

A PERSONAL PHILOSOPHY:
ITS BASIS AND IMPLICATIONS

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This Thesis for the
Master of Fine Arts Degree

by
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has been approved
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ABSTRACT

A consciousness of past art history that was based on a superficial understanding of the nature of reality in which painting remained tied to an ideal of scientific representation has led me to make an account about the expansion of man's reality in art. This is a philosophic activity that I have indulged in because the method I adopt is an affirmation of a set of ideas about the aesthetic faculty. I discuss Impressionism, Neo-Impressionism, Cezanne, the Nabis, Van Gogh, Gauguin and Symbolism, Matisse, Picasso, Surrealism, Jackson Pollock, and Marcel Duchamp, who constitutes a repertory of many new ways of defining pictorial space. And I describe rather by showing effect than by depicting directly by speaking through authors with recognizable voices--sort of borrowed abstractions having to do with their view of reality concerning painting not as a history but a personal reaction to and involvement with.

More than ever before each age now reflects upon itself, its limitations and its individuality. The aesthetic activity is biological in its nature and functions. Technical research, the invention of

new materials, the changing architectural environment, social factors of many kinds, will continue to call for experiment, and for a redefinition of previously held values and goals. What I say in this thesis has to do with these ideas and others. I felt myself plunged into a radiant and mobile medium that was none other than the pure element of time--time's common flow, an environment quite different from the spatial world. I cannot claim that I had a coherent plan in mind all this time. The reader is bound to be disconcerted by the way I shift with little or no warning from the position of the spectator to that of the creative artist. The influences, the beginnings, seeing, fumbling, working, moving, freedom, all of these evolutions are expressed in verbal terms and are so infinitely complicate that my mind will never be able to comprehend it in its wholeness.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a personal philosophy of art which deals with why I paint, what my motivations are, the directions I am taking, and something of my view of the art scene, both past and present. It is developed more from a stream of consciousness that relates to me as a painter. The seeming open-endedness, the lofty attitude, a contradictory melange of attitudes, stem from my freedom as an artist and my multitudinous outlook, which takes from every available source. I consider this paper a part of my growth as an artist. And tomorrow it will all be different because of the weeding out of the soft and humble traits of idle decoration, and the replacing of them by the raw qualities of the voice, hand, and eye. Most of the parade of my vision takes place in a silence. I talk things out with myself in a kind of isolated dialogue somewhere in my mind. Is art an exotic crutch or a psychic tension that sustains my interest in life? For all my dandyism and the complacency of my work, having brought what I have brought to this paper does give me some stronger sensation of new beginnings be these the results of a constant flow.

Then this work has been an individual modification of one

thing and another--of my soul, of man-in-his-world, of past, a present, the future, of time itself. That is to say, the representation of a present moment in its fullness, with its dimensions of past and future. It is an intuition to the individual things of my world.

In the past, specifically painting from around the turn of the century to our own time, a changing or expanding reality of man concerning the visual arts presents an aesthetic revolution. The beginning of this century saw the decline of an old conception of reality and the emergence of a new one. The way the world was viewed by artists changed because of many contributing factors-- a spiritual restlessness, economic progress, world communication and on and on. And it didn't just happen, it evolved as a kind of organic growth. In previous centuries the church and state had hired artists to develop Christian and idealistic themes in purely noble terms, both institutions expressing essentially one opinion about art. That is, reality was sought, but this was to be an inflated reality atuned to set values.

Yet, human sensibility constantly develops in an awareness of its own complexity. How could it be dealt with by one set of dogma? This ultimately was an impossible factor of expression when regarded in connection with unchanging attitudes toward art. A true artist works to examine, reveal, and translate the essence

or content of his life in visual terms despite the contamination of false values. And, with this intent, political creeds, propagandist goals, and both utilitarian and entertainment values, anything that may destroy the integrity and the universality of the work of art, must be examined by the artist as very possibly extraneous to essential expression. Then are the more abstract, formalist, obscure, minimal, or escapist attitudes not valid for painting? And don't they exist in man as well?

The freedom of the individual to select for himself ideas from all of art history revolutionized painting in the late 19th century. Impressionists took from Romanticism and Realism, from Delacroix and Courbet, but saw life untroubled by history, idealistic imbellishment, political domination, or old habits. They began to move to a world beyond traditional vision and to a new relationship between man and thing. The purpose of this paper then has been to mark a point of departure for man's new ways of seeing his world and to develop that theme on a broad scope. As a rapid sketch of some major influences, many styles or movements have been omitted in this study, for the work exists for me as more a definition of personal motives than as an all inclusive art historical analysis.

PART I

AN EXPANDING CONCEPT OF REALITY

The theories and concepts of art, like any other scientific activity, is based upon the analysis and classification of a specific group of phenomena--works of art. But works of art differ from facts of nature in that their essential characteristics, their concepts of reality, are in no sense measurable in absolute terms. The biological theory of the way art or new art develops from all art must be realized in order to understand any art form.

With the process of visual communication continually changing, the artist has come to great freedom and responsibility, from the old rather dogmatic and absolute attitude of seeing his world with the collective tight web of culture and society governing this view--to the eventual breaking down of these social and political substructures and the moving away from ancient art forms toward individualism--until this century where the unique individual contributions of man have more power in the contemporary world making this personal element valued above others in art.

