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CONCERNING
THE CURRENT
EXHIBITION
BY
ALBERS
DREIER ... KELPE
DREWES

Jean Lambert Brockway

At various times in the past artists have established certain devices which people learned to read and to accept as correct vision: e.g. Uccello's "laws" of perspective, or, the Impressionists "laws" of split colors. Contrary to appearances, these devices or symbols are problems of art and artists not problems of the representation of nature.

Great paintings have always been abstractions. They have been considered "good" or "bad" according to whether the devices used were commonly known and understood.

The abstract painters in this exhibition are using devices which though individually are not new, are now used consciously, not one at a time, but in combinations.

These are some of the things they are trying to do:

1. To abandon the idea of imitating appearances
2. To analyze objects not in order to re-create them but in order
3. To create new objects in paint and
4. To create new spaces between objects.
5. To increase the number of formal relationships between objects.
6. To reduce the number of formal elements in a painting.
7. To place the objects in space and in relation to each other so that new visual experiences will be possible.
8. To design freely with these elements of form and space so that the uses of the imagination will be served.
9. To analyze organization of parts into whole so that a structure will result which will be in harmony with the universe structure of modern science, e.g. a relationship structure.

Elsa Rogo Hirsch

Art, in an attempt to achieve a newer vision, has not refrained from utilizing either the incisive dissections of analytical scientific methods, or the accumulations of associative knowledge of the psycho-analyst, the anthropologist, the biologist.

Fed up with the naturalistic, in painting, unable to compete with the advances of photography, overwhelmed with the formlessness to which impressionistic reproduction had led, the artist set about to establish a new sense of order in his universe. Not unlike the physicist smashing the atom to penetrate its structure, one of the first steps, Cezanne's, was an analysis of simple objects into their even simpler geometric parts. His advice to a young sculptor, "You must see in nature the cylinder, the sphere, the cone " became their Gospel.

Thence stemmed the Cubists. Picasso, Braque, Leger, Hans Arp, painted innumerable canvases concerned, at first, primarily with analysing the structure of various objects through dissection, destruction, disintegration. Gradually, this analysis focussed on the structure of the picture itself. The effort was concentrated on the elements which went into the making of a work of art --- line, mass, color. Form relationships occupied the attention of the painter or the sculptor to the relative exclusion of all subject matter. From analytic investigation it progressed toward a synthetic composing of these newly discovered elements, to a consideration of the processes of construction, as in architecture. Research into the basic geometry, the fundamentals of proportion, the subtle interrelation of color and its psychological effect, was of paramount importance. All inessentials were rigorously discarded. Finally, the Suprematists like Malevich could construct a painting that consisted merely of one white square within another.

The movement in its reaching toward further and further abstraction of the structural essence from the content, had itself the character of all creative acts. The insistent urge towards a definite, unrenounceable goal, the incapability of the artist to permit of compromise, to deviate from the path of his impulsion - - almost the starkness of martyrdom in this logical pushing to a conclusion, sometimes an absurdum, made of the movement itself, in a sense, a work of art.

Abstract painting became an end in itself. Plato's aesthetic pleasure in geometry was frequently cited: "I will try to speak of the beauty of shapes, and I do not mean, as most people would think, the shapes of living figures, or their imitations in paintings, but I mean straight lines and curves

Elsa Rogo Hirsch (continued)

and the shapes made from them, flat or solid, by the lather, ruler and square, if you see what I mean. These are not beautiful for any particular reason or purpose, as other things are, but are always by their very nature beautiful, and give pleasure of their own quite free from the itch of desire; and colors of this kind are beautiful, too, and give a similar pleasure."

While the Cubists were laying bare the bones, the dichotomy of the human mind plainly showed itself in the parallel development of the non-rational and non-geometric -- the instinctive and intuitive, organic amorphous forms, decidedly emotional content. Klee, Ernst, Chirico, Pierre Roy, Lurcat, Miro, while their paintings were certainly intent on structure, deliberately used the symbology and associative-biomorphic forms that Freudian psychology had introduced.

Art found strange bed-fellows. Just as the Cubists included both convex and concave space within the limits of a single picture, and the Futurists included many facets of a moving object to denote its speed (a racing horse has, not four legs, but twenty four), the Surrealists juxtaposed utterly incongruous subject matter to intimate the functionings of the sub-conscious mind. Beginning with the emphasis placed on the emotional by both Gauguin and Matisse, brought to a point of abstract Expressionism by the pre-war Kandinsky, the Surrealists grew directly out of the vaguely nonsensical, fantastic and humorously absurd Dadaist movement, which has been described as "more of a state of mind than a school". These painters became pre-occupied with an intentioned concentration on the unconscious. Children's paintings, automatic writing, the weavings of the sub-conscious mind, habits of associative thinking, all became materials for their art.

Frequently several movements found themselves fused in the work of a single painter. No one is more impatient of rigid distinctions as to school and category than the artist. The very term "abstract" has become almost more misleading than descriptive. Just where does a painting become "abstract" to you? to me? to Picasso? Once an artist has taught us his way of perception, it is bound to become impossible thereafter to discard it -- witness the invasion of cubism in the field of advertising.

