

PROCESS ART

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I would like to acknowledge my indebtedness to my advisor,
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Abstract

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The intent of this paper is to serve as a commentary on my paintings. The specific area of concern here is 'process art,' and the pages that follow are intended to aid the reader in understanding my paintings as well as to explain the reasons why certain facets of the work have remained the same and some others have changed.

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PART ONE: PROCESS ART

As an artist I am interested in the inherent beauty of the materials used in making my paintings. I am interested in the physical surface, the manipulation of the medium in creating it, and the evidence of the process by which it came into being. The work presents itself as an honest statement of the facts of its existence. In that sense it is quite literally an object. It is made of paint which I have explored as a medium. Whatever systematic means I have used to manipulate the paint are self-evident as a process of creating the work. I have accepted the flatness of the surface as a given fact and put paint on it in a variety of ways in an effort to create an interesting visual experience for the viewer. For me, paint is paint, and can be interesting as such, independent of representation, if I have creatively handled it in making the object. The painting is seen not as a picture of something else represented by my use of the medium, but experienced as an object that is limited to its own physical properties presented directly. While this emphasis on the material qualities may suggest a limited experience of the work initially, the intent is quite different. What is done away with is the limitation of representation of any kind thus allowing a

freedom of interpretation on many levels of experience. The viewers are free to make whatever associations the work suggests to them in light of their own experiences. The evocations elicited on the part of the viewers are as intrinsic to the work as the reality of the surface. I have no desire to limit the range of the viewers' interpretation by some obvious reference or subject matter, but rather to allow for responses to have free rein. Process Art, by my definition is a way of working in which the means becomes the end: that is the object is reductive and self-referring in form. The artist has chosen to work in a manner that should be fascinating to the viewers in and of itself because it calls on their imaginations and experiences for interpretation

The experience of process art is provocative because in the creation of the object there is a transformation of the materials from their raw state into a new order of experience. It is a fact that Jackson Pollock dripped paint to express himself as an artist, yet through that process the experience provided the viewer may be much more metaphysical than just witnessing paint splashed on the physical surface. The material and methods used in the making of the painting have created an interesting visual phenomenon. The painting is about the imagination and creativity used by the artist in making it, and it requires an active participation of the viewer to experience its content.

This particular tradition of the process as art may be said to have begun when we see the artist becoming "painterly," i.e., emphasizing the brushwork in making an image--and has continued to the present day in an evolution of refreshing interpretations. The works of Rubens, Daumier, Turner, Monet, Cezanne, Van Gogh, Seurat, Picasso, Kandinsky, Pollock, de Kooning, Dubuffet and Johns are of particular interest to me because of the manner in which each has elaborated on the surface in articulating the visual experience of painting. I find that I am fascinated by the honesty of the statement as a painted image and that any illusions about space, light, and energy are a consequence of the artists' creative dialogue with me through the medium. They each have had a profound influence on my thinking about the importance of the medium in providing the visual experience of the painting.

The tradition of emphasizing the art-making process in making abstract paintings has continued to grow in the last twenty years, and many artists, inspired by the abstract expressionists who led the way, have explored very personal methods to achieve their aesthetic ends. The ingenuity of these artists is impressive to the degree that they have made powerful images through their virtuosity, and the range of possibilities for making art and providing diverse visual experiences which their work suggests.

I find another tradition in modern art equally stimulating in terms of both its surface richness and the process, and that is the work done in the medium of collage. The idea of taking real material, something which has previously served some other purpose, and using it to construct a surface is very intriguing to me. That the materials are somehow transformed by their context in a work of art is a very challenging experience. My interest in the concept of process art grew out of my own investigations in collage. As I became involved with the medium, I found that in taking items out of context and juxtaposing them on a flat surface I created objects that insisted on the viewer's becoming more sensitive to the look and feel of "things." The objects demanded attention and scrutiny by the very fact of existing in a work of art. I made art from old pieces of wood, burlap sacks, cardboard, roofing material, insulation, and builder's cement. Making a collage was an act of self-discovery. The interest I had in the inherent qualities of all things caused me to be more open to the experience of nature and to have a searching attitude towards its potential as source material for my art.

From these experiments with collage my own work as an artist has continued to be concerned with extending the possibilities of the medium in making a statement that exploits the intrinsically beautiful properties of the

materials. I respect the efforts of several contemporary artists in whose work I sense the same interest in the potential of materials for dramatic painterly effects. I have been impressed by the ingenuity and the creativity of these artists in making paintings which are at once both abstract and real in form. Their work is quite literal in nature and I respond to their emphasis on the reality of the materials and methods with which they work.

Currently my work can be related to certain American artists: the color-field painters Frankenthaler, Louis, Bannard, Johns, Olitski, Christiansen, et al. Before I can discuss their work however, it is necessary to mention those four individuals who, of all the artists I respect, were most important to my development as an artist in terms of their influence on my attitudes and ideas about art. Antonio Tapies of Spain, Alberto Burri of Italy, Karl Dahmen of Germany, and Jackson Pollock of the United States are those artists who are most important to me because of their openness to experience, their willingness to take risks and their use of unconventional materials and techniques. It is appropriate that I first discuss the works of these four men in my thesis because the insights I have gained from my interest in their work will provide the viewer with a background for better understanding the attitude about art expressed in my work.

