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THE FORMAL LANGUAGE OF NONOBJECTIVE ART

by

GWEN M. ERICKSON

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

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in
PAINTING

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1986

TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ART:

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Special thanks to Mel Katz and Dick Muller.

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THESIS PROPOSAL

As a central issue in my thesis work, I wish to explore a growing interest in the nature of shapes and their relationship to each other and to their environment. The character or personality of a shape is defined for me by its gesture and its color. I like to join shapes with different characters in such a way that they incorporate a sense of movement. The emphasis has not been on competition or conflict, but on a kind of dynamic balance.

As I worked through a series of still life studies last winter, I felt tyrannized at first by the objects in front of me. While I was looking at them, I could not break away from a faithful rendering of their shapes, colors, and placement. It was only when I sat down to draw them without looking at them that I was able to redesign their contours and reinvent the space around them. I also found it helpful to cut still life shapes from paper and rearrange them with other scraps of paper. It was important for me to separate still life objects from their natural surroundings in order to concentrate on the formal considerations of making the shapes more interesting and activating the negative space around them.

During spring term I began doing pastel drawings without reference to any specific thing. I learned that I am most interested in shapes with strong gestures that can be linked with other shapes that contribute to an exciting relationship. The content of the drawings became the relationship between the shapes. I recognized an old theme in my art:

the depiction of my relationships with others. My old work is narrative while the more recent is abstract, but both reflect my desire to live in harmony with my husband, family, friends, and environment without sacrificing my need for growth and change. The drawings, like my relationships, are not based on competition or conflict; I have been trying to achieve a dynamic balance between parts, one that allows the excitement of implied movement.

The play between the two-dimensional surface and the suggestion of three-dimensional space also interests me. I would like to create more of an in-and-out movement within a somewhat deeper pictorial space. I would welcome the return of recognizable references to the world around me, but I do not want to go back to the detailed representational drawing of the past.

I hope to strengthen my understanding of these and other formal problems through further study of other artists, especially the Cubists, and to examine their creative potentials in my own painting, drawing, and printmaking.

Gwen Erickson
May 22, 1985

Figure 1. Gwen Erickson, M.F.A. Thesis Exhibition, 1986.
Installation view at Gallery 299, Portland State University.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

There are two problems in painting. One is to find out what painting is and the other is to find out how to make a painting. The first is learning something and the second is making something.

-Frank Stella

The body of work in this thesis exhibition demonstrates my attempt to understand the visual language of nonobjective art and to use the formal elements of that language to make powerful and provocative art. Line, shape, and color are the formal elements that interest me most. Allowing the surface to develop in the process of making lines and shapes has resulted in an undisguised record of the decisions made. The large scale magnifies every line and shape and demands confidence and energy in each gesture of the drawing and painting activity. Color affects the weight, character, and spatial position of the shapes and allows greater complexity in the composition.

To learn about the formal elements of art and how they interact, I first limited my examination to line and shape. Later, as I began other works, I complicated my approach by including color, increasing the scale, and using different materials to build a surface with greater physical

¹Robert Rosenblum, Frank Stella (Baltimore: Penguin Books Inc., 1971), p. 57.

depth. At each stage of development, I studied the work of other artists to analyze how component parts of an abstract painting contribute to the whole and to understand the ideas that generate the work.

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE WORK

. . . in cubism's highest flights, what is striking is not the material structure that Kahnweiler and most abstract artists like to speak of, but a sensitive calligraphy that sweeps up internal and external worlds into a oneness in which reality consists not of opposing essences of matter and spirit, representation and structure, but of relations, process.

-Robert Motherwell

Cubism opened the door to abstract art. During the analytical phase, Braque and Picasso studied objects to find forms which could be translated into geometric shapes arranged across the picture plane. In the following phase, synthetic cubism, they began their compositions with abstract elements--flat shapes, line, and color--and added descriptive details to connect the pictorial reality with the world around them. Instead of translating an object into geometrized form, they began with the form and then gave it significance as an object. The brilliant playfulness and free manipulation of shape in synthetic cubism opened my eyes to the possibilities of art beyond naturalistic representation.

