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*Art, Barnard College, 1937*

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*A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the University of Colorado in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree Master of Fine Arts Department of Fine Arts 1960*

This Thesis for the M.F.A. degree by

C. Abbott Meader

**CONCERNING THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE DIDACTIC  
AND THE PLASTIC IN THE VISUAL ARTS**

by

**C. Abbott Meader**

**A.B., Dartmouth College, 1957**

Roland Reiss

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Date 24 May 1960

**A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate  
School of the University of Colorado in partial  
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**Master of Fine Arts**

**Department of Fine Arts**

**1960**

Roland Reiss

Meader, C. Abbott (M.F.A., Fine Arts; Creative Arts)

Concerning the Relationship of the Didactic and the Plastic  
in the Visual Arts

This Thesis for the M.F.A. degree by

Thesis directed by Associate Professor Wendell Black and

C. Abbott Meader

Assistant Professor Roland Reiss

has been approved for the

The problem of the Department of Fine Arts of didactic  
content may arise from the effort of painting itself.

We cannot truly know the why and how of creation, and

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How are we involved? What are its

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We find differences between the child and the adult in

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tics relates closely to the nature of pure communication

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that a purely visual language exists and is indeed, at

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this the didactic may also be implied in its fitting sense.

This abstract of about 160 words is approved as to form and

content. I recommend its publication.

Signed Roland Reiss  
Instructor in charge of dissertation

Meador, C. Abbott (M.F.A., Fine Arts: Creative Arts)

Concerning the Relationship of the Didactic and the Plastic  
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The problem of the position and nature of didactic content may arise from within the effort of painting itself. We cannot truly know the whys and hows of creation, and misgivings may invade our attempts at visual communication. How are we involved with didacticism, and what are its forms and possibilities?

We find differences between the child and the adult in desires and conditioning to expression. The didactic is found herein. Within the multiple forms and ages of visual art the didactic exists on numerous levels. The author hypothesizes that in its basic and immediate nature didacticism relates closely to the nature of pure communication itself. The beliefs of some recent artists, as they pertain to the problem, are presented and discussed, as are certain observations on "primitive art". The conclusion is drawn that a purely visual language exists and is indeed, at present, the foundation and structure of painting. Within this the didactic may also be implied in its fitting sense.

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other manifestations of man's mind, but which can be touched by none of them.

"Somehow, art and the creative drive do exist. We know that."

**CONCERNING THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE DIDACTIC AND THE PLASTIC IN THE VISUAL ARTS**

we are able to recognize, comment on, and, in essence,

Neither by logical process nor by any scientific investigation can the existence of art be explained to all satisfaction. Art, in its elemental nature, insists upon appearing and manifesting itself apart from the rational sense. The will to creation arises from the expressive element of the soul that may be seen by nature as diametrically opposite in its action to that searching element which exists for the accumulation of experience and knowledge. Artistic knowledge, to the extent that such knowledge does exist, may be termed the ultimately intuitive comprehension of our own expressions. It is, therefore, inner directed rather than externally so. That which the Western world calls primitive art bears witness to this. Within its forms as created by many peoples -- Africans, Bushmen, the Pre-Columbians, Eskimos, American Indians, etc. -- there is harbored, as we term it, a certain unsophisticated element. By designating such art as "unsophisticated," we tend, perhaps unwittingly, to indicate that its essence lies closer to the elemental core of man, to that possibly unknowable center which is the seed of logic, science, and than those created from itself; at the center there is the core, the universal human identity. In its first stirrings

other manifestations of man's mind, but which can be touched by none of them.

Somehow, art and the creative drive do exist. We know that we are faced with a unity that must be of a subjectively ordered nature. This we know intuitively for we are able to recognize, comment on, and, in essence, comprehend the artistic statements of diverse mankind. The universality of art could not exist without some all encompassing internal order. Certain absolute meanings and structures are essential or all would dissolve. The word art could not exist as the symbol it is, for irreconcilable fragments and parts of thought, feeling, and perception would be our only heritage from the innumerable forms and states of humanity.

