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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF Lee Merriwether Clark for the
Master of Science in Teaching presented May 20, 1969.

Title: The City

APPROVED BY MEMBERS OF THE THESIS COMMITTEE:

Richard J. Präsich, Chairman

Frederick H. Heidel

Leonard B. Kimbrell

This thesis is composed of five oil paintings and four synthetic paintings. The works are arranged in a sequence beginning with distant over views of the city and progressing toward more immediate views. Techniques change also, from the suggestive impressionistic mode, a style I explored in my early years of art education, to a studied application of large, solid, simplified shapes of color. In my work, realism is sacrificed for a decorative arrangement of color patterns.

From this creative experience I have reached conclusions about art education and my responsibility as an art instructor. Motivation is essential when introducing all art projects. Students presented with interesting background material are more likely to present an acceptable work of art. Critical thinking plays an important role in the teaching of art. I conclude that if the students consider all

possible alternatives before making a final decision, there will be a higher degree of artistic quality. A general knowledge of the development of art and its great men is a vital part of art instruction. I feel that a student with an awareness of the past and its influence upon today's art movements is better equipped to deal with artistic problems or demands.

Last, my research has aided me in establishing this educational objective: to involve the students in learning experiences which would cause a deeper understanding of both art media and subject matter.

THE CITY

by

LEE MERRIWETHER CLARK

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE
in
TEACHING

Portland State University
1969

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May 20, 1969

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The City, the choice of my investigation, is a subject with many artistic possibilities. The paintings are arranged in a sequence, beginning with distant over views and progressing toward more immediate views. This sequence is developed in three overlapping phases in which the first and the third developments are linked by a transitional or intermediate period. Technique changes from a loose application of overlapping color planes to a combination of the first and third phase methods and finally to a more studied arrangement of solid, geometrical shapes of color. The first four paintings were developed at on-the-spot locations in Portland, and the remaining five pictures were contrived from my observations of the city and from discoveries made while working on the previous four.

CHAPTER II

THE PAINTINGS

The painting Portland, Figure 1, an oil, was my first visual response to the city. The picture was created on location, from the west hills above the Lincoln High School football field. One end of Multnomah Stadium is located directly behind the bush on the left side. The technique employed in this first painting was impressionistic; in other words, the color was applied in a dot or square shape in a loose manner. Then occurs a building up of the canvas surface and also an overlapping of one spot of color over another.

Figure 1. Portland, 9½" x 14"

This particular style of painting was made known to me through my undergraduate education and by studying the work of one of the great practitioners of this method, Paul Cezanne, a French artist of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the leading figure of the post-impressionist school.

The picture can be divided into four major sections. Beginning in the foreground, the trees with their cool color variations make up the first compositional area. The second division is composed of large

building forms executed with the warm colors of yellow and orange. Continuing up and into the painting, the next major division is characterized by the mixture of both warm and cool variations. The buildings, which are reduced to spots or squares of color, help to give the impression or suggestion of perspective. The sky represents the final compositional division of the painting. Light values of warm and cool color cause an illusion of a light sky area.

My only intention in this first painting was simply to project on canvas my personal response to what I observed.

The second painting, an oil, entitled Panorama, Figure 2, is another example of my earlier style. This view of Portland was observed from the very top of Rocky Butte. The temperature of the day of this picture's creation was very hot, and the city seemed to indicate this to me. The work is atmospheric, characterized by somewhat vivid spots of color in the foreground, implying a clear day and a hazy quality in the background.

Figure 2. Panorama, 8" x 58"

The technique exercised was the same used in my first painting. Figure 3, a detail, shows the method of my earlier paintings. My intention was to record with suggestive paint strokes an image of the whole scene before me.

Figure 3. A detail

The work, From Rocky Butte Looking West, Figure 4, was the third painting of the city and is characteristic of the previously described pictures. This work, a general view of Portland, was observed from a particularly high vantage point. A factor which makes the painting interesting is the large amount of sky; the viewer's eye is suspended for an instant and then "falls" into the city. Once into the city the eye of the viewer becomes aware of small spots and squares of color representing building forms. The picture is highly atmospheric and is characterized by the suggestion of smog. The painting is divided into four well-defined areas: the sky, the smoggy middle ground, the darker forested section, and the residential area in the lower left corner. At the time of this painting I was involved in presenting an impression of what I observed. Looking at the picture, one notices that there is much activity. I concentrated on masses and direct form rather than on meticulous detail. Shapes, such as houses and trees, were suggested, not clearly defined. I also felt the composition of the painting should hold together and possess a broad point of interest, not just one focal point.

