

ESSAYS
ON ART AND LIFE

c Norman Sasowsky 2012

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 3. *Introduction*
- 5. Art, Life, and Experience
- 15. How the “Realist” Painter Helps Us to See
- 20. The Female Nude Figure in Art
- 28. The Limits and Possibilities of Art
- 31. What Happened to the Fine Arts?
- 35. The Universal “Something” in Art
- 40. Art Now
- 43. Individuality
- 47. Hand Made Images
- 53. The What and the Why of Art
- 60. Qualities of Paint
- 63. Being an Artist
- 68. Photography and Painting as Ways to See the World
- 73. Effective Imagery

INTRODUCTION

From the beginning of time people have felt the need to create things. While it is not always clear what the initial purpose was, it is safe to say there are some real purposes for what we call art - and for being an artist.

The arts offer individuals the opportunity to give form to their ideas and feelings and to create something unique and meaningful. Art has the potential to enrich life for the artist and the public.

We are intrigued by artists and art, because we sense the special importance these have for us. Although the forms may change, art remains a central need for people. It is one of the distinguishing features of our species.

In the past twenty years, many artists have become very involved in writing about art. Often, it was to take a position vis a vis their own artistic efforts. An appreciation or understanding of the artist's work was dependent on these explications. These writings have played an important role in shaping contemporary art. In some instances one might say that the writing overtook the art and one would be hard pressed to find evidence in the art work of what the written word had promised. Some art works became totally "conceptual", that is, they "existed" as unexecuted or not realized (materialized) ideas.

Artists often wrote as critics, aestheticians, and forecasters of art history, relying less and less on their art to manifest any latent theory. I have written from my experience as an artist, that is, based on what I have learned in the process of being an artist, after the fact rather than before. In doing this, I hope to return some of the power of the visual experience as the primary force in creation rather than the

illustration of pre-conceived concepts.

While there are many artistic activities and forms of expression, I will focus my thoughts on the visual arts. What I say might apply to other art forms. The following are reflections on being an artist and the meaning of art, for ourselves as artists, and for those of us whose lives are affected by the arts, the art of being.

Norman Sasowsky

ART, LIFE, AND EXPERIENCE

To eat a meal without the awareness of the texture, taste, aroma or other qualities of food and drink is to miss the experience of eating and, perhaps, part of the meal's nutrition. This is also true for other events in our lives, the so-called good or pleasurable and the bad or painful. The paramount gift of life is the possibility for conscious experience.

The practice of art can vivify our encounters in life, record them, examine and reshape them, and finally, leave a trace that can be shared by others. Art is also made for other reasons: to entertain (this is different from heightening conscious awareness because entertainment implies a distraction), to communicate ideas and information, to organize visual material and experiences, to attract attention to oneself, ("look at what I can do"), and to acquire a fortune and power. I will not go into the merits or other reasons for these various purposes, but choose to focus on what I consider art's most unique function: the enhancement of life experience. If what I've said is true, then any art activity that helps to heighten awareness of any and all aspects of life are very useful. This is not to argue that art must have a purpose beyond its immediate self; its reward can also be intrinsic.

Some might say, that if we thought or were aware of all our perceptions it would create a sensory overload and drive us mad. I suppose this might be the case, if the rate of awareness was excessive. Many things occur in a moment, and we can best experience our response to one moment at a time focusing on that part of ourselves that is most engaged.

If you are shaking my hand, I think awareness of our holding hands would be the

primary focus, although obviously looking at each other's face would be an important part of this experience. When we are shaking hands and one or both of us is thinking about something else, we lose what is happening in that moment. You might say what is gained is the thought that is occurring simultaneously. I don't think I can say that the hand shake is necessarily more important than the thought, but if one is not even aware of the thought you are, in essence, there, shaking hands, but not. What is the value of being there if you are not? Admittedly, sometimes it is better to choose to daydream, to be elsewhere, for a meaningful experience, but I would not recommend this as a pervasive life style.

There are many ways to concentrate, focus, and heighten our experiences. The use of one or more of our senses helps us to do this. If I am in a room, or in nature, and I can see, touch, smell, hear things in it, I am so much better able to experience what is there, what is given. Those who are deprived of some senses lose the opportunity to experience a part of the environment.

Seeing is a way we increase our experience and art helps to facilitate seeing. Unlike the camera, which "sees" mechanically, the human viewer can see with much greater sensitivity. This is not always the case. We can all remember times when we have seen "mechanically," I can recall times when I have literally read a page, but had no knowledge of what I read. I was seeing, but not experiencing or processing what my optical system was recording.

Although I have talked about the sense of sight as a way we experience the world we live in, it should be clear to the reader that seeing - human - as opposed to mechanical, is very complex. We do not disconnect our other senses when we see. So seeing should not be thought of as an isolated experience. Other stimuli enter our

consciousness; seeing is a multi-sensory experience.

Inner and outer seeing are equally important. We can see images in our mind's eye, but this is not the only way we "see" inwardly. Inner vision is the result of listening and feeling as much as visualizing. In a world in which the television image and sound are ever present there is little opportunity for inner seeing. We constantly seek outer stimulation because we have forgotten how to see and listen to ourselves. Perhaps we do not respect or are not interested in our own "program." I believe each program is potentially fascinating. In seeking to use ourselves to experience our lives fully, we are not limited to mechanically looking at something and attempting to record the minutiae or optical detail. There are some artists who devote their energies to this pursuit. We are free to use the full range of seeing/experiencing in which we employ our total body, being, selves.

Living offers us a multitude of things to see; it is seemingly infinite. Each of us is attracted to some things more than others. It is not clear why this occurs. Probably it is our complex, sociological, psychological, and physiological structure that effects our seeing experiences. It would be nice to say that we see what we need to see. This cannot be proven anymore than we can say that people eat what is good for them. Common sense tells us this is not so.

Cezanne can accomplish, with a few pieces of fruit on a table, what another artist can do only with a full cast of characters. The relationship between subject and artist is critical. One artist can focus on what appears to be a simple element and find much in it while conversely a lesser artist, by choosing a more powerful element, can achieve similar ends. The balance is critical. In the end it is the quality of the experience that counts, shallowness is not an attribute of the subject but of the way it is actively perceived.

Rather than argue about what each of us looks at, and why, let's just accept that there is much to see and we are free to choose. Furthermore, we have the option to look outside ourselves and within.

Saying this, it is not possible to say one approach - inner or outer- is better or more appropriate than another. Thus, focusing ones attention on fruit is not more or less significant than kings or dreams. Pushed a bit further, would we agree that seeing/ experiencing a person is no more or less significant or appropriate than seeing a picture of a person? I would have to revert to my opening remarks on food. Is it better to "eat" the picture or the food? Nutritionally, food is richer in substance than the image and the experience to be had with reality is potentially more profound and useful than what is offered by a two dimensional representation.

Now this might not always be the case. Is a Rembrandt self portrait of less importance than a real seed pod one discovers on a walk? Potentially, I think the seed pod richer, although I greatly admire and am deeply moved by the self portrait.

Why is the seed pod, or a grain of sand so potent? We share the same fundamental nature, the same potential for transformation and growth and therefore, in seeing it, we are reminded of ourselves. The things that men have made are also reflections of us, part of us too, yet one step removed from our origins.

I argue in favor of nature, of the three dimensional world and for the inner world because these are closer to our being. When we choose to look at second hand phenomena we deprive ourselves of some portion of the riches' life has to offer. When we look at first hand phenomena we deprive ourselves of some portion of the riches' life has to offer.

I am not saying that an artist cannot use a photograph or reproduction as a primary resource with great success. Many examples can be brought to mind - and I should agree with them, as is true of the Cezanne painting: "Bather," in the Museum of Modern Art Collection. However, in terms of the total of human experience the visual arts bear certain limitations.

Therefore, while I do not think photographs and other artist's paintings to be good sources for new paintings, I would argue strongly that great works of art - paintings and photographs - are potentially very meaningful elements in our world. These are rich in the possibility for enabling the viewer to expand their vision that may be confused by the infinite and dynamic vitality that nature holds for us. No matter how great the Rembrandt self-portrait is - and it is magnificent (I'm thinking of the one in the Frick Collection) it does not equal the man.

Having said that one subject is potentially as good as another, provided it is of the fullness of life, what can be said about the choices that are possible? Can a landscape be as good as a wife, or the television? Each is part of our lives and we can choose to concentrate on seeing/experiencing it more fully by increasing our experience, our knowing.

Some things attract our attention. They evoke a certain energy and response in us. For some reason, one needs to know more about them, or they provide the necessary medium or vehicle for us to experience something important in our life. Therefore, the landscape may suit one person/artist and not another.

I have always enjoyed being in nature, in undeveloped areas. I find it restful and restorative. Recently, in attempting to use landscape as a subject, and flowers as a part

of that landscape, I have found limited satisfaction. On a base level, my choice - landscape or flowers - cannot be faulted. I choose to increase my awareness of these places and things in my life and in focusing my attention I have become more mindful in these areas. My life is a bit richer, and, at the same time, I've developed my skill in concentrating, listening, and seeing. This last point is important, because each time we practice art, we can increase our sensitivity and ability.

Yet, as I reflect on the images I've created, no longer as powerful as the original event/experience, I sense that my choice of subject might not have been as meaningful as another. In reality, remember, no experience is really intrinsically better or worse than another. They are just events in a life and we are attempting not to miss what has been provided.

Ultimately, just as strong men are able to lift great weights, so each of us has a particular nature - another given in the equation of life. Those inclined to practice art do so in response to their nature. If I were made another way, I might have needed to be an explorer to heighten my experience of living. Yet, in a way the artist has much in common with the explorer - an example I randomly selected. We tend to select subjects - inner or outer - that provide meaningful vehicles for us personally. I now sense that for me, unblemished nature, or flowers, while they still hold great interest for me - are no longer what I need to focus on. This is fine, each subject is a stepping stone to the next. It would not be amiss, if at sometime in the future, the same subject were to be reenergize.

