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The Use of Automatism in Mixed Media Watercolor Painting

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THE USE OF AUTOMATISM IN MIXED

MEDIA WATERCOLOR PAINTING

———

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by

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APPROVED FOR THE GRADUATE FACULTY

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Chapter 1

THE PROBLEM AND DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

The use of automatism in painting is not new. The painters of Dada, Surrealist, and Abstract Expressionist movements all were aware of it and used it in varying degrees.

For the purposes of this study, the candidate has chosen to examine the possibilities of the use of automatism in mixed-media watercolor painting.

Mixed-media watercolor painting is a relatively new approach to watercolor painting. This new approach allows the artist a greater range of experimentation and facilitates various deviations from the traditional. With the introduction of new pigments, glues, glazes, etc., much can be done to alter the traditional approach to painting. With this new concept toward the medium, the artist is allowed to express his attitudes and personal aims in a freer, less restricted, manner.

Therefore, a series of mixed-media watercolor paintings will be developed to study automatism as a means of providing line, form, color, and various surface qualities in the painting.

1

THE PROBLEM

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is (1) to investigate the principles of automatism, (2) to apply these principles and means in developing a series of original mixed-media watercolor paintings, and (3) to draw conclusions relevant to the process.

Importance of the Study

Each artist wishes to achieve his own mode of expression, but not all are afforded the opportunity to do so. The importance of this study is not only to explore the effect of automatism, but to stimulate interest in the area of mixed-media watercolor painting.

The candidate believes that this approach to painting and the use of mixed media will serve as a means to improve, as well as broaden, his ability toward the medium.

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

Mixed Media

This term refers to the use of a variety of materials used by the artist to express an idea.

Watercolor

This refers to a variety of pigments that use gums as binders and are water soluble.

Automatism

Automatism is suspension of the conscious mind to release subconscious images.

Content

For the purposes of this study, Martin L. Wolf's definition will be used. He defines content as follows:

> 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 (18:158)

Composition

The organization or arrangement of forms in a work of art.

Flat Color

In painting, any color that is broadly applied with little or no variation of texture.

Medium

The physical material with which the artist works.

Technical Elements

The principles, or technical means, that refer to the elements of line, color, space, and texture.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study was limited to those pigments which were water soluble, including tempera, watercolor, and casein artist colors. The paint surface ranged from white butcher

paper to a gesso-covered masonite. When paper was used, it was stretched over a masonite board and taped along the sides with a gum backed tape. This procedure allowed a painting technique much the same as that used in oil painting. The size ranged from 16" by 22" to 5' by 8'. The number of paintings was limited because of the amount of time needed to create a composition and, also, to study the possibilities and limitations of the media. The content was not limited in the painting, since this would have restricted the approach, and would not have allowed for varying alteration, thus reducing the flexibility of the process.

The study was begun June, 1968; the last painting was completed in July, 1969.

Selection of the paintings for representation in the thesis was determined by the Graduate Committee and the candidate.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

INTRODUCTION

The statement of the problem in this thesis has indicated that automatism is directly related to the procedure used in producing a composition. The review of literature has been directed toward further exploring this assumption; it has attempted to offer examples of explanation relevant to the study.

A relatively small amount of information was found on the study of automatism. For this reason, the information offered in this chapter will, to some extent, summarize the potentialities and limitations of automatism in painting.

THE PRINCIPAL ASPECTS OF AUTOMATISM

There can be no doubt that during the past twenty years, abstract art has been the most dominant movement on the American scene.

With a major concentration on the probing of the subconscious, in order to reveal guidance in producing unconscious forms, images, textures, etc., the artists of this movement relied heavily upon automatism.

Automatism, which is the automatic action that allows the unconscious mind to bind expression through uncontrolled or uncensored images,

> ...the principle of creation without the interference of thought, the act that constitutes a deliberately sought method of procedure, the unfettered stroke of the brush or pencil, with no direction, will, or control exercised by the conscious mind (18:60)

is an important factor in the work produced by the candidate. Not only did automatism allow the artist freedom to express whatever inner feelings he possessed, in a fully spontaneous and unpremeditated manner, but it allowed the surface to become a battleground where the artist could act out his state of being.

The scale of automatism is very large and very aggressive, with the large muscles of the body, (not the wrist and fingers) used to produce the spontaneous effect, an important factor in keeping the composition loose and flexible. It is apparent that this type of painting is very introspective. In theory, at least, it is concerned mainly with the artist's inner life; though, inevitably it is affected by the artist's outward life, too. Thus, the painter who uses automatism thinks of his work as a type of autobiographical art, which in its very nature implies a particle of the artist's personal life.