Picasso did more than revolutionize my understanding of painting; he showed me a painter's vision in three-dimensional terms. His cubist constructions of musical instruments and still life objects extend the

²Robert Motherwell, "Preliminary Notice," The Rise of Cubism, by Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, 1949), p. vii.

two-dimensional elements of shape and line into three dimensions. Flat shapes become planes of wood or metal that can be placed on edge to read as line. Margit Rowell has written very well about the close relationship between painting and construction. She explains that the picture plane "exists in space as a geometric surface, having length and breadth but no thickness. In painting the plane is an abstraction, a translation of visual images into conceptualized forms. Spatialized it is no different, except that its structural autonomy is underscored."³ Picasso's constructions are extensions of the picture plane into the space in front of the wall. Although they depend on the wall to function as "ground" as we read them frontally, they do exist in real space. When Picasso placed wooden replicas of still life subjects on a piece of wood mounted perpendicular to the wall, that piece of wood became a shelf; it is not a painted depiction of a table, it is a three-dimensional representation of a table. The constructions are more than images, they are themselves objects.

Picasso never embraced the idea of total abstraction, or nonobjective art, but his ideas about form and materials influenced other artists who did develop nonobjective art. Vladimir Tatlin, considered the father of Russian constructivism, visited Picasso in Paris in 1913. When he returned to Russia, he began making three-dimensional collage paintings. Picasso had used non-traditional materials to contradict the academic idealization of a work of art, to "debunk the idea of 'noble means.'"⁴ Tatlin came from a different tradition. The Russians believed that the

³Margit Rowell, The Planar Dimension (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1979), p. 9.

⁴William C. Seitz, The Art of Assemblage (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1961), p. 23.

"form of a work of art derives from two fundamental premises: the material or medium . . . and the construction, through which the material is organized in a coherent whole, acquiring its artistic logic and its profound meaning."⁵ While Picasso subordinated the medium or material to the image, Tatlin drew his inspiration from the materials themselves and the way he combined those materials became the content of his work.

Tatlin did not find it necessary to identify the objects in his art as still life objects. His "counter-reliefs" employ wood, wire, glass, paper, and sheets of metal. Their rough and worn surfaces undergo minimum modification to allow their irregularities to play against the rigid structure that orders their placement into a unified whole. Tatlin's attitude towards materials helped me to reconsider my choice of materials and to use them with little alteration. The contrast between his organic surfaces and tight structure is similar to the contrast between my loosely painted surfaces and hard-edged structure.

The formal concerns and content issues generated by early abstract painters continue to influence today's artists. "Probably the most annoying and tedious characteristic of abstraction is its tendency to defend and explain itself in terms of problems," comments Frank Stella. "To survive, abstraction must not only transcend this tendency toward a schematic or decorative elaboration of its early successes; it must also somehow come to terms with the constant challenge of classic art, teaching itself to use and develop the formal dynamics of the past without a return to the illusionism upon which classic art was based."⁶

⁵Nikolai Tarabukin, Le Dernier Tableau, quoted in Margit Rowell, "Vladimir Tatlin: Form/Faktura," October, 7 (Winter 1978), 91.

⁶Robert Storr, "Frank Stella's Norton Lectures: A Response," Art in America, 73 (February 1985), 11.

Stella's investigation of the nature of abstraction is apparent in the evolution of his work. In his early paintings, the shape of the support depends upon the regular linear pattern that covers the surface. Stella maintains the essential relationship between interior shapes and the silhouette of the canvas support in the Irregular Polygons and the Polish Village series. The Irregular Polygons are painted in bright, flat colors with clear boundaries between shapes that seem to interpenetrate rather than overlap one another. The interlocking shapes continue in the Polish Village series, but Stella adds another complication. Each design is constructed three times. In the first version the medium is paint and collage on canvas, the second uses thicker collage elements on wood, and the third version is painted on tri-wall cardboard cut into individual shapes and assembled with the planes tilting in opposition to one another. In subsequent series of works, Stella combines elaborate curving shapes with his usual geometric shapes and introduces aggressively expressionistic painting and drawing on the surfaces of the shapes. His paintings have become increasingly three-dimensional. Cutout shapes almost fly off the wall, confronting the viewer in his own space. To study Stella's work is to see the logical progression of an art form that becomes ever more complex and energetic.