The child, when he first discovers in the nature of his arm and hand the inherent instrument for bringing into existence a visual image and proceeds then to use them for that purpose, is probably following a pure impulse towards self-expression. But further, it can be noticed that upon viewing his own work he singles out various pieces and eagerly thrusts them upon his elders for viewing. What does he find in his creation that generates this first stirring desire to communicate through the new found form? Again we have the unknown and ultimate "why" of the creative drive. There are no yardsticks for its measurement other than those created from itself; at the center there is the core, the universal human identity. In its first stirrings



the genius of creation allows the child to know this center. Instinctively he realizes that his ideas -- interpretations of his pure visual world -- have meanings, and with perhaps the hope of increasing his store of love, understanding, and identity, he extends his created images forth, intuitively confident that within them are qualities to be shared. Almost as basic as the inclination to self-expression is the desire to create through it a method of telling, of explaining the myriad intuitions, conclusions, patterns and proportions of feeling and thinking that create the stuff of living. Within this impulse we recognize the beginnings of didactic intention, since instruction, defined as "knowledge and information imparted,"<sup>1</sup> is undoubtedly the *raison d'etre* of symbolic communication. The didactic can perhaps be considered in this light of communication. The oldest Egyptian hieroglyphs and Chinese characters are pictographs, representation, that is, of actual objects that are used in telling. Image making arises almost immediately with life, as does also the desire to communicate through it. Kandinsky feels that art is guided by "the principle of internal necessity,"<sup>2</sup> which, in turn, originates from three elements: the "something" that demands expression, or personality; the compulsion to

<sup>1</sup>American College Dictionary, definition of didactic, and instruction.

<sup>2</sup>Kandinsky, Concerning the Spiritual in Art, p. 52.

express the spirit of the age; and the compulsion to help the cause of art.

But is the didactic itself to be known only as a tempter, a threat, a nemesis, an unfortunate art yardstick? No. There shall be in this instance an attempt to present the didactic as an Argus, not a Cyclops, and to investigate many, though certainly not all, of its objects, for it has seen its way to many ends, and has challenged Proteus in achieving them. Can there be found within the workings of didactic intent manifestations which lie close, in their functions, to concepts of pure communication? If so, there would arise a partial identity between such didactic and the quite basic, communicative aspects of the primary creative drive. Along with this aspect of didactic possibility there shall be an investigation of the more recognizable didactic elements that are frequently manifest in the visual arts, with the hope of finding the point, if such a clear separation may be discovered, where the didactic bursts from the universal and the plastic to exist statically apart.

In the interest of achieving clarity in the presentation of this intended concrete though rather illusive exploration, we shall now pose some questions, the answering of which may in some ways elucidate our problem and create a structure of actuality which may, positively or negatively, be of utility in the creative realm.

In investigating the sources and manifestations of the didactic in art, what are the implications of the differences of spirit and direction in the man grown from the child in reference to quantity and quality of didactic content?

Do these differences relate to the distinctions set up between primitive and non-primitive art, and is Western Man to find didactic content within primitive art expression?

Is there such a thing as the purely formal or the nonobjective in art to the exclusion of all didactic intent?

How are we to evaluate the level of didacticism that exists in the social statement or in religious art in its relationship to the plastic? And, can the overtly literary combine with the plastic in art, or must they inevitably conflict? Is this not the ultimate question to be resolved?

If we can presuppose that in the basic desire to create an image, there exists a social, that is, a communicative intent, then we may expect artistic problems to arise through human growth. Certainly the child and the adult are not the same social creature. The child who in relative unity of purpose shows his drawings to an adult is not the adult man whose mind abounds with concepts and opinions on a host of subjects within countless areas of human experience. To try to create in the manner of a child as we have seen twentieth century painters profess

to do, would seem to be folly or misconception. No man can again be the child, though it does seem possible, on the other hand, to create a work of art in a childlike manner. Where has our meaning changed? The artist may never again perceive as a child, but he may attempt to achieve the singleness and purity of a child's spontaneous approach to art. Any attempt at such a creation involves a certain extreme discipline in which the artist must exert a great effort to open himself to the freshness of experience.