As it happens, I sense that there are things closer to me - the unspoiled landscape is not really close to me, although it may be spiritually, nor is the beautiful flower - but nature in relation to the man-made environment is. The choice of subject - what we focus on is a personal matter. Practicing art, as a way of developing

mindfulness, greater awareness, the ability to concentrate, to organize ones experiences, all give breadth to ones life. Such practice, not only develops the skill in art as an artist, but can contribute to the rest of what life offers. We become more sensitive, aware, of many other aspects of our lives. In doing this we live more fully, are awake, and have chosen to do so.

Besides inner and outer observations, working from memory and/or imagination, and the process of art, whether it be painting, sculpting or weaving, also afford the artist the opportunity to focus ones attention on what is now. This too increases the quality of life experience. One often hears an artist say that they “lose themselves” during work. What I think happens is that one becomes entirely absorbed in the work- you become one with it. All your attention and energy is focused on what is before you. Because of this, artists experience a great feeling of freedom. I think it is the salutary effect of being totally involved in what you are doing and experiencing. The art process allows and provides a vehicle for experiencing life at an exceptional level.

Why do we make photographs, or paintings? Isn't observing, seeing, or experiencing a sufficient exercise? Why go further? Well, seeing is random and it can be lazy. “Oh,” I say. “I saw that,” but did I really? Did I see it in detail, experience it? Generally, the answer is a clear “No.” Most of us see poorly, irrespective of our actual visual acuity. In drawing from observation we must concentrate to see, and we must focus our attention to experience what we see, otherwise we gain no awareness. We have noted that the photographer does not have to concentrate in the same way as the artist, they see fields, but not the individual elements. The photographer is more like a mid-wife who helps in the birth of an image, but does not give birth to the image.

What about the artist who chooses to work from pure imagination, or from memory? Is this in the hierarchy of experience, worse than working from a photograph? Obviously, a great part of what¹we have in life is what exists around us,

the reality, the concrete world, what those of us who are sighted see.

There are, however, other significant experiences we have that are not so directly related to observation. Like observation, they have to do with our experience of being aware and alive. Besides responding to what is around me, I can also respond to myself, my own body, with its countless sensations and inner images. I too am something to be “seen” and experienced. Drawing, painting, and other art forms allow us to project and give form to these images. The artist who “plays” with materials, with no preplanned image, or recollection in mind, can create images of detailed discrimination that represent inner experiences, maybe not seen but felt. The game is the same, heightened experience and awareness. The same ordering of experience, and creating form, obtains in this effort. The same willingness to share our knowledge and experience holds true. It is perhaps much more difficult for others to relate to these images, because they are less familiar. They seek to remind us of common experiences, but are not as accessible as those from everyday observation.

Of course there is the middle ground, neither the extreme of strict objective observation nor free play and imagination. It is probably fair to say that most artists occupy various middle positions, using observation in part and imagination and memory. Always, it can be said that the reason and purpose for such activity is first for the artist to see/experience his life more vividly, to experience the process of vivifying life, and to share and extend this quality to and for others. The painting is not a substitute for responding to the raw data of life, it is one way to deal with it, and one that is highly human and useful.

If you have not chosen to listen to yourself, if you have not elected to see/experience your world, inner and outer, you are much less likely to hear or see anyone else’s world or experience. The vicarious sports fan seeks to live through someone

else's experience because he/she may not believe they can have it for themselves. As a result they are dependent, and ever seeking experiences, distractions, outside themselves. In effect they attempt to live someone else's life. This is the antithesis of fully experiencing ones own life.

In the contemporary world of art I find much evidence of the "second-hand" life, of a watered down existence, of artists who have avoided the experiences, events, things, people, that life has provided. Artists who have decided to focus on life that is two-dimensional and often mediated by a mechanical image - the artists who use mass media as their subject. While it is true that mass media are pervasive, adding to its pervasiveness may not add clarity or light to the artist's or viewers life; it trades on familiarity. Mass media inspired art is not the only evidence although it is a very large part of the basis for contemporary art. My intent here is not to survey or condemn certain aspects of the art world, but to show what I feel to be a significant role for art and the artist, and to remind the reader of the great function, perhaps the primary purpose of art, which is to enrich life.

Some artists are gifted in being able to expand our vision. Others, by nature or calculation, need to repeat successful formulas. It is only when we have aroused the eye of an experienced viewer, that we know that an expanded vision has presented itself.

Before art can serve others, I think it must serve the artist. By sharing experiences, responses to life, the artist and his work can evoke this in the viewer, a remembrance of experiences equally important to others. When we trivialize our own experiences we do the same for the viewer. Art can improve the impoverished condition of life. We breathe foul air, drink impure water, eat questionable food, and some artists create shoddy work because they no longer believe in the value of their

own experiences, the ability to organize and transform, and to share their experience.

Too often the artist, his mind and his whole body is out to lunch.

HOW THE “REALIST” PAINTER HELPS US TO SEE

The painters Janet Fish and Philip Pearlstein (and other artists) paint directly from observation. I consider them perceptual realists. They do not work from photographs. Their approach is not purely objective, nor do I think they would claim this. Even if they happened to come upon a random still life, or nude figure in a studio, they would first have to choose from among many “random” possibilities. They first select and then “edit” nature by framing it.

Such choice suggests that a particular slice of reality is worthy of attention for the artist and the eventual viewer. By isolating a part of nature it is charged with meaning just like a photograph made with the same approach. Paintings such as those by Fish and Pearlstein have a certain appeal because they are closely related to the depicting or describing nature of photography.

We also know that artists such as Fish and Pearlstein do not strictly function as many photographers would - framing the “found” scene - but choose their models, settings, and arrangements. Currently, more photographers use this method of consciously composing and then photographing their subjects. A synthesizing process is put into play; the compositions are designed before they are photographed.

I do not believe that Pearlstein and Fish are interested in composition in the traditional sense. Perceptual rendition is their first interest; they aim to see and to depict what they see for the viewer. In this way they hope to make a good painting. The viewer of the finished painting can then notice and see better what she/he might not previously have attended to. Of course the artist can modify what she/he observes and may accidentally do so because no matter how “objective” they may attempt to be, subjectivity occurs.

This kind of realist painting focuses on depicting - creating the illusion of three-dimensionality on a two dimensional surface. The viewers' main experience of paintings is the visual excitement of seeing something they may not have noticed before, seeing it clearly, and enjoying the magic of illusion. The painting is an artifact of the artists' experience and this makes it easy for the viewer to see the original subject. It is easiest to see and relate to those things that are familiar. Pearlstein and Fish epitomize this extreme position within the so-called realist painting tradition and, as such, present an interesting paradigm.

To know the extent of the influence of photography on painting, and to be able to use this knowledge to communicate more effectively, it is essential to realize the qualities and characteristics that lens made images epitomize. Photographs typically provide an optically correct illusion of three dimensions on a two dimensional surface. The previous essay noted the primary characteristics of photographs.

The artist who is a perceptual realist can record better than the camera. The human eye (and brain) is more sensitive to values and colors than lenses or films. Artists' materials hold greater possibility for recording observation than photographic means do.

Of course, sometimes the camera lens and film, can outstrip the human eye and hand. Micro and macro-photography immediately come to mind, as well as x-ray photos and other remote sensing systems.

The camera records an instant. The perceptual realist may attempt to record a static subject by controlling lighting, subject, etc., but time is an element that does contain

variables. If nothing more, the artist, unlike the camera, changes during the duration of the painting. The artist sees with two eyes. She/he can see more than the camera and is able to clarify those elements that may not be optically clear. They have more control of their medium than the photographer. It is therefore possible for the perceptual painter to provide the viewer with a very accurate image of what they have seen and studied over time. In this process they have also experienced, that is, actively noted and transcribed. As I have mentioned before, error and subjectivity do enter, but these can be minimized. The artist is also in a better position to vary the texture of the painting and thus provide a convincing image of the subject. They can provide more information than the lens-made image.

Although it can be said that Perlstein and Fish function in way like a photographer (or camera) there are distinct differences. On a comparative basis, in relation to depicting reality, the can outdo the photographer.

For most viewers, there is probably little difference in the viewing experience. It does not matter that there may be some texture (brush strokes, etc.) or that the artist saw more than the one eyed lens. The final image is essentially the same in viewing experience and information. I wonder if even a connoisseur could distinguish important differences between a photograph and the same subject painted by a perceptual realist if the obvious material differences were absent?

What the viewer of the painting can get is a very labored and highly technically proficient image in more permanent materials.

I cannot tell the difference between work of the good perceptual realist and a realist (such as James Valerio) who relies and uses photographs as part of the process to create paintings, although I believe my perceptual abilities are highly developed. Thus,

in the end, the images of the perceptual and photographic realists, or those photo realists who work exclusively from photos, may be experienced equally. There is a difference, especially in the work of the photo realists, but it may not be very significant, in terms of the viewer's main experience of the painting.

Potentially such paintings are better because they are clarified images - than some photographs; in a sense we can consider them akin to manipulated and highly retouched photographs.

It seems that what we get in the best of the perceptual realist paintings by artists like Fish and Pearlstein, or photographic realists Valerio and Close, is a better, clearer, information rich image of a particular subject.

.What we don't get is much of the artist, recreation (we mostly get mimicry), invention, or imagination, or symbolization. The viewer of perceptual and photographic realism is not called upon to participate much in interaction with the image. What you see is what you get, there is no more. The ease of relating and reacting to such images perhaps attests to their great popularity.

On the one hand, we can admire the modest conceptual ambitions of these realist painters, on the other we are awed by their technical accomplishments. We unconsciously admire the labor intensive achievement and enjoy the ease of seeing. The satisfaction obtained is effortless.

One of the primary aims of art is served by the photographer, the perceptual realist and the photo realist. Each in their own way sees and records something they deemed significant. In doing this they help us to focus our attention on some aspect of our environment; we are helped to see a little better. What we see influences us, builds our

storehouse of images and memories, and helps us to create values, goals, and ultimately actions, for images are the flags we follow.

THE FEMALE NUDE FIGURE IN ART

The female nude figure has long held the interest of artists in many cultures. I use the appropriate term “nude,” as opposed to naked which connotes other meaning. Kenneth Clark has amply shown the difference in terms in his book: The Nude - A Study in Ideal Form. The nude can be considered a hidden naked figure - covered by the more discrete term.