> Planning and reasoning do not have to be in verbal form--we know very little yet about the non-verbal types of thinking which a painter or musician carries on. But certainly many artists form tentative imaginary conceptions of a projected work at first in visual or auditory form may act as a tentative purpose to be

achieved in one's chosen medium, subject to alternation
on the way. The most purely impulsive painter will step
up to the canvas and start painting automatically, with
no preliminary conception. Even so, the first accidental
stroke may suggest an imaginary form which will hence-
forth direct the process (10:414)

In pure automatism the painter may pick up his brush

and let it wander aimlessly over the canvas. But in doing

so, he is partly determined by his previous experiences and

habits. As he proceeds, the apparently accidental strokes

may suggest a theme, to be developed into a workable

composition. As he tests it out, the artist may find it

advisable to modify the original idea or substitute it for

an entirely new one. The artist will paint, wash off,

repaint, and wash off, until the effort that would usually

yield a whole exhibition has disappeared under the final,

accepted skin of the signed picture.

A practiced eye mercilessly judges every passage
either close up, where each nuance of texture, or from
a greater distance than the walls of the studio would
allow, through the wrong end of a large magnifying lens
(9:104)

Each form will suggest an endless series of asso-

ciations; and only after a long period of evaluation will

the artist attempt to call his work finished. This again

does not constitute finality, for the painting may easily

render the process of correction and growth, and emerge,

a month or so later, entirely changed. Thomas Munro said:

"Artists vary as to the extent to which they analyze their

work, into specific problems and alternative solutions, def-

inite goals and means to them." (10:415)

This type of painting goes through two phases, both being the acts of recognition. One is the recognition that the artist experiences when looking at phenomena outside of but around him. This is an act of perception; he recognizes things significant to him at that moment. This is a human experience which may not always be taken further; it is the cause of some emotion, such as surprise or sympathy. The second act of recognition takes place in the artist while he is working. He has to be able to see what he is doing, this being accomplished by an interaction between the artist and the painting. He alone is in charge and can control the work in any manner he sees fit. When it is finished this act of recognition takes place, and at that moment validity is achieved.

THE RELATED VIEWS BY CERTAIN ARTISTS

The information offered in this section will be taken mainly from the Abstract Expressionist movement.

The use of automatism was first used by the painters of the Dada movement, and in 1916, was announced by Andre Breton as

> . . . pure psychic automatism, by which it is in-
> tended to express, verbally, in writing or by other
> means, the real process of thought. It is thought's
> dictation, all exercise of reason and every aesthetic
> or moral preoccupation being absent (12:41)

One of the first artists to become noticeably interested in automatism was Matta (Roberto Echaurren).

Matta, who was one of the leaders of the Surrealist move-
ment, developed theories on automatism that had an
overwhelming effect on the art of this movement.

> I am only interested in the unknown, and I work for
> my own astonishment. This astonishment which derives
> from my canvases comes from the fact that the structures,
> which seem anything but anthropomorphic, are neverthe-
> less, capable of communicating the nature of man and
> his conditions with even more "fidelity" than his own
> image can (17:59).

As one of the major leaders of abstract expression-
ism, Willem DeKooning has long been involved in the act of
recording his immediate sensations experienced during the
act of painting. From these recordings, his attitude toward
his paintings never seemed to be peaceful or pure, but
rather, he seemed to be caught in the melodrama of vulgarity.

DeKooning is probably best known for his woman series
in which he portrays all that is frightening to mid-century,
middle-aged women (6:208). These paintings are developed
by a paint surface, which is violently attacked and has the
appearance of compulsive madness; only the eyes and the
mouth have clarity, with the rest of the figure taking on
a feeling of horror. His paintings have a very rich,
sensuous, and emotional significance about them. They are
products of his inner feelings for the true beauty found in
the abstract.

The aspect of uncertainty, which prevails in abstract
expressionism and in DeKooning's work, is one which is
completely without grounds. In DeKooning's work, the act
of discovering images and pulling them out from the painting

as he works, allows the picture to develop under the guidance of his skilled hands. He works with the painting, allowing himself to go along with it, and thus, is able to alter the direction whenever he sees fit. This approach to painting is not at all unskilled, rather it is more skilled than that of the tighter forms of painting. In this type of painting, DeKooning was able to employ the accident. Some psychologists tell us that "accidents are the result of the failure of our faculties and our unconscious tendencies asserting themselves over the conscious." (15:205) Whenever an unanticipated effect occurred, he would accept it and capitalize on it in order to add flexibility to his work. DeKooning is probably one of the best examples of this movement, but as in all movements, there are others who also achieved great fame.

