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# A SERIES OF ORIGINAL PAINTINGS IN WATER SOLUBLE PAINT EMPLOYING MIXED MEDIA AND EXPERIMENTAL TECHNIQUES

contition

A Thesis

Presented to

the Graduate Faculty

Central Washington State College

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Art

by

E. Wayne Swanson
August 1968

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SPECIAL COLLECTION

# APPROVED FOR THE GRADUATE FACULTY B. Stephen Bayless, COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN William V. Dunning J. John Agars

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### CHAPTER I

### THE PROBLEM AND DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

Mixed media watercolor is a relatively new media and comparatively little has been written about it. The traditional approach in watercolor is a form of painting in which pigments are used transparently without the use of white pigment (5:1); the pigments stain the paper and are absorbed by it. New approaches allow for various possible deviations from the traditional. With glazes, glues, and many other materials, much can be done to alter the traditional watercolor approach and appearance. Within the last ten years a different attitude has been developed. The artist is not limited to a traditional school of thought or restricted to traditional theories, and now the artist has developed a freer attitude toward experimentation and exploration with media. Through the new media of synthetic paints (acrylic or polymer), plastics, glues, and other materials, the experimental artist is helped to develop different ways of expressing himself. This study will help the candidate to further his understanding of mixed media using water-soluble paints and to develop some aspects of this experimental attitude toward painting.

### I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. This thesis was a creative investigation of mixed media using water soluble paints in order to further develop experimental techniques. Painting was limited to watercolor pigments, tempera, polymer tempera, acrylice, Elmer's glue, water, ink stick, or other materials that relate to water soluble media. The development of the problem helped the candidate to draw conclusions about the technique, development, application, and experimentation of this mixed media. This study was written so that one can understand the terminology and investigation procedures and use this as a departure point for further study using water soluble mixed media.

Importance of the study. Relatively little has been written about mixed media watercolor. There are several reasons for this lack of written material. First, using mixed media watercolor with an experimental attitude is a recent innovation. Secondly, due to the newness of this media, few artists have actually recorded their discoveries.

In this area of mixed media there are practically unlimited possibilities. Through use of mixed media one can accomplish things never done before with traditional watercolor. The experimentation with material and idea, through a series of paintings helped the candidate develop

a free and fresh attitude toward the media. Through experimentation, things that happen accidentally often turn out to be an advantage or become an idea for further experimental departure. As Yar G. Chomicky states: "Some painters . . . hold great faith in the accidental as a clue to more flexible techniques which reflect the true spontaneous nature of the medium. Whenever an unanticipated effect is accepted . . . it is called a 'happy accident' " (5:26-27). Whether the results were accidental or intentional, this study helped the candidate to pursue and peruse the unlimited possibilities of mixed media watercolor.

Limitations of the study. This study was limited to water soluble paint pigments. It included gouache, tempera, polymer tempera, watercolor, and inks, excluding oils and enamels. The paint surface ranged from watercolor paper to X-rays, metals and other materials. When paper was used, it was stretched over a Masonite board and taped over the sides of the board with quikstik gummed tape. This process is similar to the stretcher system of oil canvas, with the exception that the actual painting surface has the Masonite backing. The size of these surfaces did not exceed 6 feet by 6 feet or be less than 1 foot by 1 foot. A limited number of paintings were done to study the possibilities and limitations of water soluble mixed media. The content produced in the paintings was not consciously limited by

anything other than the mixed media used. Many different methods and styles of painting were explored, but the objective was diversity rather than depth of any one method used.

### II. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

# Collage "Collage" is a term accepted as:

The designation of certain pictures or other visual arrangements . . . These are made, in part or entirely, of pasted pieces of paper, newspaper, wallpaper, chromos, illustration, photographs, and other textured or figured materials, which are assembled in a manner totally incongruous with ordinary phenomenal experience.

Sometimes arrangements are made of fragments of such materials, plus somehow related, drawn, painted, or three-dimensional passages; sometimes painted or drawn passages are added to, or incorporated into photography, illustrations and the like; sometimes whole cut-out images are inserted into the midst of already existing pictorial compositions (14:233).