There is a special place in art for the female nude. Why artists elect to portray this subject is a question worthy of separate consideration. For the purposes of this essay, let us accept that there is a special fascination. It has interested artists even when it has been necessary to invent a pretext for including the nude.

For purposes of comparison, and as a way to clarify several distinctly different approaches, I have chosen the work of three artists. Other artists could be used to fill each of the three categories I am about to propose.

The first category is the most “abstract.” Henry Moore’s work exemplifies this approach. His figures, whether carved or drawn, tend to be symbolic - forms that represent or suggest femininity, motherhood, or yin. Some of his figures are more naturalistic than others, that is, four limbs, torso and head are clearly identified. In other works, there is only a suggestion of the anatomical make up of the figure. DeKooning and Modigliani’s paintings would also provide good examples.

Degas, on the other hand, would never fit this category. His work falls in the area I will call the genre or “realistic” approach. The female figures, which are the main staples of his work, are either involved in their toilet, or practicing, or performing some activity. They are always situated in a space that we can recognize as being either a room, a

theater or rehearsal hall. While Degas' figures are sometimes generalized - not so specifically delineated that we feel we know them as individuals - they are much more specific than Moore's.

The contemporary paintings of the artist Kitaj provides another example of the genre category, although there is sometimes ambiguity concerning the locale of the figure. In this instance, the viewer of the painting is given a picture of a person - nude female- engaged in some activity which we may or may not be able to positively identify, but believe could be identified.

Unlike the first two categories, the third is more explicit and limited. Philip Pearlstein's paintings provide an excellent example of this. His figures are, for the most part, always clearly a model posed in a studio for the artist to paint. The model is hired for this specific purpose and there is no hiding of the fact that this is the subject of the painting.

We must be quick to note that Moore and Degas may also have hired models to pose for them in their work They may have worked directly from the model. However, it is easy to see that the attitude toward the model, or to the subject of the nude female figure is quite different in each instance.

First, let us examine what they held in common. The female figure is a subject that interests each of these artists; there is an attraction. Furthermore, each has something to demonstrate, or show, about the figure. Initially, the artist "sees" something, and creates an image for themselves; this is the first act. The experience of seeing/creating belongs to the artist. Secondly, they offer what they have made for others to see. In each case they choose to see-create a female figure representation.

In this process of creation, the artists use the subject to convey some idea, feeling, or value. They also experience in the process and learn by interacting with the subject, their materials and themselves.

Yet, as we have seen, each treats their subject differently. We could imagine the same model being hired by Moore, Degas and Pearlstein and consider how each of them would treat the same subject. The results would be distinctly different concerning approach, attitude, and resultant image/affect.

Moore takes a more distant posture. He does not care what this person may do in the normal course of life, nor is he interested in peculiarities of individual form. I assume he strives for some essence that he believes the female figure can convey or invoke in himself and the viewer. It is difficult to talk about the figure he has created and, perhaps it is correct to say it is impossible to gossip. What can we say about her? We don't know what she does, where she lives, or how time has marked her body. She is aloof. Yet, we can feel something very deep in her presence - but, it doesn't lend itself to discourse. If it reaches us, it is through feelings - mute recognition and evocation.

Degas, using the same model, would insist on seeing her in some environment - the boudoir or elsewhere. Not just standing but doing what she normally does. The viewer observes her in a specific moment. (With Moore, we observe the figure in a timeless setting.) The particulars of her figure would be noted. If not absolutely detailed, specific enough to feel that she is a particular person - not an idea or abstraction. Although she may be a hired model, we are not led to believe this; she is portrayed as a part of real, everyday life - genre.

Pearlstein is very direct. He uses a model as a model in his paintings. We know that

this person works as a model and poses for the artist. Nothing about other parts of the individual's life is revealed. The model is encased in the artist's environment, an object for study. In this instance the figure may be as depersonalized as in Moore's work, yet she is specific rather than generalized. The figure may convey a distant feeling, yet we know and see and experience the subject as a particular person - an artist's model.

Clearly, it is not the actual subject - the model - that is responsible for the kind of image or painting that the artist creates, but how the artist approaches the subject. Obviously, each artist has a different interest and each subject serves a different purpose for the artist and the viewer.

Moore aims to experience, express and evoke some timeless quality epitomized by the female figure; perhaps a distant relative to ancient fertility goddesses. Degas may aim for a similar expression; the female form contains some energy he wishes to capture, but he sees this in the particular and uses the specifics of time and place to support his aim. Pearlstein focuses still more on the particular, the individual model, as a model, in a studio setting - an object as a study in perception. He too seeks to create a special quality but in terms the scientist might best understand. The viewer is drawn to see what we may have missed seeing before; the artist practices the exactitude of careful seeing and we see as he does. Description, although subjective, is raised to a higher stake.

In each case, the artist has chosen the female nude figure and presented it in various ways. In doing so, the artist reveals their own interest and finds a means to express their feelings and ideas by using the female nude as a primary subject for the art. The artist, interacting with the subject, materials, their use, and, ultimately the public, work together to create a distinctive image.

I believe, each approach, although there are decided differences, as noted above, has much in common with ancient fertility images. They venerate, capture, and transmit an energy force in nature that is thought to be valuable and necessary to harvest. Probably, we could add the contemporary pin up photo as a very distant relative to the subject.

In selecting my examples, I could have selected other artist's work from vastly different cultures. For example, Indian temple sculpture, African sculpture, or Japanese prints could be used. The three basic approaches put forth would still serve to delineate differences in attitude and motivation in creating images of the female nude.

Perhaps some may wonder why so many male artists have focused so much attention (the gaze?) on the female nude body. What is its special significance? At its worst, usually such works serve as substitute experiences - a way of relating to the opposite sex vicariously as opposed to experientially. It may also serve as a form of eroticism - a source of erotic pleasure in making and viewing.

Or, it may serve as the early fertility figures did, or, for that matter male fertility symbols, to energize the viewer as does any object of beauty or desire - the features, forms, proportions that cause attraction and energy to flow in the process of life - affirming life.

EFFECTIVE IMAGERY

Gombrich (1) makes the claim that the visual arts, such as painting and drawing, are preeminently suited to function as arousal. They evoke emotional responses in the viewer. As communication - the ability to make a statement, or as description, these arts are very limited; Gombrich has presented much compelling evidence to support his contention. The specific communicative function of an image is improved only in the presence of a code, a particular context, or a caption.

Even as a source of arousal the arts cannot be easily or surely predetermined. For, as Gombrich has illustrated, often what the artist intends, whether expression or communication, is not clearly received by the viewer, or at least stands a good chance of not being effective.

The implication of this argument is that the artist is severely handicapped because what he may want to express is not, ipso facto, understood or felt by the viewer. The artist can only suggest and hope that his work might be correctly experienced, unless he is willing to provide or use a clear cut code, caption, or context. Even under these circumstances, absolute clarity is not guaranteed because of the limits of language.

Arousal - the special quality Gombrich points to - is at best a “soft” operation. Each viewer, theoretically may be affected in a different way by a specific piece of work. This is what we often hear when talk is about the very subjective nature of art.

Of course while the artist’s original motivation may be communication or arousal - maybe it is not. It may be that personal expression is the goal. In other words, the artist is attempting to communicate with herself/himself first; their imagery is not focused on sending a specific communication to others. The urge to create an image may not be, as

is so often thought to be the case, initially, to communicate to others. Perhaps, it is just another way of being.

Artists create images, as they do sounds and writing, primarily as a part of their human nature and behavior. Secondly, communication is attempted, but perhaps only arousal is achieved. We are social beings, and we do communicate with each other. As I write now, I am aware of trying to communicate with myself; to clarify my ideas about reality. In turn, I may attempt to share my ideas with others, but the primary reason was to develop and explain things to myself in response to ideas Gombrich espoused. The first function of much art may very well be personal rather than for purposes more explicit such as when an artist completes a commission or is using art skills to resolve an ancillary problem, or to communicate to others.

No doubt if one wants to communicate effectively, the image must be adequately supported. Artists constantly seek to extend the boundaries in search of more adequate expression.

There is another point that needs to be examined and that has to do with the possible mediumistic aspect of art. That is, the artist may have no explicit message to communicate or feeling to evoke. In fact he merely serves as the medium and the first witness. Some quality, idea, or feeling is being expressed by the artist through the manipulation of materials, but it is not strictly his message. As a painter, I am often surprised by what I have produced. This may appear “out of control,” but in another sense it mirrors the kind of control we have, or don’t have (depending on our world view) of our lives. The control we have has more to do with development of our predilections and skill.

Maybe the real function of the fine arts, and its ultimate power, is to serve first the

need for self communication or expression and then to produce an evocative image that will have different meanings for different viewers, and will vary in time and place. I think the best works seem to “communicate” on a sub-surface level, sometimes referred to as “universals.” The test of the efficacy of these images is their power to “speak” to many of us, over time, and to touch us deeply, not superficially - to nurture something in us, to remind us of who we are, who we were, where we came from, and what we might become. This power is not fixed; it is like life - dynamic and in this respect is related to context, caption, and code. The image is not absolute in its meaning or power; it is relative.

THE LIMITS AND POSSIBILITIES OF ART

Based on what we experience -- as much as we can trust our experiences -- it is not possible to have absolute certainty when we are in the realm of communication. This is so whether it is in writing, the visual arts or music. Everything, it can be said, is indeterminate, when it comes to agreeing on meaning -- even this statement.

The deconstructionists and postmodern artists who take this notion of indeterminacy to heart are probably correct; it is not possible to have absolute truth, or absolute anything.

This situation is not as serious as we might be led to believe. We live in a world of indeterminacy and uncertainty. Nevertheless, we continue to live in it. While we don't have absolutes, we manage with approximations, and some try, when it is thought necessary, to be as explicit as possible. Therefore, the lawyer and the legislator constantly work to refine the letter of the law.

Although we might think that it would be best to live in a world of absolutes, it may be to our advantage to inhabit a more dynamic sphere where we are all constantly in flux, adapting, transforming, developing. In wanting absolutes, it is as if we were trying to remake the world in some static image/idea we hold and assume would be better, or more to our liking. The reality -- again, based on individual experience -- is that the world, in its various parts -- is not fixed.