Less disciplined than DeKooning, but undoubtedly in the public's eye the best known of the abstract expressionists, was Jackson Pollock. His principal style, whence he received the nickname, "Jack the Dripper," was that of dripping and pouring paint onto the canvas. This method of painting allowed him to take the canvas and roll it out onto the floor, giving himself complete freedom of expression. When working this way, he would apply the paint in the most spontaneous manner possible. He would use his feet, pieces of wood, old cigarette butts, his hands, and old cans filled with paint, which were poured and dribbled. The brush was not an important factor when he worked this

way, although it has been noted that he would grasp the
brush in one hand and a can of paint in the other, in order
to receive the cosmic energy embodied in it. This belief
was derived from the standards of painting that guided the
Chinese for many centuries (11:9). In an article by Sir
Herbert Read, "The Limits of Painting," he discusses
Hsieh's Six Canons of Painting. Of the six, only one is
important to this study. This specific canon deals with the
concept that all things organic or inorganic have spiritual
energy embodied in them. In this principle, the basic
question is the Chi or cosmic energy that flows about in
everchanging streams through all methods of painting. Thus,
Sir Herbert views Jackson Pollock as one who is experiencing
this everchanging flow of cosmic energy that causes one to
become infused in his work. The whole attitude is that of
physical immersion into the medium (11:4).

Pollock's pictures are mixtures of house paints,
metallic pigments, cigarettes, keys, nails, paint tube tops,
and a multitude of extraneous objects applied in his
unconventional, haphazard manner. Occasionally, he "stooped"
to use the brush and pallet knife, though he thought they
hampered the spontaneous gestures of his arm on which he
so greatly relied.

Everything about his work suggests a great reliance
on automatism and the spontaneity that it produces, and yet,
the results were quite different from what one would have
expected. All his pictures have an intensity of rhythm, an

ordered complexity, sequences of rest and explosion, and
what Alfranso Ossoria aptly called, "an immediate splendor"
(8:219).

Although Pollock's work may look uncontrolled, it
is really far from that,

> . . . for although the manner of working emphasizes
> gesture, freedom, and even accident, it is nevertheless,
> the result of the artist's involvement in the act of
> painting and the control-mechanism of the body (15:197).

He knew exactly what he was doing, and working from
intuition, he was able to control the direction of the
painting, reassessing and changing it whenever the picture
started in the wrong direction. Thus, the painting becomes
a physical record of the artist and his involvement with
the media.

The major influential factor in all his later work
was automatism. For Pollock, automatism helped open up
previous untapped areas of the unconscious and allowed
him to interpret his spontaneous actions and feelings
during the act of painting. "The thing that interests me is
that today's painters do not have to go to a subject matter
outside of themselves, they work from within" (8:219).

Although some authors feel "that automatism was less
important than the agonizing struggle to imbue line and
color, alone with a naked violence of feeling," (16:200)
the candidate still felt it was an important factor in
producing Pollock's motivations in painting.

Like Pollock and DeKooning, Mark Tobey was an im-
portant painter of the Abstract Expressionist movement.

Though Tobey's paintings are seldom large in size, they still are very potent and effective. The major characteristic found in his paintings is the use of calligraphy, which is based upon the free movement of the brush. This principle was derived from the Orient and introduced into his work through the use of thin lines of white tempera paint, which would weave in and out within the painting.

As an abstract expressionist, Tobey also

. . . attaches importances to the act of painting, but only so far as it allows him to exteriorize his sensory impulses, which become a projection of what the artist himself calls, "the secret unity and reciprocity of everything that goes to make up the inner life" (15:200).

Many of his paintings are done in watercolor, rather than oil, and are limited to very unassertive color. His brush work can be bold, but it also is somewhat limited to delicate spider web-like strands, called "White Writing." About his work, Tobey recently said,

. . . in the forties I created a sensation of mass by interlacing of myriad independent lines. In their dynamics and in the timing I gave to the accents within the lines, I have attempted to create a world of finer substance. But I do not think I pursue conscious goals; the only goal I can definitely remember was in 1918, when I said to myself, "If I don't do anything else in my painting, I will smash form!" Line became dominant instead of mass, but I still attempted to interpenetrate it with a spatial existence. Writing the painting whether in color or neutral tones became a necessity for me (9:98).

As one of the early forerunners of the Abstract Expressionist movement, Hans Hofmann, through his explosive and spontaneous use of paint and color, directly influenced the early phase of this style.

Hans Hofmann's art is a controlled explosion. Whether he deals directly with nature or with the reasoned structure of cubism or with the freer forms of present-day abstraction, the exuberance of his brush shatters the normal limits of style and creates its own dynamic order. The vitality of the man and of his art is indivisible. Even the titles--Ecstasy, Burst into Life, Ascop--are words that explode or escape the bounds of dictionary English.

His work is inimitable, as many of his students have discovered, yet Hofmann has been a great teacher to those who catch fire from his enthusiasm but reserve the strength to find their own way. As both teacher and artist, he has been a perilous and a liberating power in our twentieth century art--perilous because his illusion of unleashed force has sometimes been mistaken for a gospel of emotional license--liberating because the true strength of his art lies in an iron self-discipline, which alone justifies the extravagance of his experiments.