Other contemporary artists that are working with large scale cutout shapes include Elizabeth Murray, Sam Gilliam, George Sugarman, and Jay Phillips. Considering a variety of approaches to a particular set of problems enlarges my understanding of the issues involved.

Two artists who have influenced my drawing in terms of line, scale, and surface are Al Held and Mel Bochner. Al Held has done a series of black and white paintings using lines of varied weights to control the

Figure 2. Al Held, Phoenicia II, 1969. Acrylic on canvas, 48½" x 48½". Reproduced from Marcia Tucker, Al Held (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1974), p. 71.

Figure 3. Al Held, Phoenicia V, 1969. Acrylic on canvas, 96" x 132". Reproduced from Marcia Tucker, Al Held (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1974), p. 74.

illusion of depth (Figures 2,3). He suggests the third dimension in his depiction of boxlike forms but contradicts the linear perspective with the addition of ambiguous lines that cross over and penetrate the space described. The way he fills and divides the rectangular format and the way he adjusts the scale of the line to the size of the canvas particularly interest me.

Mel Bochner has done a series of drawings in which the lines are drawn, rubbed out, and redrawn, building a rich surface in the process of working towards a resolution (Figure 4). The idea of an overall tone and an atmosphere of old lines resulting from the attempt to solve a pictorial problem suggests to me the passage of time and a straightforward record of endeavor. Bochner has also done a series of paintings directly on the wall (Figure 5). Brightly painted polygons alternate with wide bands of color creating a chain of geometric shapes that dance across a great expanse of white wall space.

That simple geometric shapes can take on such lively gestures, suggest movement, and surprise us with the complexity of their relationships fascinates me. These shapes come from a branch of mathematics that deals with the properties, measurement, and relationships of points, lines, angles, and figures in space, so they are especially appropriate as components of a formal approach to nonobjective art. The difficulty lies in making art "that sweeps up internal and external worlds into a oneness in which reality consists not of opposing essences of matter and spirit, representation and structure, but of relations, process."⁷

⁷Motherwell, p. vii.

Figure 4. Mel Bochner, *Untitled*, 1982. Charcoal and conte on canvas, 90" x 70". Reproduced from Stephen Westfall, "Bochner Unbound," Art in America, 73 (July 1985), p. 112.

CHAPTER III

THE THESIS WORK

It is the surprises which come from inside--one does not know oneself according to what laws they come, or where from--but there is that difference between them and those which come from outside, that we recognize them as our most trusted friends; they are after all only an expression for what we longed to see.

-Julius Lange

My thesis work began with two series of drawings that became the foundation for all that followed. The first series followed an investigation of synthetic cubism. The series is done in pastel on a small scale and each drawing was begun with an "open start," without reference to any outside source (Figures 6, 7). The shapes are fairly contained, often organic, and usually suggest some narrative content. I enlarged one of the drawings to use as a pattern for a large dimensional piece made of masonite. The pattern was drawn on blue paper with a charcoal line. Encouraged to continue to draw on a large scale and to learn more about nonobjective shape making, I began the second series of drawings. At first the second series was clearly related to the earlier small drawings, but gradually the complex organic shapes became simpler geometric shapes (Figure 8).

⁸Julius Lange, "Erendringens Kunst," Bastien Lepage og andre afhandlinger (Copenhagen: P.G. Philipsen, 1889), p. 63, translated by Roald Nasgaard, The Mystic North (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1984), p. 10.