Classical color theory. Basically, placing cool colors in the background and keeping reds, oranges, and bright yellows in the foreground is the technique which follows the classical color theory.

Polymer media. There are two primary ingredients in paint--the pigment and the vehicle. The pigment consists of small particles of opaque materials, and this gives the paint its hiding power. The vehicle is the liquid portion of the paint, which has two basic components--the thinner and the binder. The thinner is a volatile component which evaporates,

leaving behind the solid paint film. "A material termed 'synthetic' is one which does not occur in nature, but which must be built up in the laboratory . . . Polyvinyl acetate, polyvinyl chloride resins, the epoxies and polyesters, and the acrylic resins are products of the chemist's laboratory." (9:39-41).

Frottage. In frottage an image on a printed page is transferred by rubbing to another piece of paper, which has been soaked in a solvent.

Content. It is "the essential meaning, significance, or aesthetic value of an art form; the psychological or sensory properties one tends to 'feel' in art forms as opposed to the visual aspects of a work of art." (11:158).

Funk. "Funk art looks at things which traditionally were not meant to be looked at . . . Funk has created a world where everything is possible but nothing is probable . . . Even the idea of permanence has occurred to them. Although neatness or sloppiness is not the issue here, there is a general trend toward greater care in execution and more precision, partly due to a limited amount of recognition enjoyed by the artists, and partly facilitated by the use of new materials—all kinds of plastics, including fiberglas, vinyl, epoxy, and the polyester resins." (15:4-5).

Watercolor is made up of pigments which

have gums as their binders and which use water as a solvent.

Figure-ground. This term refers to the spatial association existing between figure and ground forms usually enclosed or having some limitation of size and shape. Usually the figure reads as a form in front of another form.

Mixed media. A variety of materials used in conjunction to express the artist's idea is referred to as mixed media.

### CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### I. INTRODUCTION

Regardless of the medium an artist chooses to use, it has an influence on the artist's form. The literature reviewed for this study, to some extent, summarizes the potentialities and limitations of water soluble mixed media. However, because some synthetic, water-soluble media, which were used extensively in this study, were but recently developed, their written history is limited.

### II. SUMMARY

Since his existence, man has sought a means of self expression. "Somewhere when someone struck a line of color with a chunk of mud, charcoal, or an attractive mineral, artistic expression was born. Learning to portray things outside himself, man became himself." (5:191). Man's capacity for expression, however, has always been limited by the means or media he chose. For centuries, artists were content to paint within the limits of their media--primarily oil, fresco, and egg tempera.

Breaking away from the limits of the traditional media has had several effects on the artist. One effect is that artists' everlasting desire to achieve a higher level of

accomplishment led to a new awareness of subject matter and a wide means of identification with subject matter. (9:30). Part of the consciousness of new material for subject matter and of new images is seen in the changing forms and styles in contemporary art. "As technology made new media possible, serious artists . . . expanded their vision of form." (9:2).

New forms find ready expression within the restrictions and opportunities afforded by the new medium, restrictions and opportunities which are different from those imposed by other media. (9:3).

Another effect of this new freedom and vitality is the artist's attempt to find individual technical means of expression. Lawrence N. Jensen terms the most important result as:

. . . a greatly expanded vocabulary for the serious painter. No longer is he limited to a few traditional media with all of the dangers of long-established technical cliches and repetitive performances. The sensitive artist today increasingly explores the new media or reworks the old media until he has arrived at his own personal technique. (9:3).

The artist's increased awareness of the means or techniques involved in his painting has also resulted in a greater
involvement with the new synthetic media, because now the
artist requires more of media than ever before.

Ideally, a medium would respond . . . "to the painter's most subtle thoughts"(9:3). It would be subject to almost any manipulation (such as darkening, lightening, erasing) by the artist. It would permit the artist to experiment with changes in surface qualities, color, and value. Until recently, only the oil medium approached the ideal in these technical

requirements, but the greatest disadvantages of oil paint—that it darkens and cracks or flakes with age when used incorrectly, and it dries slowly—left many contemporary artists dissatisfied. (9:3-4). Today's painters are ready to experiment, they are willing to accept or at least try a new medium—the synthetic media.