That nothing is impossible so long as the creator controls his means is an ancient lesson, but one that Hofmann proves more dramatically than most living artists. He has opened new avenues to the future, and they are not even necessarily those that he himself has so brilliantly explored (19:13).

In his painting, Hofmann's main drive is to overcome differences, to indicate an enormous sum total, and then simplify and condense.

Simplification is a very important thing. I say to my students, you must give with the least the most, not with the most, the least. A thousand leaves are still not a tree, a thousand flowers not a bouquet. Greater you should go, simpler you should go (19:24).

Hofmann has conceived of painting more as the probing, pushing, marking, and scoring of a surface than as the inscribing, tracing, or covering of it. Each of his pictures seem to be alive, they quiver to the touch, they breathe, and throb in answer to the thick application of paint. These open, pulsating paint surfaces have a life of their own, existing therefore as a thing, independent of

the artist's subjective feelings. Thus, the painting does
not express a feeling, it provokes it.

"If I take it from nature, I paint it very quickly,"
says Hofmann. "Those from my imagination take longer."

Thus, Hofmann feels that the object should not be
the important factor. There are bigger and better things
to see in nature. In order to create and produce forms that
have never been exteriorized before Hofmann probes the un-
conscious mind and looks "above and below nature" (12:23).

His style is that of explosive blaze of color. His
paintings look new in the world, "with the color seeming to
live for its own sake, if it ever did, but in reality it is
color for the sake of form" (19:26).

> Color is an agent to give the highest esthetic enjoy-
> ment. The emotion-releasing faculty formal aspect of
> the work becomes a means to awaken in us feelings to
> which the medium of expression responds anologically
> when we attempt to realize our experiences creatively.
> Upon it will depend the formal and psychic appeal of the
> created image which is finally achieved through an ab-
> solute synchronization in which a multitude of seemingly
> incompatible developments have been firmly interwoven
> molded in the synthesis of the work.
> Endowed with such cognition, all creative possibili-
> ties are left open to the imagination inventiveness,
> and sensibility of the artist, and to the selective
> capability of his mind (19:56).

In conclusion, it is evident that all the painters
were working with an unusual bond between the artist and
his work. Jackson Pollock seems to sum up this feeling best
by saying,

> When I am in my painting, I'm not aware of what I am
> doing. It is only after a sort of "get acquainted"
> period that I see what I have been about. I have no
> fears about making changes, destroying the image, etc.,

because the painting has a life of its own. I try to let
it come through. It is only when I lose contact with the
painting that the result is a mess. Otherwise, there is
a pure harmony, an easy give and take, and the painting
comes out well (13:152).

Chapter 3

THE INVESTIGATION AND RESULTS OF THE
INDIVIDUAL EXPERIMENTS

It is important to emphasize at the outset of this
investigation that every artist has a definite and varied
approach to the actual experience of painting. In this
study the candidate has tried to develop his own approach
through the use of automatism as a means towards development
of a composition. Each painting developed its own identity
through the continuous exchange of forms in a random,
spontaneous manner.

The subject matter for the study was derived solely
from the unconscious mind and is manifested upon the surface
in a fully spontaneous and unpremeditated way.

Each painting was discussed on the basis of all the
criteria mentioned in the first chapter, as well as the
candidate's personal feelings toward the study. All
paintings are described in the order of their completion.

THE INVESTIGATION

There is a watercolor medium for everyone. Each of
the several related watercolor media is sufficiently
diverse in character to prove a different avenue to
satisfying painting experience. Means and qualities
can be matched to individual temperaments.
Transparent watercolor is versatile, elusive, and
alluring. More predictable and amenable are the opaque

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watercolor vehicles, among which gouache enjoys wide-
spread favor, with casein tempera its closest rival.
Exquisitely beautiful, egg tempera is pleasurable to
the eye and to the hand. Pastel, surprisingly perhaps,
also qualifies as a watercolor. The same is true of the
inks. And, for the more restless and venturesome, the
latest in synthetic emulsions offers new sets of
characteristics and the potentialities of new visions
(3:11).

By mixing the above pigments and adding additional

binders a new realm of experiences results. This is known

as mixed media. Mixed media, through the use of various

combinations of single pigments, offers an even more

expanded range of possibilities, characteristics, and

potentialities.

This section is designed to establish a base of in-

formation broad enough to help orient the reader to the

kinds of problems and solutions to be expected from this

approach.

Eventually, when media and process are better under-
stood, the elements of individualized technique are
likely to take shape. In anticipation of change and
independence an aspiration to gear every sense and effort
of the imagination to the highest level of expression
and performance will result in more significant ends and
means (3:12).