How is it that artists have found themselves so concerned with understanding the childlike in our times? It would seem that we have, in our pendulum swing from early nineteenth century thought and art, as typified by the Pre-Raphaelites, emerged from an era that was ignorant of, or unconcerned with, many subjective and plastic realities that are now inseparable from the mainstream of creativity. For the greater part of the nineteenth century the didactic in the visual arts could be found to exist solely in a clear cut teaching context, and in an imposed and distinct nature, apart, from the plastic elements of the work of art in which it manifested itself. As artists' concepts of reality, of the physical world and its laws, changed, and as the world itself, in its technological thrust through to revolutionary concepts of existence, began to react against long held social and cultural traditions, great re-evaluations occurred with the result that the artists turned inward to subjectivity, searching for clarity and

simplicity of statement that was not known. Many traditional themes and concepts of the adult world came to lose their seat in profound reality. They appeared to be sterile superficialities, and so became artistically inappropriate and empty. By the late nineteenth century Cezanne could break the crust of traditional meaning from the seen world of material form and allow it to breathe a fresh existence. Later, with the advent of expressionism, we find evidence of dissatisfaction with the near entire concept of adult vision itself being evidenced.

Kandinsky has stressed in his writings the spiritual role of art and purity that must mark its creation. He is one who found a great wealth of analogy in the vision of the child. M. T. H. Sadler calls attention to the fact that "freshness of vision the child has, and freshness of vision is an important element . . . but beyond this a parallel is nonexistent, . . . It is one thing to ape ineptitude and another to acquire simplicity of vision."<sup>3</sup> Kandinsky never intended, though isolated statements would have otherwise, to claim that the artist is, or may be, the child; but for him, as with other leaders in the twentieth century the search for freshness of vision and interior existence came to be of paramount importance.

We have, at present, in terms of following the threads of didacticism through our contemporary scene, merely

<sup>3</sup>Sadler, M. T. H., Introduction to The Art of Spiritual Harmony, by Wassily Kandinsky, p. xiv.

defined the threshold to our subject -- that is, the creative explorations of the child himself and the basic didactic implications that may be implied from the form that these explorations take. In the growth from child to man the causal factors of creativity shift in their manner of emphasis, with the resulting formation of new levels of didactic possibility. In the philosophies of Kandinsky, Picasso, and others, we see a reaction to the form of art and its didactic content that adult growth had created prior to them. What was, or, it may still be asked, is the Western Man grown from child? Can it be argued that the average Western Man moves in his growth in a direction away from the primary creative spirit? He grows into set forms, embracing the most convenient, though not always complete or competent forms of communication as his own, tending, as he grows toward social living, to lose his desire either to create or to find and investigate unknowns. There is, to use Kandinsky's terms, the retention of the "How" but the loss of "What." Note the often stated observation that the artist is an extraordinary sort who displays "childlike," naive, and impractical attributes. What is this to indicate but the perception of the ungrown in the artist -- the fortunate incapacity to find spiritual completion within the convenient abbreviated modes of expression? In this we again turn away from the nineteenth century and the external didacticism and to the internal, more fully communicative didactic possibility. We have

mentioned Kandinsky and Picasso in the same breath above, not to equate their artistic expressions, but to show that two greatly differing artists have found that the problems of adult expression have resulted, through search for a basis for reaffirmation of intention, of freshness of form, in an arrival at the internal order of creativity and at a conscious appraisal of the art inherent in the vision of a child. At this level we leave the personal, subjectively designed but externally directed contemplation of the objective world, as exemplified by Cezanne's vision, and turn inward to the expression derived primarily from subjective reality. The child and the subjective go hand in hand, for "the child is not observing nature, and its activity has nothing to do with objective reality; the child is an expressionist giving a symbolic representation of its inner or mental life. . . . By expression we mean the creation and communication of nondiscursive symbols to represent states of feeling or intention which are outside the range of conceptual thought."<sup>4</sup> Didacticism, as it may be present in the intention of the twentieth century artist of merit, will be then predominantly intangible in form, existing perhaps, it may be said, as an aura of abstract meaning and symbol rather than a tangible construct through representative elements.