Whatever attitudes or notions an artist has comes from

many sources. Both art and society in any concrete sense of the terms have their origins in man's relation to his natural environment. Life and art cannot be separate nor can a person's individualism not be affected by his times. The growth of an artist is a process of change and a continually expanding consciousness, an awareness of things.

The variety of painting styles of the 19th century was part of the freedom of the individual to select for himself and combine as he chose all the available means of expression from the whole history of art and from the styles and customs of all peoples and epochs. The artist's dialogue in the last decade of the century was coming to a higher awareness of things based upon individual experience, rather than on the old unities of common experience and beliefs. The good, the true, or the beautiful were not what mattered, but rather the concept of reality. "The self and the world parted company and a tragic tension developed between them. As a result, the visible appearance of things came to be regarded as less important than the relationship between man and things."¹

The transformation of nature became the method through the formal elements of color, shape, line, and structure to make

¹Werner Haftmann, Painting in the Twentieth Century (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1965), p. 65.

visible, in images, a reality that could not be perceived by the senses. Form and the independent expressiveness of the individual gained in importance, so that from about 1910 all modern art has had as its content, its real subject, the formal language used by the artist to create a highly structural aesthetic object.

What I will do is trace this development of a new reality based on form and the artists independent expressiveness in a wide contour taking as the starting point Impressionism, Neo-Impressionism, Cezanne, the Nabis, Van Gogh, Gauguin and Symbolism, and Matisse, then to Picasso, Surrealism, Jackson Pollock, and finally to Marcel Duchamp who stands as a paradox an apostle of the new art through his strange ironical detachment to art and life.

The aesthetic wars at the end of the 19th century loosened all of art toward a greater height of human expression. Painting was brought to the verge of abstraction by its very effort to transcribe visual experience with ever greater accuracy. This accuracy was supposed, by the Impressionists, to create the values of pictorial art itself. Art and nature would work together, in an accord, one to enhance the other. What happened in this development of trying to bring visualized nature and the essence of art together was instead a shift toward art rather than nature.

Impressionism has to be looked at from a multiple perspective. Many experiments were taking place during this era with all kinds of ground work being laid for other attitudes in art. The Impressionists brought more to art than simply nature; they colored what they saw, made notes on perception, gave space new air, pushed painting to realize that the flat plane of the canvas was its own. There is a good deal of optical sensation, a feeling for the uniqueness of paint for itself, and there is felt definite subjective interpretations of subject matter in a special atmosphere.

The methods employed to express some of these personal ideas become important for themselves. Experiments with color, risking a flat area to strengthen the patterns of the design, the breaking up of areas to show the effects of atmosphere, different angles of vision, all were becoming a new vocabulary for expansion of that flat surface that had for so long been treated in the sculptural tradition of three-dimensional illusion. Painters still painted portraits, landscapes, still lifes, but the perceptions had to be felt through the plastic elements themselves and not by a set of dogmatic systems. They wanted people to look for forms, for a special awareness and not so much for their illustration of historical attitudes. Yes they turned to the past, but no longer for visible qualities at all so much as for vital contributions of

arts growth seen with a certain detachment of observation. These experiments, these new notions were fresh air for art, for painting paintings. It was a new vision of reality, but it had to be dealt with in the human mind.

Impressionism didn't start as an entirely new formulation of ideas in art. Painting has always had a history with each new concept dragging along baggage from the past. Impressionism had roots in the realism of Delacroix, Courbet, and Manet, from which its origins are inseparable. Impressionism is the only bridge between the classical and romantic dualism of the 19th century and the advanced modern styles. Virtually every other important strain of 20th century art drew at some point in its evolution from Impressionist innovations.

Impressionism examined a new range of themes and motifs drawn from actual life in the contemporary world. Historical, tragic, and imaginary subjects were excluded. The subject matter is important because it gives you an idea of their feeling toward life. It was going back to nature, but giving it a sensuous presence. Man is there or he's not--he is not alone in this landscape of bright color and optical sensations.

Impressionism arose directly from objective perception rather than from religious, historical, or psychically generated themes, or the art and literature of the past. With minimal sub-

jective distortion, those involved in Impressionism perceived a new kind of reality in minimizing their knowledge of the observed world. The three-dimensional notion of space was dropped for a more detached vision of space--the distance from that micro-structure to the back of the illusionistic space was getting very shallow. The Impressionist perception became increasingly less corporeal, providing a basis for the metaphysical ideas of reality held by the Symbolists, the Nabis, Kandinsky, as well as the emotional dematerialization of Van Gogh, the Fauves, and the Expressionists.

Impressionism with its conflicts and experimentation released the artist more to be his own man. The influence of the academies, salons, the intellectuals was far-reaching at the beginning of the 19th century, and artists were subjected to their principles based on one kind of art only--the figurative art of the humanistic tradition. What still remained to be done was to show the social relevance of symbolic modes of representation, and to do this despite the opposition of those politically minded critics whose conception of art was limited to a superficial ideal of realism. Could a painter who saw into things in a different relation to these rules be made to fit into the hierarchy? Alienation from institutions and later on from the public was becoming a reality for the artist. The subjectivism and freedom of the artist is extremely necessary to the spirit of new art. Each

artist has the tremendous knowledge of the past vocabulary in art, but his own set of aesthetics to use with his own poetry--a self-examination--his own truth. Subjectivism has made all art conceptual.