Because of the tendency of paper to wrinkle when

water touches it, it is important to mount or stretch the

paper in much the same manner as done with canvas. In order

to accomplish this, a stretcher must be constructed.

Figure 1 shows a masonite panel. The making of the

panel is relatively a simple process. Figure 2 shows the

reverse side of the stretcher. The construction process

consists of attaching a sheet of masonite, with counter

Figure 1

Figure 2

sinking nails, to 1 by 2-inch cedar stock. The framework is not necessarily built first but should be developed in accordance with the masonite panel. Center braces are added to guard against shrinkage and warping caused when the paper dries. An important fact to be noted is that all edges and corners should be lightly sanded to remove sharpness and reduce the chance of paper separation.

After the stretcher is completed, the next step is to attach the paper to the panel. In this demonstration a medium weight butcher paper, 72 pounds or less, is used. With the stretcher lying flat, on a table or stools, as in Figure 3, the paper is placed on top of the masonite board and allowed to overlap the edges. The edges of the paper are gently creased over the sides and trimmed, allowing for an overhang of 1 inch. The corners are folded or lapped in much the same manner as the ends of a package.

In preparation for the next step, pre-cut strips of gummed paper tape, and place them within easy reach.

The wet sponge is used to saturate the paper with the water by allowing it to soak on both sides. Vigorous rubbing of the paper surface must be avoided. After the paper has become completely saturated, it is sponged of all excess water from the center out. The paper is next positioned on the panel. The pieces of tape are wet singly and attached, as shown in Figure 4. For added protection, staples can be used. The stretcher must be kept in the same position and checked again for excess water and

Figure 3

Figure 4

allowed to dry. With the drying, shrinkage will take place, eliminating previous wrinkles and leaving a workable, taut, flat surface.

As explained in previous chapters, the candidate has chosen to examine the possibilities of the use of automatism, as a means of providing line, form, color. and various surface qualities in painting. In the following pages, the candidate will attempt to explain the procedure used in the study.

The beginning, as shown in Figure 5, begins with application of pigment in a spontaneous, unpremeditated manner, allowing the brush to wander aimlessly over the surface. The pigments are those which were previously explained as water soluble. As the painting develops, through the repeated application of pigment upon pigment, the mind begins to accept and reject areas, as in Figure 6.

After the painting has been completely covered with paint, as shown in Figure 7, it enters a phase of recognition, where the artist interacts with the painting. During this process, the artist searches for lines, forms, colors, and textures, that will suggest associations, which in turn build upon each other and form structures capable of indicating a sum total. According to Anton Ehrenzweig:

> The modern artist tends to create more automatically, with less conscious form control, than the traditional artist. At the beginning he knows only vaguely, if at all, what he is going to produce; his mind is curiously
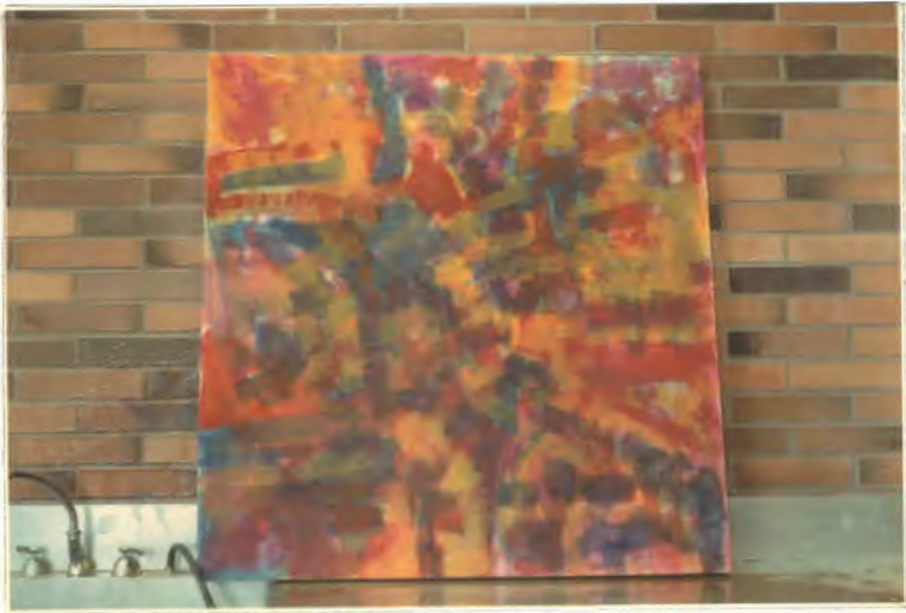
Figure 5

Figure 6

Figure 7

Figure 8

empty under his brush. Automatic form control means that the depth mind has taken over the form production (5:33).