What does this mean for the artist? If we read deconstructionist theory as a license for despair or opportunism, we can find enough reasons (interpretations). This is however, only one set of options.

To think of the arts -- particularly the visual or fine arts, music, literature, drama and poetry as means of communication -- systems for organizing and delivering meaning in an explicit sense, we choose to see its purpose and function in a very limited way. Furthermore, we are aware of its limitations in this regard.

Although there is misunderstanding in oral communication, we still pursue talking as a useful vehicle for human exchange. It is even possible to try to make it function effectively. In this regard, deconstruction plays an important role in making us aware of the indeterminacy of the "text."

However, it might be useful to consider that various modes of "communicating" best serve more "poetic" purposes. People -- at least some -- need to give or create form from their life experiences. They need to -- even as I am now doing-- shape their environment, invest it with meaning no matter how indeterminate. This is tantamount to creating myths to live by. If the myth is effective, that is, helps -- or seems to -- enhance life, then it serves its intended purpose. After all, the ritual to bring needed rain at least provides us with something we can do about a situation though it may not be physically effective.

Similarly, one might, in painting, seek some universal truth and find that future viewers experience the finished work in ways the artist never intended. For the artist though, the experience of creating -- even seeking a universal truth -- is very important though he might delude himself about his achievement. There is no way to know if it is so or not. Absolute verification is not a possibility. This need not be a deterrent. What may appear to be a failure may at another time or place hold a very "meaningful" experience.

You can begin by trying to write or paint what you think of as a universal truth, or

more modestly, an evocation of reality, or a specific message. Perhaps you would find that at best you had limited success in terms of the original goal. Nevertheless, the process of creating itself might really be the content or text and that the experience of creation -- not manufacture -- did touch a universal truth. For the audience or viewer, if the work is effective and affective, one is brought in touch with an inner truth and reminded of one's deepest connections with life and is vivified by the experience. What we experience in the presence of "great art" is a revivifying of life -- not specific meaning -- although it may be conditional and might not bring rain.

You can, at best, point to the ineffable. It cannot be named or described. It may be experienced -- not explained.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE FINE ARTS ?

The so-called fine arts are dysfunctional. They serve only the most peripheral artistic purposes in the western world.

The work of the painter, sculptor, and printmaker has been superseded by the photographer, film maker, video artist, graphic designer and architectural designer. It is natural that the need for decoration, design, communication, and expression should have grown into these newer forms.

From the outside, the fine art world might appear to be vital -- an active partner in the business of living. There are lavish art magazines and galleries, high priced works of art by contemporary artists, and stardom of the few who enjoy the rewards of this situation.

However, the fine arts remain peripheral. It is only a small minority who are at all interested in those art forms and often the interest is for status and investment. Perhaps the largest group of interested parties is comprised of aspiring artists -- there are thousands -- who wish to know the way to the magic kingdom.

For the public, contemporary fine arts are almost non-existent, and when encountered, obscure. Yes, I will argue that quantity is a valid criterion. Even among artists there are not many -- granted this is a broad generalization -- who are seriously interested and engaged by the work of other artists beyond trying to decide how to "make it." The most compelling evidence is exhibition attendance. Attendance is highly correlated to publicity and refreshments -- the better the P.R

Traditionally, the quality of the work was the driving promotional input. Now, the

fine arts are driven by publicity. This is not new. Artists realized soon enough that if they didn't promote their work no one would know it existed. However, the last twenty years some art dealers have become masters of the practice in collaboration with art magazines and museums.

In an art world where standards are at best ambiguous and constantly shifting, the public has come to rely on the dealer and the museum curator to establish taste and value. Fashion has become the cornerstone of judgment. Artists no longer concentrate solely on a legitimate purpose for their activity. Instead, one aims to establish a new product that can be marketed. Since it serves no primary purpose, a secondary purpose has to be created -- historical progression in the guise of theoretical postulates or the "new."

If one looks to the other arts we find experimentation and growth. There seems to be a core "craft" and criteria by which one is able to say, and argue, which works are significant and worthy of attention. Hardly any such criteria exist in the fine arts that are admired in promotion. This is the case because the fine arts no longer hold a significant place in our society. One can barely compare the quality of work done in literature, theater, or music, with the largest and most visible elements of the fine arts. Many artists have crossed over into other art forms -- such as performance art -- because they have recognized the wasted position of the fine arts.

One could argue that in the fine arts there is a lot of "commercial" stuff, just as there is in popular fiction or theater, or music. I would argue that I am hard pressed to find the level of quality in the fine arts that exists in the others. The fine arts may have become trivial because the traditional forms have been superseded.

There is more honest and better criticism of films -- although their main focus is

entertainment or commercialism -- than in the fine arts. You can get a pretty good idea about the quality of a film from a newspaper critic. This is often not so in the fine arts that seem subject to promotional pressures. Many art books/magazines suffer in the same way; they are P.R. publications much like fan club literature for a movie star. People still write fine short stories, novels, plays, and poems; these forms are still vital. They serve us in our living by helping us see ourselves and the world better and to come to grips with issues that are important to us. Some of these are written for newer forms -- film or television. In the fine arts no such development has taken place, unless we say that photographers and film makers have become the new painters and printmakers.

The myth of the fine arts dies hard. Art has become a big business but, in terms of art -- communication, design, expression, aesthetic -- “not vital” (also the remarkable name of a contemporary artist).

For artists with a bona fide artistic interest and sensibility it has become necessary to adapt. As mentioned above, some move into new forms -- site specific installations, video, book art, performance, film and photography. The avocational aspect of art making is still a viable function. For many a myth holding artist this is the most suitable adaptation. It is not that the practice of image making or forming no longer meaningful and humanly useful, it is that as a form -- one that serves other's needs as well as the artist's, - it can only exist by virtue of the extreme measures needed to keep the beast alive. One has only to read the endless attempts at explaining and explicating what it all means to realize that anything needing so much documentation cannot stand on its own merits. A painting is not a scientific or philosophical treatise. Essentially, paintings are images based on seeing and imagining. That is what the artist does and what the viewer can do! Because of experiences, people may be affected -- a successful work is affecting.

This brings us to the question of quality. The answer is Yes! There is quality. Yes, it is dynamic. No one can make a final judgment, and there is room for disagreement. However, this does not mean that we cannot make such judgments, however temporal. Some things are better, more skilled, more accomplished than others, and great human achievements are something we all participate in bringing into being and share in the benefit. Candy is dandy, but there are other things that satisfy us more and have a salutary effect. This is a judgment, and one usually develops and modifies these based on ongoing experience.

I do not mean to imply that all of contemporary fine art is flawed. My sense is that much is, and there is a very rotten core, because the forms are outmoded. They no longer serve significant human needs. The way they exist in the world is by being propped up for a variety of reasons. Ultimately, these factors effect the quality of the work and the artists. The term “art” refers to a work that is distinctively a product of human needs, that serves people for entertainment, expression, design, communication, or decoration. Many paintings, sculptures, and prints are products that function as status symbols and stocks and bonds, or trading stamps, but not, as was originally conceived, to function in the art of living. I believe we still need art to live effectively and aesthetically, but this is not so in the fine arts world.

THE UNIVERSAL "SOMETHING" IN ART

Is there a thread that flows through the history of the visual arts? Could it be that it is the power to affect the viewer in a positive way that is the essence of art to make one feel whole, to be reminded of our origins, our deep connection to the universe - a momentary resolution of the Great Mystery of our lives? Is this thread Beauty? If this is so, then it would help to explain why art of other times and places, often very different from our own has a staying power that is beyond current vogue and specific purpose, or function related to a particular time and place.

This is dangerous and suspicious, because it implies some absolute quality -something that is timeless and universal. Yet we would not question the power of nature to move us in a life affirming way.

We are forced to acknowledge the subjectivity of responses. Not everyone is affected in a positive way from an identical source, whether it is experiencing an ecstatic day or seeing a work of art or being attracted to a particular person. Let's also admit and add that no theory will explain the whole. We might approach, at best, some understanding of what it is we try to do in art, though it might not be consciously sought.

Clarification is necessary regarding the quality of response. It is not only the quality of the work (art) that needs to be assessed, but the quality of response. Theoretically, everyone can respond to a great work of art, yet clearly there are many people who seemingly are not capable of having such an experience. It is not a necessary condition of education, class, or race, but, more likely sensitivity, taste, or need. Education and experience could play an important role in altering or establishing this condition.

It is foolish to think that our abilities are equal, painful as this might be to accept. I

cannot do some things as well as others, and my judgment is limited in various instances. There are differing levels of quality and quality decisions are value bound. If you think any food is as good as any other for the optimum maintenance of physical, emotional and mental health, then obviously we are not going to agree on the question of quality. If you don't think an optimum human condition is a very high value, there is no need to read further.

If you do agree that optimum quality is a high priority, then we might agree that some experiences are better than others because they contribute to the good. I would agree that the artist, perhaps unconsciously, strives for a life-enhancing experience. Probably the artist's primary motivation is to enhance his/her own life. It may explain why so many people are drawn to the making and experiencing of art when it does not fit neatly into the pervasive drives of our culture to amass conventional wealth and power.

The artist is also interested in power; it is originally a personal power that sometimes becomes outwardly directed - that is, the art is used as a source of power in relation to others.

The first motives are life enhancing; this is what drives the effort to make art. It is a quest to gain control over oneself and the world - to feel connected in a way that is not possible on other levels of human experience. One can feel safer owning property, life and health insurance, having a family or attending church, but not personally a part of the greater unknown. I don't mean to make this metaphysical, but to suggest a power and experience that people may have. If this were not so, who would bother looking at the ancient cave paintings, Chinese pottery, a Rembrandt, or listen to Satie's music with awe and feel refreshed by the experience.

It is easy to forget these potentially life enhancing experiences in a world of candy and pain. The first because sweets debase our appetite; the latter because the pain is so great and pervasive. These extremes seem so all encompassing that we have lost, or are embarrassed too much to acknowledge any other possibilities

I am not willing to forgo value judgments. While I may enjoy reading a comic strip for relaxation, I would not choose a steady diet of them. Nor would I ascribe a high level of achievement - beyond how it relates to other comics - because it does not feed my need to know myself and the world better and to provide a model of man's greatest abilities. (The form itself is not limiting; this was proved by Art Spiegelman's *Maus*,) it is the pervasive content.) Talking about the weather is useful, but not nearly (unless it is a tornado warning) as a conversation about more pressing issues of one's personal life interests and issues.

