

Summer 1971

## A Series of Paintings Investigating Certain Specified Space Concepts

Michael C. Jackson  
*Central Washington University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.cwu.edu/etd>



Part of the [Fine Arts Commons](#), and the [Painting Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Jackson, Michael C., "A Series of Paintings Investigating Certain Specified Space Concepts" (1971). *All Master's Theses*. 1631.

<https://digitalcommons.cwu.edu/etd/1631>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Master's Theses at ScholarWorks@CWU. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@CWU. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@cwu.edu](mailto:scholarworks@cwu.edu).

A SERIES OF PAINTINGS INVESTIGATING  
CERTAIN SPECIFIED SPACE CONCEPTS

---

A Thesis

Presented to

the Graduate Faculty

Central Washington State College

---

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

---

by

Michael C. Jackson

August, 1971

APPROVED FOR THE GRADUATE FACULTY

---

Margaret Sahlstrand, COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

---

Frank Bach

---

Stephen Bayless

This thesis is devoted only to that work considered completely investigated: a portrait/figure series of seven paintings. In addition, the series of works with which this thesis is devoted essentially follow this format: large areas of architectural space and color versus a natural object--a portrait figure. A play or conflict was set up between these two things; the success of the play determined the success of the painting. The factors used to judge success are basically those classical rules of composition dealing with balance: visual weight of areas, complexity, and color. The only areas manipulated were: (1) shape of architectural areas, (2) size and multiplicity of architectural areas, (3) color, and (4) placement of naturalistic figure(s). Composition became a most important and difficult factor. In dealing with simple compositions if but one object out of three is misplaced the painting is a failure. I gave myself a better chance by working with a square. Subtle natural movement and rhythm are almost inherent in this format, and it provided a concrete starting point.

At all times an attempt was made to keep the paintings small (3' x 3' average). The works are small for convenience, but deal with a large subject: immense flat areas. The space may become outer space, but it is also the space of a blank wall, and the figures are cut-outs against that wall. Sometimes the figures fit into the geometric areas of

space as a missing puzzle piece. Current minimal sculpture, color field painting, and photography are the most important influences on my work.

To utilize the aforementioned minimal sculptural quality, the pieces were purposely hung unframed with three having figures wrapping around an edge. I endeavored to either locate the figure direct center or close to the edge of the work, not, in any case in accordance to the traditional rules of portraiture. Experimentation with what should be by classical standards either a grossly imbalanced or an extremely boring composition intrigued me. Eventually I found myself pushing the figures either further to the edge or to a more obvious direct center. Also, I discovered that progressively smaller figures were needed to strengthen the space. The last portrait was a four inch figure entirely on the edge of a four and a half foot canvas. This painting may be considered an appropriate concluding piece to the series because of the extreme figure ground relationship. The figure could get no smaller without becoming inconsequential; nor could it be moved further from the face of the canvas without it being moved to the reverse side.

All the pieces were painted in acrylics with a brush then sprayed over lightly (dusted) with aerosol to achieve a flat look. In this process the high lights are dimmed to the tone of the spray and the darks are raised likewise. All figurative images were derived from preplanned

photographic poses. The gesturing images in Figure 2 were experimented with in an attempt to alleviate the sterility that such simplistic surfaces and poses gave all too easily. In Figure 4 a photographic emulsion created the central figure; I speculated that that figure might work as well as its identical painted, but I found something intriguing, strong and necessary in the figures done by hand. Moreover, in Figure 4 I was experimenting mostly with the play between the two images (painted and photographic), and to my surprise the painted image came through with more life giving reality: the same kind of situation one finds when comparing homemade clothes with those store bought. This quality of realism and personal interpretation was just what I needed to avoid the aforementioned sterility. Let me clarify myself, mechanical austerity I needed, not total lifelessness. I am a human being painting, ultimately, other human beings. I found the realization of "someone painted that" helped me to immeasurably shorten the aesthetic distance to my spectator.

Most all the paintings are static formal compositions. However, three do have greater movement. First let me mention the movement in Figure 7 and Figure 3. This is the kind of movement that the viewer must provide by physically moving about the piece. A portion of the figure wraps about the canvas; one must walk to that side of the canvas

to see it. Figure 5 met with more success; walking back and forth in front of it also nets the viewer an illusion of the warping of the surface--not unlike a funhouse mirror.

All of the shaped canvases are shaped laterally with the exception of one. All shapes are subtle. A conscious attempt was made to stay away from "Stella" forms or any shapes that shouted, "I'm shaped!", or "look at me--I'm different!" Inevitably, I found that working with large areas of space posed a problem: making the would be infinite end somewhere. I wanted the spectator to sense space continuing forever and at the same time have the flat areas relate compatibly to the wall. First, everything was done to maintain the wall like quality of the spatial areas themselves; conservative pastels, literally wall colors, were used. Second, the edge of the canvas was treated as a line upon which the whole composition balanced; it wasn't just an edge, but a line undrawn--a very important boundary. Third, the shapes themselves acted as doors to the composition. They are "gates" between the contained area of the canvas and the space of the wall.

I list here those findings that are the most important aspects that can be concluded from this thesis.

1. It takes a great amount of simple flat area to balance a relatively small complicated one.

2. In working with great amounts of space the space surrounding the composition may become as important as that contained by the wall itself.

3. Figurative images, if not by complexity, then emotive power, possibly carry the greatest amount of visual weight.

4. Colors that civilized twentieth century man paints his walls evoke in his eyes a greater illusion of space. They are generally associated as negative ground where as brighter colors are associated with positive.

5. Edges of compositions themselves need not be looked at merely as frames for the composition itself, but rather an object or line carrying visual weight.

6. To utilize wall space in paintings dealing with great amounts of space edges can be used as transitional boundaries between the contained space of the work and the expanding space of the wall.

7. Extremely subtle changes either by inclusion of color or form in great amounts of space can possibly: (1) alienate the composition from the wall because they make the composition too self contained (i. e. as a traditional composition) or (2) break up the monotony of a spatial area by acting as either a buffer or a transitional form between the area of space and the isolated area of complexity.



8. Paintings do not have to be large, nor make allusions to nature's space in order to evoke the quality of immensity or depth.

9. Rhythms and movement are easily attained in simple compositions, especially those contained by a square. In this sense a square can be likened to a circle.

10. The shape of the canvas itself can help a spatial painting relate more compatibly to the space of a wall.



FIGURE 1



FIGURE 2



FIGURE 3



FIGURE 4



FIGURE 5



FIGURE 6



FIGURE 7