Contrasted with Impressionism, Neo-Impressionism deals with more physical and often mechanical use of form and space; the prismatic breaking up of colors, the splitting up of form and contour, within an order. Seurat's theories of refraction and the optical blending of colors lended something of a scientific approach to painting. But he makes such fantastic, logical constructions, a clean pictorial geometry with roots in Poussin and Chardin. By the use of his divisionism the forms are free in a special way and yet everything holds together--a very strange but exciting relationship. In Neo-Impressionism you go from contrast to contrast under a law and discipline, plus psyche. It was a new dynamic of color, surface, and space. Art was a higher awareness than a mere copy of nature, not the realization of a view of nature but a painting as an autonomous thing.

There is a complicated relationship of Cezanne, Cubism and structural form to the Impressionist stream, both opposing and intermixing with it. Cezanne wanted to give order to Impression-

ism, to nature, to drawing, to everything. He wanted to keep stereometric space, only articulating the volumes in an infinite number of planes--shifting, modulating color to create special depth and illusion, (used idea of divisionism), the Impressionist use of warm and cool color to model, content created by the paint itself, creating a web, demands of the pictorial space, these were some ideas developed in his style. Cezanne examined the world objectively, responded to it visually, emotionally, and looked toward the past as well as the future. "Imagine Poussin entirely painted after nature. . ."² Cubism (Picasso, Braque) owes to Cezanne because of the way in which he used relational structure by the use of planes--re-arranging objects according to compositional need. Cezanne's relevance was as an anti-Impressionist, leaning more toward Cubism. "To paint is not to make a servile copy of the objective, but to grasp the harmony between a number of relations, transpose them into one's own scale and develop them according to a new, original logic."³ He analyzed nature and released the form with a constant dialogue between his ideas of order and the object. This analytical method freed the new art of expression from old form, and pushed it to its own means of

²Bernard Dorival, Cezanne (Paris: Continental Book Center, 1948), p. 110.

³Ibid., p. 101.

expression.

Synthetic, symbolist, religious ideas (espoused by Serusier and Denis), decorative, rhythmic line, all of these ideas are found in the Nabis temperament. It was a new formalism taking attitudes from Gauguin, Japanese Stylization, Mediaevalism, Byzantine Art, and Neo-Traditionalism. Painting was the symbol of a sensation that becomes an expressive new form of an emotion, executed in simple drawing and expressively decorative color. Maurice Denis states, ". . . a picture, before being a war horse, a nude woman, or some anecdote, is essentially a flat surface covered by colors arranged in a certain order."⁴ I think this is a very important and far-reaching idea concerning modern art. The artist has complete freedom to distort, deform, to push art to an almost naive artlessness. Denis adds that, "nature cannot for the artist be anything but a state of soul."⁵ The subjects in the Nabis paintings came to mean less than the methods by which they were depicted. The pictorial space becomes important here--how that flat two dimensional surface is designed with the plastic elements--not created by

⁴Werner Haftmann, Painting in the Twentieth Century (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1965), p. 41.

⁵Wylie Sypher, Rococo to Cubism in Art and Literature (New York: Random House, Inc., 1963), p. 220.

illusion--you don't project your own illusionistic experiential space into this work to understand it.

Impressionism was a motivating influence on Van Gogh. He was attracted by the reality of things in a spiritual way. The personality of his mind comes through in his forms and images; guts, honest, searching, tormented symbols in a way revealing his intensity with the world. His was a kind of expression that had already been implicit in Delacroix, Daumier, and Millet. He peered into things, into the rhythms of nature, presence, brilliance, using Impressionism but penetrating deeper into things. It was human passion rather than mimicry. The technical problems of an artist with this kind of energy seem to become resolved by a kind of formal vibrancy. The tension between objects and the energy of the abstract distortion of form and color, of negative space, created a new conception of the artist and a new vision of the relation between man and thing.

Gauguin believed that art was an abstraction drawn from nature, the bringing together of nature and abstract ideas. "Art is an abstraction; derive this abstraction from nature while dreaming before it, . . ."⁶ It was a synthesis, a concentration of the natural

⁶Ibid., p. 218.

impression, colored by emotion. The autonomous expressive power of line and color, the flattening out of shapes, the "cloisonnism," painting from memory, were some of his notions. He wanted simplified design and a more forceful statement of line and pure color. Suggestive color, subconscious dream symbols, the primitive and exotic, the "inner necessity," were all information to bring to painting. He tried to rediscover the content of art and to give it new symbols--to make it a more meaningful decorative art. Painting should act on the soul like music.

I obtain by arrangements of lines and colors, using as a pretext some subject borrowed from human life or nature, symphonies, harmonies that represent nothing absolutely real in the vulgar sense of the word; they express no idea directly but they should make one think as music does, without the aid of ideas or images, simply by the mysterious relationships existing between our brains and such arrangements of colors and lines.⁷

Gauguin anticipated much of modern painting: the anti-naturalism, reliance on the means of pure painting, letting the painting grow and change, distortion for the sake of design, making use of the accidental. Gauguin's symbolism has to do with the shift from thing to form, the simplification and concentration of form.