I think there is much avoidance in life. We substitute evasion (entertainment) for experience - the vicarious sports event for the real events of one's own life, abilities and potential experiences.

How does the above impact on our lives as contemporary artists? If the highest order of art is to touch, to evoke the ineffable, should we not differentiate between the various levels of art and aesthetic experiences? Would it not be wise to say that art can serve many purposes? From the purely personal to the commercial, from light entertainment to the profound, rather than be unclear and confused on these issues? If yes, is it possible to do?

Although intent and result are not to be confused, because intent does not guarantee a particular result, intention does give us an important clue why art is made and whom it serves. It would be foolish to seek profundity in the mass produced hamburger

and yet, at times, I think we do just that in art. I can conceive that a painting of a hamburger could be profound. Even a modest subject or effort can, but it is an area that is not likely to yield wisdom, especially when it was never intended.

There may be a trend that flows through our greatest examples of art, and it possesses a profundity that has the power to evoke a respondent chord in the receptive viewer. One could say that the quest for beauty has been the subliminal goal of artists in all times. At other times, usually in great despair, this goal is decried and abandoned and in its place we find irony, sarcasm and negation.

One might view pop art, postmodernism and dada as such reactions - a failure of faith - a lack of belief in the ability of art or man to deal with the large questions in life. A denial that there even are “big” questions.

Perhaps these movements are necessary correctives - a way of righting the course, of overthrowing entrenched power and moribund forms. If so, these are to be welcomed as cleansers - clearing to open the path to renewed conviction.

At present, modernist driven art appears to be severely limited. It no longer has the power to speak to us in our time. It is not patently bad or useless. At this moment, it has become another form of academic art whether it is painting or photography, waiting to be revitalized, perhaps in an altered form, yet with its primary goal and purpose intact.

Can you think of a postmodern work that has the power to affect you deeply? If so, why? Is it because it eschews such a goal? What do you think is the most important thing in art?

Finally, one is left with a basic problem regarding the appreciation or response to art. Art affects people in different ways. Time or place play important roles in the nature of these responses. It is a given that there is a wide range of response. Art which is thought, in one time period, to be magnificent can be relegated to obscurity and disinterest later on. We cannot arrive at definitive answers.

My belief is that, aside from the obvious utilitarian purposes for art, at its root there is, for want of a better term, a “spiritual” purpose. Admittedly, this purpose is often not consciously planned. Nevertheless this is the sustaining drive to make art and to live with it. Also, certain works have a staying power that rises to the top, although not invariably, or for ever and ever.

Art serves an important role in human existence. There is “thread”, not easily defined, but sufficiently felt or experienced to convince us of its existence and usefulness. This “thread” is very important. Even though this quality “beauty” is difficult to define, I believe it is the essential ingredient and the primary motivation for making and responding to art.

ART NOW

We often accept as a given that art ultimately lives and is judged by its aesthetic function. This is why we treasure, study, and carry it forward in time. However, this is not invariably the case. Some things are carried forward because of their historical importance or continued functional vitality or usefulness.

While art may continue to live as an aesthetic object this is often not its original role. There is usually a decided functional purpose for making what we later call art. In the past the work might have been made to decorate a church, and to tell the story of the bible. Or, it might have been a basket meant to hold and carry something. Or, a portrait, or commemorative sculpture. In our times, images might be made to question societal values, to point to or document injustices, or strictly as decoration. In fact, the art might be made to comment and challenge art of the past with its implied values and purposes.

At issue are the questions about the primary purpose of activities we ascribe to artists, the making of images and forms, the ordering of visual elements. We tend to call such efforts “art,” if we believe it meets our criteria. Yet much of this was conceived for a specific functional purpose. Although, we can say that creating an aesthetic object is also a functional purpose (perhaps a decorative purpose, but not necessarily minor, purpose as might be implied by the term “decorative”). The making of an aesthetic object may also serve spiritual, theoretical and expressive purposes.

Historically, I think the conscious making of an aesthetic object - called Art - was probably not the primary motivation, but a secondary outcome. In our time, the primary reason is to create art. At least this is what we expect artists to do.

I wonder though, **if this** “cart before the horse” approach does not weaken the vitality of the work? Even if the purpose was the expression of ideas, feelings, or values, the work might be fueled with greater meaning and be more meaningful in its time, if there was little or no concern about its future status. This is an argument in favor of a clear purpose or intention, one that has a specific function aside from the aesthetic.

If this were the case, then much contemporary work that may not at first appear aesthetically satisfying as an art object, because content is a preeminent concern, may be right and “proper” as an artist’s work. Aesthetics need not necessarily be a consideration.

Some artists make aesthetic objects because this is seen as the only valid approach in the “fine” arts. In other areas, the purely aesthetic aspect would not be sufficient or primary. For example, artists who are designers of books, clothing, offices, or fabrics patterns, all need to consider if their creation will be used and if the prospective clients and consumers will respond. There is an aesthetic consideration but it is not necessarily primary.

Much postmodern art is driven by a concept, an issue that is the main focus of the work. Aesthetic considerations play a much lesser role. If we apply modernist criteria and values to these works, they may be considered failures, not aesthetically satisfying. Even though we may know that these artists have deliberately abandoned the modernist canon, that they do not believe in its purported powers, some of us tend to still use this as an appropriate measure. This is largely the case because essentially we believe that in time it is the aesthetic qualities that will survive or fail, long past the issues addressed in the work.

Yet we also know that the conscious making of a largely aesthetic object is not the

rule, historically. Those objects we venerate as high art were made for very specific purposes - aesthetics being a secondary consideration, if it was one at all. We tend to judge the present by the past. We believe the future will be judged by the standards we now hold to be valid.

The truth may be that those contemporary artists who are focusing on a particular issue, having a certain program, are in effect working for a patron, even though the patron may not be clearly identified. (Perhaps it is the collector, the Museum, the Art Magazine, the Art World, the Corporation?). They are focussed on a functional purpose. This is foremost and the work survives and lives in its time - its moment - if it meets that functional end. In time we may come to appreciate its aesthetic appeal, even though it may be very different from earlier canons. Maybe this will not happen and it will only have historical interest. These are factors we cannot predict with certainty. However, it might be safer to meet present needs, to create for our time with little or no concern as to whether we are making Art that will last for the ages. There are other factors beyond the originating artist's control that create the objects we install in museums, and they might include aesthetic factors we are not totally aware of now.

INDIVIDUALITY

Each person is unique. Naturally, the way we view and react to experience and the world will vary because of our uniqueness. This is also true in art. We don't really need to strive to be unique - we are - but develop our special interests and abilities. Probably, one of the factors that contributes to our admiration of artists and their work is their singular ability to express their unique talent.

Factors such as environment and personal makeup determine how far the potential residing in each person will be developed. For example, in vegetables or flowers, the seed carries the genetic structure with all its inherent capabilities. There is no reason to expect that the tomato seed will become anything but a tomato. Yet, the soil, temperature, water availability and sunlight will all contribute to the development of the seed - the range being from aborted growth to a magnificent fruit in size, color, and flavor.

It is the interaction of various elements that aides or hampers our development. Furthermore, consciousness makes us aware of our growth or lack thereof, and we can assume responsibility for our progress. In fact, it could be said that this is the primary business of living.

It is challenging to pursue our heritage, to utilize the environment to best advantage, and experience satisfaction in realizing our abilities - this is tantamount to living creatively. The arts provide an excellent vehicle to use qualities lying dormant within us. When we give these feelings or ideas form, a high degree of fulfillment is experienced, our purpose is met.

Countless images are within us. These are not literally pictures but rather a storehouse of latency that can be expressed. It is really inherent qualities that are brought to

awareness and given form in concrete images. Just as each individual has a unique structure, there is probably one mode of expression that is most suitable or efficient.

How can one find the unique qualities that are right to develop? Consider looking at this entire issue in relation to two differing modes of thinking, sometimes associated with the left and right brain hemispheres. It can be thought of a discursive and non-discursive thinking. Because most of us are conditioned to think discursively, it is easy to forget that we probably first thought non-discursively and can still do so. Our discursive thought is conditioned by time-worn patterns, geared to fulfill certain expectations. We are locked into thinking patterns. Some refer to the non-discursive mode as visual thinking, but this is not accurate because visualization is an aspect of non-discursive thought and is only one system for presenting these thoughts (ideas, feelings, sensations). It is really an academic question whether non-discursive thinking takes place (right or left hemisphere, etc.); what is significant is that this mode of thinking exists and there is ample evidence for it in the arts, sciences and technology. Most important is that we have means for reactivating non-discursive thought.

There are several ways we can gain insight to our personal goal and special qualities. First, look at what you have already accomplished. It may be that you have practiced art in the past, as early as childhood. If you still have this work, study what you created, and look at it with the idea of finding patterns. By patterns I mean subject interest, particular shapes, colors, lines and textures, that seem to crop up repeatedly. A note of caution is called for because on the one hand you are looking for unique characteristics but repetitions may also be the result of conditioning and have little to do with your particular interests and needs in art. An artist has a great advantage in being able to look back. Use this method whenever you can as a way of discovering your direction.

Another related approach is to look at the work of others. I have found parts of my interests in the paintings and sculptures of other artists. We find that certain works hold our attention. We respond or resonate to particular elements. Look and see what these art works have to “tell you”. It may be the way the artist designs his work, his subject, way of applying paint, shapes, etc. You will find that this experience will change over the years, but will have a general direction.

The third way is related to the first two in that it too requires that we look beyond ourselves. In this case, we reflect on our environment. Start with your room, apartment, or house if it is a reflection of you. Consider the things outside of your immediate environment. Are you drawn to parks, mountains, beaches, or cities?

If you use some materials such as pen and paper, crayons, a lump of clay, or many other similar items, and “mindlessly” play or doodle with it for ten or fifteen minutes, you can create a form that also contains useful information for you. We rarely receive guidance towards our goals in a big flash. More often, we are lucky to be given a hint on our next best steps.