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<sup>4</sup> Herbert Read, The Art of Children, p. 4.

of . . . Somehow it seems we must become aware, as artists, not only of our capabilities as adult, knowledgeable spirits, but also of the limitations or obstacles within us as imposed by growth. We must accept and honor our debt to the child, to the unconscious, the emotional, the basic and elemental humanity of ourselves, for their contribution to mature art. "There is an unquestionable relatedness between artist and child . . . for child and artist alike draw the phenomena they experience from the substratum of the psyche."<sup>5</sup>

Related to this "childlike" quality of the artist in our time is his response to primitive art as discovered in the late nineteenth century that flowered in the first decades of the twentieth century through the interest of Kandinsky, Picasso, Matisse, Modigliani, and scores of others. It will be recalled that such men, particularly the last three mentioned, found indirect, and at times, even direct inspiration from African negro sculptures. Though the work of these Western artists reflected at times certain formal characteristics of negro art as the artists themselves strove to comprehend the compelling nature of these sculptures, their work was never truly reflective of the aesthetic entity, or creative motivation, of the African pieces. Similarly the artists themselves never adopted, nor could they have, the mind or attitude of the African sculptors. In African sculptures did not involve preference over other work from other primitive areas; it merely happened that the African pieces were then available in some quantity.

<sup>5</sup>Richard Ott, The Art of Children, p. 6.



of the African sculptor.<sup>6</sup> The important factor for our consideration lies, however, in their response to such art. We are dealing with men who found in what had been mere anthropological curios fifty years before, living artistic presence of a nature to inspire them to great visual and intellectual explorations. An analysis of the spirit of the African sculptures might bring to light, therefore, the character of that Western spirit then being born.<sup>7</sup> The author will not begin here to introduce any comprehensive discussion about the characteristics of African art beyond saying that, as with most art termed "primitive," the most immediate statement seems to be communicated in emotional terms, couched in symbolic, highly stylistic form. In this sense then we notice a similarity to the expressive nature and form of children's art. Herbert Read's statement that the child embodies the qualities of an "expressionist giving symbolic representation of its inner or mental life," might define as well the nature of the African sculptor, for between the intentions,

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<sup>6</sup>African negro sculpture is nonexpressive, nonindividual in the Western sense; it adheres to style and never, except recently, has the sculptor been other than anonymous, a craftsman in his own eyes with none of the claims to individual vision that has become inseparable from any Western definition of the artist in the last century and a half.

<sup>7</sup>The interest shown by artists at the turn of the century in African sculptures did not involve preference over other work from other primitive areas; it merely happened that the African pieces were then available in some quantity, whereas works from other areas were not.

if not the forms and symbols, of the child and the primitive, a close parallel may be drawn. The question has been raised as to whether didactic content is, for Western man, perceptible in "primitive" art. If we accept the existence of didactic content as suggested in relation to the child's impulse to create, then it appears that we can attribute a similar intention and content here on a similar level. In other words, we can contend that the African sculptor does consciously or unconsciously impart a highly personal, individual statement through his work. This is, of course, a characteristic that merely crosses the threshold of what we may in justification term "didactic," for it is involved with the basic yearning to communicate that we have mentioned as the prerequisite to the most elemental didactic intention. There is, however, in primitive art a great store of didactic content of a highly conscious, immediate, and practical sort. This is a fact that anthropological and cultural investigations have disclosed. Such didactic content is, however, often overlooked by a person not of the immediate culture because its symbols are not apparent to him. Even when he can sense that something is being "told," he will not comprehend its meaning. "It is remarkable that in the art of many tribes the world over, ornament that appears to us as purely formal, is associated with meanings, that it is interpreted. Karl von den Steinen found that the geometrical patterns of the Brazilian Indians represented

fish, bats, bees, and other animals, although the triangles and diamonds of which they consist bear no apparent relation to these animal forms."<sup>8</sup> We see, therefore, that the more precise, complicated and, indeed, immediately present certain didactic content becomes, the more limited may become its receptive audience.