Figure 6. Red Two, 18" x 24".

Figure 7. Three Blues, 19" x 24".

Figure 8. Untitled, $87\frac{1}{2}$ " x 60".

A very large simple shape can have great impact; the configuration is easily read and one is free to respond to its size. The line used to designate such a shape must have enough weight to sustain the sense of scale. If the line is drawn with a single motion from the shoulder, it can convey the speed with which it is drawn, adding energy and vitality to the drawing. When I began to cut templates from tagboard with the same single-stroke motion, the templates enabled me to make swift, controlled, heavy lines that carried the gesture of the shapes in a powerful way. Overlapping templates created unpredictable secondary shapes that were often more interesting than the templates themselves. As lines were rubbed out and redrawn, the drawing acquired its own history. The multiplicity of rejected lines gave authority to the final black line verifying

it as the result of a process of trial and error. The repetition of a line in various positions suggests motion, as in sequential photography.

The last drawings in the second series are smaller works. They combine the charcoal line with cutout shapes derived from the templates. Paper shapes are arranged and glued to heavy paper. The line traces the edges of combinations of cutout shapes. In Collage Drawing (Figure 9), the shapes no longer overlap in a simple stack contained within the surrounding space of the rectangle. Instead, they share edges and their position in space becomes ambiguous as their relationships become more complex; the shapes extend to the edges of the rectangle and the surrounding negative space disappears.

Figure 9. Collage Drawing, 40" x 30".

Blue Monoprint (Figure 10) also fills the rectangle with positive shapes. The black and white shapes hold their own against the colored areas. This collagraph is a print made from a collage. In keeping with the collage idea, the chine colle process glues pieces of lightweight colored paper to the heavier printmaking paper as the image is printed onto them. The same combination of printmaking techniques is used in Monoprint with Rectangle and Two Bars (Figure 11). The rectangle becomes the focal point as it hovers between the two bars. Its regular shape and formal position dominate the organic, heavily textured field around it.

Figure 10. Blue Monoprint, 28" x 20". Figure 11. Monoprint with Rectangle and Two Bars, 29" x 20".

Figure 12. Cardboard Cutout 1, 85" x 80".

Reviving an interest in working on a large scale, I began to cut shapes from corrugated cardboard instead of paper and other thin collage materials. The rigidity of the cardboard made it easy to tack the shapes directly to the wall. I applied white paint to the multi-level surface with a roller which skipped over the edges leaving a halo of brown cardboard around each overlapping shape. With the edges already so well defined, what would be the function of the black line? I began to draw through the central part of the shape, tracing its axis and forming a linear structure that related well to the existing structure of shapes, linking them together.

In Cardboard Cutout 1 (Figure 12), I concentrated on developing the surface as well as the linear structure. I used latex paint because it is

relatively inexpensive and has the same common, non-traditional sensibility that the cardboard has. The surface is painted rapidly with a fully loaded brush in an expressionistic way that contrasts with the hard edges of the cut shapes. The charcoal line associates itself with the painting process as its edges are disturbed by brushmarks while its structure describes the relationship between shapes as two major planes cross over and balance one another. The gray areas emphasize the plane that leans to the right as the black line almost outlines the plane that leans to the left.

Figure 13. Cardboard Cutout 2, 73" x 79".

In Cardboard Cutout 2 (Figure 13), color takes over the function of describing the relationship between shapes as the charcoal line is eliminated. The flat black shapes define two large opposing planes that

establish the general framework of the painting and give it a stable base. The yellow shape at the top completes the plane that also forms the base. Smaller shapes enhance the larger shapes with their contrasting size, color, and surface treatment. The large shapes are insistent in their controlling position as the small shapes are compressed into a small space limited by the curving edge on the left and the long straight edge on the right.

