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Advertising Media as a Source for Painting Iconography

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ADVERTISING MEDIA AS A SOURCE FOR
PAINTING ICONOGRAPHY

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate Faculty
Central Washington State College

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Betty Tompkins
August, 1969

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"The written word makes public a state of mind, a state of consciousness which transfers from private to public expression a set of ideas and facts which would otherwise remain unavailable, both to the one who writes and to the one who reads."

- Harold Taylor (31:16)

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CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Introduction

The viewer of Renaissance art is systematically placed outside the frame of experience. A piazza for everything and everything in its piazza (16:53).

The Renaissance context no longer exists. The paintings and sculpture from that era were meant as objects for serene contemplation and meditation. This attitude in art is completely alien to today's fast-paced, computerized world. "Art is made of the stuff of life. It is an expression that arises out of the unique experience of a particular time and place, reflecting the common knowledge of that era" (25:2).

Today's art involves the viewer/consumer/participant. It jiggles around the room, lights up, and makes noises. Paintings sit on the floor, sculpture hangs from the ceiling and the wall. Its audience is asked to move in and around it, rearrange its parts, answer its telephones, plug it in, turn up the volume, and live with it. Contemporary art is anything but an object for quiet contemplation. Claes Oldenburg has said:

Painting which has slept so long in its gold crypts, in its glass graves, is asked out to go for a swim, is given a cigarette, a bottle of beer, its hair ruffled, is given a shove and tripped, is taught to laugh, is given clothes of all kinds, goes for a ride on a bike, finds a girl in a cab and feels her up . . . (14:108).

Art is no longer a known quantity. It "is constantly making itself; its definition is in the future" (24:54). It is open and vulnerable to anything.

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the Problem

One of the phenomena of twentieth century America is the enormous growth in size and influence of the advertising industry. It is impossible to avoid the visual and aural images of sultry women and sophisticated men (and various portions of their anatomy), who order, persuade and cajole the public through the media of television, newspapers and magazines. It was the purpose of this thesis (1) to use these advertisements as a source of visual imagery for a series of drawings and paintings; (2) to utilize the resulting ambiguity of the image when taken out of a commercial context and put into a fine art context; and (3) to develop the concept that the audience acts as the active ingredient in the confrontation between itself and the art object.

Importance of the Study

The work in this thesis was considered significant from the view of personal development. The candidate's paintings, drawings and attitude prior to beginning this thesis were based on abstract expressionism. As work began on this thesis, the candidate realized that action painting was no longer pertinent as a viable movement

to the contemporary art scene¹ or to her own concepts of what she wanted her art to be. It was, therefore, hoped that the work included in this thesis would help the candidate invent for herself a new vocabulary of form and philosophy. "To be a new man is not a condition but an effort - an effort that follows a revelation in behalf of which existing forms are discarded as irrelevant or are radically revised" (24:18).

No one can be certain of the impact, influence or geographical travels his work will have at the time he is doing it. He is not even sure what the piece will look like. A major characteristic of art is what Etienne Gilson calls its "imprevisibility" (32:56). It does not become what it is until after it has been done. Ideas, concepts and images that exist only in one's mind do not count. The idea depends on the painting for its importance. Jasper Johns puts it this way: "My idea has always been that in painting the way ideas are conveyed is through the way it looks and I see no way to avoid that, and I don't think Duchamp can either" (14:69).

¹Alan Solomon in New York: The New Art Scene states: "After all that time the tradition of belle peinture effectively came to an end, for the present at least, in the work of Rauschenberg and Johns, and the abstract painters. After them not a single younger progressive painter of importance has appeared so far who has not reacted against expressionism in one way or another, and, more than this, against the whole painterly tradition" (29:42).

II. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The limitations of this thesis were the following: (1) The source for the images used were found mostly in magazines with a few from newspapers and television advertisements. (2) Materials used were oil paint, acrylic polymer paint, various drawing materials, and fabricated and vacuum-formed plastics. Damar varnish was sprayed on the paintings to achieve a glossy surface which reinforced their commercialized source. (3) The size of the paintings was determined by the image to be presented and the increase in scale considered necessary to remove the image from its original context.

III. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Ad-mass Imagery. Images taken from advertising in the mass media; magazines, television, newspapers. A commercialized image.

Ambiguity. "Double or dubious meaning" (20:53). As used in this thesis, it also refers to a commercialized image which is also placed in an art context.

Arbitrary. Depending on will or pleasure; capricious (20:91).

Commercialized Image. An image derived from advertising art not created by the artist in whose work it appears.

Confrontation. A face to face meeting; presentation of a bold front (20:368).

Given. Granted as the basis for reasoning, calculation (20:796).

Hermeneutics. Pertaining to interpretation (20:894). Modes of interpretation.

Iconography. The subject matter of a work of art.

Image. Used "to describe evocative visual material from any source, with or without the status of art" (14:33).

Mimesis. Imitation or representation of nature (34:39). Originally a Greek concept.

Transparence. ". . . experiencing the luminousness of the thing in itself, of things being what they are" (31:13); phenomenology.

Vaccum-forming. A process of molding plastic by heating the plastic and sucking it over the model or mold.

Viewer Response. The experience of an individual when looking at art.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

One of the effects of the prestigious Abstract Expressionist movement of the 1940's and '50's was to move the hub of the art world from Paris to New York. This change in locale has exposed contemporary art movements to American mass communication media. In addition to several glossy monthly magazines devoted entirely to art (which are geared to those professionally involved in the field), popular weekly magazines (such as Time, Life, and Newsweek) regularly track current developments in painting and sculpture. Concomitant to this exposure to the public there has developed several interesting phenomena: 1) a change in attitude by many artists of the purpose or existence of "meaning" in art; 2) an awareness of the critic's role; 3) the responsibility of the viewer in getting meaning from a work of art; and 4) the effect of the mass media on both the production and visual effect of much of contemporary art.