There was a conflict between the sensory world and the spiritual world--the concrete object and the purely abstract. Symbolism

⁷Ibid., p. 195.

stressed the use of painting for only decoration. It makes use of mystery to project a symbol in poetry as well as painting. The self-realization of the spirit is what symbolism is about.

Matisse continued the experiments of Impressionism, Neo-Impressionism, Van Gogh, Gauguin, and the Symbolists. It was Matisse who translated the indulgent ambiance of Impressionism into fully 20th century terms. His art: he sought a tranquilizing art, a cool calculated sensual art with a sense of linear rhythms, the arabesque released, a sensitive color harmony, formalist view of nature, surprise, choice, and the insistence of the flat pattern (minimal art). The real subject was art itself--to render visible the inner struggle or reality to an outer world. How was his personal aesthetic achieved? Through drawing, through a constant attack at a simple yet severe essence of things, that's how. An artist whose whole intention is to be related towards some notion of formal harmony. Behind the sense of luxury in his work you can sense the struggle to transcend decoration and the duality between the world and self--to take risks, not to be merely pleasing. Unlike the Impressionists, Matisse did not aim to render the material but to arouse human emotions.

What I am after, above all, is expression. . . .
I am unable to distinguish between the feeling I
have for life and my way of expressing it. . . .

Expression to my way of thinking does not consist of the passion mirrored upon a human face or betrayed by a violent gesture. The whole arrangement of my picture is expressive.⁸

He created a non-illusionistic pictorial space constructed from simply color areas--the picture is a thing in its own right, the content and the means become one.

Picasso seemed to digest all the influences in painting getting at their real meaning then responding in his own language. Cubism was only more vocabulary, not experiment, and supported by Braque, Gris, and Leger. They were trying to restore autonomous structure to painting with its own existence as an homogenous object. It was this trend they detected in Cezanne's paintings. They wanted to paint objects in terms of lasting representation--what one knew about objects rather than what one could observe. This was in opposition to the Impressionist vision of the momentary aspects of the external world. Cubism saw from many angles with form being the main consideration and not color. Picasso defined Cubism as "an art dealing primarily with forms, and when a form is realized, it is there to live its own life."⁹ Cubism undertook a completely two-dimensional

⁸Herbert Read, A Concise History of Modern Painting (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1959), p. 38.

⁹Ibid., p. 78.

transcription of three-dimensional phenomena, and ended up with an even more radical denial of all experiences not literally available-- to use the formal means of art and to use them for expression. Picasso uses the forms abstracted from the object as elements with which to organize the picture. He pushes it to any degree he wants. From the early cubism and the formal analysis of the visual appearance of things came a painting conceived of pictorial effects of the plastic elements for pure pictorial means--an abstract construction. The artist creates the external world of man. Picasso believed that painting was not for merely decoration but that it could be used as an "instrument of war," to make people see things in the light of new relationships. Picasso added,

There isn't any such thing as abstract art. You must start with something. Afterward you can remove all traces of actuality. There's no danger then anyway, because the idea of the object will have left its indelible mark.¹⁰

Picasso's art was a conceptual art, the subjective observations providing us with a visual metaphor of what he sees.

Surrealism is a way of life, an approach to life, a distinct kind of realism. Surrealist art induces a crisis in what is or can be known--but always an encounter, an experience of provocation

¹⁰Wylie Sypher, Rococo to Cubism in Art and Literature (New York: Random House, Inc., 1963), p. 268.

and revelation as the same, an event. The metaphor is not knowledge but an intense feeling for eroticism; the mysterious unconscious motives of human behavior, inspiration in contradiction and hysteria, no control of reason or aesthetics, a reality of the imagination, the dream illusions, that's what surrealism is about. Surrealism explores that which is marvelous and elusive in life. It is the automatic kind of expression brought about by a freeing of the subconscious and the deliberate use of fortuitous happenings. Surrealists looked into the unconscious where the world is defined in images of things, that fantastic inner reality produced by the unexpected, the absurd, the accidental. Along with Cubism, Surrealism is responsible for abstract expressionism and Jackson Pollock.

Pollock created a visual object which can stand by itself. It's a denial of a completely rational statement using chance, process as process, the accidental. His art is totally subjective, answerable only to his own aesthetic. His paintings might be incomprehensible--you have to bring your own private emotions to it. "Pollock felt that painting today to be valid had to be direct, that is, to use Miro's insight, in order to rediscover the sources of human emotion one could not strain the act of painting through

an aesthetic formula."¹¹ It's a kind of poetry that can have endless meanings, but can't be caught up in the form of language. The power and liberating idea in Pollock's work is instinctual expression, psychic improvisation, and a space of infinity and non-perspective. He rejected culture and history and believed that painting should be pure action.

. . . Pollock. . . left us at the point where we must become preoccupied with and even dazzled by the space and objects of our everyday life. . . Not satisfied with the suggestion through paint of our other senses, we shall utilize the specific substances of sight, sound, movement, people, odors, touch. Objects of every sort are materials for the new art: paint, chairs, food, electric and neon lights, smoke, water, old socks, a dog, movies, a thousand other things which will be discovered by the present generation of artists. Not only will these bold creators show us, as if for the first time, the world we have always had about us but ignored, but they will disclose entirely unheard-of happenings and events, found in garbage cans, police files, hotel lobbies, seen in store windows and on the streets, and sensed in dreams and horrible accidents.