We are brought now to the problem of the purely formal and the non-objective in painting. Do such manifestations of attitude and intention exist in fact, or are such terms intended more to exclude from the area of aesthetic consideration possible extremes to the opposite of the artist's intention? We have mentioned Kandinsky in reference to the vision of the child. Here is an artist whose mature work has been termed non-objective, a man who considers the arts to be closely related, and to whom the purity and nonrepresentative nature of music has appealed to such a degree that he has frequently compared his own explorations and expressions in painting to certain freedoms and intentions in the art of music. Kandinsky wrote in 1938, concerning "non-objective" art: "This art creates alongside the real world a new world which has nothing to do externally with reality. It is subordinate internally to cosmic laws."<sup>9</sup> Surely the artist's work after 1910 must

<sup>8</sup> Franz Boas, Primitive Art, p. 88.

<sup>9</sup> XX<sup>em</sup> Siecle (magazine), 1938, (sic.). Underlinings are the author's.

be called at least nonrepresentational, for no longer are the forms or colors of our world utilized in the combinations that lead us to ready symbolic identification with reality. We see no "tree," "sky," or "river," because no longer do form and color work to create them. But investigation of the artist's writing or painting will certainly disclose that by no means does the non-objective intend to negate the possibility of meaning and communication. The common concept of the artist who paints only for himself may have some validity in terms of integrity, but not in terms of ultimate causality of the desire to create. We might argue that, as with the earliest strivings of the child, the artist's basic desire to create relates to himself alone, but since the desire to communicate, and the growth to social living, become strongly present in the adult, the purely non-objective effort becomes nearly extinct. So involved do we become with these later motivations that even unconscious doodlings often take on significant form and content. Kandinsky has said, concerning meaning:

The spectator is too ready to look for a meaning in a picture -- i.e., some outward connection between its various parts. . . . Instead of allowing the inner value of the picture to work, he worries himself in looking for 'closeness to nature', or 'temperament', or 'handling', or 'tonality', or 'perspective', or what not. His eye does not probe the outer expression to arrive at the inner meaning. In a conversation with an interesting person, we endeavor to get at his fundamental ideas and feelings. We do not bother about the words he uses, nor the spelling of those words, . . . nor the movements of his tongue and lips . . . We realize that these things, though interesting

and important, are not the main things of the moment, but that the meaning and idea is what concerns us.<sup>10</sup> Kandinsky then largely rejects one level of "meaning" but insists upon another by stressing the importance of the pure, unique language of painting. In seeking the existence of the didactic in such work we must be prepared to expand our definition of the term from one which would suffice for, shall we say, Holman Hunt's The Awakening Conscience, to comprehend the possibility of "knowledge or information imparted" through a purely visual language -- visual knowledge through visual terms.

Kandinsky, like other painters after him, strove consciously to avoid the external didactic possibility by freeing his form and color from literal associations. In this way he avoided known symbols that might tend to introduce "literary" content and a resulting kind of didacticism, for "the emotions may be stimulated not by the form alone, but also by close associations that exist between the form and the ideas held by the people."<sup>11</sup> By conventional terms Kandinsky's mature art must be considered as one in which the didactic does not exist, and yet we have known his humanity and concern for communication. Here is a painter who has said, "the greatest freedom of all, the freedom of

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<sup>10</sup> Kandinsky, The Art of Spiritual Harmony, p. 35.  
<sup>10</sup> Kandinsky, The Art of Spiritual Harmony, p. 97.

<sup>11</sup> Boaz, Primitive Art, p. 12.

an unfettered art, can never be absolute."<sup>12</sup> We may discover that for Kandinsky the freedom of art can never be absolute because "the artist must have something to communicate, since mastery over form is not the end but, instead, the adapting of form to internal significance."<sup>13</sup>

In this context we might investigate the work of the American, Jackson Pollock, whose "drip" paintings of post World War II have been frequent arenas for some intelligent as well as some hysterical harangues over "meaning". Here is represented action painting, a phenomenon or form that most persons will term expressive but that many will contend to be "decorative" and noncommunicative.

With Pollock we have a painter whose origins lie in straightforward representational painting. "It is not surprising that Pollock, after experiencing the attempt made by his teacher, Thomas Benton, toward heroic regional expression, should have become interested in the works of Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros. . . . The drawings and paintings done during the period of Pollock's interest in Orozco and Siqueiros, however, seem to be studies of their unabashedly dramatic treatment of subject -- it is not art which interested him here, but their attitude toward content,

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<sup>12</sup> Kandinsky, The Art of Spiritual Harmony, p. 35.  
Underlining by the author.