I. THE ARTIST

Even the most cursory study of Western art history reveals a pattern of hierarchies and standards that extends from the Canon of Polyclietos to the numerous manifestos of the Cubists and surrealists. These treatises written by artists, art critics and

philosophers cover a wide range of topics from supremacy of one art media over another, hierarchies of subject matter, mimesis, form, color, approach as well as standards for moral beauty, carving hair, proportion, religious and secular messages, and devotion to the study of antiquity. To cite just one example, in 1666, the standards of the Academy of France were published in a book entitled Conversations on the Most Excellent Painters, Ancient and Modern written by Felibien. Along with many bits of advice on 'how-to' (draw anger, correct nature, etc.) is a hierarchy of subject matter:

. . . since the figure of man is the most perfect work of God, he who paints living animals rather than dead things without movement; then he who paints landscapes, and finally fruits and flowers (34:122-124).

In addition to the relative security of these various canons, there was, until the end of the nineteenth century, some comfort for artists in the fact that prevailing art movements had a certain longevity that is totally lacking today. After all, the Renaissance had lasted over two hundred years, the Baroque era over a century. Even the Barbizon School was active for thirty years and the Realists for twenty. The effect of all this was to perpetuate the idea that many elements in art were determined for the artist before he created the art. Finished pieces were evaluated according to how successful the painter or sculptor had been in conforming to or executing the right and correct norms. Despite the fact that since Impressionism, movements had had shorter life spans, the habit of presenting one mode of painting and thinking as the "only possible

conception of pictorial art" (10:4) persisted up to (and, in this author's opinion, including) Abstract Expressionism.

To be a member of the art audience one, two, or several hundred years ago, was a far easier task than it currently is. The statement ". . . we are in the unfortunate position of having no order or canon whereby all artistic production is submitted or rules" (8:74) implies more of a crisis for those who look at art than for those who create it. When the art experience was designed to be passively morally or religiously uplifting, the viewer was only required to see the work and be tranquilly enlightened. If he wasn't, the fault was the artist's not the spectator's.

However, around 1860 the situation changed radically and irrevocably. The private exhibitions of Courbet in 1855 and 1867 and the Salon des Refusees in 1863 revealed to the public art that was for them neither peaceful nor enlightening. The Realists and Impressionists and subsequent European movements up to World War II were received by both the masses and the official designators of the status quo with much disfavor. The attitude of the artists of that era is probably best exemplified by Pablo Picasso:

When I paint, I always try to give an image people are not expecting and, beyond that, one they reject. That's what interests me (8:72).

The form of the metaphor may be worn-out or broken, but I take it, however down-at-the-heel it may have become, and use it in such an unexpected way that it arouses a new emotion in the mind of the viewer, because it momentarily disturbs his customary way of identifying and defining what he sees (8:322).

I want to draw the mind in a direction it's not used to and wake it up. I want to help the viewer discover something he wouldn't have discovered without me (8:60).

You can't impose your thought on people if there's no relation between your painting and their visual habits (8:72).

I want my paintings to be able to defend themselves, to resist the invader, just as though there were razor blades on all surfaces so no one could touch them without cutting their hands (8:270).

The artist must know the manner whereby to convince others of the truthfulness of his lies (5:34).

The great majority of people have no spirit of creation or invention. As Hegel says, they can only know what they already know. So how do you go about teaching them something new? By mixing what they know with what they don't know (8:73).

Picasso has been quoted here at length to show that even though the public found the art of that period violently repulsive, there still existed, on the part of the artists, the attitude that they were producing work which was beneficial and edifying; that there was a concern for the viewer's response; and, moreover, the implication that the disorientation of conventional viewing habits was for the public's own good.

Knowledge of the ambiguity of interpretation of any stimuli has reduced the confidence artists were once able to have in a one-to-one communication with their audience. The artist today knows that he cannot count on an accurate reading of art; abstract and figurative imagery are equally subject to the psychology of rumour and to variable responses (14:52-53).

The reaction of the public to avant garde work has brought about a certain cynicism among many contemporary artists. The idea

that it is possible for one man, one style or one attitude to dominate the art world eternally no longer seems to exist. Robert Rauschenberg has said: ". . . the awareness grows that even in his most devastating or herioc moment he is part of the density of an uncensored continuum that neither begins with nor ends with any decision or action of his" (14:180-181). Jean-Paul Sartre puts it this way: "It is dangerously easy to speak too readily about eternal values; eternal values are very, very fleshless" (35:112).

The idea that the work of art itself embodies a message, an emotion, a comment or an attitude also appears to be singularly missing: Jim Dine's statement, "If it's art, who cares if it's a comment?" (3:79) is typical of this lack of concern with communication. Moreover, many artists have made it clear that if any "meaning" results from looking at their art, it is because the viewer himself has invented it:

I believe that in modern work the spectator has to bring with him more than half the emotion (Alexander Calder) (22:140).

I feel that any art communicates what you're in the mood to receive. If you're at the Met and are in the mood for an Egyptian wall painting, it communicates a lot; if you're not, it says nothing. The same goes for Titian. Art is nothing. A little bit of nothing (Larry Rivers) (22:120).

. . . there is no possible way of communicating with anyone on the subject of art (Philip Hefferton) (17:92).