Being an artist - giving form to ideas and feelings - creating - is a way to realize and express qualities latent within us. What are normally called works of art are traces left by our actions, our movements. We can be aware of the quality of our movements and allow them to develop by practice. When we touch someone else or are touched, it is possible to be aware of the quality of the touching. For example, it is easy to tell if the touch conveys hostility, eroticism, friendly caressing, or a transfer of energy. It is also possible to know a good deal about the state of mind of the person doing the touching. You can tell, if you pay attention, if the person doing the touching is fully concentrating on the contact or whether their mind has wandered in its attention. A great deal can be known by the quality of touching which is the result of movement.

If we are touching or moving with art materials, we also leave a trace of our actions. Thus, it is possible to note how concentrated we or another person was when they made a drawing of a flower, for example. Is there evidence of full concentration? Do you sense manipulation or abuse? Stuttering? Display of technical virtuosity? Is there probing to realize the form, or the energy latent within the form? Each of these and more is available for our awareness in our own work or that of others.

HAND MADE IMAGES (ART)

Are older media (painting, sculpture, graphics, ceramics) viable in our time? My question is whether an artist can use older hand-applied media, such as oil paints to develop and deliver a contemporary “message?” I am surprised that this issue is not addressed when questions about the death of painting in particular, and art are discussed. It may be that we are ignoring the obvious and still trying to understand what no longer applies when we consider the viability of the fine arts today. Of course there may be any number of other reasons for questioning the role and relevance of contemporary art.

Before proceeding it is important to define “hand made.” Images can be made by hand and yet contain little if any indication that this is the case. For example if an artist has taken the attitude that they wish to remove any visible indication of human presence - many do - then it is possible to achieve this in hand work I would eliminate this kind of work as an example of hand made images because it just as well could be made by some mechanical means. The most vivid evidence of hand work contains “gestural” marks which can be seen in clay, paint, or other media.

Can a contemporary audience relate to and “read” hand made images? My tentative conclusion is that this is very questionable. New forms such as film, video, and photography developed to meet the needs of our times and superseded older media. In addition we have to include the newest of the new to the newer media: computer graphics. Nevertheless, I still have some unanswered questions.

These new images are not created by hand; there are chemical, mechanical, and electronic intermediaries, as well as lenses that play very important roles in creating the images. True, human decisions and manipulation¹ are involved. However, essentially,

In hand made imagery, the artist may have looked at and seen a visual field and made a selection. However, it all had to be synthesized, be built from the start. This process made it necessary and possible to consider alterations while making the image. Alteration in lens made imagery is the exception; the converse is true of hand made images. Computer graphics returned this possibility, that is, images could be created, crafted via the computer from start, or they could be the result of previously captured lens made images which could then be manipulated as needed. The cycle had come around, in some ways.

Meanwhile, the public lost its appetite for hand made images as the way to receive information about their time and lives. It's true that paintings and such still have a revered place in museums - not much in homes - and they gained exceptional value because they became rare collectibles. There is also something charming about things hand made and such items are becoming rarer all the time. However, the public finds it comfortable to relate to things, people, and images through an intermediary. We no longer value human touch in art as the general rule; we prefer that the image be one step removed from the artist's hand. We also began to confuse reality with representations of reality. When reality does not measure up to the expected representations, we sue for divorce.

Placing more control back in the hands of the artist by using computer graphics raises the possibility that we can again make use of some capabilities we had with hand made images. However, one thing is missing and it might be critical. Why is it that so many computer graphics images, are so unsatisfying as static images? (Perhaps I am conveying a personal bias based on my long connection with hand made images.) The capabilities for manipulating images with computers are astounding. There are endless options; these may be part of the problem.

Perhaps a new generation does find this kind of image satisfying? This is very likely because this is the imagery they have been conditioned to relate to. One would need to do research on this question to discover what really is the case. And, one should select an educated population that is interested in the “serious” as opposed to the popular arts. In any case, by far the most pervasive and influential images people relate to are not hand made images in older media or forms.

What, if anything, can the hand made image, in the hands of a skilled artist deliver that the lens made or computer generated image cannot? No matter how much hand drawing that occurs with the computer system, it is all mediated by algorithms. William Mitchell has addressed this issue in his thoughtful book: *The Reconfigured Eye.*

Hand made images have another kind of mediation. A pencil, provided it is not so hard a graphite that it leaves little variation of marks, leaves a trace of the artist’s movement. This can be approximated in computer graphics. However, I believe it is different from the pencil which is a closer extension of not only the human hand but the body. There is something special that can happen with artist’s material, whether it is pastel or clay, which is transferred directly to the receptive surface. Unlike computer graphics it is unrepeatable. A direct energy transfer occurs, for better or worse. It might be argued that the simple pencil itself stands in the way between the artist and the work. No doubt there is some truth to this but I believe the pencil is less intrusive.

The first beneficiary of such an action is the artist. When the resultant marks are successful, the artist achieves what was sought for or more. The second beneficiary is the viewer, if she/he is receptive and has not developed an antipathy toward human marks.

The receptive viewer has been touched and feels the contact of the artist. This may be on an unconscious level. It is this energy transfer that may be very important. Depending on the materials employed the touching can be very complex since it might include not only a mark but one that has color, value, and texture. Texture and material may have special importance because of the quality and quantity of data it could include. In our time, we do not touch each other frequently. When we do it may be to hurt each other, or to arouse each other for sexual satisfaction. I believe there is little touching as a way of communicating other feelings. Many people suffer because of lack of human contact. Sympathetic touching is essential from childhood on.

I started out believing that newer media had bypassed the older media and forms. I believe this may still be the case for the reasons I have alluded to above. Yet I became aware even as I developed these beliefs that something was lost and missing. I have tried to discover if this is the case, and if so, what the problem is. I believe we have lost something very valuable and significant and I am not sure we can regain it. It is true that the hand made image will not entirely disappear. But, if it only remains as a quaint collectible artifact, it will not function anywhere near its potential. To do this, the hand made image must make the fullest use of its unique qualities which is the absolute ability to carry and transfer, via human touch the somatic knowledge we each contain. It requires a skilled artist to manifest this and a receptive audience to complete the communication cycle.

We have become so used to accepting glossy reproductions of paintings and sculpture that we forget that what is especially important in hand made work: the fine discrimination of hand and eye that are part of a master's work. Hundreds of decisions and actions have been taken regarding color, value, intensity, texture, touch,

relationships, etc. that cannot be repeated in reproductions. The original is important because it contains all the results of the artist's work. We need to remember and acknowledge these differences.

If there still is a viable role for hand made images using older media it may be the following service that art can perform. It can allow the person - the artist - to dream, to imagine, to create. In and of itself this is personally valuable and distinctively human. Secondly, if the "dreaming" is successful then it provides the means to release the dreaming, imagination, creativity of others. When we talk about our dreams we have a small example of how this works. The conversation immediately can move to a more personal and universal level. Partly, the success of this interchange is due to the quality of the dreaming - what we allow ourselves - and the receptivity of the others. It is both the structure and the content of the dream that makes for accessibility and stimulation. Thus, (art) images can serve us and others. It is a modest goal to become aware of our feelings through imagination, dreaming, creating, but, nevertheless important in a world that provides fewer of these opportunities for people. Imagination and feelings are prepackaged in much that is available; there is a great deal of manipulation. Older visual forms may seem to fail because they do not provide clear communication via a contemporary means. However, the real message and purpose may be in their capability to evoke feelings, thoughts, ideas, by "touching" the viewer in a non-manipulative way.

Perhaps their greatest value is to share the artist's imagination, dreaming, creating, not so much as a way of sending the artist's particular experience, but as a way of awakening the viewer's experiences. It is the quality of the artist's experience and work that establish the level and quality of the viewer's response. I assume, a shallow "dreaming" evokes a shallow response.

It may be that a new generation will only be able to communicate in what I consider a more mediated or interfaced way and that this way will serve their needs. I can only hope that what has been lost with the changeover from hand made images will be replaced with capabilities that the older media and forms could not have and that these will be at least as valuable. After all we cannot claim to have done such a excellent or when it comes to human communication. And, we probably can devise ways to incorporate into contemporary images (art) what was valuable, and what we still value, about hand made images.

Mitchell, William J. *The Reconfigured Eye, Visual Truth in the Post-Photographic Era*. MIT, 1992, p.76.

THE *WHAT* AND THE *WHY* OF ART

There is an uneasiness in the art world, among artists, curators, critics, gallery owners, and the public to whom all the work is ultimately directed. Evidence of the uneasiness is more than the financial collapse of the art market in New York and other art centers. It is more than the insolvency of art institutions. Perhaps more telling is a sense of uncertainty among artists (and institutions that attempt to educate us) regarding what they do and why, and the real value and purpose of our activities, beyond any personal satisfaction.

One might look at the situation and say it is healthy, that there is a vigorous search going on to develop greater clarity regarding the what and why of art. Often this seems like a frenetic search to either discover the key to the magic kingdom (how to make it) or an equally frenetic search to find meaning and purpose in being an artist in the 1990's.

A constant eroding and abandonment of the basic forms of plastic visual expression (images and forms) has gone on unabatedly since the 1950's. We have seen a succession of "isms," each accompanied with "theorists" to explain what was occurring and how we should respond to the work. Public relations efforts have surpassed the work itself so that the PR and the artist have become the focus. Andy Warhol best exemplified this and was a seminal influence.

It seems that what was significant, if even in a marginal way, about the visual arts, was depleted. It's true that a small part of the public was interested in collectibles and needed new items to store power (besides oriental rugs, stocks, and bonds) and to build status. Artists went to see each other's work, and if the publicity was good enough, the collectors came.

Of course, I'm talking about "serious art," work that had as its aim a thoughtful interaction with life - an exchange with an avid and intelligent public. What we might call work that is directed to the marketplace - the secure and decorative - still maintains its place in society. This is not the present subject.

I'm thinking about the works that people do that may be categorized as: drama, literature, poetry, art film, dance, and music - not made for popular consumption but that which seeks some truth - productions that attempt to enrich life and help to give or create meaning and insight, if only temporarily.