<sup>13</sup> Kandinsky, Concerning the Spiritual in Art, p. 75.

<sup>14</sup> O'Hara, Frank, Jackson Pollock, pp. 14-15.

<sup>15</sup> O'Hara, ib. cit., p. 16.

their convictions."<sup>14</sup> In actuality, many of the contemporary painters who display the most intense interest in the plastic aesthetic have reached this level from a foundation of representationalism. This holds true for Kandinsky, Mondrian, and many others. Such an observation leads us to suggest that there must be in the language of the purely non-objective a full expressive potential for the "meanings" of these artists. Moreover, in the work of Pollock we can see the influence of surrealism which author O'Hara feels "enjoined the duty, along with the liberation, of saying what you mean and meaning what you say, above and beyond any fondness for saying or meaning."<sup>15</sup> It would be wrong to try to discern in such works of Pollock as Number One 1949, or Blue Poles 1953, an explicit didactic intention. To do so would be pure invention. Yet meanings do exist in these works, as experiencing them will emphatically disclose. Although such meanings are inexplicable in actual language, they are plastically tangible and indicate in the conscious or unconscious nature of the artist's creative effort a unity with the basic desire, as we have discussed it, to further human communication and project plastic knowledge and expressive meanings.

An area of didacticism we have mentioned in our discussion, but not defined, is that external and literary

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<sup>14</sup>O'Hara, Frank, Jackson Pollock, pp. 14-15.

<sup>15</sup>O'Hara, op. cit., p. 16.

level which encompasses the most traditional concept evoked by the term didactic. In this sense we mean the didactic that exists in those symbolic forms, seen through "reality," that relate to our lives, customs, mores and traditions, and which can be understood to deal directly with them. In a crucifixion painting, for example, whatever its plastic merits may be, there is a comprehensible story to be experienced by Western Man. Here we have the literature and dogma of the church, and in speaking of such a painting one may frequently find that the literary content may be all that is discussed. Herein lies the important factor: the possibility, in paintings that display the literary didactic level, of paraphrasing a great deal of the content through translating from visual into verbal language. Unfortunately, it seems to be a common pattern for teachers, when introducing the fine arts to a young group, to dwell upon the literary aspects of artworks. In the memory of the author rests some unfortunate "art education" experiences perpetrated upon him through an inept introduction to eighteenth century portraiture. The portrait is, of course, most suitable to one who wishes to discuss a picture without experiencing its visual existence. Through the use of portraits, it is possible for an uncomprehending instructor to completely confound a child's visual curiosity by dealing uncompromisingly with nonvisual aspects of art. Obviously, with the work of artists such as Kandinsky, a similar approach in teaching, except in the



case of sheer fraudulent and speculative madness, would be impossible, but our heritage is rich in works of art whose representational level will allow lengthy investigation into the nonplastic.

Our problem then is to attempt to define and comprehend the relationship of the plastic to the literary. It is a temptation today to reject the work of art which makes a comprehensible social, moral, or other temporal statement, but we must recall that our hypothetical teacher whose lecture on, for example, the Blue Boy, may comprise mere commentary on costume, stance, reading of the sitter's "personality," etc., has not touched upon the whole work. The fact remains that abominable commentary and conclusions may accompany many investigations of representational didactic in painting, but we may not ourselves conclude that this negates the possibility of a harmonious unity between these elements and the plastic.

August Rodin was a man of convictions and quite eloquent when it came to expressing opinions on art. When he was criticized for being too literary in his work, he replied, ". . . If my figures are correct and alive, what have (the critics) to say? And by what right do they desire to forbid my inclusion of certain intentions? Why do they complain if, in most of my work, I offer them ideas, and if I enhance the significance of already eye-pleasing forms?"<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup>Auguste Rodin, L'Art, p. 200. Translated by Abbott Meader.