I go to great lengths to avoid literary relationships arising from the juxtaposition of various elements (Tom Wesselmann) (25:133).

Art is a sphinx. The beauty of the sphinx is that you yourself must do the interpreting (Leo Steinberg) (27:82).

The point of art is participation, by the artist in his work of making the art work, by the observer in his work of making the artwork a part of his consciousness. All art requires participation (Carl Andre) (2:28).

. . . the capacity for tragic response belongs to the observer and is limited by his fund of experience and gift for association. I wouldn't claim I have expressed such emotion . . ." (George Hickey) (22:146).

It appears that many contemporary artists have rejected the traditional mantel of responsibility in determining the success of their work by refusing either to reveal the "meaning" of the work or to accept the idea that such a revelation by them is warranted.

∫"What am I working with? It's only colored dirt" (18:99).∫

There is the implication that this refusal will compel those who choose to be part of the art audience to a great degree of involvement beyond the level of Philistinism. It is perhaps this desire which has prompted Robert Rauschenberg to say: "I refuse to be in this world by myself. I want an open committment from the rest of the people" (9:22).

II. THE CRITIC

Beginning with the Greeks, art criticism has slowly developed over the centuries into a form so intricate that a study of it might lead the student to the erroneous belief that it is a subject completely independent of the art it professes to judge. A brief

review of this development up to the nineteenth century suffices to show the overwhelming complexity of this body of literature and will, perhaps, indicate the problems confronting the critic of art today.

"For the Greeks . . . art was mimesis . . . and for them beauty had a moral character identified with the good, or a mathematical character identified with geometrical proportions" (34:39-40). The Greeks were also concerned with the proportions of the human figure as embodied by the Canon Of Polycleitos (34:37).

In the Middle Ages, the concept of mimesis was replaced by the concept of man's spiritual value and "the idea of art was completely absorbed in the idea of God" (34:60). "The idea remains rational in its aim of attaining the reason of God, but its process is intuitive, imaginative" (34:62). In the twelfth century, Theophilus "assigned to formal representation a moral task; and a value of mystical contemplation to colour and light" (34:66).

During the Renaissance, "religion did not disappear . . . but was made more human . . . and it is understood that the study of the antique writers, sculptors and architects was a consequence and not a cause of the new religion of man" (34:99). In 1436, Leon Battista Alberti wrote a treatise on painting which is the basis for Florentine art:

He wishes to make painting arise from from roots within nature. "We do not, like Pliny, recite history, but build anew an art of painting." So strong is his influence that the Florentine painters adhere to his ideas until toward the end of the fifteenth century.

Painting, he says, is the section of the visual cone; that is to say, painting is a perspective solution to reality He presupposes in the painter the Idea, of Plotinian origin; and the Idea will be executed with the hand. But that Idea is no longer transcendent; it is the mathematical knowledge of man . . . the origin of art coincides therefore in history and in the psychology of the artist, and has become the eternal now (34:83-84).

Alberti also feels that the "interpretation of reality is not enough: there must be the ideal beauty necessary to contemplation" (34:85).

In the sixteenth century, Albert Durer wrote a treatise on proportions:

Durer seeks to measure everything, with a precision and minuteness never used before, in order to give the rule of art according to Italian principles. He considers art as theory, in opposition to practice . . . but when he has arrived at the . . . conclusion of this desire of rational laws for art, he perceives that measurements are not enough, and that it is necessary for the artist to receive from God the gift to do in a day with a pen a better thing than another, with all the measurements could do in a year (34:93-94).

During the seventeenth century, the concepts of moralism, Cartesian rationalism, and sentimentality were juxtaposed to each other with none arising as the predominant philosophy of the Baroque era (34:109-114). However, in the beginning of the eighteenth century there was a "spontaneous reaction against the use and abuse of the Idea, and there arose the statement that art was a matter of feeling, and that therefore, not laws, but sensibility and taste must be the judges of art" (34:155). This condition did not last long. In midcentury, Baumgarten, an expert in the analysis of

scholastic logic (34:136) decided that

. . . confused knowledge -- that is, artistic knowledge -- has its perfection close to the distinct knowledge of science; and therefore he considers art as an active mode of knowledge In such a way he assigned to art its own field in the system of the human mind, accentuating it with the name of Aesthetics . . ." (34:136).

For critics of neoclassicism, "formal beauty, identified with the beauty of ancient Greece, remained the sole ideal . . ." (34:137).

The eighteenth century also saw the first published report of an exhibition. It was not initially well received by the artists who were criticized but the number of publications grew (34:140-141).

In 1797, William Henry Wackenrader tried to free criticism from its tight band of rationality: "Looking tranquilly at all times we try always to feel the human in every sentiment and all its works"

(34:173). A half century later, Ruskin expanded these ideas: "What we want art to do for us is to stay what is fleeting, and to enlighten what is incomprehensible. . ." (34:181). Ruskin, in his adulation of the Middle Ages, continued what Wencklemann, who adored the Greco-Roman art, had started. Both were detached from their contemporaries' art. Lionello Venturi says of Ruskin that he was "too much shut up in mediaeval art -- and that was his pride -- to understand what was happening around him" (34:186).

The nineteenth century saw a resurgence of the idealistic philosophy in the writings of Kant and Hegel:

Kant realised the distinction between the subjective and the arbitrary in art and in artistic judgement; rejected all rules in art; fused the concept of

beauty with that of art; distinguished art and science, art and nature, sense and imagination; and accentuated the spontaneous and original character of genius, productive of art (34:191).