Have the visual arts lost their place in this field of endeavor? If we look at the art world the answer would very likely be: "Yes." But, we would not look to popular music, fiction, sitcoms, etc. to satisfy these needs. It must be that in the visual arts serious work also takes place in a realm that is not readily seen in what passes for the art world. At least, I hope that this is the case. Yet one would hope to find this kind of work in the museums if not the commercial galleries.

Otherwise, I would have to believe that "serious" art cannot be made, because the forms and/or media are outmoded. It could be that the plastic visual arts, like painting, sculpture, and printmaking (two and three dimensional work) have been replaced by visual arts that are more graphic, animated, complemented by oral or written commentary, and sound/music, because these provide a more fertile means of expression and communication. Maybe it is just too difficult or inappropriate to continue using the older forms. They may no longer be adequate. (This is a difficult premise to accept for those of us raised with certain beliefs and expectancies about the understandings, feelings, ideas, that can only be gained in this way.

Clearly, Van Gogh could reflect on his life and the life in his time by using a

landscape as his subject. His content had to do with the forces of nature and nature's raw beauty. In our time we may need other subjects and content to accomplish similar ends, but we should not lose sight of this very valuable purpose.

The bottom line, it seems to me, is that life can be enriched by the experience of interacting with images in a profound way. And, I admit that this experience is and will be individual. However, I believe we can tell the qualitative difference between substances, though at times it may be very difficult. Some works are richer and much more meaningful than others.

Perhaps I am being presumptuous when I assume there is some common agreement that the work of an artist like Van Gogh, a composer, Mozart, the playwright,

Arthur Miller, the contemporary painter, Susan Rothenberg, or others is exceptional, though it might not meet our individual tastes or needs. If this is not so, then we might have to abandon the idea of mastery.

When we think of our institutions that play an important role in the development and presentation of visual expression, we can also consider the questions of "what and why" to recognize how these institutions might best serve our needs. What should we teach and why? What should we display and why?

I would argue that we should deal with a wide array of work Preference should be given to fulfilling the greatest purposes - examination of the human condition and the creation of meaning, communication on the deepest and highest levels. It's good to say "hello," but I believe we have much more to say to each other, and when this happens we enrich all our lives. Perhaps we no longer believe in this possibility? I believe it is possible and that artists can play a significant role in this part of our lives.

An artist's job - at the highest level of performance - is to discover or invent (imagination and creation) an image that embodies and conveys (not illustrates, although illustration has a useful place) a response to life. The finished work may evoke a feeling, idea, an insight, or sensation, which enriches an individual's life. Artists probably began as craftspeople, making needed things and giving form to feelings for specific purposes - to carry liquid, to mark a community or personal event. Suddenly, besides serving its initial "utilitarian" purpose, it reached beyond that capacity and embodied or evoked a deeper experience and meaning however temporal. Somehow it touched another part of ourselves and our capacities. We need not start with such a lofty aim, but merely aim to serve each other and occasionally reach beyond that.

I suggest that at a certain time, an individual craftsman transformed what they were doing unconsciously so that it became more than was originally intended. This is tricky, because what I am alluding to may not have been the work of the artist, but happened because of the viewer's response. Somehow the viewer was moved in an unexpected way and a special value was given to the object and the artist. This was probably the moment when the term and being "artist" was created.

This special event or object we call *art* is in reality something that happens in the process of viewing; at least individuals believe it does. Of course once this was occurred, craftspeople probably started to strive to repeat this occurrence. Symbiotic relationships were established. Now we have specialists who tell us when this magic occurs - they are called critics and theorists.

Usually, we believe that the artist has transformed some raw material into art. We may believe that this is the role, as I have alluded to above, of artists at their highest level of performance. In such cases the artist approaches the role of shaman, priest, or philosopher, at the least, magician. Oddly, it might be that the artist has to do little more

than take an already existing object and place it in a new context, such as Marcel Duchamp did: Duchamp transformed the object, although not physically altered, and for some it became art. If an artist can create a new insight or meaning in such a way it would have to be accepted. It would not matter if the artist's hand was evident, or if it were fashioned with certain acceptable materials. The only criterion would be if the artist had created meaning, provided a fresh insight or feeling regarding something that people held to be important. I am inclined to argue that something *special* can happen when there is actual manipulation of materials. The individual forms materials in part unconsciously and there are often unexpected discoveries in the process. I would also have to consider the possibility of this happening even when there is no such direct manipulation or forming of materials except by conjunction.

Institutions dedicated to the education of artists should remove the emphasis on media as a way to structure the curriculum. Rather, the emphasis should return to the *why* and *what* of art and being an artist. The first skills an artist must learn are how to take the raw data of life - or even data already gathered - and to find the means to transform this data/experience so that it provides insight and meaning.

If the visual arts (fine) are moribund, it is probably because the focus on *what* an artist should do and *why* is lost. New ways of creating images have emerged and serve a larger public, whereas older forms serve a shrinking audience. How we create images is only significant in relation to our needs. The media must match the "message." It must be an appropriate carrier for the content. It should be so wedded to the content at times that they are inseparable and it must be accessible to an intelligent audience. It may still be possible to use an old form, such as illusionistic oil painting to deal with a contemporary issue (Erich Fischl comes to mind), but probably this will rarely be the case because differing times and places require new means, and because a contemporary audience can no longer respond to the older form - if it is not current language.

Perhaps the new visual artists may cross over very closely into other disciplines video, film, etc. The telling distinction will be the quality of the images that are created and how large a role the *images* play in the finished work Is it the *image* that provides the means and the insight? The boundaries are not important as such. What is important is the effective use of imagery to further human inquiry, knowledge, and communication in a distinctively visual way.

Therefore it might be useful to let go of the word and the idea it denotes: *art*. We should focus our attention on the creating of images (two and three dimensional, static and moving, with and without text) to help us to order our lives and experiences and to give meaning, and at times new knowledge and insights. What we have called art, was the separation of craft and some higher or different purpose that images could serve. If this was not just an arbitrary distinction and really something worthy of special attention, then we should continue to nurture it. If we do not find this to be the case, then we should accept the implications, that is, there is nothing very special about Rembrandt and other artists considered masters. For myself, I am not ready to say this.

Remember the various purposes that images may serve, from decoration to designing, as well as to the loftier goal that may approach philosophical inquiry. Let's not forget the power of images to shape our lives.

What does this mean for the future education of images makers and the institutions that are charged with their preparation? At the least the focus should be away from the study of specific media. This places the emphasis on materials and media disconnected from purpose and potential meaning and creates unnecessary boundaries. This is especially foolish in a time when many traditional media are no longer relevant to a contemporary audience nor provide appropriate means for ex-

pressing the complexities of our time. The emphasis should first be on why we make images and for *what* purpose. This means we need to teach the use of materials and mediums in relation to purpose. In this way we can again take a meaningful place in the world and be clear about the very important role we have to play.

QUALITIES OF PAINT

When we look at paintings we are most likely to notice the subject matter or the dominant image of the work. We may also be attracted to the colors and shapes. Underlying these more obvious attractions and fundamental to their existence are the materials that the artist employed and the way they were used.

Paintings are composed of pigments (or dyes) which are available in many colors and a binder - something to hold the pigments together. There are various binders and solvents which are used in conjunction with the pigments. We don't often think about the paint substance when looking at a painting and this is probably as it should be. However, the paint and its particular qualities play an important role in bringing the image into being and affecting the viewer, even though this may be on a subconscious level.

Currently, artists are fortunate in having many choices in deciding what kind of paints they will use and the way they will be applied. Early paint formulations such as egg tempera or distemper (glue) pigment mediums required that the paint be put on in very thin layers and dictated the speed the paint had to be applied since it dried very quickly. Over the years, slower drying materials were developed. The possibility of varying the thickness of paint application became more feasible. Artists were able to create varied textures with the use of oil paint. In the last hundred years we have seen artists build the thickness of paint so that there are at times several inches of paint loaded on the surface.

Of course, thick or thin, transparent or opaque, paint is not better in and of itself. Nor is acrylic better than oil or egg tempera. In fact, all of these media are still employed successfully today. What is important is to realize that the way in

which an artist uses materials can contribute very significantly to the finished painting. It is fair to say that the choice of materials as well as the manner of use contribute to the finished painting. It is fair to say that the choice of materials as well as the manner of use contribute to the conception of the work.

Think for a moment about the various qualities of paint. If you are familiar with egg tempera you will know that it is usually built up very slowly, with individual strokes of the brush. The finished surface is very smooth. Acrylics can be used in a similar manner. Oil paints can be blended more easily than either of these media and it is possible to have very transparent areas as well as great opacity and thinness as well as thick textures.

What does it matter? Why are artists attracted to certain media more than others? Why does one prefer watercolor and another oil paint? One might guess that it is the qualities of the materials that foster the selection. Some paints are “smooth talking,”others rough. When we look at paintings we don’t think about the inherent qualities or those material potentials that have been utilized by the artist, but we are affected by them. The smooth carefully blended surface is likely to make us feel a certain way when looking at the painting, aside from the effect of the image. The rough, heavily textured paint of another work will satisfy or repel us. The combinations are infinite and the skillful artist makes good use of the various possibilities for expressive and aesthetic ends.

One of the distinctive aspects of contemporary painting is the realization of the potential for a great variety of ways to use paint - the selection of medium and application - to achieve artistic purposes to a degree that has not existed before.

If we are sensitive to the various qualities of paint, we can be affected by this as

much as any other aspect of a painting, and when all the elements of a painting operate in a synergistic way the effectiveness of the whole work is greatly enhanced.

BEING AN ARTIST

I'm thinking about the so-called fine arts - painting, sculpture, printmaking, and photography. Within these categories it is the non-commercial approach or use of these disciplines, that is, work not made solely to satisfy a popular market. I am referring to is what we might call "serious art," just as we might think about the sciences or the humanities in their most respected manifestations.

Painting, for example can be likened to basic research in the sciences, or original creative research work in the humanities. Its prime motive is the expansion of knowledge and the creation of exceptional artistic achievements - not necessarily technical, but a high order of expression that might include technical innovation.