According to Lawrence N. Jensen, there are eight distinct advantages in using synthetic media, which in his estimation, most nearly approach the ideal medium:

- 1. Synthetic media are comparatively inexpensive.
- 2. They are fast drying.
- 3. They are relatively permanent.
- 4. They may be easily built up to any thickness.
- 5. Most synthetic media are nontoxic and noninflam-mable.
- 6. They allow use of coloring agents other than pigments, such as colored paper.
- 7. They adhere to many different surfaces.
- 8. They do not change in value or color when dry. (9:8).

These advantages of the synthetic media readily allow freedom in development of new techniques. One technique the synthetic media facilitated is the use of mixed media. As Lawrence N. Jensen stated, other materials than pigments could be used, whereas in the past, traditional binders would not make materials other than pigments adhere to the support. Now synthetic binders allow wood, canvas, sand, paper, and other

materials to be used in place of pigment. (9:59). Other mixed media techniques made possible are these:

- The use of papier-mache spread over Masonite or a wooden frame and wire mesh.
- 2. Monoprinting in which newsprint images are transferred to the ground.
- 3. Paper collage with the synthetic media used in place of glue.
- 4. Transparencies which resemble stained glass.
- 5. Texturing a ground in which burlap or other material pressed against the prepared ground leaves a negative impression. (9:66-71).

Since the first user of plastic or synthetic media,

Hans van Meegeren, who mixed pigments with a plastic medium,

various artists have experimented with the media. Brie

Taylor in Art News reports on several artists and their

findings. (16:46-49, 62-63):

- Fairfield Porter used thin, transparent washes of paint.
- Thomas Hart Benton adhered to the traditional tempera technique in his work on a mural.
- 3. Alfonso Ossario, using mixed media, combined synthetic paints with natural and synthetic objects imbedded in glue on Masonite panels. "Areas between objects, and sometimes the objects themselves, are painted over in thin glazes of plastic color. The result is an almost overpowering array of textures, forms and colors" (16:49).
- 4. To form a collage with the medium as an adhesive,
  Theodore Halkin built up textured surfaces
  on Masonite using a paste of ground marble
  and polymer emulsion medium. Over this

surface he rubbed transparent glazes to achieve depth.

- 5. Ilya Bolotowsky used synthetic paints on wooden columns because he liked their texture and crisp colors.
- 6. Al Held painted on canvas and built up rough, irregular textures with the medium to achieve brilliant color effects.
- 7. Richard Anuszkiewicz found it helpful to mix colors in advance and try them on paper before starting work. "He has begun using masking tape of different widths to lay out his previously measured designs, and by isolating each color in this way, can control the exact thickness or density of his paints." (16:62).

Another artist, Edward Betts, in his experiments with mixed media using the polymer media, enriched his paintings with the use of:

. . . colored inks, wax crayons, felt-tipped pens, and stencils, as well as various cut and torn papers, sand metallic powders, and so on. (3:34).

Synthetic media have not only changed painting techniques; they have also changed the support artists may use. Instead of canvas many artists now use Masonite (commercial wallboard) for several reasons:

Masonite is not limited to standard stretcher sizes, nor is it vulnerable to physical damage and accidents or the harmful effects of moisture and humidity as is canvas. Masonite will not split as the traditional wood panel often does. (9:6).

Other supports that have been used with success are cement and illustration board. Various types of paper stretched over the support allow even more flexibility.

As mentioned previously, the matter of exploration and experimentation is by no means completed. Because the impact of synthetic media is barely emerging, no conclusions have been made; however, there are implications for contemporary artists.

Because the synthetic media most nearly approach the ideal medium without technical restrictions of any kind, we may not be too extravagant in supposing that painters in the near future will find themselves as artists at an earlier age than was the case in the past, when technical manipulations counted for so much. (9:11).

Although technical restraints may be alleviated by the synthetic media, it cannot be regarded as a panacea to the problems encountered by artists. As Edward Betts states:

Any media, whether traditional or new, is of value only if it is employed as a means to an end--to enrich pictorial expressiveness; to assist the artist in saying whatever he may have to say. But he must take especial pains to avoid grasping at a new medium with hope that through it he will discover a simple solution for his own technical or aesthetic problems, or using it as an evasion of the demands and disciplines of picturemaking. (3:39).