George Hegel accepts the definition of beauty which his predecessors . . . had formulated: the true is the idea in itself, and the beautiful is the sensible appearance of the idea In consequence, the aim of art is "to manifest the truth under the form of sensible representation" (34:200).

There was also a continuance of the trend, except in France, to ignore modern art in preference to past art. Venturi says, "with rare exceptions, if they perceived modern art, it was only to appreciate those . . . who were better able to imitate the things or the principles of past art . . ." (34:337).

The critic of art today is faced with a monumental problem. He can base his judgements on ideas anachronistic to his time and environment, or as Allen Leepa says, he can confront each new piece of art as an "extra or super phenomenal object unto itself, to be examined without prior conceptual commitments . . ." (4:144). Unfortunately, many critics seemed to have opted for the former choice.

The critic with anachronistic tendencies reveals them in the following ways: (1) by setting up boundaries beyond which current and future artists may not go; (2) by finding a source for a new art in past thus making the new art "respectable"; and (3) by giving us his interpretation of what the artist "really" meant to say.

Art criticism has been called "probably the only remaining intellectual activity, not excluding theology, in which pre-Darwinian minds continue to affirm value systems disassociated from any

observable phenomena" (23:44-45). Nicolas Calas, for example, ignored a good deal of "observable phenomena" (such as the entire movement of Minimal Art and subsequent collaborations between artists and industries like Lippincott, Inc.) by stating in 1968 "unlike the manufactured object, a work of art is able to express feeling. Through his interpretation of material . . . the artist conveys feelings about images, forms and ideas" (6:15).

In 1959, Sam Hunter, one of the champions of the Abstract Expressionist movement, in discussing the plight of the contemporary artists stated:

Indeed, the pressures of materialism and the deeply rooted American psychology of the utility of all products, including the cultural product of art, often undermine the artist's position. On the one hand the artist is made acutely aware of his separation from shallow popular culture, and his creativeness is threatened by his sense of isolation. On the other hand, he may also be unconsciously affected by the corrupted visual currency of mass media, of advertising art, and driven into slick and synthetic expression (12:120).

Mr. Hunter's warning notwithstanding, on November 1, 1962, Pop Art, which draws specifically on "mass media . . . advertising art, and slick and synthetic expression", was officially launched at the Sidney Janis Gallery in New York. In his preface to the catalogue of that show, John Ashbery states: "the artists . . . are at an advanced stage of the struggle to determine the real nature of reality which began at the time of Flaubert" (28:1). He goes on to say:

New Realism is not new. Even before Duchamp produced the first ready-made, Apollinaire had written that the true poetry of our time is to be found in the window of a barber shop. Picasso had constructed his

absinthe glass, Gaudi his gigantic mosaic of broken dishes in the Parque Guell, Gris had used the severely elegant Quaker Oats package in one of his collages; and the posters at Trouville were a favorite subject of the Fauves (28:1).

This historical lineage was probably no comfort at all to James Rosenquist, Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein and others in the show who had only empty studios and no "inevitableities" since as Etienne Gilson says: "What has not yet been seen is a painter able to foretell the future evolution of his art or the probable development of his own career . . ." (32:56). This idea has been supported by critic Harold Rosenberg who states:

Anything can be "traced back" to any thing, especially by one who has elected himself First Cause. The creator, however, has not before him a thing, "traceable" or otherwise; to bring a work into being he must cope with the possibilities and necessities of his time as they exist within him (23:44).

Interpretation, however, is probably the most used and abused mode of criticism today. One example of this concerns Robert Rauschenberg's painting "Bed". In February, 1964, The New Yorker ran an extensive interview/article on Rauschenberg in which was included his stated reason for doing the painting:

He simply woke up one May morning with the desire to paint but nothing to paint on, and no money to buy canvas. His eye fell on the quilt at the foot of his bed. The quilt had come up from Black Mountain with him, and he had slept under it for several winters. The weather was getting warm, though, and next winter seemed a long way off. He made a stretcher for the quilt, just as though it were canvas, and started to paint. Something was wrong, though, the quilt pattern was too self-assertive. Rauschenberg added his pillow. "That solved everything -- the quilt stopped insisting on itself, and the pillow gave me a nice

white area to paint on," he says . . . "I think of 'Bed' as one of the friendliest pictures I've ever painted," he said recently. "My fear has always been that someone would want to crawl into it" (33:76).

Completely ignoring this, ten months later, critic Max Kozloff, in an attempt to show Jim Dine's indebtedness to Rauschenberg, stated: ". . . The inertness of the paint [is] a commentary on potential sterility as panicky as Rauschenberg's "Bed" . . . (13:39).

One plausible reason for the predominance of interpretation in criticism is given by Gregory Battock: "The critic has . . . to paint the painting anew and make it more acceptable, less of the threat that it often is" (4:14). In her essay, "Against Interpretation", Susan Sontag agrees but carries the idea further:

In most modern instances, interpretation amounts to the philistine refusal to leave the work of art alone. Real art has been the capacity to make us nervous. By reducing the work of art to its content and then interpreting that, one tames the work of art. Interpretation makes art manageable, conformable" (30:8).

Miss Sontag builds her case on the following arguments:

Whatever it may have been in the past, the idea of content is today mainly a hindrance, a nuisance, a subtle or not so subtle philistinism" (30:5).

What the overemphasis on the idea of content entails is the perennial, never consummated project of interpretation. And, conversely, it is the habit of approaching works of art in order to interpret them that sustains the fancy that there really is such a thing as the content of a work of art (30:5).

The modern style of interpretation excavates, and as it excavates, destroys; it digs "behind" the text, to find a sub-text which is the true one (30:6).

