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University of Colorado at Boulder



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THESIS STATEMENT

By

Robin Pittendrigh

A.B., Barnard College of Columbia University, 1966

A thesis submitted to the faculty of the Graduate
School of the University of Colorado in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

Department of Fine Arts, Creative Art

1973

This Thesis for the Master of Fine Arts Degree by

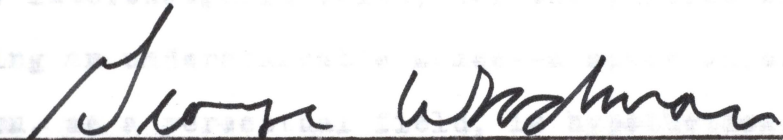
Robin Pittendrigh

has been approved for the

Department of

Fine Arts

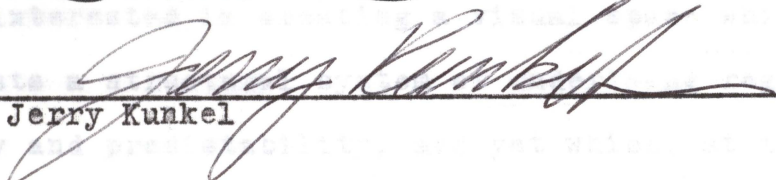
by



George Weedman



James Johnson



Jerry Kunkel

Date _____

Lynn Wolfe, Chairman

My art is concerned with formalist issues, demonstrating as it does perceptual relationships and contradictions within a context of color, repeating shape, grid-like structure, and the alternate reinforcement of flat surface versus depiction of illusionistic space.

I conceive of space, whether real or pictorial, as something that is understandable only by virtue of the structure it exhibits, or by the structure which defines it. With respect to my painting, I conceive of color, shape, and surface (flat or pictorial) as structural elements, potentially interchangeable units, for the purpose of creating an understandable space--a space which, in turn, as a perceptual field, is hypothetically capable of infinite multiplicity, configuration, and re-configuration. Stated somewhat differently, I am interested in creating a visual space which suggests a structural system of underlying regularity and predictability, and yet which, at the same time, implies its own model for change or permutation.

My paintings depict what I call understandable spaces, then, with color and shape; and the problem

of making them understandable to perception in particular and varied ways is first and predominantly an analytical and intellectual process of great excitement for me. The aspect of multiplicity of perceptual readings within the formal system of a given painting (while, to be sure, it can no longer offer infinite possibilities once the painting is completed) is an important feature to me. In contrast to the limited experience of extreme reductivist art, I intend that the experience require time, and also that the painting allow for repeated and varied readings by virtue of its contradictions and complexities.

My latest painting is large, being twenty feet long, because--for one--a lot of surface was needed in order to accommodate the number of colors I intended to use. The colors develop fairly closely stepped progressions, repeating themselves within three intervals of the same length, but in reversing order and yet with a progressive linear change in one direction with respect to saturation and value. This movement across the surface from reds to yellows is fairly evenly punctuated by the addition of the contrasting colors of the modelled shapes.

Such a long progression allowed me to show not only more colors for the sheer sake of color, but at the same time more color juxtapositions,

which serve to establish more different kinds of pictorial relationships: different sorts of figure-ground reversals, different readings of the relative location of shapes within optical space, and/or conflicting readings of the location of surface.

The size of the painting served also to enhance the sense of potentially infinite expansion, suggested by the self-repeating progressions of shape and color. It further allowed the experience of color, which occupies a surface extending beyond peripheral vision, to be larger than life, comparatively free from distraction or interruption and, hence, to be more total and more all-involving for the spectator.

Choices and decisions made during the process of painting, as said, are first and predominantly intellectual ones, relating to problems of how to give structure to space in particular ways; yet the choices finally made (which particular colors, and which particular bits of pictorial space to present) are certainly not the only intellectually possible ones with respect to my formal concerns. Other ones would often serve equally in the general matter of establishing my structured spaces. In some measure--which I do not ever seem to care about calculation precisely--these choices also

reflect the affective or subjective influences of color and space on me. For me the subjective experience of color and space, as opposed to an exclusively rationally quantifying perception of them, is inevitable. When I make a painting I cannot wholly predict it (its character), but I look forward to it.

The frantic activity of highly intense and contrasting color, the softness and quiet of even grays; a sense of density and compactness in pictorial space, or the illusion of penetrable depth and openness--qualities such as these have affective associations for me that are ultimately irrepressible, no matter how obsessively preoccupied I may become with my analytical perceptions during the informing process.

The problem of talking about the affective experience of non-objective art is a difficult one, because the experience is so abstract and impossible to name, and also because it is so relative and variable--depending on whatever contexts the spectator brings to it. Further, I believe that the full experience of perceptual phenomena, such as offered by non-objective painting, consists in both a rational, analytical perception of visual data and an affective response to them, and that the two are so closely bound

together as to be virtually disassociable aspects of the experience.

Attempts to make final distinctions between intellect and feeling with respect to formalist art seem to me not only difficult but also dangerous, since they lead, on the one hand, to the attitude that it is not the proper and serious business of analytical, relatively quantifiable art to concern itself with "feeling", or, on the other hand, to the attitude that such art is coldly and categorically incapable of it--neither of which attitude I, necessarily, subscribe to. In general, I tend to consider it rather stingy and ascetic of these "extreme" formalists who find it necessary to maintain such strict dichotomies between knowledge and emotion, perception and feeling, the intellect and the senses. Similarly, I find it rather narrow and insensitive of those detractors of formalism who do the same thing.

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

Robin Pittendrigh

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

#1 Painting

#2 Detail

Acrylic Painting
Number and Medium

#3 Detail

#4 Detail

6'x20'
Size

Untitled
Title

#5 Detail

slides of which are in the permanent possession of
the University of Colorado and recorded with the
Department of Fine Arts

#7 Painting

#8 Painting

Approved by

Chairman of Committee


Co-Chairman of Committee

Committee Member

Chairman, Fine Arts Department

Number of slides and medium

<u>#1 Painting</u>	<u>6'x 20'</u>	<u>Untitled</u> <u>(Acrylic)</u>
<u>#2 Detail</u>	<u>6'x 6'8" panel</u>	<u>"</u>
<u>#3 Detail</u>	<u>6'x 6'8" panel</u>	<u>"</u>
<u>#4 Detail</u>	<u>6'x 6'8" panel</u>	<u>"</u>
<u>#5 Detail</u>	<u>6'x 20'</u>	<u>"</u>
<u>#6 Detail</u>	<u>6'x 20'</u>	<u>"</u>
<u>#7 Painting</u>	<u>4'x 6'8"</u>	<u>Untitled</u>
<u>#8 Painting</u>	<u>6'8"x 6'8"</u>	<u>Untitled</u>

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