After the phase of recognition has taken place, it may become advisable to modify or substitute new forms. This is done through the repeated process of washing the painting surface, repainting and rewashing, until a whole new structure of forms appear (note Figure 8). Ehrenzweig also says:

> One can distinguish three phases in creative work: projection followed by the partly unconscious integration (unconscious scanning) which gives the work its independent life, and finally the partial re-injection and feedback on a higher mental level (4:57).

With this approach it is impossible to call the painting in the pure sense of the word finished; it is only at rest, for at any time the painting may easily re-enter the process again and emerge months later completely changed.

THE RESULTS OF INDIVIDUAL EXPERIMENTS

The study began in May of 1968, with the painting of Reawakening. This painting was the culmination of a series of similar paintings. It employs the use of Elmer's glue, mixed with watercolor paint. This method is designed to develop overlays of pigment, which in turn produce a transparent, translucent effect.

This painting, as with the rest, was developed in its early stages from the most unconscious, uncontrolled manner possible. The technical elements of line, color,

Figure 9

Reawakening

space, and texture, were all realized through the sub-
conscious interaction of mind and media. The large flat
areas of red and brown were developed to produce a transition
between the two textural surfaces.

Though the color scheme seems subdued, on the whole
the painting was quite successful, and caused the candidate
to become aware of forms in their relationship to other
forms.

Remarking on a similar approach to painting in
Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art Criticism, Jerome Stolnitz
says:

    The uses of form are infinitely subtle and various.
  We cannot spell them out, nor should we expect that

great works of art will disclose all of their formal patterns to us at once. But if we unite knowledge of the principles of form with sensitivity to their variations and combinations in specific works, we will come to appreciate more and more this most subtle dimension of art (14:242).

As the study progressed, the candidate became interested in application of a circle in the development of a composition. According to Rudolph Arnheim:

The circle with its centric symmetry, which does not single out any one direction, is the simplest visual pattern. We know that perception spontaneously tends towards roundness when the stimulus gives it leeway to do so. The perfection of the circle shape attracts attention (1:137).

In painting Circle One, the candidate sought to create a composition through the use of color interwoven with line. This was accomplished by letting a charcoal pencil wander over the surface in an uncontrolled manner, much the same as doodling. After the surface was completely covered with line, color was added. Color application was done in the same manner, allowing for overlapping and variation. Hans Hofmann worked in this way:

In painting the formal development of the work and the color development are performed simultaneously. The color development leads thereby from one color to the next. Since every color can be shaded with any other color, an unlimited number and variations of shading within every color scale is possible (19:52).

The painting was conceived in the center of the surface. In order to isolate it, a masonite mat was developed. Also a thin strip of white was left to develop a transition from the mat to the painting.

Figure 10

Circle One

A third painting entitled <u>Composition</u> <u>No</u>. <u>3</u>,
measuring 48 inches by 48 inches, was completed in July,
1968. Acting under the same procedure as before, the can-
didate experimented with large areas of flat color. This
introduced the idea of working large sections of color
against areas of extreme textural concentration. By using
flat color the candidate was able to get away from the busy
effect of previous paintings.

In the painting of <u>Composition</u> <u>No</u>. <u>3</u>, the candidate
has tried to incorporate a sense of movement by the addition
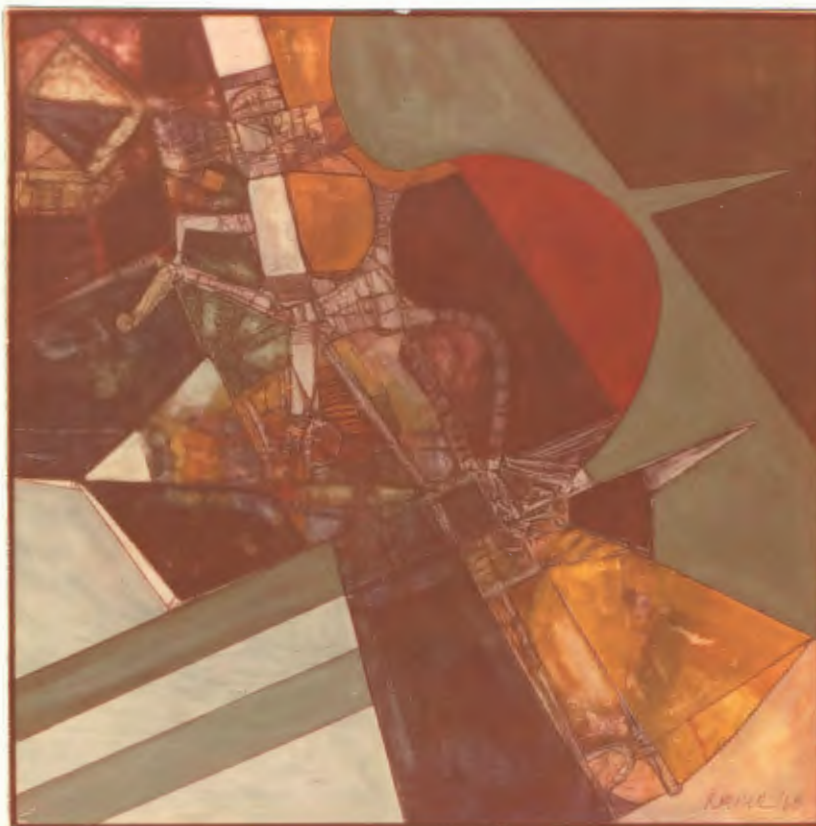of bars of solid color.