Like the fumes of the automobile and of heavy industry which befoul the atmosphere of the city, the effusion of interpretations of art today poisons our sensibilities. In a culture whose already classical dilemma is the hypertrophy of the intellect at the expense of energy and sensual capability, interpretation is the revenge of the intellect upon art (30:7).

But the merit of these works certainly lies elsewhere than in their "meanings" (30:9).

It is always the case that interpretation of this type indicates a dissatisfaction (conscious or unconscious) with the work, a wish to replace it by something else. Interpretation, based on the highly dubious theory that a work of art is composed of items of content, violates art. It makes art into an article for use, for arrangement into a mental scheme of categories (30:10).

The flight from interpretation seems particularly a feature of modern painting. Abstract painting is the attempt to have, in the ordinary sense, no content; since there is not content, there can be no interpretation. Pop Art works by the opposite means to the same result; using a content so blatant, so "what it is", it too, ends by being uninterpretable (30:10).

Interpretation takes the sensory experience of art for granted, and proceeds from there. This cannot be taken for granted, now (30:13).

Miss Sontag is not alone in her sentiments about interpretation.

Jose Ortega y Gasset says:

The metaphor disposes of an object by having it masquerade as something else. Such a procedure would make no sense if we did not discern beneath it an instinctive avoidance of certain realities (21:31).

Jean Paul Sartre also lends support to the argument: "It is one thing to describe the image and quite another to draw conclusions regarding its nature. In going from one to the other we pass from certainty to probability" (35:49). Hans Hofmann remarks, "a thought

that has found a plastic expression must continue to expand in keeping with its own plastic idiom . . . and so a plastic art cannot be created through a superimposed literary meaning" (11:39). Larry Rivers observes, "When you see Rembrandt's pictures you're overwhelmed by the body of literature explaining what it all means" (22:120). And Rollo May, in discussing a similar situation in psychology, states that "dogmatism and rigid formulations block [the individual] off from the full presence in the encounter which is essential to understanding what is going on" (15:28).

Miss Sontag proposes a solution to the current critical dilemma which she calls "transparence" which means "experiencing the luminousness of the thing in itself, of things being what they are" (30:13). Another, more familiar term for this is "phenomenology" which is

the endeavor to take the phenomena as given. It is the disciplined effort to clear one's mind of the pre-suppositions that so often cause us to see . . . only our own theories or the dogmas of our own systems, the effort to experience instead the phenomena in their full reality as they present themselves. It is the attitude of openness . . . (15:26).

This attitude toward art was also suggested by Lionello Venturi, in 1936, when he broke art criticism into three factors of judgement: the pragmatic, "given by the work of art on which the judgement is brought to bear;" the ideal, "given by the aesthetic ideas of the critic and in general by his philosophical ideas and moral needs -- in short, by the civilization to which he adheres and which he helps to form;" and the psychological, "which depends upon the personality

of the critic" (34:30). Of the three, Venturi feels "the intuitive experience of works of art -- that is, its pragmatic factor: (34:30) is the most important.

The purpose of this approach, says Miss Sontag, is to treat art as a "mode of proof, an assertion of accuracy in the spirit of maximum vehemence" (30:198). The task of the art critic is "not to find the maximum amount of content in a work of art much less to squeeze more content out of the work than is already there. Our task is to cut back content so that we can see the thing at all In place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art" (31:14).

Another possible solution has been suggested by critic Brian O'Doherty:

Art criticism has to be reinvented for every generation, and it seems to me that the mode most suitable to dealing with art now is some modification of the structuralist criticism . . . such multiple frames of reference catch the art object in transit through a section of time in a way impossible for modes that depend completely on the fiction of development, which is really a critical disguise for the illusion of progress (18:12).

III. THE VIEWER

"The release of art from the one-way push of the past is inseparable from a permanent uneasiness. . . this uneasiness both artists and their audiences will have to learn to endure" (18:33). Artists seem to have little or no trouble with handling the lack of rules and canons. David Smith's statement, "I enjoy watching the world crumble and the old values go down" (22:128) is typical. For

the art audience, however, the situation has not been so pleasant.

As Harold Rosenberg says:

One thing had been learned from the notorious mistakes of the past one hundred years, and the lesson was thoroughly confusing. It was that no new work, no matter how apparently senseless, repulsive or visually vacant, could be rejected without running the risk that it would turn up as a masterpiece of the era (23:28).

Leo Steinberg puts it this way:

. . . every moment during the past one hundred years has had an outrageous art of its own, so that every generation from Courbet down, has had a crack at the discomfort to be had from modern art (4:32).

This discomfort exists because, more and more, art is presented as a confrontation-type experience (2:26). For instance, Max Kozloff states that "the important relation in a work of art is not between two or more forms on a surface, but between itself as a complex event, and the spectator" (4:128). Alan Solomon agrees:

The work of art now insists on its presence in the room in a way which makes it the psychological equal of the people present; it must be taken into account, and it must participate dynamically in the feelings and interaction of those in the room. It is one of them (29:33).

One of the elements of this confrontation is contemporary art's noticeability. As Kierkegaard says: "In all eternity, it is impossible for me to compel a person to accept an opinion, a conviction, a belief. But one thing I can do: I can compel him to take notice" (35:70). Or as one reviewer put it: "No man can point at a painting and say it's nothing; he'll be lucky if it doesn't come down off the wall and club him to death for such an impertinence" (22:107).

