1981

Nude and its environment

Margaret Libby
Colby College

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.colby.edu/seniorscholars
Colby College theses are protected by copyright. They may be viewed or downloaded from this site for the purposes of research and scholarship. Reproduction or distribution for commercial purposes is prohibited without written permission of the author.

Recommended Citation
http://digitalcommons.colby.edu/seniorscholars/156

This Senior Scholars Paper (Open Access) is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Research at Digital Commons @ Colby. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Scholar Papers by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Colby. For more information, please contact enrhodes@colby.edu.
THE NUDE AND ITS ENVIRONMENT

by

MARGARET E. LIBBY

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Senior Scholars Program

COLBY COLLEGE
1981
APPROVED BY:

Tutor

CHAIRMAN, DEPARTMENT OF

Reader

CHAIRMAN
What is the nude? Does it exist only in the mind? Can it be realized on paper or canvas? Is it natural? Are there certain archetypal forms that evoke responses in all humans?

Kenneth Clark defines the nude as the idealization of the human body. He speculates that our dismay at our imperfection led to the concept of the nude. There is a strong tie between spiritual and physical embodiment of perfection springing from classical philosophy. The Greeks believed outer form mirrored the state of the inner soul. Their athletes performed with religious zeal, whereas today's sports are filled with violence. There are no nudes in the locker room. Greek artists sought ideal proportions and perfection in the forms of the body, removing from the work any trace of individual artistic or emotional feeling.

Michelangelo too idealized his feelings in rich three-dimensional forms of the body, seeking the alchemy of transformation in energetic lines and marble blocks. In modern times, Cézanne and Giacometti both felt the impossibility of achieving realization of their inner vision, yet both worked incessantly toward that end. Perhaps it takes the place of working towards death. Reaching out to the idea of perfection is more appealing than reaching out to the end of life.

The nude is not naked feeling. It is transformed feeling into an abstract sphere. After the atrocities of man against man in this century, there seems to be no place for the ideal, only death. Institutions of death such as hospitals and morgues
strip men of human dignity. Machine age technology does not allow human fallibility or compassion. With specialization, knowledge becomes compartmentalized, and people are physically compartmentalized in apartment living. Perhaps, the nude serves as one way to synthesize knowledge and potential and give unity to one's definitions of self and others. Matisse's work shows this synthesis of reason, perception, and intuition, and contains more truth than reason alone would allow.

The nude and its setting can reflect man's relationship to the environment. Do artists want control, especially over the environment, as Matisse says? How will this technological control cause environmental changes that will change the genetic makeup and evolution of man himself? A figure should become part of its environment without removal or dominance from the setting for the most unified results in art. Man should seek this unity of self and environment and knowledge. I try to with art and hope my work will express this intent.

This leads to formal problems. How do points, lines, planes, and color express artistic intent? How much can they be distorted from reality? Tension, which is one of today's truths, is achieved when recognizable forms and space are transformed into an abstract system which parallels the real world. A simplification of truth, leaving forms recognizable, seems more profoundly balanced with positive tension between real and unreal than does total abstraction.

How does one define form and space on canvas? Space defines
form as much as the area of form defines itself. Is space tangible? Alan Watts would call space the pattern of nothingness. Can a pattern of brushstrokes and color convey this reality? What relation does quantum physics have to the patterns of reality on canvas? How do we perceive the electromagnetic spectrum as light translated to pigment of a two-dimensional surface?

There is no one correct solution to the post-Cézannean problem of painting, of transforming three-dimensional forms to a two-dimensional reality. The problem is to synthesize a unique solution. How does one paint? The only answer is to continue the search by drawing and drawing and painting and painting.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


(View from Runnals Hill
Oil
30"x36"

Construction Site
oil
30"x24"
Reflecting on Ginny
36"x36"

(Reflecting on Ginny
oil
36"x36)

Mindspace
oil
36"x40"
Dreamspace
oil
20"x22"

(Model Amid Drapery
oil 20"x20")
Carleton Pond Road
oil
14" x 22"

Waterville's Backside
oil
24" x 20"
Jane in Caverns
pastel
24"x18"

DeAnn as Gertrude Stein/
Henry VIII
pastel
24"x18"
Skull and Model
black and red chalk
30"x20"

Geometry of Form and Place
black and red chalk
24"x18"
Standing Nude
black and red chalk
2¾" x 18"

Back and Air Currents
black and red chalk
30" x 20"
Striding Studio Nude
black chalk
30" x 20"

Reclining Nude
black and red chalk
20" x 30"