inspiration to me. The De Stijl group is certainly a part of my personal heritage: Mondrian, in some of his early work, and his theosophic leanings, and van Doesburg in his Counter-compositions and his attitudes. Later artists like Barnett Newman, Al Held, Robert Mangold, and Brice Marden have had some effect. I first came to realize clearly the use of time-space in art through the work of Robert Smithson. Several artists working today I admire and relate to are Judy Chicago, Elizabeth Murray, and Dorothea Rockburne.

Moreover, for years, I have enjoyed Sung painting. My present work deals with some of the same spatial and temporal

issues present in that landscape painting.

Some of the writers that have interested me in the last several years are the philosophers, Plotinus, Croce, Bergman, Heidegger, and Husserl. Others are C.P. Snow, F.S.C. Northrop, Alan Watts, Peter Berger, Carlos Castanada, H. Hesse, Lizzie Borden, and Donald Kuspit. All of these writers have epistemological and ontological concerns that challenge the scientific, technological, positivistic, empirical traditions of the Western world.

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1. Gregory Battcock, Minimal Art (New York, 1968) p. 158.
 2. Herschel B. Chipp, Theories of Modern Art (Berkeley, 1971) p. 550.
 3. William Barrett and Henry Aiken, Eds. Philosophy in the Twentieth Century, Vol. III, (New York, 1962) p. 172.
 4. Paul Overy, De Stijl (London, 1969) p. 30.
 5. Chipp, op. cit. p. 341.

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Battcock, Gregory. Minimal Art, New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1968

Chipp, Herschel. Theories of Modern Art, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971

Overy, Paul. De Stijl, London: Vista Limited, 1969

SLIDE LIST

1. "H-Piece", 36'x48', acrylic on board
2. "Co-Efficients", 48"x48", acrylic on board
3. "V-M", 48"x48", acrylic on board
4. "Ekstasis", 48"x48", acrylic on board.
5. "Holes", 24"x36", acrylic on board and exposed stretchers
6. "Noughts and Crosses," 60"x60", acrylic on pieced board
7. "In and Out Darkly", 48"x48", acrylic on board
8. "Blue Passage", 48"x96", two panels, acrylic on board
9. "White Desert", 48"x48", 48"x96", two panels