It is characteristic of modern art to project "itself into a twilight zone where no values are fixed" (82:45) and to be "an unlimited risk for the intelligence" (23:29). Several people have written about the art audience's refusal to risk itself in sympathetic response to the new. Gregory Battcock states:

The vast majority of the population cannot endure the challenge to conventional value structures and existing social psychology represented by the statements of contemporary artists. For art is not merely a question of understanding, but of acceptance and response. Since people have so much to lose by facing up to the challenge of art, they will not -- cannot -- do so . . . Insecurity, intolerance, and reaction are all incompatible with art appreciation (4:14).

Agreement is found in this statement of H. L. Mencken:

The one permanent emotion of the inferior man . . . is fear -- fear of the unknown, the complex, the inexplicable. What he wants beyond everything else is safety. His instincts incline him toward a society so organized that it will protect him . . . against the need to grapple with unaccustomed problems, to weight ideas, to think things out for himself (12:68-69).

In an essay entitled "Contemporary Art and the Plight of Its Public", Leo Steinberg says, "Confronting a new work of art, they may feel excluded from something they thought they were part of -- a sense of being thwarted, or deprived of something" (4:33). He believes that this feeling may mean that "having a strong attachment to certain values, he cannot serve an unfamiliar cult in which these same values are ridiculed" (4:37). Fellow critic, Lucy Lippard adds to this: "If the viewer dislikes the subject matter, he will be repelled initially no matter how the artist has depicted it. The artist can only isolate the subject . . ." (14:86).

Jose Ortega y Gasset, who has said of young artists that one can either "shoot them, or try to understand them" (21:12) has written extensively on the subject of viewer response. The following are a few of his ideas on this subject:

Through its mere presence, the art of the young compels the average citizen to realize that he is just this -- the average citizen Accustomed to ruling supreme, the masses feel that the new art, which is the art of a privileged aristocracy of finer senses, endangers their rights as men. Whenever the new Muses present themselves, the Masses bristle (21:6).

If the new art is not accessible to every man this implies that its impulses are not of a generically human kind. It is an art not for men in general, but for a special class of men who may not be better but who evidently are different (21:8).

It appears that to the majority of people aesthetic pleasure means a state of mind which is essentially indistinguishable from their ordinary behavior By art they understand a means through which they are brought into contact with interesting human affairs. Artistic forms proper . . . are tolerated only if they do not interfere with the perception of human form and fates Now, this is a point which has to be made perfectly clear . . . preoccupation with the human content of the work is in principle incompatible with aesthetic enjoyment proper (21:8-9).

Ortega y Gasset's ideas are, perhaps, clarified by this statement of Sartres: "An imaginative consciousness is a consciousness of an object as an image and not consciousness of an image" (35:50).

Harold Taylor has also written on the subject of viewer conservatism and response:

The conduct of the observer . . . when he comes to the gallery or to the museum is a matter for the observer to determine for himself. If he screams with rage, if he feels himself threatened, insulted, or badgered, if he shouts that contemporary reality is not like that, if

he cries for the Sistine Madonna, if he calls for the police, this reveals something in him, not in the artist or the art (31:57-58).

Mr. Taylor's solution to this problem is through education that stresses flexibility:

. . . He must have learned to respond to other people and other ideas different from his own, rather than reacting against them, and that he has learned to accept differences as natural rather than as a threat to himself and his whole style of life (31:56).

Not surprisingly, Mr. Taylor's attitude is supported by some existential psychologists. Rollo May, for example, says that decision "always involves some element . . . of leap, some taking of a chance, some movement of one's self in a direction which one can never full predict before the leap" (15:44). Only the mature, non-rigid person will be able to reorient himself to new situations (15:44). Psychologist A. H. Maslow also agrees: "Only the flexibly creative person can really manage the future, only the one who can face novelty with confidence and without fear" (15:59).

The viewer must be willing and able to accept and respond to the new even in "the absence of available standards" (4:44). He must be open. The attitude of "I don't know anything about it but I know what I like" is simply not practical. It represents a closed state of mind; the opinion is formed before the experience which in turn renders the experience of looking useless. As Gabriel Marcel says:

It does very often happen that our "opinions" . . . can be seen to be not mental acts but mere mental habits. In practice, they reduce themselves to

things which we habitually say in a certain context,
without asking ourselves what our words mean . . .
(35:71).

Given the current attitude of many contemporary artists that the onus of responsibility for determining meaning and response is now the viewer's, approaching art in a passive or negative way seems completely inappropriate.

IV. MASS MEDIA

Never before has the human eye been so assaulted by images printed, painted, photographed, stenciled, and otherwise copied, both moving and still. Because of the immense power and spread of advertising and mass-media communications through publications and television since the Second World War, we have taken for granted a whole new set of signs, symbols, emblems and imagery which has settled into our subconscious as a commonly shared visual experience (3:11).

More than any other one thing, mass media is responsible for most American's visual orientation. It influences those isolated from large cities through magazines and television as effectively as those who live in Manhattan. "The pre-fabricated plastic reality of a package existence . . . has more meaning than the products it contains . . . everything comes in a box: our job, our pleasures, our dreams, our love life" (3:12). No one is immune. For the past ten years, artists have been beginning to utilize these commercialized images and trademarks which comprise our "commonly shared visual experience". "To be legitimate, a style in art must connect itself with a style outside of art, whether in palaces or dance halls or

in the dreams of saints or courtesans" (24:16). James Rosenquist has this to say about Madison Avenue techniques:

Its like getting hit with a hammer; you become numb. But the effect can be to move you into another reality. These techniques are annoying in the form in which they exist, but when they're used as tools by the painter, they can be more fantastic" (14:114).

