

I am a painter living in New York City. I am an autobiographical artist in that I have always used the events, places, images, remembrances of my life as central themes of my work. I am looking for an essence, or inner life of an idea.

When asked what my influences have been my answer is "Almost anything except the work of other artists." I've been influenced by rocks, weeds, views from airplanes, rivers, subways, forests, machines, kinds of lights, red things and imagination.

One of my constant companions is my sketch-book. Since it is a small black book, people have thought me a poet, a scholar, a religious person carrying a prayer book. Once at Customs in Moscow, my sketch-book was taken from me (later returned) because my notes were a "code." The sketches are actually so a kind of short-hand writing. The world moves so quickly that images are blurred or lost. I try to record responses and moments. Later, I work with the note-sketches, developing them to the final form.

I was born into a large family, six brothers and one sister, and into a small house. This made it natural to spend much time out of doors. In Oklahoma the summers were long and hot and filled with small adventures. In my childhood explorations of nature (plants, rocks, caves, landscapes) I made discoveries that I use even now in my painting.

At six years, I modelled small animals and people from clay that the well drillers dug. I learned about color from rocks, leaves, and berries. A game we had was "coloring rocks." We pounded small rocks to dust, mashed berries or leaves, made colors, painted surfaces of large rocks and let them dry in the sun.

At eleven I had typhoid fever. For a summer I was bedridden. I did many drawings and cutouts, and my imagination came alive.

Thirteen was an important year. I began high school. I saw an oil painting for the first time. It was called "Moonrise on Blue River." I began drawing from a live model, from casts, from imagination. I did a mural on four sides of the art room.

The following year I won a silver medal in "Free-Hand Drawing" at the Scholastic Meet at the University of Oklahoma. Many years later I won another silver medal, at the Art Institute of Chicago.

After two years at the University of Tulsa, I left Oklahoma to study at the Art Institute of Chicago. I did not know how much of early life would be relived in later works: themes of suns, moons, flat landscape, games, patterns, moods.

Chicago brought other elements and discoveries: cold and wind, ice on the river. I learned about being alone in a large city, of wandering, drawing, and getting lost. I found people with whom to speak in a vocabulary I never knew, Art.

I met students who became friends, teachers who believed in me. I went to galleries and museums.

I kept drawing, observing, studying. I worked in factories, lived in one room. I studied dancing so I could earn more money to study art. I travelled to Mexico and to the Southwest. I was adding to my store of "images": structures of a city, bridges, colors, theatre, lights. The small gouaches that I did were "documentation" for what I was living.

Living became filled with people: artists, actors, dancers, musicians. There was good spirit, talk, hope, work. I met a fine gallery and its two directors. We became close friends and the gallery has represented my work for thirty years.

I met a man who was important in my life. He was a painter, and from a family of painters. I had never seen Art as such a living force, as a way of life. We were married, and the following years were rich and eventful. They were of working, having a house, having a child, travelling, coming home, juggling all the things that are important to living.

New themes were added to painting: children and their world, holidays, animals, seashores. I visited New York at intervals. From the first time I felt that eventually it would be my home. I was at home in it. One day, many years later, the child had gone to college. The man had left on a two year assignment (Cultural Affairs Officer in the Mideast and Far East). I knew that it was time to move to New York. So my life changed again, as did my work.

There are many experiences that are unforgettable because they change our point of view or sense of the visual world.

For me: seeing Sputnik flying over the Earth. Until that night, the human figure had always been the center of thinking of Art. Suddenly, people became small huddled shapes on tops of buildings watching a moving light across space that they could never reach. Then the space itself became the theme.

A view through the electron microscope re-enforced this thought. It was pure abstraction. The view on a river boat in China, moving into the immense verticality of the stone gorges is visually opposed to the patterned land and sea from an airplane window. I have used both points of view.

Describing "canvas collage," the color is acrylic, the canvas is unsized cotton. The adhesive is gel, acrylic medium or a combination of glues.

The colors are brushed on large pieces of raw canvas. Sometimes there is a small sketch for the work. Sometimes it is done directly from the idea. The layers of painted canvas are built, one at a time. They are laminated under weights. The painting becomes color against color, shape against shape. Action of color next to stillness of color.

The collage is done on the floor. I work from four sides of the canvas. My perspective while working is unique. Sometimes I don't see it vertically until it is stretched and hanging. I often paint over parts of the work with transparent color, or draw with crayons.

The simplification (or abstraction) of forms in my work is intended to hold the theme at its basic form. I like to think that it relates to a poetry that reduces words to the essence.

Art has nothing to do with "inspiration." It is more like an enduring warmth. It is a path one travels, not being able to see far ahead.

What is abstraction? To me it is a state just before or just after - reality. One observation on being a painter is that painting can contain so many elements of other arts: the drama and light of theatre, choreography or design as dance, image making of graphics, poetics of written words.

I find that many of my friends are in other professions: an economist, a mathematician, a weaver, a playwright, a medical researcher, a composer, a dancer, a lawyer, etc. I learn from their discoveries. We are searching for the same thing in different ways.

Not long ago I had an exhibition at a university gallery. On opening day, a student ran down the hall to tell me, "I have just seen your show. It is a room full of light and color." Later, the University President called me to ask, "Will you go through your exhibit with me so that I will know what I am seeing." With two such different responses, the artist stands somewhere in between.

He stands in front of his works, to consider them, to question them. He stands in front of nature, his teacher,

his source. He stands in front of memory and the observed world. He stands in front of change, and moves with it. He searches for greater awareness.

Some themes that I find recurring in my work are: kinds of light, aspects of time, celebrations, sounds and rhythms, life of a city, elements of nature.

The two elements, the unknown and the familiar, play equally important parts in an artist's life. It may be more difficult to see depth in everyday life than to look for the new, but it may be looking for another layer of reality.

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