The young artist of today need no longer say 'I am a painter. . . .' He is simply an 'artist,' All of life will be open to him. . . . Out of nothing he will devise the extraordinary. . . . People will be delighted or horrified, critics will be confused or amused, but these, I am sure, will be the alchemies of the 1960's.¹²

¹¹E. C. Goosen, "The Big Canvas," in The New Art, ed. by Gregory Battcock (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1966), p. 54.

¹²Allan Kaprow, "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock," in The New Art, ed. by Gregory Battcock (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1966), p. 76.

Duchamp is very complex--this complexity comes to me from his enigmatic involvement and non-involvement in art. He began painting at an early age, had success, got bored and quit painting. He became famous but turned his back on it--he can't be bothered. "I force myself into self-contradiction to avoid following my taste."¹³ His painting underwent all of the stages of development that were available to him, but he couldn't be satisfied, he had to reach for something else. He was a revolutionary. He questioned everything. I only point these things out, because any man can play his part in an outer way and represent all the things of his day that happen to be in vogue--but to be disciplined within, where all is permissible, where all is concealed, that's the point. These considerations gain great luster by comparison to the condition of most artists. I have said all this out of a new respect for Duchamp.

Duchamp wasn't a fool or a madman. He had roots in Impressionism, Neo-Impressionism, and Cezanne. But Cubism and particularly Picasso showed him the way to his new ideas about art. However, Duchamp stood aloof from the cubist manner to dissect form and from the static aspects of simultaneity of Picasso's and Braque's analytical cubism he demonstrated in his "Young Man on a Train" and "Nude Descending a Staircase," that he was more

¹³ Cleve Gray, "Marcel Duchamp 1887-1968," Art in America, LVII (July-August, 1969), 20.

attracted by the kinetic motion of rhythmically repeated forms, as they appeared in the works of the Futurist painters. But then he moves from the pictorial expression of dynamic motion to his morphological machines. Another change; he works in the same manner that an industrial designer would for a blueprint. He stops drawing, stops painting, makes anarchic hints about everything, risks all. Not to stop seeing or feeling but to extend the mind, and perhaps go beyond painting. He was serious about not being serious and that is his wit, his humor and irony. The great problem for Duchamp was to know with what to replace the mere conventions of visual art, and he found that the imagination must prey upon everything lofty, elevated--but finally release itself from them into pure fictions, the figurations of the mind. Was his criticism anti-art? What does being anti-art mean, anyway?

His revolt was directed against certain bourgeois traditions and what they stood for: nationalism, war, competition, money-making, fame, etc., etc.,--this has been his attitude. He was responding to the disintegration of society by rejecting most of the traditional concepts on which Western Art had been based since classical times and creating a new basis and a new function for art itself. "The most remarkable quality that Duchamp possesses is his ability to find expression for notions which, at first sight, seem totally devoid of plastic interpretation. He finds a visual poetry

for ideas which appear essentially abstract and non-visual."¹⁴

Should it be that some selected appearances rule the others?

Many interpretations disperse the so called truth of reality and shatter it.

Duchamp believed a work of art could be made without the intervention of the artist. This is a part of a broader idea about breaking down the barriers between art and non-art.

He believed that all art should turn to an intellectual expression and away from an animal expression, and for this reason his pictorial means became increasingly mechanical. Mathematics became a kind of goal, a means by which he could cool off, dehumanize art.¹⁵

The assemblage by Duchamp that has attracted the most attention, because it is such an enigmatic document, is "A Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors Even"--a dispassionately dry diagram of desire, erotic intention executed on sheet glass. It was accidentally cracked and Duchamp accepted this arbitrary act as the work's completion. The deformation of Leonardo's "Mona Lisa" was an act to cut through the popular mystery and adulation of this icon of beauty. "A painting that doesn't shock isn't worth painting."¹⁶

¹⁴Lucy R. Lippard, "New York Letter 1965 Reinhardt, Duchamp, Morris," in The New Art, ed. by Gregory Battcock (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1966), p. 193.

¹⁵Gray, op. cit., p. 21.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 23.

He is asking our society to define that reality we value in art. Can't we get at a new fresh open vision and flush out our priority vision? Don't reject things, but ask questions (art as idea).

The principle of formation or a kind of organic growth only without organization, pre-meditation is found in Duchamp's art. He introduces the chance element in art through geometry and physics. He used chance, choice, the accidental, and humor to get beyond taste. He implied that anything made by man or by man's machines was art, and that the artist was "merely someone who signed things," so the use of real objects or "ready-mades" (leading to pop art).

The experience of Surrealism, Dada and Fantastic art enabled artists to open up the language they had inherited from Cubism and Fauvism. Duchamp contributed to this vocabulary. The main purpose and activity of the Dadaists was to provoke violent reactions from the public. In exhibitions, under the guise of art, of the "ready-mades," as Duchamp called commonplace mass-produced functional objects, was an attempt on his part to demonstrate the absurdity of life and the contemptible nonsense of aesthetic values and so to destroy any faith in art. The hardest reality is recognized as magical. Duchamp distrusted "retinal" reality and painters who loved paint. Duchamp said about art, . . .