Tapiès, Burri and Dahmen are products of different cultures who have worked independently of one another in separate countries. They have a kinship in that each artist has his roots in the past. There are in their works undeniable links to chiaroscuro painting (in their use of light), to Renaissance architecture (in their classical sense of ordering), the concepts of dadism (in their use of detritus), to cubist composition, and to the art of Mondrian, Cézanne, Mirò, Schwitters, and Dubuffet, as well as to the concern with making art as an object. Each of these men has worked in a unique environment synthesizing his life's experiences.

In Germany, Karl Dahmen has been one of the pioneers of 'art informel.' His works of the 1950's were highly individualistic abstractions of the local landscape and town which echoed the formal structuring of cubism. The incredibly rich surfaces of his townscapes were a dense network of super-imposed forms and lines. The means became the ends to such a degree that the composition was independent and free of the original subject and his concern was with the free play of the medium. Color was dominant, bright red and green together with somber earth tones, and imposed itself independently as color-form. Clefts and ravines, and viscous looking relief surfaces were woven across the canvas to suggest the 'earth-crust' of the land formations. The effect was a visceral, earthy, life-giving reality.

In the process of his 'materiel painting' (sometimes referred to as 'matter painting' in Europe), Dahmen used unrelated, non-traditional material to create an object which went beyond the traditional bounds of plasticity in painting. In the fusion of the materials with the support he elicited a new reality, one that approximated forms found in nature. His references to crusty earth, old walls, decayed bark, lava and other such textured surfaces in these works had inherent patterns which accentuated the color structure and the play of light on its surfaces. This play of light evoked images of quartz and rocks whose structure and color interpenetrated one another. The work never expressed anything figurative. The content resulted from relating material.¹

Dahmen's most recent works exhibit a sophisticated, highly ordered surface. The compositions have become geometric, refined, relational, articulated and highly disciplined. Nature is still the one major source from which he draws. Though his vision has changed over the years, it is interesting to note that "here is a painter that rarely works with a brush. His aesthetic sense and instinct create a work that is painterly in concept and in which

¹ Fleming, Hanns, T. "K. F. Dahmen Painter of Terrestrial Formations." Studio International Mag., Aug. 1965, Vol. 170: No. 868, 46-51.

nothing is intellectually contrived."² He is an experimenter. The Dahmen of today is no longer a Rhinelander, but a European. As his travels and experience have broadened, so have his works. His constant growth in the use of materials, though entirely independent, in my opinion make him a kinsman in spirit of Burri and Tapiès, Dubuffet and other 'matter painters."

Alberto Burri, a surgeon by training, turned to art during World War II. He was sent to a prisoner of war camp in Texas for one year in 1944. The only material he had available was burlap. By piercing and sawing, using his skill as a surgeon, he created intense, visceral, expressionistic works that were the testament of a man who, with great sensitivity, created art from his having experienced the horrors of war at first hand. This mode of working served as an outlet for his anxieties. The war pictures symbolize "the wounds of the world" and men's complete vulnerability.³ Convinced of the futility of academic conventions, the year in a POW camp gave Burri the time, the opportunity and the latitude to make very original art. Later in Rome (1945) he became a member of

² Gallerie Schottenring/Neutorgasse, "Dahmen, Montage und Objektbilder," Erste Österreichische, Spar/Casse, 1973.

³ Read, Herbert, "Burri," London: Hanover Gallery, 1960.

the "Origine" group which also included the artist Capagrossi. This group issued a "Manifesto Speciale" concerning itself with the reduction of color to its simplest expressive function. This reflected a basic concern with light as a major factor in painting. Burri's use of raw material would seem to be incompatible with painting, yet he transforms his materials into beautiful, moving objects of great sensibility and taste which relate to Picasso's and Schwitter's collages, as well as to cubist and dadaist mixed media montages. In his burlap paintings scraps of sacking form a desolate field, diverse fragments are fastened together with thread and arranged into an unstable, melancholy geometry. Red trickles through the surface like blood from a wound, holes in the sacking expose a ground color, red or glowing dark ("Sacco B"), as if something concealed was peering through the surface. One intuits a sensitive kind of ordering in the manipulation of positive and negative shapes in concert with color modulations. The fragile sacking is drawn taut with fragile threads fastened to the framing edges as though they were constantly trying to conceal some great urgently pressing field beneath. The dark formless space, its vacant nothingness, and the haunting scraps explain, as one writer said, the metaphysical anguish of contemporary man, the existential man of 1944.⁴

⁴ Haftmann, Werner, Painting in the 20th Century. New York: Praeger Pub., 1966. 362.

The evocative power of dead materials, so strong in themselves, encompass a mode of expression equal to the emotional power inherent in paint. Through a long, compulsive process the image of blood soaked bandages rose up within Burri as a universal metaphor for the world's wounds and man's terror of the void.⁵ Burri has explored and experimented with many materials in his work over the years and though he is now using plastic, tin and welded materials riveted together to form geometrical patterns in separate fields, his theme remains the threat and terror of underlying space.