Although artists have little technical knowledge of synthetic media to rely upon, experimentation is advised if growth is desired. Leonard Richmond maintains that "personal investigation, if pursued with thoughtfulness and intelligence, is always more fruitful than the blind acceptance of the best advice." (12:144). Only through experimentation can the artist discover completely what the new media can contribute.

The ultimate objective of experimentation is to stimulate a fuller comprehension of the relationships between material and expressive content, and to realize the flexible bond between the two. It prepares the individual to take command and to integrate his perceptual, intellectual, emotional, and esthetic growth. (5:32).

Occasionally, experimentation will lead to unanticipated, perhaps undesired, results, but this too is growth. "The painter's integrity is challenged when he continues to use a 'style' he has created in order to reduce the possibility of failure." (18:4). With the versatility of the new media, the artist must accept the idea that there is "no 'correct' manner in which it should be used, and fresh possibilities are continually uncovered as it is explored over a period of time." (3:35-36).

### CHAPTER III

### PROCEDURE OF THE STUDY

The investigation began in August 1967 with the painting of "Utter Habit" using polymer media and Elmer's glue as the binder. In this painting of 12 inches by 22 inches, the technique of overlaying colors with the media formed transparencies. This approach is related closely to the traditional watercolor technique for achieving transparencies. Representative of a series of similar paintings done during this period, "Utter Habit" served as a departure point for further experimentation with mixed media.

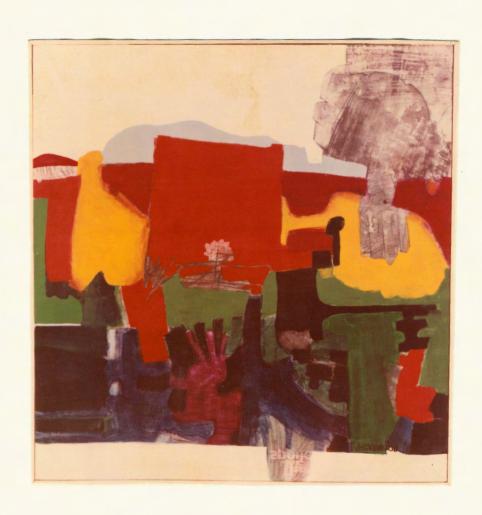


From August until January, the investigation continued with the series of paintings in an attempt to develop a new direction. "Overstimulated," 24 inches by 30 inches, completed in January 1968, seemed more challenging and involved freedom of techniques and experimentation. For the first time, large flat areas, bright colors, composition, hard edges, and "Funk" forms were used, qualities which all are

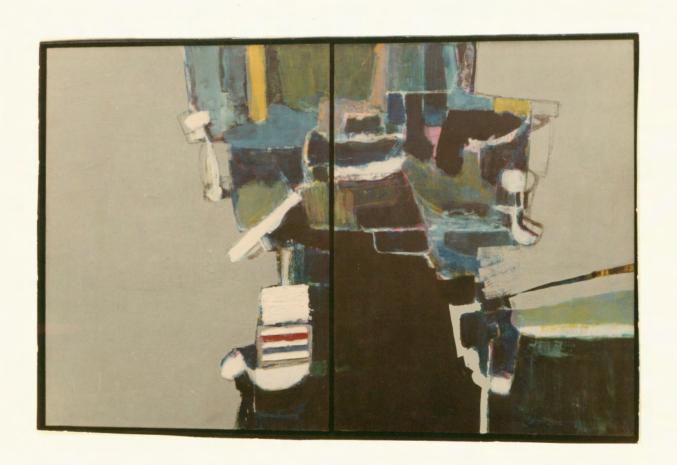


represented in current trends in art. In an attempt to get away from a "busy" effect, the use of large flat areas of color seemed to resolve the tension. Also, for the first time, white tempera was used and white areas were left untouched.