Another painter, Richard Smith, likes these images because:

There is a shared world of references. Contacts can be made on a number of levels. These levels are not calibrations of merit on a popular fine art thermometer . . . but of one aspect seen in terms of another (14:48).

Author Mario Amaya agrees. He says that the use of commercialized images by artists "creates a new reference for them by taking them out of a recognizable or accepted frame of understanding . . . we have ambivalent feelings towards recognizing a readable image and yet seeing it in terms of pure art (3:21). Claes Oldenburg feels that Pop imagery " . . . is a way of getting around a dilemma of painting and yet not painting. It is a way of bringing in an image that you didn't create" (19:22). Pop art raised an interesting question: "How close to its source can a work of art be and preserve its identity?" (14:27). Not too long ago, many people would have agreed that "there is no greater aesthetic value in copying a de Kooning than in copying the design on a beer can. If you do either you are talking to the audience about itself, not engaging in creation" (23:75). But for that matter there is also no greater aesthetic virtue in working from the human figure or a tree. The amount of transformation from the original source to the painting

is not an appropriate critical criterion.

To those who complain about lack of "transformation", Lichtenstein has replied that art does not transform, "it just plain forms. Artists have never worked with the model, just with the painting" (14:94).

Because there is so much difference between the surface appearance of Pop paintings and those of its predecessors, action painting, the question of detachment from one's own work has arisen. It appears to be an unnecessary one. Lichtenstein again comments:

Personally, I feel that in my own work I wanted to look impersonal but I don't really believe I am being impersonal when I make it I think we tend to confuse the style of the finished work with the method through which it was done. We say that because a work looks involved, as though interaction is taking place, that significant interaction is really taking place. And when a work does not look involved, we think of it merely as the product of a stencil or as though it were the same comic strip from which it was copied. We are assuming similar things are identical and that the artist was not involved" (19:22).

The effect of Pop art on many viewers and critics was initially similar to watching a film and having a well-known television commercial suddenly appear in the middle of it. The new context produced an enormous jolt and disorientation. As one reviewer commented about an Oldenburg exhibition, "the essential distinction between the gallery objects and the store objects considered as objects was the art reference of the Oldenburgs, provided by the identification of their maker as an artist and the place of exhibition as an art gallery (23:73).

Mass media and, by its use of it, Pop Art, has also helped to blur the distinction between reality and illusion:

Given the enormous dissemination of simulated nature through window displays, motion-picture and television screens . . . we become in the end largely insensitive to the distinction between the natural and the made up (23:61).

We have not only become insensitive to it, the distinction between reality and illusion has become, at least, almost interchangeable, and at most, unnecessary to make. "Illusion . . . is a real -- or should I say authentic -- part of experience and a necessary one" (4:121) states Dore Ashton and, moreover, that "the function of the real cannot stand alone. The function of the unreal is just as important to us" (4:121). Sartre quotes Gide as saying "a mock feeling and a true feeling are almost indistinguishable" (26:27). The implications of this are clearly stated by Edward Albee in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?:

Martha: Truth and illusion, George; you don't know the difference.

George: No; but we must carry on as though we did.

Martha: Amen (1:202).

CHAPTER III
THE PAINTINGS AND THE DRAWINGS

Introduction

An arbitrary set of rules is not a new idea in art. Most art is created within clearly defined limits . . . In my own experience I find that this approach not only helps focus my energies, but also allows me to generate a tension in my work that would be lacking without this discipline (Oldenburg) (25:63, 69).

The "rules" for the work in this thesis were to use commercialized images (i.e., images used in mass media advertising), to expand those images to a scale that would take them out of their original context, and to isolate them by removing their ad-copy. For the most part, the change in scale required was drastic and the most powerful of the paintings seem to be those that are largest:

Enormous enlargement of an object . . . gives it a personality it never had before and in this way it can become a vehicle of entirely new lyric and plastic power (14:18).

While there was an awareness of possible content in the images, there was no particular pro or con attitude towards them. They are simply "givens" with which it is possible to make paintings.

I. THE PAINTINGS

"Car Crash" (fig. 1) done in 1966 clearly shows the style and attitude that the candidate had been working with prior to the beginning of this study. However, it was felt that, as Tom Wesselmann has said, ". . . it seemed completely hopeless because De Kooning

had already painted all my paintings" (16:136). The problem, then, was to develop in a direction different from the one the abstract expressionists had already seemed to have exhausted. Use of advertising images was begun at this point primarily because there was not much else to look at.

"Car Crash" was followed by a series of paintings using composite ad images. This series has been destroyed because they were not particularly successful paintings. They did, however, incline the candidate to begin thinking in terms of isolated images. "Sears' Girdles" (fig. 2) was the first painting done which utilized this device.

"Shirt and Tie" (fig. 3) was originally painted completely with brushes and oil paint but portions of it were later redone using spray enamel. Commercial spray cans, however, do not have the same degree of control and flexibility as the spray guns used in later paintings.

"T.V. Mouth" (fig. 4) was the result of a series of drawings (one of which is shown in fig. 14) and prints using the mouth image on a television screen which had intrigued the candidate for several years.

The last painting to be done with oil paints and brushes was "Swedishella" (fig. 5). It was while working on this painting that it was suggested to the candidate that she try using sprayed paint in order to get a uniformly flat surface.

"It Comes in Many Shades" (fig. 6) was the first painting done with acrylics and the spray gun. The use of "flocking" (transparent sprays) helps to pull this piece together. A transparent paint is obtained by mixing a sizeable quantity of acrylic medium in the paint.