Although Burri's intent is to justify the existential idea of metaphysical anguish, the reality is that of good taste and effortless sensuality. Upon further contemplation, the work turns into a cerebral encounter. An inherent order forms the framework that forces the viewer to think about the work and about himself in terms of the work.⁶ Acknowledgment of a constant interplay between the artist and the collage materializes.

Antonio Tapies, after deciding to become an artist, went to Paris on a scholarship for ten months where he became a member of the "School of Paris" painters and painted

⁵Haftmann, Werner, 331.

⁶Gendel, Milton, "Burri makes a Picture," Art News Mag., Dec. 1954, Vol. 53: No. 8, 28-31, 67-69.

in what is referred to as the International style.⁷ He is considered a dramatic expressionist and feels that "the painter should make his materials speak, inscribing the traces of his life"⁸ This attitude is very apt for Tapiès' work. His influences include Mirò, Klee and Dubuffet. Fused with these artists' influences are such environmental factors as diverse as the political ideas of Marx, an atheistic father, a religious mother, avant-garde poetry, German music (Wagner), mysticism, existentialism (Sarte), austerity and civil war. These diverse realities in his experience combine to direct his work toward reminding man of what he really is [sic].⁹

Tapiès used materials that were an externalized reality for the imagery of his mind. In his work of the 1950's he used semi-sculptural techniques showing the influence of Dubuffet, and imparting the feeling of the barren and encrusted earth of Spain. The physicality of the work created an "image in time rather than of space."¹⁰ The impact of Tapiès' work resulted from his using pigment in

⁷ Alloway, Lawrence, "Tapiès." New York: SRGM, 1962.

⁸ Huyge, Richard (Ed.) "Tapiès." Larousse Encyclopedia of Modern Art. 1965. 355.

⁹ Phaidon Dictionary of 20th Century Art. "Tapiès." London and N.Y.: 1973. 380.

¹⁰ Alloway, Lawrence,

combination with marble dust, sand, resin or plaster of paris to create a highly dense, encrusted surface that was incised, modelled, and scarred in such a way that the work suggested old walls, graffiti, dried earth, raked sand or stratified rock. The result was an intense surface over-laying unknown mysteries below. No concession was made to beauty. Instead, his painting was unaccommodating, arid, desolate and possessed with a monumentality. His works had an anonymous reality leaving one free to discover the poetry and mystery of his ideas. "These grayish paintings of varying textures create a feeling of space, awe, distance and mystery. A sense of solitude, of silence, yet tenderness, elegance and hope pervade his canvases."¹¹

The canvases of the late 1960's contained highly specific erotic references. He seems to have come full circle in that he used paint as paint, and sex as a point of departure much as he did in his surrealist work in the 1940's. The work was more explicit now and the material of collage broadened. We find him using plastic, straw, rope and all the detritus of the streets. He did not transform his material as Dahmen had but incorporated it into his work in its original state. The work reflected Tapiès' view of present day Spain without being politically

¹¹ Evans, Dan, "Tapiès," New York: Martha Jackson Gallery, 1967.

judgmental. Our response is not to his "Spanishness" but to a universal quality of time made real for us.

Viewing the work of Dahmen, Burri, and Tapiès is a very emotional experience for me. I have a strong gut reaction to the tactile quality of the surfaces of their work. I was aware of their work long before my own involvement with collage and I am certain that their particular formal concerns had little to do with the issues with which I chose to deal. Through my own experience with the medium, however, my interest and appreciation for the beauty inherent in their work was enriched. I also feel that this affinity with their work increased my own sensitivity to the potential of raw materials to be expressive of time, stillness, and order in visually fascinating ways.

I was attracted to the work of Jackson Pollock for different reasons. Not unlike his European contemporaries Pollock lived in a world turned topsy-turvy by depression, war, and changing value systems. Pollock was tied to the "materiel" painters by his willingness to experiment with materials, to take risks and to use unconventional, anti-traditional non-art means. While he dealt with process and materiality, ideas shared with the European artists, he did so in a far more emotionally charged way.

Early in his career, Pollock was influenced by Thomas Hart Benton in the late 1920's and early 1930's at the Art

Student's League in New York City. Then, while working on the WPA Federal Art Project (1935-1942) he became exposed to and worked with Orozco and Siqueros, the Mexican mural painters whose large scaled works may have had some influence on the vast scale later adopted by Pollock. Picasso (Cubism) and Surrealism became ideas that Pollock chose to deal with in his working through to his own personal imagery. The automatism of the surrealists served as a point of departure in his use of endless linear rhythmical cadences all over his canvases. The iconography of surrealism also had its impact on his thinking in the late 1930's and early 1940's. Pollock produced motifs based on mythology. These works all have a primeval character that is set in a rigid formal structure.¹² The freedom we sense in the dynamic process, iconography, and expressive surface of his work 'is' our awareness of his having acted out his emotional state while in the process of actually making a painting.