Figure 4. From Rocky Butte Looking West, 12" x 24"

Early on a summer morning as I entered the city from Vista Avenue, I was intrigued by the atmospheric conditions. I had used this same route before but on that particular day I felt inspired to record my observation. There was a thick haze or smog hovering over the buildings below, and the sun had just appeared from the horizon. It was this combination that interested me. Looking down into the city, I noticed that the buildings were vividly defined in the foreground and as my eyes moved toward the distant horizon, the forms were less distinguishable.

The painting is entitled, A Smoggy Summer Morning, Figure 5, and the media was acrylic polymer emulsion, modeling paste, cardboard and pencil. The bottom or foreground was composed of a build up of modeling paste and cardboard which emphasized the feeling of close building forms. As the viewer's eye progresses from the foreground toward the top of the canvas, the images become less defined. The upper portion of the painting is almost completely dependent upon the delicate use of modeling paste, white and yellow pigment and pencil. I was trying to

present an impression of the entire scene, from the vivid foreground to the fuzzy distant horizon. The painting is another example of impressionism which I mentioned previously.

Figure 5. A Smoggy Summer Morning, 10½" x 33"

Night Lights, Figure 6, represents the transition between my earlier style and my current method. The work is impressionistic but there is an indication of a solid, decorative use of color and shapes. There is a blending of gradations of blue in the upper portion of the canvas, characteristic of my earlier method of painting. However the picture changes in the middle section, with color literally standing alone. One shape contrasts another, presenting the illusion of flashing night lights. Between the center and foreground areas the colors change from very hot, advancing colors to colors of the cooler range. The foreground

is composed of the largest shapes of the entire painting. They act as a visual barrier, causing the viewer's eye to look up, over, and into the remainder of the picture.

This painting caused the awareness of a new fresh approach to my painting. The work I had done before Night Lights was carried on in the only technique of painting with which I was familiar. I felt at this point that I must exploit a method which placed new demands on me. The foreground and middle ground of Night Lights was the basis for this change in method. From this point the impressionistic technique is set aside and solid geometrical shapes of flat color areas become the important elements of my work.

Figure 6. Night Lights, 15½" x 15½"

Because my artistic approach had changed, I was given new avenues of direction in my painting, City at Night, Figure 7. The work was developed from my observation and study of the basic forms of buildings, not from a particular location of the city. Simplification of the subject matter, shape, color, and space played a more vital role in my painting. Last, my method of application changed. This painting was

begun by crisscrossing vertical and horizontal bands of translucent color over a white canvas. I allowed the pigment to drip and flow down its surface, causing some fascinating, transparent color effects. I worked directly, without preparatory drawings, striving to meet the constant demands as the painting progressed toward its completion.

In a short time the entire surface was covered. The painting was allowed to dry completely so I would not lose some of the interesting overlapping effects. Since the arranged colors suggested building forms, I began blocking in areas with opaque color, leaving a few selected translucent areas for contrast. Following this stage, a few lines were placed to aid the composition. Also, window shapes were applied, warm color on cool, cool color on warm. The way in which the squares were arranged presented an illusion of flickering city lights.

Figure 7. City at Night, 36\"

As the viewer looks at the painting, there is an awareness of perspective. The eye of the beholder is "caught" immediately by the brightly colored buildings. These shapes are arranged in such a way that the

viewer is forced to "jump" from one building form to another, until he has been given permission to move into the cool quiet area at the top.

This was the first painting in which the new approach was used and from the experience of its creation I became extremely interested in the psychological effects of color.

Related to City at Night, the next painting - an oil - entitled Morning, Figure 8, is another example created from my study of urban building shapes and forms. The canvas is divided into two major areas and sub-divided into four sections. The two dominant divisions are the warm upper left corner and the large cool section that encompasses the remainder of the canvas. The four sub-divisions include the upper left corner, characterized by the colors of yellow and orange; the upper right corner with its variations of purple and blue; the green movement located in the middle ground; and the foreground area represented by variation of brown, blue and green.

A close observation of this painting reveals two interesting discoveries about my arrangement of color. Brown, first of all, is concentrated in the foreground but is distributed throughout the canvas. I refer to this use of brown as a transitional element. The viewer psychologically moves from one brown shape to another until he reaches the top of the painting. The bright upper left corner and the green region below generate the impression of liquids flowing. The green seems to flow down the left side of the painting, cross over to the right and fork; one branch going up and the other moving down. Green seems to permeate into, around, and through the other colors, further emphasizing the idea or impression of water flow.