"Aggressive Conservation" was started and completed in February. This painting of 32 inches by 33 1/2 inches was a turning point in the investigation because the artist felt free to try several different ideas. The drawing in the top right-hand corner is slightly isolated and somewhat unfinished but works in the total effect of the painting. The use of white paint here seems more successful than in the previous painting. Again, "Funk" forms such as the one in the top right-hand corner were used. By making warm colors recede and cool colors advance, the classical color theory was reversed. Hard edged forms opposed soft edged ones. Painterly ideas such as interrupted line, figure-ground relationship, warm and cool colors, reversed perspective, and balance and unbalance were consciously used for this one work, and would have been better used unconsciously.



"Inter-relationship," a painting 48 inches by 32 inches, was started in March, but required several efforts to complete this painting by April. Both panels in this painting were painted as a whole, not individually. A study of light reflection at the right side of the left panel was attempted but did not succeed; the result was a flag figure. Re-working the painting with flat areas of gray water-based house paint helped to eliminate the weaker areas and emphasized a stronger visual form. After painting in the gray areas, the candidate

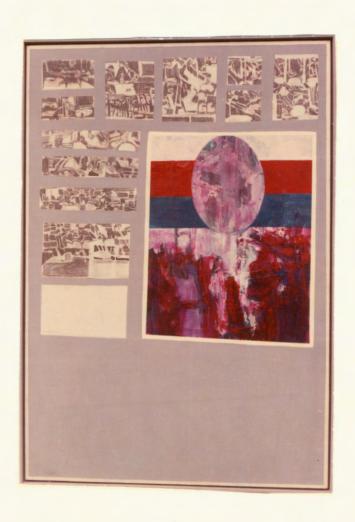


felt that these areas seemed unrelated to the figure, so by drawing lines overlapping the ground area, the figure-ground relationship became apparent. To make separation between the panels more obvious, a quarter inch recessed gap was left in the framing.

The next painting, 24 inches by 44 inches, was started in April and was entitled "Alternating Cartoon." For experimental purposes, comic books were used for subject matter and as part of the media. Painting was carried out individually on three panels. Starting at the bottom, cartoons were painted in to help place comics in aesthetic surroundings or meanings. From bottom to top the painting develops from realism to abstraction, but still adheres to the cartoon form. The daring white balloon form was used, saying nothing; the message being "no message." Repetition of this balloon form works totally in the composition, helping the viewer read back and forth.



In April, "Translating Reality," 33 inches by 48 inches was painted. This work began with a frottage and developed with abstract pencil drawings. Using water-based house paint, a newspaper type format was developed. Within this format,



a painting within a painting was produced. The inner painting has built-up areas of polymer media putty. The color and glazed effect of the inner painting juxtaposes the matte finish of the black and white half tones of the outer painting. A masking taped edge was used to give both areas a matted effect. The total painting does not seem successful; it is too busy, and the parts are unrelated. The inner painting on a larger scale could be successful by itself.

"Legitimate Experience," 24 inches by 34 inches, was completed in May. An X-ray was used as the initial idea in this painting. The X-ray was glued to the original painting surface, which was divided into two areas—one white and one silver. The use of flat areas in relationship to organic inner forms comprised the basic composition. Transparent areas and flat areas texturally contrast. Untouched X-ray areas also served as transparencies. In the process of developing this painting, certain areas did not work. Eliminating these areas with heavy paper the thickness of the X-ray, and then painting over the paper improved the painting and gave it raised surfaces.

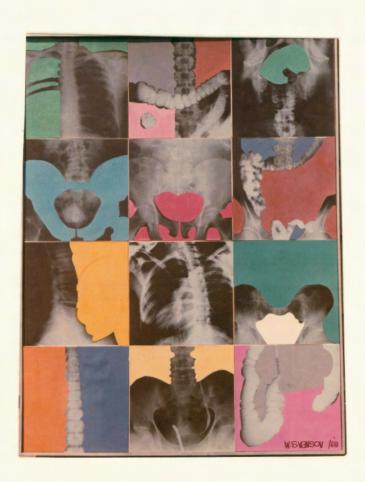


The enlargement shows detailed work of surface qualities of the painting and the drawing effects. In this, organic forms were used; specifically, bone forms. Actually, some of



the painted area was scraped away to give the quality of an unfinished surface.