When I am "in" the painting I am not aware of what I am doing. It is only after a sort of 'get acquainted' period that I see what I have been about. I have no fears about making changes, destroying the image, etc. because the painting has a life of its own. I try to let it come through.¹³

¹² Mendelowitz, Daniel M. "A History of American Art." New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc. 1970. 440-441.

¹³ Lucie-Smith, Edward. "Late Modern: The Visual Arts Since 1945." New York: Oxford Press, 1975. 33-34.

In the same vein, "Both by temperament and by virtue of the theories he professed--themselves largely the product of his temperament--Pollock was an intensely subjective artist. For him his inner reality was the only reality."¹⁴ The late critic Harold Rosenberg, in referring to the abstract expressionist phenomenon, describes it as being basically a religious movement--a movement having no commandments--wherein the gestures of a Pollock symbolized a liberation from political, moral, and aesthetic values of the time. In the opinion of Edward Lucie-Smith, Pollock's bodily involvement was indicative of his dissociation and animosity toward life as he saw it at that particular time. Rosenberg goes on to say that in the eyes of poet Frank O'hara, Pollock was tormented with self-doubt and plagued by anxiety! His early paintings attest to the fact that he was a man at war with himself and his world.¹⁵

In the early forties Jackson Pollock worked through a unique iconographic imagery. He performed a kind of personal exorcism in his paintings, briefly dealing with surrealist means and allegorical themes which he then scrapped. Subject matter seemed inappropriate as a device

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 36.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 36.

for expressing himself. His work became increasingly automatic and direct in dealing with his feelings. He was intent on his art expressing his existence. When Hans Hofmann, after seeing his work, advised Pollock to return to nature, Pollock responded, "I am nature." In expressing himself Pollock's process became increasingly self-evident, an act of will to charge the paint itself with evidence of his own psychic awareness. His personal spirit activates the surfaces of his work. In his "Lavender Mist" and "Autumn Rhythm," both painted in 1949-50, we see that his deep involvement in the work and dedication to the process of painting create an expansive cosmos which we might interpret as space. We experience the energy which created the work. Pollock was unflinching in revealing his innermost self. His emphasis on the creative act as art, an organically based concept of creation, was Pollock's power. When viewed in the context of nature, his art becomes its equivalent, eventually a symbolic act.¹⁶

The paintings were the result of Pollock's sense of alienation combined with his interest in automatism in the surrealist work of such men as Breton, Matta, Dali, Masson, and Tanguy. Pollock's canvases, while very personal for him, relate on some level of consciousness to each viewer and as such become visually symbolic paintings of a personal

¹⁶ O'Doherty, Brian. "American Masters." New York: Random House. 83-111.

nature for each person in his or her own way. For Pollock these processed abstractions were his truths. "Pollock is important because he succeeded in holding so many opposites together and because he was willing to risk so much of himself."¹⁷ It is a matter of fact that Pollock changed the history of easel painting when he laid unsized canvas on the floor and started dripping paint so that it formed tangled linear webs. His use of enamel and aluminum paint, with objects often embedded in it, shows his involvement "in" the work as he moved around it, and was a recording of his emotional moods and aesthetic decisions during the process of creating the painting.¹⁸

I am particularly interested in Pollock's manner of working directly on the painting and the problems involved in placing the canvas on the floor. Working flat, from four sides, I also feel free to build surfaces in any media that suits my purpose. I find that the involvement in the work, responding immediately to the painting and making decisions during the process is exciting and demanding work. I am free to respond to the surface without worrying about issues which might arise if the painting were in a vertical relationship to me. So it is to Pollock that I am indebted for the ideas concerning process and technical procedures I have chosen to use in making my paintings.

¹⁷ O'Doherty, Brian. pp. 83-111.

¹⁸ Lucie-Smith, Edward. pp. 32-36.

Art which emphasizes the process has continued as an important concern to this day and Pollock has been significant as an influence and inspiration to the succeeding generations of artists who have chosen to make art in this manner. Helen Frankenthaler is the heir and progenitor of what has become known as color-field painting. From Pollock she adopted the horizontal method of working as well as the pouring on of paint, using the motions of her arms and body as she manipulated the flowing paint. Using raw unsized canvas, as Pollock had done before her, became an overriding factor in the color-field exploration of her idea. By the mid 1950's Frankenthaler opened up her painting to include more color, using a number of web-like lines as a grid-like structure, inserted patches of solid hues in the areas between the lines. At the same time, by allowing the pigments to stain the canvas directly, she created a continual surface alignment which maintained the picture plane as a two-dimensional surface. This was quite different from Pollock's work because of his thick-pigment applications on the surface requiring the use of a more repetitive all-over dosage to accomplish.¹⁹ His paint is built up on the surface whereas Frankenthaler's was in it. Frankenthaler was creating lyrical works which

¹⁹ Carmean, E. A. Jr., "The Great Decade of American Abstraction; Modern Art 1960-1970." Houston: MFA, 1974, 19.

were emotionally based, soft and open. Her compositions show formal considerations based on a thorough knowledge and understanding of cubism. Because of developments in her own style, however, and following Pollock's lead, she abandoned cubist methods by 1952.²⁰