Many technical problems were encountered in "Blusher/Mouth" (fig. 7) because of an improper ground on the canvas for acrylic paint. Rabbit skin glue was used and this allowed paint to bleed under some taped edges and caused an uneven surface glare that was corrected by damar varnish.

"Comfortable as the Very Air" (fig. 8) originally had a man in a support truss painted on the left side. This image was removed because of the candidate's desire to work with isolated images or groups of image. The second figure spread the image out too much.

"Avoiding Bumps" (fig. 9) was painted in a few large sections rather than many small ones. It takes advantage of the spray paint's ability to blend tones of color.

"Where the Action Is" (fig. 10) was done primarily in three sections. There was an effort made to give less information about the image the closer the viewer stood to the painting. Because of its size (16 feet in length) it was possible to do this.

"Plastic Cover-Up" (fig. 11) was made with vacuum-formed plastic. It is painted with metallic enamel, regular enamel, and pencil. Acrylic paint was tried but discarded because next to the formed plastic, it just didn't look like plastic paint. The enamel

paint, however, had a gloss that seemed to be appropriate to the plastic surface.



Figure 1. "Car Crash"
60" x 49"



Figure 2. "Sears' Girdles"
60" x 68"



Figure 3. "Shirt and Tie" 41" x 46"



Figure 4. "T.V. Mouth" 58" x 67"



Figure 5. "Swedishella" 59" x 72"



Figure 6. "It Comes in Many Shades"
41" x 34"



Figure 7. "Blusher/Mouth" 84" x 67"



Figure 8. "Comfortable as the Very Air" 36" x 48"



Figure 9. "Avoiding Bumps" 90" x 65"



Figure 10. "Where the Action Is" 64" x 192"



Figure 11. "Plastic Cover-Up"
46" x 45" x 11"

II. THE DRAWINGS

"Image/Icon" (fig. 12) was drawn with a fine-pointed crow quill pen, India ink and silver metallic paint. This drawing was done before "Sears' Girdles" and was helpful in demonstrating to the candidate what might happen with an isolated image. "Clean" (fig. 13) was also done with pen and ink. The ink was diluted to various grades of darkness with water to maintain a uniform surface on the paper which would not have been possible with only a dense black ink. "Swinging on the Late Show" (fig. 14) and "Girdles" (fig. 15) were done while work was in process on "T.V. Mouth" and "Sears' Girdles". "Flowing Hair" (fig. 16) was a preliminary study for "Where the Action Is". The rest of the drawings (fig. 17 - 21) were done over a two year period. They were an aid in developing the painting style and, for the most part, are more informal than the paintings.

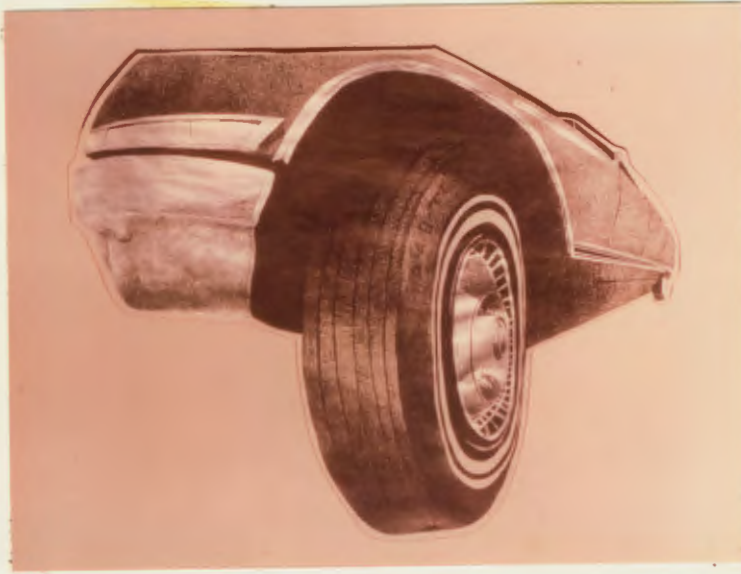


Figure 12. "Image/Icon"
22" x 27"



Figure 13. "Clean"
17" x 25"



Figure 14. "Swinging on the Late Show" 18" x 29"



Figure 15. "Girdles"
22" x 28"



Figure 16. "Flowing Hair"
11" x 14"



Figure 17. "It Only Starts With My Feet" 40" x 26"



Figure 18. "Colorful White Shirt"
19" x 48"



Figure 19. "Calendar" 28" x 22"



Figure 20. "Bra" 14" x 11"



Figure 21. "I Dreamed I Was A Vamp" 14" x 11"

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This thesis was divided into two sections: the written and the visual. The written section was concerned with various aspects of spectator response from the viewpoint of some contemporary artists, critics, and viewers. Mass media and its effect on contemporary art (Pop Art in particular) and contemporary viewing of art was also discussed. In confrontation-type art, which most of current art seems to be, it was found that many critics, artists, and psychologists feel that the viewing experience must be met openly, without preconceptions and that the responsibility for determining "meaning" in the work of art is the viewer's and not the artist's.

The visual portion of the thesis was based on the use of isolated advertising images, expanded in scale and placed in a new context. As work progressed there was a change in materials from oil paint and brushes to acrylic paint and spray guns.

It is felt that the use of sprayed paint has opened up a number of pictorial possibilities both in technique and in surface which will be explored by the candidate in the future. It is also felt that the isolated images in painting can be further explored and manipulated. The possibilities of sprayed paint on vacuum formed plastics is also being considered for future work. It is not possible

to be very specific about future work and directions since, as Kierkegaard says, "Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards" (35:57-58).

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