Often, artists, engaged in self criticism, say that we only make art for each other. The claim is that only other artists understand contemporary art. This is no doubt largely true, but it is no different saying that only scientists, or poets, understand each others work. In an age of great specialization, the understanding is limited to specific spheres. Therefore, to say that it is only artists who "speak and understand the language" is not alone a serious indictment. One might hope that it could be understood by a wider audience. This is always a possibility when an artist attempts to make their work

For the moment, let's assume that "serious" fine artists are like scientists, poets, dramatists, novelists, and modern composer doing important "creative research" in their disciplines. Their work is primarily understood by others in their field, and their fields are, by their nature, very specialized. They are not interested in seeking a popular audience -their quest is the "truth," or "beauty." We know that while the scientist or the poet toils in a small area, ultimately their work may add to the whole, if it is part of an ongoing talkconnected to life. At some point in time, the scientist's findings may lead to a new medicine, product, or methodology.

Similarly, the poet may provide new insights into the human psyche or personality that may be incorporated into psychological theory and practice, or simply help individuals to know themselves and the world in new ways.

What of the visual artists? Their work also may become part of a larger world. It might influence fabric patterns for garments. Surely, we have seen how the fine arts have effected and educated our visual sensibilities in the realm of popular photography, film, and video, and now computer graphics.

At first sight, the fine arts may seem frivolous and silly, and no doubt much of it may be because much is not seriously directed. These artists are interested in shortening, if not eliminating, the distance between the fine and applied nature of the discipline. However, at its root the visual arts still have an important role to play in human development. What is most important is the direction, emphasis or value that is placed in the work. Too often it is misdirected and, therefore, misunderstood.

Forms do and should change; however, the basic nature of the discipline (art) remains a fundamental function of human development! Now let's look at the forms to see if they need to be altered to function effectively as a current means. Forms have histories. Some are fairly easy to trace. Poetry, drama and narratives seem to go back a long time to an oral tradition and forward to our time in recognizable form. No doubt, before the written word, or printing, the oral tradition was more important as a form than it is now. We have to recognize that forms survive and can be vital and relevant. Think about the importance of performance artists who are monologists. Film and television are updated versions of drama and narrative forms. Are these newer forms more appropriate to our times? Are they more efficient or effective? They may be and this is a question worthy of our attention.

One might even say that films and television are a combination of photography and drama - a new form. Again, we might consider how valid the old form still is. If it does appear to still be valid, how can it be used in its most effective way?

A form can remain essentially valid and adapted to changed times and needs. It is important to say that any form could be valid. It is not so much the form, or what one does, but how well it one does it; its compelling energy and achievement. Cooking can be a form - an experience - a way of interacting with the world that is extremely effective and relevant. Conceivably, the way in which the cook does his job could impact significantly on others, and I don't mean in the most obvious way.

For a form to be useful and effective it must be accessible, even to a small audience - and there must be room for talk and exchange, not necessarily daily, but in time. A work could remain unseen for a long time, but at sometime it must be seen, "tested", and found meaningful or not. Without exposure there is the danger of sterility, or still born work.

What or where is the appropriate place to "publish" ones work or findings. I suppose wherever one can, but more importantly, where it can be experienced by an intelligent, educated audience. This is not to discount the popular audience - where would Shakespeare have been? - but to acknowledge the importance of the audience. In our time there is little difficulty in showing films, including art films, to an avid audience. Although it needs to be acknowledged that some films wait a long time for exposure and most are very costly to make thus limiting access to filmmaking and audiences.

Do we have an avid audience for fine art photography, painting, sculpture, or printmaking? Sometimes yes, but it seems very small. Of course it is not only large

~~numbers that are important, but real, intelligent interest. This is only possible if there are~~
criteria to apply in making evaluations, even if they are not explicit. Do we have such criteria?

For the visual artist, the place to exhibit might be “alternative spaces,” or the rare museum dedicated to experimentation and innovation. Or, a gallery that can afford an interest beyond the monetary.

An artist may not think about the issues raised here as clearly as the scientist because there is confusion between commerce and “research” in art. However, if these were more clearly articulated there would be less confusion regarding goals, directions, and expectations. Also, it need not be one or the other. One can choose to earn a livelihood and do “serious” work and avoid confused goals by being clear with oneself. This might help immeasurably to make goals more realizable.

Is it possible to do “serious” work in art today. Are the forms we use appropriate, lending themselves to this kind of inquiry? If yes, is there a real audience? If you are a visual artist, what is your purpose in 1993?

Now the artist has to face different issues than in Medieval or Renaissance times when the artist’s work and audience were clearly defined. The position of the fine artist is different today. One’s work can be strictly geared to the marketplace - or, as with other disciplines in a University, motivated by fewer present considerations.

Of course, artists also make art for spiritua/religious reasons, and this has its own validity, just as practice for personal reasons. However, if you are undertaking to do work that you expect to serve others as well as yourself, it is very useful to be clear

what your purpose is and to consider the effectiveness of the means you have chosen and the possibility for realization.

PHOTOGRAPHY AND PAINTING AS WAYS TO EXPERIENCE THE WORLD

The evidence we have is that the unconscious or dead do not record their experiences or attempt to share them. As living beings, we do, some in art, others in everyday commentary.

We know that it is easier to see and show people things with which they are familiar. This takes advantage of habits and strengths already developed. Conversely, it is difficult to see, appreciate, and understand new things.

Making an image photographically does not call for, or is there, detailed visual discrimination. Photography is essentially an analytical process. The photographer scans the environment, frames an area in the camera viewer then releases the shutter, exposing the light sensitive film to the reflected rays of light falling on the chosen scene. Choice has played an important part. There are infinite selection possibilities, yet the photographer has selected a particular section of life and has made an image of this rectangular field. The photographer does not have to see or experience each element that is included in the frame, the camera records it all almost automatically and monocularly, rendering the three dimensional richness in a flat representation. One has only to compare a stereo photo with the ordinary single photographic image to realize how lacking in three dimensions the latter is. Furthermore, the image is a single, instantaneous, static image, unlike the way we see. We see more like a moving camera (motion picture) than a fixed camera.

The photograph can provide a great deal in its image. We have noted its democratic propensity to record all. The details have not been selected and represented on an item-by-item basis, and they have not had to pass the photographer's judgment.

Often the photograph lacks really fine definition due to the nature of its materials. It has no textural variation. As a surface, it is fairly neutral. However, just as a drawing or painting provides an image for contemplation, so does the photograph. By looking at the photograph, we can see/experience what was before the photographer. It is important to remember that in the photo we see limited data. Within the limits of the medium and the process it represents a particular point of view.

When artists choose to use a photograph as the subject for a painting, and there are those who meticulously reproduce the intact photo at one extreme, and others who take liberties in combining or altering the images that are based on photographs, they address themselves to a limited subject.

Photographic images are a pervasive element in our culture. Many artists choose to use this “one step removed from actual life” subject - the photograph, from among countless other choices life offers. They make art from art rather than the raw material of reality. Among artists, we also note those who observe life carefully, minutely, and with concentration. The spectrum is wide including those who combine memory, imagination, and observation.

The artist and the photographer both have a blank area to fill. The artist must process each element and manually create an image on the surface. This forces a certain degree of involvement with the subject, be it observed or imagined, that is largely absent from the photographic process.

Why make an image, other than for the reason of encouraging concentration? Perhaps other reasons need to be added. First, we said our choice of subject and focused attention help us to see/experience that subject. And, we have the opportunity to order our experience, to make sense of the experience and give it form; this is very

important for us individually. It is also a way to share our perceptions with others. We can help each other to see - to experience and gain awareness - to be alive to our fullest capacity.

The quality of the experience is more important than the value of the thing, person, or place, attended to. Everything is equal in value. If there are degrees they have more to do with how we experience something. People have different needs. If a person needs to see a sunset over the ocean, they will respond more to this than to a still life.

Some kind of seeing and experiencing is always taking place. A camera, in the hands of an operator, can be used to “make an image” but it is an image which, as noted earlier, lacks a certain kind of experience. Selection is obviously a very important part of the process, as is printing the image. However, in terms of attending to and experiencing what is observed, photography has its limitations. The photographer, due to the nature of the process, does not see/experience most of what he sees through the lens - the artist must, or else he cannot represent it. In painting or drawing, the observation may also be limited. The nature of the process, however, requires a higher degree of attentive seeing. If heightened seeing and experience are a high value, drawing or painting processes might yield greater results. Nevertheless, the final image is what counts - how it affects the artist/photographer and the viewer.

Now that we know what the limits of photography might be in regard to heightening the experience of life it is important to note its strengths. The location of an element in life that the photographer chooses to focus our attention on can be very revealing and telling. Even if we keep in mind that it is easily possible to view a photograph, or any other image, incorrectly, that is, otherwise than was intended. The photographer

might also consciously mislead the viewer or create a situation in the viewers' mind that was not present in the original instance. This is not unlike the creation of an image by a painter that is not based solely on the subject at hand. The choice of subject and the way in which it is photographed and printed has as much potential, if not more in our time, to move us deeply and enrich our life in many different kinds of ways. How the process affects the photographer is another matter, and this is difficult to know. Often photographers can be witnesses to horrendous happenings that they choose to photograph. For the photographer it may only be a momentary experience due to the nature of the medium. Nevertheless, it can be a very lasting experience for both the artist and the viewers. The photographer's methods are different but not necessarily less effective.

Photography is perhaps best used in the pursuit of knowing and ordering life experiences by creating an artifact - a document. This is especially true for photographers whose major emphasis and approach is "documenting." We tend to experience photographs as documents though they may not be as important to note that another distinctive branch of photography is more synthetic in its approach, that is, the image is pre-planned as often happens with filmmaking and video.) When the photographer is more involved in manipulating the subject, however it is done, I believe there is a different kind of potential for heightening experience, at least in different ways.

My purpose is to clarify the difference between the kinds of seeing/observation that takes place in photography and painting. The recent arrival of computer programs that allow for the manipulation of the initial photographic image has made it possible to put more of the artist back into this process - made it possible to include detailed vision, experience, imagination, and a kind of "manual" skill previously largely absent from photographs. In a sense, the new computer technologies have increased the possibility of bringing closer the methods of painting and photography.

the artist or photographer, and life. There will probably be distinct differences in the resulting images, the way viewers experience them, and how they affect the creators of such images.