Figure 11

Composition No. 3

In this study the bars seem to brace the composition and develop a force that pushes its way through the textural ground of the painting. The same color as the bars is repeated on the right side and increases the movement which stops in the upper right corner of the study.

This painting also, for the first time, employs the use of gesso instead of paper as the working surface.

From August to November the candidate worked with various compositions of large flat color in order to establish a new direction. Composition No. 4 was completed during this time. This painting emphasizes a strong

Figure 12

Composition No. 4

Figure 13

Detail of Composition No. 4

downward motion, which is caused by the orange bars at the top and the curved one at the bottom. The rich textural areas were developed by repeated washing, repainting, and rewashing until the desired effect was realized. As the forms developed, they were emphasized and isolated with a charcoal pencil. The use of the charcoal pencil in this painting served as a tool for the development of new and exciting forms. It allowed the candidate to enrich the study with an intermingling of various lines which in turn merged into areas of extreme textural development.

The detail of this painting shows the rich surface quality produced by the use of the charcoal pencil and the effects of repeated washing.

Composition No. 5 measuring 60 inches by 96 inches completed in May, represents a strong advance in the use of color. While a definite step forward was made with this element, hard edges appeared and color selection became secondary.

The size of this painting is manifestly important. Battcock in The New Art states:

> . . . the large surface contains inherently within it a theory of human proportions which grows out of its scale in relation to the artist or observer, endowing him with the grander size it has taken unto itself (2:56).

This painting first began as two separate works. The developmentary procedure was, as explained earlier, completely spontaneous and uncontrolled. After the panels were covered with paint and washed, it was decided to attach them

Figure 14

Composition No. 5

together and create one large study. This was done by
drilling a number of holes in the side braces and bolting
it together with stove bolts.

As the study progressed, it began to establish planes
and areas of extreme complexities. These complexes
tended to contain the same color relationships, and so
composed one color-form event, "a central solar fact that
holds all the satellite areas in place" (19:49). Hofmann
explains, using musical terminology:

> Thirds, fourths, fifths, how do you say? We make
> an octave, what is the word?--blue here, you look for
> another blue--nicher--yellow starts here, one there,
> the eyes are permanently guided in a rhythm, each color
> has its own rhythm. In the end this leads to the re-
> creation of form (19:49).

As the painting began to resolve, the complexity
subsided and the study became simplified and ordered.

The dynamics of this composition derive basically
from its diagonal pattern of geometric forms which originate
in the upper center and then begin to rotate in a counter
clockwise direction. Also, because of its size, it is
difficult to see the whole painting. Feldman, in writing
on art criticism, would corroborate this observation:
"Hence, one views only a succession of its parts, and these
are quite abstract, the color and pigment taking precedence
over description" (7:330). He also goes on to state

> . . . that the areas and shapes in a painting become
> not so much the object of perception as parts of the
> environment in which perception takes place. A color
> area in other words surrounds the viewer" (7:330).

Detail one of this painting (Figure 15) shows the interaction of a rich textural area with that of extreme flatness. In this instance the textural area was literally carved out of the surface in order to soften the surrounding hard edges. The introduction of the offset black bar is important in that it serves as a means to attract attention, as well as balancing out the upper left corner.

The second detail (Figure 16) is the center section, and is designed to show the intergradation of forms and the development of structural planes.

The third detail (Figure 17) offers a view of the lower right corner. The view is important in that this area was one of the last to be completed, and it had an enormous effect on the painting that followed.

In the candidate's struggle to strike a balance between contradictory elements, the conscious and the unconscious, feeling and intellect, structure and openness, in <u>Composition No. 5</u>, the painting, <u>Extra Selective</u>, was developed.