It's only one occupation, and it hasn't been my whole life, far from it. You see, I've decided that art is a habit-forming drug. That's all it is, for the artist, for the collector, for anybody connected with it. Art has absolutely no existence as veracity, as truth. People always speak of it with this great religious reverence, but why should it be so revered? It's a drug, that's all. . . ¹⁷

The eye only seems to half-create --and what perceive? He despises realism and seeks mystery. Duchamp keeps right on asking the same troublesome questions about the nature of art and the nature of reality.

Duchamp's contribution to art was his example of how to live outside convention. His influence appears in the attitudes of Americans such as Oldenberg, Rauschenberg, Lichtenstein, and Dine. By his irreverent trifling with art, Duchamp has forced us to re-evaluate concepts that we have previously accepted without question. A needed criticism from without and within it seems to me. So there is Duchamp, and his idea of the end of art. But it is only an idea; one enacted in the world of art in order that art lose its name and move to another realm.

. . . as you know, it is the intellectual side of things which interests me, even though I don't like the term 'intellect', too dry, too stripped of expression. I like the word 'believe.' In general, when one says 'I know,' one doesn't know, one believes. I believe that art is the

¹⁷Calvin Tomkins, The Bride & the Bachelors (New York: Viking Press, Inc., 1965), p. 18.

only form of activity by means of which man as he is can manifest himself as a real individual. By it alone he can surpass the animal stage because art is an outlet into the regions where neither time nor space dominates. To live is to believe; that at least is what I believe.¹⁸

Is there truth in art--is there a realism based on truth and is it necessary for man to find his relationship to a certain reality? I don't know. It's only that a painting has its own reality and the man who painted it his own inner life that bore the conception. Art is always art--not nature, realism, abstraction, (abstract art is only painting). A painting must stand alone without any talk. You don't have to understand art no more than you try to understand those beautiful things in nature you love. The artist is always between two aspects--one is the loading up of information from many sources; history, life, other artists which brings him to the planning and conception of the whole thing--and the other is the feeling, the style expressed by the artist in executing the concept.

Criticism has to come from within. Modernism is simply history and crisis with more freedom. The attacking of ideas, verbal or visual is what is alive in our culture. You must have that information that comes from criticism--criticism of procedures

¹⁸Gray, op. cit., p. 27.

and discipline as well. Man either advances or he is retarded; painting is always in the present. Art is eternally revolutionary and painting has achieved an independence it must have.

There is the reality of nature and the reality of man--the opposite poles of human experience. Our world is not so ambivalent that we cannot come to all dimensions of expression--to the "greater reality" and the magical experience of the thing, and to the "greater abstraction" with form as the ultimate concrete reality. The coming together of these ideas or the necessity of both in man can give art an intense life, not of reality, but of universal harmony.

PART II

THE CONTAGIOUS CABAL

I come to this paper with a kind of fragmented vision when many conflicts at once gnaw at my being. Times are threatening and rapidly changing, and so are my ideas about life and art. I have been browsing through life too long. I have been seeing art like others see it. Now I find myself beginning to engage in real struggles--not a necessity to make pictures but a search for something. The choices and decisions that I make with my freedom and the responsibility to mankind through art are the greater issues being inaugurated in this search. Why I must draw and paint, what my motivations are, and the direction I am taking are questions that I will deal with and perhaps clarify.

Why paint? I do it for me--I do those things for me. It's almost a biological need like wanting to be warm when it's cold or wanting to be cold when it's hot. For me, I feel that certain experiences and things can best be dealt with visually rather than through words or music or mathematics. The important thing for me is the expression of my relationship to the environment and materials, my sensations, my meaning as a human being. I'm preoccupied by

energy, the metaphysical, not just an aesthetic drive. The significant content of my work then is somehow related to the close involvement with the very stuff of life itself--not just external sensations, but with basic inner forms and relationships. When you really begin to peer into something, a simple object, a face, and realize the profound meaning of that thing--if you have an emotion about it, there's no end. Those fantastic vibrations you receive from people and objects, the graphic imagery that fractures your thoughts, this is what brings me to work. Some moments do contain magic. The struggle to preserve an abstract idea--that's why I draw. What else is there? What do other people do? And the pure pleasure of just paint, canvas, paper and pencil--it's a very sensuous feeling I get working out with them. I don't paint to create art. I simply paint. It's an experienced personal need. The act of painting is a physical response to my natural and unnatural environment, a personal vision. My art must be an expression of my self. I want to do some beautiful things effortlessly. The artist's sole concern ought to be art.

Paintings are a private diary where you talk to others about your worries, your tastes and pleasures, your political opinions, your hates. You see, you think, feel, and react. You don't want to entertain, to decorate. The world and man is in a state of crisis. I can't wait for things to be resolved by anybody. I can use art as an expression of my separate and unique personality to criticize

ignorance. Killers have not ceased their slaughter nor pacifists their protests. You fight a battle and you feel it's against wrongness. But are you losing? How much do you surrender? And this is all deeply rooted in your own imagination--your own daily experienced life.