Morris Louis visited Frankenthaler's studio in 1954. Louis had been concerned with problems involving space and color prior to this visit. He had used Pollock's linear webs of paint as a point of departure for his own ideas. Seeing Frankenthaler's work open^{ed} up new ways of thinking about surface and illusionistic space for him. His new concept of the plane as a flat surface coupled with the catalyst of Frankenthaler's open color work were what he needed to create his series of paintings called "Veils." A major difference in Louis' work method was that he stapled his canvas to a vertical scaffolding with canvas folded over a top horizontal bar.²¹ He poured acrylic paint down the undulating surface of the canvas, directing its flow. His exact method is a matter of conjecture. All brush marks or linear references were absent. Wash after wash of thin acrylic were poured and fused under controlled conditions

²⁰ Ashton, Dore, "Helen Frankenthaler," Studio International Mag., Aug. 1965, vol. 170: no. 868, 52-55.

²¹ Carmean, E. A. Jr. "Morris Louis and the Modern Tradition: VI: Principles of Abstraction," Arts Mag., Dec. 1976, vol. 51: no. 4, 116-119.

in which saturation of the weave of the canvas created a completely fused and integrated surface. The surface colors and evanescent hues have a sense of mystery contained within their interior lighting that shares a kinship with Picasso and Braque in complexity and richness.²²

Morris painted a "floral" series involving radiating spokes of color, an "Unfurled" series in which huge, empty central areas are contained by diagonal rivulets of color at the edges. These color passages come close to drawing.²³ His "Stripes" series in the early 1960's treat pictorial elements linearly in a directly frontal manner. Placing color in a limited area served to isolate and increase the power of each color. A painterly handling of color would have been visually more complex but would have diminished its power as color. This stain technique by virtue of its being non-painterly allowed for a color surface that was identified with the weave of the fabric, a fact that emphasized the role of color.²⁴ Pollock's art contained within it attitudes and methods which served as seminal ideas for Frankenthaler and later, for Louis.

Walter Darby Bannard is one of the best known process painters working today. Originally, he used geometrically

²² Carmean, E. A. Jr. "The Great Decade of American Abstraction; Modern Art 1960-1970" Houston: MFA, 1974, 19.

²³ Lucie-Smith, Edward. pp. 32-36.

²⁴ Carmean, E. A. Jr., "The Great Decade of American Abstraction; Modern Art 1960-1970" Houston: MFA, 1974, 1--22

based shapes in his paintings done in light hues. Unlike Louis he has no concern for using unpainted areas that count as color compositionally. He uses magna medium, a kind of gel-like plastic liquid that allows bright colored pigments to surface from underneath forming irregular ridges. The whole surface has paint applied in wide, vertical sweeps. Unlike Louis or Frankenthaler, he mixes media to include "decorator" colors such as bright blue and gold, alkyd resins and aquatic gel. He has stated unequivocally that "color or colored paint has always been my interest; I have always 'felt' with color and paint while painting, rather than drawing, or form" His work continues to show that commitment to surface and the literalness of paint. His colors have changed since 1973 and so have the expressive qualities of his surfaces. Depth is implied by the ridges but it is in no sense pictorial depth, rather an obvious layering of colors.²⁵

Color and surface are so important to process art that I feel the need to include a few of the other painters who have characteristics in their work with which I can identify in one way or another--either in their use of tactile, painterly, or expressionistic devices. To flesh out a more complete picture it is important to mention

²⁵ Goodman, Judy., "Walter Darby Bannard," Arts Mag., June 1975, vol. 49, no. 10, 34.

Clifford Still who was also a member of the original Abstract Expressionist movement. The literal materiality of his surfaces has been of great interest to me. His work has a frontality and interlocking of forms that is a constant feature of his monumental, jagged, flame-like imagery. The "excremental" application and vertical strokes sweep your eye beyond the framing edge. He combines dark colors like brown, blue or black with bright areas of color, electrifying reds and yellows, in his later paintings. No one area is more important than another belying the drama of his expressive surface. His later works in the 1960's were freer, more lyrical and atmospheric paintings of sensuous color fields. The paintings retain their literal and tactile surface qualities.²⁶ During his long years of work "Still repudiated all established notions of what art ought to be in order to be free from the fetishes of fear, estheticism, nostalgia, or mechanism."²⁷ In his lifetime he has been dedicated in his work to being a free man recognizing subjugation to no "ism" or ideology. We read about references to landscape in his work, but Still is not at all in agreement with these opinions.²⁸

²⁶ Rose, Barbara. "American Art Since 1900." New York: Praeger Pub. 1976. 164-166.

²⁷ Sandler, Irving. "The Triumph of American Painting," New York: Praeger Pub. 1970. 158-174.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 158-174.