Figure 8. Morning, 33" x 44½"

In Morning, as in City at Night, I was interested in color and its effect on the mind of the beholder. Color in Morning is organized into two groups, warm and cool; on the other hand, the color in City at Night is dispersed. There is some contrast, but the feeling of flashing lights in the previous picture is not present. Morning, in a visual sense, is a quiet painting. The large, cool area "holds" the viewer for a moment and gradually is released by the warm section in the upper left corner.

One purpose in creating this picture was to explore the design possibilities of the building forms. My other intention was to organize the color into more definite areas, giving the painting a better order.

The picture entitled Competition, another acrylic painting, depicts one of the major characteristics of the city, commercial signs. Everywhere one looks, signs of different sizes, shapes and colors, each try to nudge the other out so it can be read as well as seen. This painting represents my response to commercialism and in particular the erection of large billboards and signs which obliterate the scenic views of the city.

Figure 9. Competition, 45" x 45"

The painting can be placed in the same category as City at Night because of the large, hard edge geometrical shapes of color, but there are major differences between them. Competition is composed of solid well-defined opaque shapes where-as City at Night is constructed with both opaque and translucent color. City at Night is divided into two prominent areas: the bright foreground, which involves the majority of the canvas, and the smaller dark area at the top of the painting. Competition is composed of four major areas, each division situated in the corners of the canvas. The Hancock sign acts as a divisional element, separating the picture vertically into two parts. The black shape above the Mobil sign, and the top edge of the Chevron sign divides the canvas horizontally. Each sign is different in color and shape, and each simply stands independently. The individual signs are arranged in such a way that they balance each other. The curved line of the Phillips Sixty-Six sign counters the diagonal lines of the

Chevron sign. Even the words become shapes which, in their arrangement, balance and contrast each other.

This large canvas has an interesting effect on the beholder. He is immediately exposed to the color and shape. The signs prompt such a physical response as "Hey, look, here I am over here"; or "Drive on in, we will give you better service". The signs visually scream for attention.

Competition was developed by acquiring from gasoline stations, an object such as an oil can, travel map, or any other object bearing the company symbol. Actually quite an experience in itself was telling the station attendant why I wanted his particular trademark. It was interesting to observe his reactions to my intended plan.

The painting represents a progressive change toward a further simplification of shape, color and space, in flat color areas and this same approach is carried farther in the next painting.

Central Park, Figure 10, an acrylic painting, is the concluding picture dealing with my research of the city. The method of application is the same as in the four previous paintings, with shape, contrast, and color being the most prominent elements.

The idea for this last painting came from an exploration of a Portland map. Between Twelfth and Southeast Hawthorne, and Twentieth and Southeast Division is an intriguing layout of a street design. The area encompasses approximately eighty square blocks and is characterized by a circular grassy area in the center called Central Park, which also suggests the name for my picture, another synthetic polymer painting.

Figure 10. Central Park, 29" x 29"

The composition seems at first glance to be the same on both sides, but there is a difference. Where two colors come together a street is indicated, and in the upper right corner a small brown shape which, assisted by blue and red, represents a short street. Applying color in a dispersed manner, I transferred from one side of the painting to the other. Each time a section was painted I was challenged by the colors to move to the opposite side. The color, organized into alternating vertical bands of warm and cool color progresses from left to right, beginning with warm and concluding with a cool area. The X shape in the center of the canvas was purposely placed over the top of the vertical strips to suggest more clearly the idea of a three-dimensional subject like the city.

My over-ruling purposes for creating this picture were to manipulate color over a preconceived design and to experiment with color relationships from one section of the canvas to another.

CHAPTER III

PROBLEM SELECTION AND PRESENTATION

The paintings previously discussed represent my response to the city, first from the standpoint that it is a dwelling place for people and, second and most important, that it offers for me challenges and demands as subject-content in the area of creative painting. The development of these paintings reflects an approach to the field of art education.

The paintings were organized into three developmental phases. The first was represented by distant over views of the city, using the impressionistic method of color application. The second phase of development was the transition from the beginning style to the concluding method of painting. In my work the element of change occurred in Night Lights, with impressionistic blending of color at the top of the canvas giving way to larger, bolder presentations of color and shape in the middle and in the foreground. The third and final phase represented by the paintings City at Night, Morning, Competition, and Central Park emphasized in a more pronounced way the arrangement of solid geometrical shapes of color. Arising from these three stages of development is the movement toward simplification which has become an important part of my approach to the teaching of art.