I paint because I feel responsible to mankind as an artist by involving myself in his struggles and fears, his beauty and beastiality. I'm not going to change man nor wage a polemical campaign for him. The human predicament, the exploration of man, of man-in-his-world, that's what I want to investigate. I see my world but I must deal with it on a high level of human involvement. Groping toward a means of bringing vision into relation with graphic clarity is a responsibility to others. I want people to be aware of my expression and discoveries. I want to say "look at yourselves," in my work--a communication rather than communion. And I want the spectator to see the world my way--not his way. A commentary, an identification of and with objects, and people, and place, and all things which expand the influence of a painting beyond its frame--that's a responsibility I feel toward the public. You can't stand off in a private atmosphere and expect people to respond to your ideas with any intensity or deep relationship. You have to bear the full weight of your own doubts, your own prejudices, your own defeats and pains, soberly feeling moral experience. What I mean is, though my drawing and painting is a search, a reflection

of my interior world, I can't isolate my work to the narrow view of only myself because I need people and they supply more of my ideas than anything else. Then it becomes a new and conscious dialogue between artist and an older tradition.

I cannot work without having a tremendous loading up of art history and legends. The quoting of heroes and their imagery is an inescapable eclecticism in the beginning, while realizing style and particularly your own style and how man and objects relate poetically to you. It's the weeding out of the mannerist sense of what art is. What is it to you? What kind of experiences are art? Is there an hierarchy in art?

Why is a painting on canvas so sacred? Can't walls, your garden, or any of man's furnishings and apparatuses be as worthy as expression in art as a painting can be? I think they can. And you can attack any materials with much the same sets as you do a canvas--making order out of chaos, design out of no design. The poetry will come according to how clear you can make your concept felt with all the paraphernalia at your disposal. What is alive in our world is the attempt to describe with the structure of art our perception of the space we inhabit, and to criticize ideas and procedures as well. What is there and what is the nature of the experience? This understanding brings information to art and to life. It refines, explores, augments or completely restructures our intellectual,

psychological and perceptual awareness of the human spatial domain. And there are moments when art happens in a time sense like a trip to Safeway's or the railroad yards. It certainly happens in music and films.

There is a kind of brainwashing in schools and museums that keeps you so one dimensional. You begin to think you are a stunt man with nothing but gimmicks. You can't be forced into a pretense of more depth than you have. The great weight of a superimposed hierarchy, professional rules, secret traditions, and social obligations that are a real necessity keep flushing you along as if you had no control of anything. Everybody adapts-- but you find in it the foul smell of mediocrity. The anguish of that dead feeling in your stomach is enough. You become a blind concatenation of causes and effects or the gradual unfolding, forever retarded, disconcerted and thwarted, imitator of ideas. You can't let yourself go. You must see for yourself art rather than skill, knowledge rather than proficiency, a method rather than a set of procedures. The preservation of sensibilities all through my life is what matters. I discover beauty--it's not reality but my ability to create something beyond reality. What distance do you live from reality?

I paint for man to see, but can he see? It's a dilemma. They want you to be cute. People want smooth, finished work, not

personal remarks. They know what beauty is. Everyone pretends to know it. Society just takes what it wants. But you remain modest and resentful. Of course you want some kind of mandate to paint. You're flexible. I cannot suppress the notion that painting will be a mere pastime unless it produces some income. There's an amount of shrewdness in the establishment that goes on with the contract chaser to produce at any cost. Fool the buyer--give him something for the money. It's a bland protectionism found in any big business. Art is not an instrument of propaganda or persuasion. The utilitarian values and entertainment values destroy the integrity of art. The more consciously moral or political values are imposed on art, the more art suffers. Art is spontaneous, the unique act of an individual, but always innocent. How difficult it is to push back the prejudices of your age. How isolated are you in a world of things?

I embody contradictions--confront enigmas. I must work as an independent member of society that either needs me or doesn't. I struggle to escape from the bourgeois reality that I am helping in spite of myself to create. But do I achieve self-affirmation through deceit? Sure there is a presence and an absence of that. I'm always between freedom and control and a leap of faith. You like to think you are singular. You learned to paint and reckon. It's a very vague terrain. I enter the studio. What goes on? A transformation to another world? Do you forget? Do you leave it

as soon as possible to reclaim the other world? It's not a lab. You can't sever art and life into completely different existences.

But then there is the conflict between consciousness and representation--the act of seeing and the time that elapses to get it put down--the duration. A strange transformation happens between reality observed and reality invented. In spite of my emotional revolt I still remain faithful to conventional form, particularly in painting. I let myself be pulled into an easy pattern of working so that my viability and the telling arguments for self expression are secondary. I think this is where much of a concept is lost; to your own limitation, to facility and techniques of material and the displaying of them for their own sake. Staying with a system, being comfortable, knowing how to start, what happens in the middle, and the ways to finish it off--this is commenting in a most narrow realm. Where are the risks? Where do accidents happen--the discovery--how are new formulas of vision developed? Is it a real response to life or the way someone else wants to see it?

The involvement with subject matter, that is, intimacy, spirituality, dealing with color and shape, can be an aspiration towards the infinite expressed by every means available. Systems take on superficial notions. The experience or conception must be dealt with in full force. What kind of space do I move in? What is my condition now? A world where there are no simple locations,

where all relations are plural; standing on a boundary--that's where I am. I always have two notions--one to demolish the other. Like you'll see something or get an idea, very visual, and at once you're childlike in response to it. The delicate way you handle that conception because it's spiritual and physical--it's art then--but then you attack it with your sets of formal conventions. Who knows what can happen to it? If you can keep in touch with that initial cleanness. I know things precede and follow an idea and there is an intersection. Where I am most myself is in the raw sensation. Then I take up my position and when examination continues and I learn more, the problem complicates itself again and there are continuing reinterpretations. I talk away real meaning or don't have anything to say. When I want to deal with an idea with a lot of information somehow the conception can disappear, behind a merely verbal logic, and other things take over. Expression is lost to technique or stylization--with many conflicts coming at once.