Dan Christiansen is a younger contemporary artist whose work I find very exciting optically. He uses a roller and a fairly liquid paint. The roller creates ridges as he works it back and forth, up and down over the surface. Underpainting in orange or blue or yellowed pinks reveals itself through the heavily glazed overpainting. The paintings achieve their color by a build-up of single hues working toward an integration of the whole surface. Color values and color placement create their own moods. I find them intriguing and expressive presences. I sense an intelligence and sensibility in his creation of the rich, but subdued surfaces to which I relate spontaneously.²⁹

Jasper Johns is a pivotal figure who has focused on the issue of reality and illusion in art and the literalness of art as object. His painterly surfaces relate to abstract expressionistic gestures (facture). Attached objects are very literally used and stencilled letters convey conflicting information. Johns forces the issue of "meaning" in art. His intellectual approach to his work has always been based on a conceptual approach. His process involves taking an object and changing it by doing something to it, then doing something else to it again. The intent is to make distinctions between painting and language, knowing and seeing, and seeing and believing. His

²⁹ Marshall, W. Neil, "Dan Christiansen," Arts Mag., June, 1975, vol. 49, no. 10, 21.

process is always apparent to the naked eye.³⁰ Johns is a painter's painter. For me, he has reinforced the lessons to be gained from Pollock's work. By using traditional and untraditional materials in traditional and untraditional ways he has brought into focus the unlimited choices available to artists. Reality in art is what we use to create it.

Jules Olitski is a New York based process painter who raised many an eyebrow in his lifetime by using methods and content that, in the beginning, were not readily acceptable. In his earlier New York days in the late 1950's he was dealing with figure-ground problems based on large, blotchy round shapes rendered in thick impasto. This can be accounted for by the fact that his student days in Paris (under Ossip Zadkine and influenced by Fautrier) were still influencing his work after his return to New York. His attempt to find a more original mode of working by 1950 resulted in his use of richly colored circles with concentric rings in broad, flat areas of color with unpainted bands in between. He has been concerned with a number of techniques, from staining canvas like Frankenthaler and Louis to using very heavily impastoed surfaces. Like all color painters, Olitski deals with color, light, atmosphere, and surface reality.

³⁰ Hunter, Sam and Jacobus, John. "American Art of the 20th Century." New York: H. N. Abrams, Inc. 1973. 328-331.

By 1965 he had abandoned his round rings and bands for a spraying technique which he has continued to work with to this day. Subtle atmospheric effects are achieved by spraying colors of varying saturation on top of one another and creating a surface that dissolves into a vague mist. The literalness of the painting was emphasized by the framing edge and by the shape of the canvas, both of which become important "issues of the day." This questioning made him realize the importance of varying the height and width of the paintings and of working on a large scale. Later he referred to the framing edge by using impasto bands in contrasting hues at the corners and edges which serve to contain the illusionistic effects of the sprayed centers. The lack of form heightens the atmospheric sensuousness of the paint surface.³¹

The works of Clifford Still, Dan Christiansen, Jasper Johns, and Walter Bannard all are concerned in their work with tactility and light which I relate particularly to my "mud" painting series. The "presence" of these issues are qualities of concern in my work. Frankenthaler, Louis, and Olitski concerned themselves with color in reference to light, space, and atmosphere. The modes of application vary for each of them, but the awareness of the physical qualities of paint application is intrinsic to

³¹ Rose, Barbara, pp. 198-199, 227.

their process. In my own "circle" paintings the open spaces relate to a figure ground relationship which has been important to Frankenthaler, Louis, and to Olitski in his earlier works of the late 1950's.

I relate to all the people from Pollock on who deal with color and surface in some way, be it the pure sensations of color, paint, or texture for its own sake. The elaboration of surface is not new to art but today process painters are working seriously to further the traditions of earlier artists like Rubens, Turner, Monet, and Seurat in expanding the possible interpretations that may still be latent and unexplored.

At this point it is obvious that process art has been and is a concern of many artists. Whatever ideas have been used in regard to the canvas as a flat surface, the systematic means of application, the object as a self-referring form (informed by its own physical properties), the honest representation of different expressive means, the creative handling of paint as an end itself, all bear witness and give credence to an area of endeavor with which I ally myself.

PART TWO: THE PRESENT WORK

Before entering graduate level work I lived and worked for several months in Mexico, painting and making collages. Living in Mexico intensified my sense of history, of evolution, and of mankind's traces upon the earth. The awareness of time impinges upon one's mind while trekking through the ruins of past civilizations such as those existing at Teotihuocán outside Mexico City. Today's artists are part of a long historical chain which links time, history and mankind together. The experience of Mexico intensified my interest in different kinds of light, color, pattern, texture, and atmosphere. Everywhere I looked, sensations new to me were taken in, savored and stored. I was reinforced in my interest in tactility, surface and color.

In Houston once again, the desire to mix paint colors in infinite variety became very important. After much trial and error I decided on a process of applying paint by rotating my wrist while holding a brush and found that I was able to rhythmically and systematically create circles of consistent dimension. Circles offer a direct method of paint application that announce themselves as process and image at the same time. With practice I found that

the diameter could be varied at will by a slight change in pressure on the brush. Subtle color and size graduations coupled with a limited palette and random placement of the circles became the limitations I set for myself. I knew from previous experience that working in series to explore one set of self-imposed limitations was a necessity. Another imposed limitation was the issue of size. The canvases were limited in two ways. The first involved my ability to intuit the size of the field necessary to my process. The second limitation arose from my own physical size. When I worked on a vertical plane the work could be larger, but when I worked on a horizontal surface five feet in width was the maximum width I could manage--barely. Thus it is that the rectangles for my paintings vary in size from 42" to 60" in width by 52" to 96" in height.

