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IMAGES OF FLOWERS

By

Michael Gene Whiteley

B.F.A., University of Nebraska, 1983

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

1987

This Thesis for the Master of Fine Arts Degree by

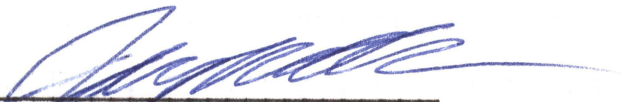
Michael Gene Whiteley

has been approved for the

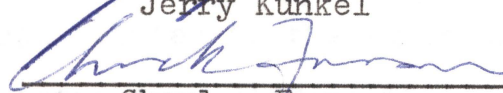
Department of

Fine Arts

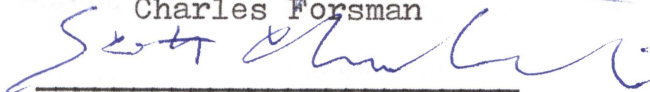
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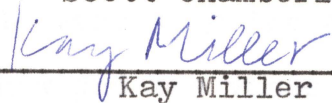
Jerry Kunkel



Charles Forsman



Scott Chamberlin



Kay Miller

Date 12/11/87

For the past two years, I have been making pictures of flowers. It is my intent to complicate the representational qualities of flowers in this work by juxtaposing them against and combining them with the more abstract properties of picture making. This causes the subject matter of flowers to become somewhat elusive in relation to one's perception when viewing the work. This complication of our perception of the subject matter is a result of three concepts dealing with representation--reality, illusion, and abstraction. These concepts and the way they relate and interact with each other cause different levels of perception to exist simultaneously within this body of work. There are also three distinct physical groups of work in this show; drawings, paintings, and ceramics. Each of these groups relates to the concepts of reality, illusion, and abstraction differently and causes even further complications of the images of flowers.

The ceramic vases are the most concrete of all the work in this show and the vases have the closest relationship to flowers based on reality. Because of the fact that the vases appear as real functional objects, we assign certain meanings to them which correspond to all functional vases. The most obvious meaning within

the context of this show is that vases are used as containers for flowers. Through this meaning the vases and subject matter are connected together. This relationship is one that is derived from meanings based on real flowers and vases, not one based on images or artistic ideas of representation.

The drawings and paintings are also related to the flowers through reality. Both the drawings and the paintings appear to be pictures; and, in our society pictures, like flowers, are sometimes used as decoration. A relationship is then established between the pictures and flowers because of this similar functional value. This relationship is enhanced further by the fact that there are decorative elements within the drawings and paintings (like polka dots and other patterns). Although these elements are not physically separated from the image or illusionistic aspects of the art work, they are recognizable as something real (the polka dots read the same as polka dots on real objects--not as illusions of real polka dots). The decorative nature of these elements and the fact that they appear real rather than illusionistic further connects the drawings and the paintings to the decorative properties of flowers.

The fact that the drawings and paintings appear as pictures also makes their relationship to real flowers somewhat distanced. In our society we do not usually

see pictures as only decoration but rather as a combination of the context as well as the images contained within the picture. This makes it difficult to see the picture as only an object and, hence, becomes an obstacle between our perception of the reality of the picture. This in turn tends to separate our perception of the connection between flowers and the pictures.

The difference in these reality based relationships between the drawings, paintings, vases, and flowers is what causes different levels of representation to exist in the work. When one views the ceramic vases one sees images of flowers based on relationships that exist between vases and flowers. When one then looks at the drawings or paintings, one sees different images. This is because the relationships between the subject matter and the art work have changed. Since we know what the subject matter (it remains constant) of the show is, and these changes between image and art work that we perceive causes one to feel that one's perspective on the subject matter has changed. It is like we see the same subject but it is moving around trying to avoid our perception and each time placing itself on a new level.

Eventhough the vases are the most concrete, they also have illusionistic connections to the subject matter. The vases are very large (much larger than would be expected to hold flowers). The vases are also painted in much the same manner as the paintings. Both the

size and the paint quality tend to abstract the realness of the vases, making it easier to see them as art. One then assumes that, as art, the vases must derive meaning not from functional qualities but from relationships to reality. One also can see images of vases in the drawings and paintings. The vases, appearing more art-like and also seeing pictures of vases helps one to perceive the vases themselves as pictures of vases. If one sees the vases as pictures, then within the context of the subject matter of this show, one can also see the vases as abstracted pictures of flowers.

Illusion, in this work, further complicates our perception of flowers. Illusion, on one hand, makes it easier to perceive a representational connection to reality; but, at the same time on another level obstructs our perception of reality. When one looks at the paintings one sometimes sees illusionistic representations of flowers. Othertimes, the paintings just appear as paintings (or painted objects). This perception changes from painting to painting as well as from one part of a painting to another. When the painting, or a part of a painting, is more illusionistic it appears like a picture and we see the image of a flower. But, when the painting is less illusionistic, it reads more object-like. On one level illusion makes our connection to reality (and the subject matter) much closer and easier to perceive. Illusion, at the same time makes the reality of the painting less available to our perception.