The relationship between my paintings and their influence in the field of secondary education can be shown by describing a selection of

design problems which have proved to be successful. The student's task in each of the following problems is to concentrate and study critically the line, texture, color, shape value, and form of the subject matter, and to develop a simplified, geometrical, representative design.

The first selected problem deals with the design possibilities of tree bark. The surface qualities and shapes within the bark communicate to the student a definite arrangement or pattern.

The second design problem, with the insect as the subject matter, is used in much the same way, but there is a slight difference. The student is first given the task of drawing an insect in precise detail. The understanding and knowledge learned from the detail sketch challenges the student to organize a simplified geometrical design which represents in a general sense the idea of an insect in its surroundings.

Thousands of people literally jammed into a small area is the subject matter for another possible design problem relating to my approach to creative painting. Here the student is introduced to the problem by studying in depth a picture of a crowd at an athletic contest, at a political gathering, or at other similar events. By critically observing the human images in the picture, the student becomes aware of the suggestion of a simplified arrangement of color and shape. The observations made are recorded in the form of a geometrical design.

The final design problem has for its subject matter cardboard cartons which are stacked in a corner of the room. The student is first told to make a general sketch of the arranged cartons. From this drawing he is to develop his own simplified geometrical design which represents the masses of the cardboard shapes within.

CHAPTER IV

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON ART EDUCATION

This research, culminated by exploration, observation, and analysis has been a valuable educational experience. From the results of this study I have reached some vital conclusions regarding the subject of art education. I have learned the importance of critical thinking, and I strive to emphasize it in my teaching. The finished project is absolutely meaningless without a certain amount of concentrated critical thinking and understanding. Most students seem convinced that simply submitting a completed project for an evaluation is the most important accomplishment. I feel that the reasoning behind the finished work of art is more important, but the final work does indicate how much thought was given. Critical thinking in the area of art can be explained this way: When a problem or project is given to the student, a number of demands are placed upon him. On a given day he is to turn in, for a grade, a finished work of art. He is to use certain tools and materials indicated by the teacher. In addition to these demands, he is to begin his thinking toward a personally accepted solution to the project. There is to be but one final expression at the end of an allotted time, but there can be and should be a number of possible alternatives or ideas leading up to its completion. These thoughts or ideas are the results of the critical thinking process.

Many times I have found that students who have thought out imaginative and interesting ideas receive a failing or poor grade because they

are incapable of using their artistic tools and materials. However these two abilities do not insure success. There are those who have the ideas and knowledge in the use of tools, and still fail because they cannot express their feelings in visual form. Ideally, the student that I would like to have in my class is the one who is capable in each area: arriving at solutions to problems, using materials effectively and projecting thoughts; realistically this type of student, at least in my experience on the high school level, is difficult to find. Therefore, critical thinking must play a vital role in the teaching of art. Without it students rarely meet with artistic success.

This thesis has made me aware of the work of other artists. Throughout my research I read about artists who were noted for their work on the city. The act of painting forced me to be curious about other past artists' methods and their philosophical viewpoints. My work was greatly influenced by the French artist, Paul Cezanne and the Dutch painter, Piet Mondrian, and the American artist Stuart Davis. From Paul Cezanne I acquired the fundamentals of his post-impressionistic style. From Mondrian and his approach I was made aware of balance and rhythm of composition. From the painting of Stuart Davis I acquired a fresh approach to color and shape, relating to his use of city symbols, and their placement and arrangement on the canvas. Each of these artists, each with his own unique method and artistic philosophy, aided me in my research.

I strongly believe that a general knowledge of the development of art and its great men is a vital part of art instruction. When I present a project to the students, I strive to mention a great practitioner of

the particular type of work in which they will be engaged. I also teach a course in art appreciation, believing that this too will give the students a better understanding of the past and its influence on today's art. Students with an awareness of the development of art are more capable of coping with artistic problems.

I became aware of motivation and its importance in art education. In my opinion, it is essential that a person be deeply interested in order for him to succeed. Another motivational factor in my work was the change in living environments. I moved from Portland to St. Helens four years ago, and I noticed that even in this short time my impressions of the city had changed. The most interesting observation I made was the traffic movement of both pedestrians and automobiles. Both of these move at a higher rate of speed in Portland. This rushing from place to place gave me a sensation of alienation and fluidity, which is presented throughout my latest paintings. Motivation is the key, I believe, to a successful art program and I strive to make every presentation as interesting and meaningful as possible.

It is this combination, critical thinking, motivation, and awareness of the artistic past, which comprises my personal philosophical approach to art education.