The paintings themselves consist of layer upon layer of painterly circles placed over the total plane in a non-hierarchical manner. The framing edge became of real concern and in the single panels I treated the edge as containing space. The edge was a boundary approached but not broken by the circles, all of which were contained by the edge. In other paintings I treated the space as if there was no consciousness of its limits. Some panels were treated with the intention of carrying the eye beyond the framing edge. This was particularly true when one painting consisted of three or four panels. In these I

considered the space as unbounded by the edge. Conscious decisions were always made during the painting process.

Color was used to form surface delineation at close range and to create spatial ambiguities when viewed from a distance. First I decided to investigate very pastel colors and to explore the potential of color to convey atmospheric space. Then a totally new experience was that of working in shades of black to investigate further the reductive premise I had decided upon. The dark surfaces convey the experience of night, an occasion when distance becomes very difficult to gauge and all one's senses become focused on the effect of resolving where objects are located with respect to oneself. Working with shades of black was difficult because of the problem of minimal amounts of light refraction. Surfaces became difficult to assess, particularly while wet. Black is a mysterious color with which to work and until the paint dried I could not be certain what had happened compositionally. The results were exciting visually.

Adding fillers to the paint in some of the circle paintings prompted me to think of the look I remembered from the Dahmen, Tapiès, and Pollock surfaces. Drawn to three visceral experiences I went on a search of my own that could elicit from me the same kinds of responses. By trial and error I found a builder's material called

"Quick Fix" which I mixed with my acrylic paint. The mixture sets up hard in a fairly short time so the "workability" factor was limited to between ten and fifteen minutes per batch. Inherent in this mixture was the fact that it had no elasticity or tensile strength and its ability to adhere to a surface was limited by its own weight. The build-up also created a rather fragile surface, and the protuberances ran the risk of being broken off if care in handling and storage were not taken. The paintings are also rather heavy compared to conventional canvases because of the physical weight of the paint layered on the surface. With this new mixture of paint I began a new series of paintings which I call my "mud" paintings. I was concerned with their having a great deal of "presence," "thingness," or "objectness." The painterly surface--the build-up of texture, the use of multiple shades of related colors, and the opportunity to capitalize on "accidents" continued as my major concerns in these works. The considerations in these paintings were related to my earlier experience with collage as the tactile properties seemed much more important. I now chose to limit the range of color and was very conscious of the more physical nature of the paint because of the added filler. Pushing the heavy paint mixture around with a putty knife somehow gave me the feeling of linking myself to history, particularly

to ruins like those at Teotihuacán which I had experienced in Mexico. Randomness in application was balanced by the constant width of the putty knife I used in the troweling-on process. As the material would bunch up or drag across the surface the underpainting would become exposed. In the extrusions I had the sensation of stopping in time some microscopic organism that would remain suspended forever. The surface, though flat, possesses a dimensionality recalling ridges of parched earth. Irregularities excited me by their reality and by their inferential qualities. If the surface is evocative for me of ancient walls, ruins, or time, I felt the viewer might make the same connection. The potential of "matter" to evoke tactile pleasure optically as well as to provoke ideas relating man to time gives me a sense of satisfaction. The order versus disorder makes for a visually moving experience. For my own needs I found these surfaces satisfied my desire to create a reality imbued with a timeless feeling of life within the work, a self-contained reality. In making these works with their strengths, presence, and freedom from compositional restraints, I heightened my sense of being linked to nature and to history.

"Quick Fix" presented a very real disposal problem. It is solid and indissoluble, and created a problem of finding a satisfactory method for the proper and necessary

cleaning of utensils. Inadequate cleaning between batches ruined the texture of the new mixture. My home just was not compatible with my working in this manner. These complications with the medium were an inconvenience that caused me to think in different directions about retaining surface interest by building up layers of paint while capitalizing on the implications afforded by color build-up across the whole plane. I was no longer attached to the need for a brush as a tool after having used a putty-knife in the "mud" paintings. My interest in light, color and surface were still prime concerns. Necessity, being the mother of invention, caused me to discover hardware cloth. I had forgotten that I had used it for building armatures when I was making sculpture some years ago. By placing this metal mesh on a horizontal canvas I found that paint could be forced through the grid with a house paint brush. Manipulation of paint had now evolved for me from layering circles of paint, to using a putty-knife in troweling on "mud" pigments, and now to a process involving brush, mesh and paint.