In the drawings one can see evidence that illusion does not always connect directly with reality; but, rather illusion sometimes connects to other illusions of reality. Some representational images which one can see in the drawings look like children's drawings of flowers or patterns of flowers that might be seen on wallpaper. Because of the context of this show (an MFA show in an art gallery) one can assume that these drawings are not real children's drawings. One can also see that it is not real wallpaper. One then must assume that these are illusions--illusions to children's art and floral wallpaper, not real flowers.

With the addition of illusion to this work there is a whole new set of relationships that complicate our perception of the subject matter by adding more levels of representation. One sees in the drawings that illusion shows us not pictures of flowers but pictures of pictures of flowers. Each different picture creates a different perspective from which one can see the overall image of flowers. The images of flowers that one sees in the paintings is obstructed by different levels of illusion. The vases when seen illusionistically can become pictures of flowers.

Abstraction within this body of work shifts our perception of flowers from one context to another. In the case of the vases, one saw how by abstracting the size and the surface qualities, the vases are able to

function as pictures rather than real objects. With the paintings, abstraction makes them appear less like pictures and more like objects. In both of these cases, abstraction has shifted how one perceives the flower. In the case of the vases, ones perception shifts from a real, functional relationship to an illusionistic representation of a flower. In the paintings, ones perception is shifted from an illusionistic representation to an artistic representation.

The shift to artistic representation can be seen more clearly in the drawings. Here, one sees images of flowers--both representational and abstracted. The overall drawing appears to still be a picture because the abstraction does not cover up the illusionistic qualities but exists along side them. Because we are looking at a picture, one assumes that the abstract parts of the drawing are representational, but being abstract one can not see what they represent in reality. So, from the context, one sees them as representing art. Since one knows that this work is art and also that it is art about flowers; and, that one can not tell the abstract parts are flowers one then assumes that they must be art. This does not mean that the abstraction parts make this work art; but, that the abstraction functions as a reference for art within the context of this show.

By referencing art, abstraction shows one that

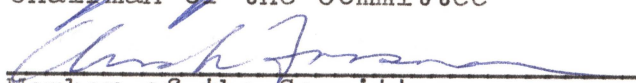
this work is art about art and also causes a level of humor to exist in the work. By making art a part of the subject matter, one sees art the same as one sees the images of flowers within this work. Childlike flowers, wallpaper flowers, and things such as polka dots are very light hearted in nature; whereas, our assumptions of high art are very serious. Within the work one sees these two types of images side by side causing a tension that is humorous.

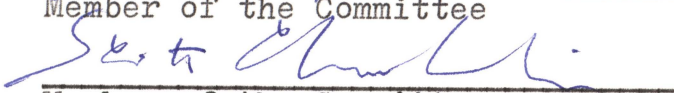
Throughout this body of work the concepts of reality, illusion, and abstraction manipulate our perceptions of the subject matter until we begin to question what the image of a flower is. The relationships between these three concepts and the subject matter of flowers is a continuously changed and altered within the work. This creates many levels from which one can perceive the subject matter and confuses one as to which level is the right level. These levels are also often related to one another by an inverse relationship (as something becomes more abstract it also becomes less illusionistic etc...). This makes the subject matter appear to be always changing and more elusive to one single perception. The presence of art is also combined within the structure of the work, further detracting us from the images of flowers. All this leads one to questionable feelings about the image that we are seeing.

In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree Master of Fine Arts
Michael Gene Whiteley
has submitted this written thesis
as a supplement to the creative thesis
and nine slides
which are in the permanent possession of the
University of Colorado and recorded with the
Department of Fine Arts

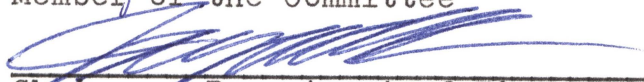
Approved by


Chairman of the Committee


Member of the Committee


Member of the Committee

Kay Miller
Member of the Committee


Chairman, Department of Fine Arts

Number of Slides and Medium

Mixed Media/Paper	42" x 30"	Flower
Mixed Media/Paper	42" x 30"	Flower
Mixed Media/Paper	42" x 30"	Flower
Acrylic/Clay	69" x 14"	Flower Vase
Acrylic/Clay	68" x 17"	Flower Vase
Acrylic/Clay	63" x 22"	Flower Vase
Acrylic/Wood	72" x 72"	Flower
Acrylic/Wood	72" x 72"	Flower
Acrylic/Wood	76" x 47"	Flower