<u>Extra Selective</u>, employs the same technique of painting as used before. This painting was a probing of the unconscious mind, in order to release and invent new forms. From this approach the candidate developed a strong warm-cool composition. In this painting, through the interaction of a warm color and a cool color, the eye of the viewer is pushed and pulled from one area to the next.
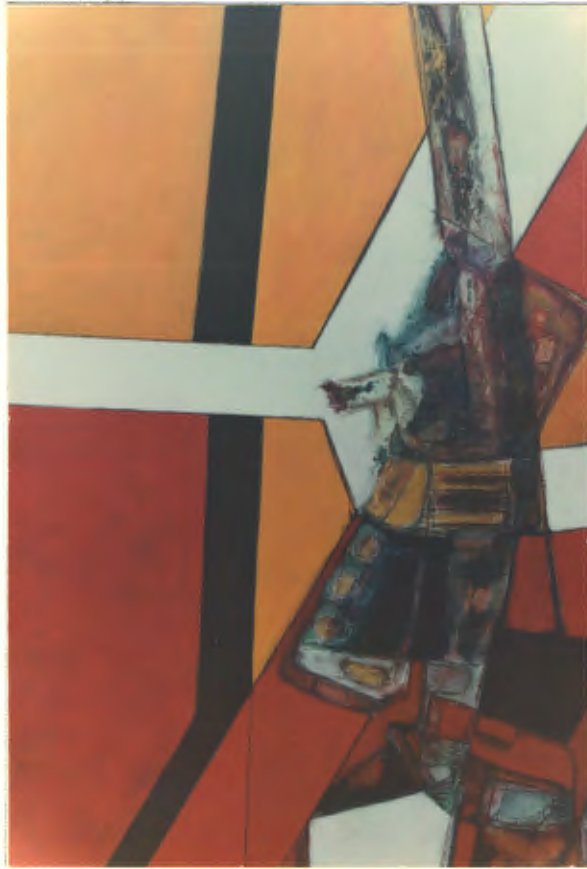
Figure 15

Detail One of Composition No. 5

Figure 16

Detail Two of Composition No. 5

Figure 17

Detail Three of Composition No. 5

In discussing the development of a painting, Hans Hofmann states:

> Push and pull control not only the variations of depth relations in a two dimensional sense, but especially the variations of intensities in these relations. The most pronounced depth suggestion is then enriched, in the painterly process, by greater voluminosity, which generally requires a deeper shading of color with a consequent diminution of luminosity. Lesser formal depth suggestion demands diminution of volume and intensification of luminosity (12:53-4).

It should now be noted that, as the study progressed, the painting became less detailed, with a greater stress on simplification. With this in mind the candidate decided to develop a painting consisting of flat color arranged upon a neutral ground. Simplification was realized in the painting, Shazzamm. Shazzamm is completely void of texture, the colors are hard and flat, and the ground is a neutral white. Though this painting was done in a mechanical, controlled way, the major form was still conceived through the automatic act of doodling.

After this painting was completed, the candidate reevaluated the study. Upon the reevaluation, the candidate decided to discard the previous use of extreme flat areas of hard edged color and develop a new approach involving the use of a soft edge in relation to areas of intense textural complexities. The use of large sections of color was retained and modified to act as neutral films which allow the areas beneath to show through.

Figure 18

Extra Selective

Figure 19

Shazzamm

Number 21 exemplifies this new direction. This painting represents a gradual transition from one area to the next through sensitive edges which brush softly together. The new direction is mainly aimed at producing a painting that has, within itself, areas of airiness which surround other deeper areas of massed forms, thus causing the central region of the painting to appear to float in space.

Figure 20

Number 21

Chapter 4

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to examine the possibilities of the use of automatism in mixed media watercolor painting.

The primary concern in the thesis involved the use of automatism as a means of providing line, form, color, and various surface qualities in the painting.

Since the medium of watercolor alone prohibited the investigator from attaining flat, opaque areas, the introduction of other materials such as temperas, polymer media, and designer's colors, were used. This combination of media, as well as the experimental attitude of the candidate, resulted in the development of an approach of complete freedom.

The limitations of the study were imposed in such a way that the media and content were not restricted, which in turn allowed for varying alternations that were conducive to the flexibility of the process. Through the creation of a series of paintings, and the research involved in the background of the study, a deeper understanding of the use of mixed media watercolor painting was developed.

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During the study new directions were continuously being explored in order to develop a stronger attitude toward art and the procedure used.

The validity of the study was based on the results obtained from the paintings. Therefore the paintings are solutions to the theory implied in the beginning: that automatism is directly related to the procedure used in producing a composition.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

A study of this type is very difficult to conclude, for to conclude would be to end, and this approach offers no real conclusion. At any given moment, any one of the paintings could re-enter the process and emerge a totally changed work. Applying the above theory to this study, it can be seen that these paintings are only in a state of temporary suspension, and could easily serve to motivate changes in their present state or entirely new paintings.

The preceding statement should not be interpreted as a negative evaluation of the study but should, on the contrary, indicate a direction for further study. Further examination of this study could result in the discovery of new avenues for the manipulation of line, color, form, and surface quality. Consequently, it is felt that there is a need for further exploration in order to expand and explore the concepts exposed by the study.

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