The use of hardware cloth imposes different limitations on the art process. The geometric grid creates a pattern on the surface that is akin to an impressionist-like application of paint, not in terms of brush strokes and colors necessarily, but in terms of an over-all,

regular application and build-up of paint. In the beginning the surfaces were built up by a random method of applying the patterning grid. The painting was built up in multiple layers of contrasting colors. Some of the colors show through in the process because of moving the mesh around while building up surface. These works vary in their over-all effects from painting to painting. The spectrum is wide in the evocation of a sense of landscape, atmosphere, aerial views, cityscapes, mistiness, sunset, or "inscapes," all a result of the process of layering countless applications of paint. Reference to external reality is dependent in great measure upon the pigments used. Allusions in their simplicity or complexity can only be determined by the sophistication of the viewer. This object has its own reality whose function is only to exist. Hardware cloth allows me the means of creating a kind of atmospheric space that is particularly well suited to the role of process and its ability to afford me the opportunity to create realities of my inner vision.

Initially I experimented with two sizes of mesh. The smallest openings clogged hopelessly and had to be discarded as an alternative kind of surface. The limitations of using one size became a factor in terms of "modularity." Using three-eighths inch hardware cloth

seemed to call for an inherent, relational ordering. Paintings evolved from simple geometric rectangles to more complex imagery. Here too, the first shapes were irregular and occurred at random as design elements. Using chance as a mode of structuring these paintings was exciting because of the element of unpredictability. The realization of these paintings brought with it the need for reassessment. My deep attachment to the earth-based forms no longer seemed viable in light of my new concerns. The idea of texturing versus patterning brought the realization that they are closely allied. The regularity of the grid in hardware cloth lessened the freedom of expressive gestures which I had used in my "mud" paintings.

In using hardware cloth as a tool the paintings exhibited sharper delineation of the edge and color, a brighter palette, problems set up in sequential variations. Conceptualizing had become an integral part of the process. The necessity arose to assess the potential directions this new series demanded. Impetus to restrict material and format, yet retain optical/tactile sensation, forced the need to seek a different kind of ordering. Desire to "regularize" the surface by my use of pattern and still allow for manipulation became important.

As of this writing my work is concerned with the juxtaposition of random patterns and prismatic elements.

The surface, while using the same technique, has gotten away from patterning in terms of regular repetitions in an organized, modular fashion. While I recognize the seemingly infinite variety open to me in this mode, I have had to reckon with my nature, and I now feel that the way I was thinking about patterning was too narrow, too predictable, too finite. The anticipation of discovery, of chance, was missing. Forms had taken on too much definition and the subtleties were fewer. In using the interplay of random patterns and prismatic elements in my current work, I feel a new adventure is about to unfold. It will offer the latitude for the subtle fusion of colors, nuance of forms, as well as the opportunity for the unexpected to happen in the creative act.

Painting, for me, is a form of sharing emotional experiences. In terms of abstraction it functions as an equivalent to the experience of music and dance. It is a matter of feelings which cannot be weighed or smelled to prove their existence, nevertheless they are very real sensations. Feelings give meaning to the content of life whereas the context of life is the means by which they become real. My desired end will be served if, upon viewing, the works act as a catalyst for the viewer to get in touch with his or her feelings by enjoying the surface optically for its visual pleasure. I am interested in the

reality of surface in these paintings. Delicate changes in tints are "orchestrated" as a means of increasing the range of informed content. Explicit definitions of contrast and shape have been deemphasized in favor of overall linear intricacies in which light and color play upon the receptors conveying their own messages.

I believe it is color which invites the viewer to enter the painting gradually, sustains his or her interest and nourishes the eye beyond the initial look. The colors in my work vary from earth tones to delicate pastel shades and my choice is never strident or meant to shock or to dazzle the viewer. Depending on the colors and the facture, an air of mystery is intrinsic to the nonhierarchical nature of the works. Subtle intimations are suggested by the placement and build-up of layer upon layer of differentiated pastel colors and the play of light across the surface is an important factor in "seeing" the work. Success is dependent on the interaction of color as light, as tone, and as texture. At a distance the hardware cloth paintings have the aura of non-quantifiable softly colored atmosphere that has a sense of structure caused by the overlays of the tiny grids inherent in the process. This structure has been an important factor in seeking complexity in a reductive situation. The diffusion of light within the painting enhances the intricacy of the method.

The choice of a painterly style over a linear structure (the hardware cloth) is necessary for me to achieve the spatial ambiguity of color and surface. By working with the hardware cloth the surface has all of the atmospheric effects of painterly painting and the linear intricacies of drawing. My desire is to stimulate a multi-leveled perception by using subdued color to paint canvases infused with warmth and pleasure.

Inherent in the evolution of my art is the awareness that my thinking, ideas, and concerns will change with time. This change is inevitable and necessary for making paintings to remain challenging work. What I am particularly aware of are the constants that recur in my work over a period of time. All of my work involves body movement and arm gestures in its execution. The work process itself is very important to the finished product. A constant interplay occurs between the building-up of the actual surface, color, and the inferred atmosphere and light. The nature of my work demands that all of my faculties be brought to bear at the time of making a painting. The success of a work is dependent on a great deal of spontaneity during the act of creating it. Having experienced many modes of expression and gained something precious from each, I feel that process art affords me the formal means for self-expression necessary to deal with my own

experiences and relate them to the viewer in terms of the reality of paint.

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