I have such a strong romantic fantasy about things, and that's what I paint. My ideas are built around my notions of what the world is. I think that I make use of both science and myth. I take my direction, form, or structure from many artists (and other people), no one of whom is necessarily aware of the style he is helping to create. The way my style is looked at is a figment

of history anyway. The important thing is that you use past poetry in your own way and with your own intents to deal with the present. Certainly I realize my debt to Renaissance ideas, to painters like Goya, Vermeer, Rembrandt, Velasquez, and to Fauve color, and these are all a part of me in a certain way, but used through my eyes now to see things with more depth and clarity now and even look ahead. The eclecticism will be obvious if you have nothing to say. Your individuality will have so much to say by virtue of being able to see yourself through others.

The use of imagery that is not exactly inherent in my life or not connected directly with it is used quite often. Escapism is a part of my work. I do identify with past epochs like the world wars and the civil war because those peoples ideas and battles are still being fought today and there is a strange hard edge that keeps these events locked in for me. But I am still religiously there, involved with the concept, the drawing. The kind of escapism I'm talking about can be an apocalypse, an abstract revelation of the essences of people, things, and place. I don't want to just tell a story but to get a sort of strange balance between the literary and decorative elements.

I am bound to the earth to the very soil and landscape where I move and I admit that some of the things that trigger my response merely give pleasure. I have a discipline of the senses, a concen-

trated expression of social and individual consciousness, and it is skillful, selective and intense. That I could ignore these impulses would be as foolish as to say I can't see the beauty in Cezanne, Matisse, Picasso, Braque, and a hundred other painters who have looked into man's world in such a unique way. I want to bring all parts of me together, to gain a synthesis as it were of the senses, the skill, the prejudice, the toughness, and the honest.

Then there is my obsession with the human figure. The face. The vibration of light, changing hour by hour on the planes and contours of flesh--it staggers me. Not the sweet realism but the abstract qualities of emotion, the fragmenting of time, the way a head can take on aspects of an object through the edges and overlapping of color. Creating illusions of mass, motion, light and distance on a plane surface, utilizing the angle shot, the fade-out, the double (montage) image, the mobile, distorted, or plural perspective, the cutback, are all ways of seeing man. I know the presence of man is felt where he's not visibly a part of the landscape of things and that's important for me too. But that fourth sense: existential time-field, the field of human experience where man is moving, what he eats for breakfast and where he sleeps, what his dreams are, that is what grabs me.

What kind of human figures? Is it the celebration of mankind that concerns me? Whether or not man inhabits my

landscapes is not so important but rather my mark as a human being in that space. Stupid faces of vanity, debauchery, egoism are concerns I must get involved with because of man's inhumanity to man. The magic of faces and gestures, their ends not their origins, man's alienation and the emptiness of existence are direct confrontations with life that I become saturated with and that leave me numb. This interest in the human figure for expression is sometimes pushed to magic realism; an earnestness, an essence, of yourself, begins to breathe in another atmosphere that is both real and fictional.

The things that are most real to me are the illusions which I create with my painting. The pictorial strength of design, the concept in total at first, patterns of light and dark, the interrelationship of forms, the edges, qualities of thick and thin, color and non-color--these all have a silent power, a mystery. The painting is no longer meant to penetrate to a reality behind appearance, but becomes itself a new reality. My forms are so translucent, and so pervading, and so seemingly necessary, that only by extreme effort can I become aware of them. I become enamored of blurred forms which I situate in hazy atmosphere. I want to turn my attention outward on the world around me, and not so much inward to my own reactions to it. I am compelled to define myself, to bring thinking to terms with the medium and actually conceive in the physical stuff.

What it means is the resolution of the conflict between the beautiful and the useful, the bringing of art and life together. My limited palette both physical and mental are always staring me in the face. I must constantly fight ambiguity and give a poetic vision of life with my own basic symbols plus baggage according to the needs of the idea, the conception, which has to be larger. The bite, not the justice, of the commentary is what makes it valuable. You tend to sometimes bugger up ideas by just being a dandy, by not risking when you know something is shallow. Finding you can really extend yourself, not just make circles, indicates the fresh air of change. You have to keep all channels open, becoming intoxicated with the beauty, the rightness and wrongness, and vitality of the world. The artist has the right to employ the most arbitrary methods to make himself understood and to communicate his message.

There is pain and love in painting. Humor and severity, and always the unexpected. You spill your guts out when you stand in front of a canvas. If you can push aside the brushwork of slander, of fixing up. You have freedom so you take liberties, but the consequences are felt and the responsibility remains. It is my imagination that has so much freedom. What hopes are permitted, what ones prohibited? You begin to see a general contour of what is expected. All this forces you down. I must get mobilized for conflicts. I desire only what is possible. I keep on looking,

for if I ever stopped, everything would disintegrate. The picture must be an organic thing in itself. My paintings have to stand alone without any talk.

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