As with other proclamations upon the visual arts by means of intellectual concept and verbal language, it must be stressed here that an artist's statements are suspect and subject to severe appraisal, for ultimately, as was mentioned above, the visual can be known and understood only in visual terms. Rodin is, however, extremely perceptive in translating his visual art into verbally communicative form. With Kandinsky he shares a belief in the relation of the arts. "All (the arts) express all the sentiments of the human soul as it faces nature. It is only the means of expression which vary."<sup>17</sup> Rodin is determined to reconcile fully, in verbal terms, the plastic with the intellectual, and to embrace as necessary the didactic content which results. In this train of thought he does condemn Delaroche and Delacroix for their two paintings, Enfants d'Edouard and La Barque de Don Juan respectively, for creating works in which a great deal of the subject content can only be understood through a knowledge of the literature of which they represent isolated frozen images, of painting works "which do not, in themselves, represent their own full meaning."<sup>18</sup> Thus the work of art must integrate its literary elements plastically and completely if unity is to hold forth, and if this is accomplished, the didactic level may not be challenged per se. Rodin sums up by stating a rather repetition of what he has in mind, he does so with at

<sup>17</sup>Rodin, op. cit., p. 202.

<sup>18</sup>Rodin, op. cit., p. 206.

engulfing credo, but one which harbors unlimited possibilities for contemplation. "Look at the true masterpieces of art. All of their beauty derives from thought, from that design which their authors have felt to exist in the universe."<sup>19</sup>

It seems possible at this point to return briefly to the art of the African negro sculptor, to reflect upon the fact that with these sculptures, so profoundly influential in our time, we are confronted with works both plastic in the extreme, and equally bound to the literary and the practical. Though we may not comprehend the symbolism of most elements of African work, we can be assured that within the culture the apparent didacticism of this work was great. The ancestor piece, the "fetish," the mask, exist for practical and mystical purposes, but the ultimate worth of a particular sculpture was determined by the relationship of these functions to excellence in carving.

How may we comprehend the diverse immediate intentions of the world's diverse artists? We certainly may not attribute to a Baluba sculptor the didactic intentions of a Rodin, or to either, those of a Mondrian; yet, all three can be shown to be unflaggingly involved with a communication, in some form of meaning. As Richard Thurnwald has stated, "Even when the artist is intent only upon the repetition of what he has in mind, he does so with at

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<sup>19</sup>Rodin, op. cit., p. 219.

least the subconscious purpose of communicating his ideas, of influencing others,"<sup>20</sup> and art philosopher, Wilhelm the Wendt, contends that true art comprises those forms "in which the artistic work expresses some thought or emotion."<sup>21</sup> as in every significant work of art, for the

Most art historians will hold to this view, and it would seem from our discussion that a valid case may be made for such convictions, but further it must be noted that such phrases as "communication of ideas," "expresses some thought or emotion," can be of a misleading nature. Ambiguity may corrupt the honest intention, leading the interested person into fallacious concepts. It seems that the crucial fact which has become evident from our discussion is that we must consider the inclusion of the concept that communication and expression may appear in absolute, plastic terms, that they may emerge through a language completely inimicable to verbal description, and can describe areas that are unknown in any way other than by their own existence. In such a case the didactic will exist only in the most general or abstracted sense, unapproachable itself in terms of equation with living experiences, but certainly an important factor in determining the extent to which the core of creativity will manifest itself. It can be said with conviction that the

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<sup>20</sup>Boas, op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>21</sup>Boas, op. cit., p. 13.

didactic and literary may at times confound the plastic and destroy art, as when they intrude upon and obscure the plastic through external domination; but it must also be held that in some inexplicable way there will be a form of didacticism in every significant work of art, for the basic human need for communication produces it continually within the act of creation.

as a supplement to the creative thesis

three oils, one ink drawing, one ink and crayon drawing.  
No. and Medium

48 x 48

Laden Table

37 1/2 x 32

Landscape

60 x 44 1/2

Hero-Man-Interior

27 1/2 x 19 1/2

Garden Excerpt

21 x 17 1/2

Landscape

which is in the permanent possession of the University of Colorado and recorded with the Department of Fine Arts.

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Date

12 August 1960

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree M.F.A. in Creative Arts.

C. Abbott Meader

NAME

has submitted this written thesis  
as a supplement to the creative thesis

three oils, one ink drawing, one ink and crayon drawing.

No. and Medium

48 x 48

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