In May, a painting of 35 1/2 inches by 48 inches, entitled "Inner Access," was completed. The painting was composed of twelve individual panels, in which twelve individual X-rays were attached with glue. Each panel was approximately 12 inches square. Each panel was painted individually with bright, flat colors. The problem regarding the handling of the X-rays centered around the selecting of forms in a



positive-negative relationship. After this process the individual pieces were arranged to form a total painting.

"Identical Prospectus," 43 inches by 50 inches, was completed in the latter part of May. The painting surfaces were posters stretched over Masonite support in the regular manner. Five individual panels comprised the painting and were again painted separately. Bright colors were used to form flat areas in certain parts of the posters. Since the original posters lacked depth, the areas such as the purple in the top left-hand corner behind the figure produced a feeling of shallow scale. (Shallow scale is perceived as the frontal plane advances; it may also be read as both advancing or receding). Of the five panels, the bottom center panel works most successfully because of the form and surface and paint quality. One difficult area was Bob Dylan's hair in which more hard edges could have been used.

As a protective water-proof coating, an acetate finish was applied by stretching the acetate over the individual panels and by stapling the acetate to the sides. Also, the double frame and plastic edging gave the painting an over-all artificial plastic effect.



"Glamorous Sight," 48 inches by 46 inches, was completed in June and is the final painting in this study. Work was done on three individual panels. To carry out the mechanical theme, a combination of posters and paint was used. Instead of stretching the total poster over the Masonite as was done in previous paintings, only portions of the posters were applied to the surface. Certain areas of these posters were painted in; other areas were used merely as departure points or as motifs. For example, the cycle wheel served as a basis for the motorcycle form in the first panel.

Another experimental technique tried for the first time was the use of metals on the painting itself. In the top center, a sheet of polished brass was glued to the surface. On that same panel a piece of cut, polished sheet metal was applied. Both metals further emphasize the mechanical, metallic theme. Also, for the first time, sections of acetate were used as a painting surface, giving a three dimensional illusion or depth. Some areas of the acetate were left unpainted, giving a glossy surface quality.

A religious altar piece with fancy "carpenter" trim was originally designed for the top of the entire painting, but it made the work too ornate so it was omitted. The three panels were framed individually, and brass hinges connected the panels.



### CHAPTER IV

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

### I. SUMMARY

During this study a change in attitude toward experimentation and content evolved. To break away from the limited forms, the candidate discovered that a wider range of materials Since the use of watercolor alone prohibited was required. the candidate from attaining flat, non-transparent areas which were desired, other materials such as temperas, polymer media, and latex water-based paint were incorporated. The combination of a wider variety of materials and an open-minded attitude resulted in a painterly freedom--freedom to develop new techniques and freedom to invent new forms. However, to infer that internal change in attitude and expanded use of physical materials was the only determining factor in the candidate's growth during this study, would be incorrect. Undoubtedly, external influences in the contemporary environment were involved.

It would seem that the knowledge of the technical potentialities regarding mixed media and the willingness to experiment would lead to satisfaction; however, the opposite was true, in this study. The candidate recognizes the need to continue to pursue a further range of possibilities involving media, if growth as an artist is to continue.

### II. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

The attempt to conclude what should be a continuous process is a difficult if not impossible task. At the beginning of this study, the candidate's basic problem was using trite forms. In the attempt to change, the candidate found the use of traditional watercolor inadequate, and a need for different materials developed. To achieve opaque colors, polymer media, tempera, acrylics, and latex paints were used. Consequently, the change in materials resulted in a change in form. It was then realized that materials were interrelated to form. Use of frottage and collage had an extreme influence on the paintings. Experimenting with frottage and collage techniques led to another realization-that X-ray plates and posters could also be used as media. Further experimentation with surface qualities led to the use of metals and acetate. When the metals and acetate were cut into shapes, they contributed not only to surface qualities but also to the form.

Expanding the use of media has created almost unlimited possibilities for further study. Utilization of acetate, for example, could lead to work with plastics or vacuum molds and eventually could lead to a new dimension of work. Within this dimension could evolve sculptural or three dimensional forms which could, in turn, lead to new problems in perspective or

form. Further study in mixed media should be based on the assumption reached in this study that mixed media, in effect, have no limitations.

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