Even in the quest for the "abstract", in the rigid elimination of all concrete subject matter, in the most utter reduction to fundamental geometric forms, man just will see objects suggested to him by the most elemental shapes. A dot may not mean much. Two dots, we think: eyes... a face. A large dot, dark -- a hole: a dark rectangle becomes a doorway. Sometimes artists intentionally build on the evocative quality of completely simplified, refined down forms and points and colors. Picasso, impatient with a discussion of his work, said, "I paint what I find. From the point of view of art there are no concrete or abstract forms, but only interpreters more or less conventional."

All that a picture really asks for is to be looked at.

Elsa Rogo Hirsch (continued)

Of this exhibition, it may be said that we have almost the whole range of possibilities - - even from artist to non-artist.

Albers, an architectural constructionist (for those who wish labels) achieves his "aesthetic pleasure" by a subtle balance of spatial sensations through precision of geometry, refinements of color and a superb mastery of painting application.

Kelpe, on the other hand, is distinguished by a complete lack of this sense of color-function. Working very literally along the line of Cezanne's sphere, cylinder, and cone, he does little more than build up a complicated sculpture on canvas, in an atmosphere of a Sub- rather than a Super-realistic world.

Drowes, apparently, is the most versatile of the four, and likewise more inclusive in his manner of painting so that the edges of categories to fit him become very blurred indeed. He employs most adroitly the device of theme and variations, of rhythmic elements and contrapuntal means, quite like music. Some of his paintings may be considered to be Super-realistic or at least partly so. His sense of color and his playfulness have both been brought to a high-point of artistry, which is never deterred from accomplishment by his masterly painting technique.

Edwin Avery Park

The physical fact that it remains impossible to insert literal subject matter into the composition of music will in all probability restrain the latter from ever gravitating to the extreme attitudes sometimes reached by painters. For the silliest of sentimental ditties is still music while the most illusionistic of sentimental paintings would seem to have completely abandoned those rhythmic and formal relations which in the end define painting. In other words music, by virtue of inherently possessing a minimum of abstractness is thereby guaranteed a minimum of purity. Painting seems to need the restraint of taste to keep it off the rocks of inappropriateness.

Any analogy between painting and music must be specious. Yet if we try to imagine music organized about subject matter, say the barnyard at dusk, we can conceive a mingling of quacking, cackling and mooing sounds produced by the wood winds, brasses and strings. In fact, the strong illusion of a barnyard could be achieved. But no one would call it music. The phonograph produces the exact sounds of a political convention but it is not music. Loss of the rhythmic melodic structure in sound instantly makes itself felt.

But substitution of a realistic illusion for the rhythmic melodic structure in painting is not so soon detected. The laws governing rhythms in plastic form and harmonies in color are every bit as pertinent to painting as are similar rules in respect to music. With painting it has proven to be easier to guide the public toward the appreciation of descriptive or literary subject matter than to awareness of the purer considerations of form and color. Again, be it noted, music has not had this problem. Pictures which show the familiar and recognizable, the cheerful and pretty or the sad and dramatic have sold and still sell in great quantity. Hence we have them in greater number, since their creation is one way of making a living.

The true realism, the intellectual honesty of the abstract painter is forcing him to undergo the opprobrium which is the reformers' lot. His unwelcome, self-appointed task of showing what the "works" or painting look like is fortunately **being** understood by more and more people every year. The return of a sound and logical architecture to painting may safely be attributed to the cubists. The question as to just how much or how little subject matter painting may contain is not touched upon here. When you look at the present exhibition, you may imagine yourselves behind the scenes or in the laboratory or, if you can absorb your art without words, you need only enjoy.

Lila Ulrich

In looking at these paintings you are probably most impressed with a lack of familiar subject matter or story content. Here is a good opportunity to study the fundamental elements of painting line, form, color, texture, motion, rhythm, etc. This group of painters is concerned primarily with the organization of these fundamentals in a given space and believes you can enjoy them in themselves. Every great painter in any period of history has been concerned with just these things nor could he have become a "Master" without a thorough knowledge of their use.

Albers' paintings are done with extreme simplicity: he tries to intrigue the onlooker with a minimum of means. Because the eye cannot determine any exact location of his forms in space, they appear to recede and advance with different lights on them. They are constantly in motion. An obvious example is "Gate": note the unusual use of the white triangle.

Drowes uses a much more complex organisation with tremendous variation of main forms and many contrasting forms. The relation of his planes to space and each other do not change as much. He works more with tactile values and color. Example: "Red in Red" - - mainly red planes balanced by one blue circle and a grey square.

Drowes works with solids moving around a central axis in contrasting directions. Alexander Calder uses this same idea three-dimensionally in his "Mobile Sculpture". Their work suggests kinetic form which may be one of the art media of the future. Kelpke places little importance on texture, everything has a smooth plaster quality. He subordinates color to form by using a harmony of greyed hues.

As a last word abstract painting is not an ultimate end, but just a swing of the pendulum well this way from 19th century sentimentality. If you are interested, look at each painting three minutes on two occasions and perhaps you will find there is something satisfying, beautiful, or what you will, about colors, textures, and simple forms.