Most of my compositions are very centered and maintain a sense of balance despite the opposing forces of diagonals and tilted planes. I wanted to keep that sense of order while I complicated the visual effect of the tilted planes by angling them away from the wall and projecting them into the space around them. To make a more three-dimensional construction, I needed a thicker, more rigid material than the cardboard. Polystyrene foam insulation panels met these requirements. They are manufactured in a variety of thicknesses ranging from one inch to four feet and densities ranging from a coarse, pliable material to a finely textured, very rigid material. They are also inexpensive, easy to cut, and lightweight enough for me to handle large sheets without assistance. I like the idea of making art from nontraditional materials borrowed from the industrial world, following the precedent set by Picasso, Tatlin, and others.

The first step in working with one-inch foam was very much like working with cardboard; I cut shapes as large as the two-foot width of the sheets allowed without using a preconceived plan as to how the pieces would fit together. Cardboard is thin enough for shapes to interlace with one section wrapping around another, half over and half beneath

Figure 14. Painted Foam Cutout, 84" x 73" x 3 $\frac{1}{4}$ ".

the interlocking section. The foam does not have this flexibility; separate shapes can only layer on top of each other unless they are cut to fit like pieces of a puzzle. As I began to assemble the pieces in Painted Foam Cutout (final version of the work shown in Figure 14), I had to cut them to make them fit together, closing the gaps between shapes. This process locked the shapes into a specific configuration before the painting began and made readjustments difficult. I painted the piece dozens of times trying to find the combination of shapes and colors that would make sense of the eccentric shifts from plane to plane within the painting. There were so many options for changes. The hue, value, amount, position, and shape of each color had to be adjusted to

define relationships between parts and to organize the work as a whole. I made a twelve-inch diagram of the painting and experimented with different color combinations to redefine the structure. Finally I turned the painting to the wall and went on to other things.

About six months later, Painted Foam Cutout was disassembled into three parts so that it could be moved to a new studio space. I was suddenly able to see it in a new way. I discarded one part of it and realigned the other two sections. As I repainted most of the surface, I ran tape along edges and across joints, using it to clarify the structure in the same way I had used the charcoal line in earlier drawings. When the tape was removed, the old painted surface showed through, preserving the linear structure and adding to the visual experience of layers of painted surfaces on layers of foam shapes. The colors have great density and contribute to the solid weight of the central core, the stabilizing vertical. A long curve sweeps across the vertical as two flanking shapes push out beyond its edges. The tightly knit composition is animated by crossing diagonals, by the gesture of its eccentric silhouette, and by the implied swinging motion of the long curve. Color is used to associate one shape with another; the three green shapes link together into the largest shape configuration. The black shape on the right overlaps and cuts into the green, which is held in a "background" position. The black shape on the left is sandwiched between green shapes but manages to stay on top as its strong black surface pulls forward and is associated with the overlapping position of the other black shape. The resolution of this painting after months of abandonment was an indication to me of how much I had learned in the intervening time.

As I looked at it, I could see what I called "force lines" that began to describe an interior structure like a linear skeleton. I drew the lines and later realized that I had simply traced the gestures of those combined shapes, visually explaining how the gestures carry through the length and width of the entire piece. The black line almost vibrates against the insistent pink color as its long lengths emphasize the dimensions of Pink Foam Cutout 1.

Figure 16. Pink Foam Cutout 2, 74½" x 53" x 2".

In contrast, Pink Foam Cutout 2 (Figure 16) is much more self-contained. The black line defines edges and describes interior shapes that relate to the outer contour. As it divides the interior space,

the line orders and controls the expansive nature of the pink material without reducing the large scale of the original cutout shapes.

To establish a strong relationship between the outer shape or silhouette and the inside shapes, I decided to try drawing the interior shapes first on a sheet of foam and then cut out a combination of those shapes. After preparing a sheet of foam with a coat of acrylic gesso, I began a charcoal drawing similar to Collage Drawing (Figure 9). The expanded foam I was using has a somewhat soft surface. It is made from spheres of polystyrene which are enlarged and bonded during a steam heat manufacturing process. Tiny pockets between spheres catch and hold the charcoal so that once a line is drawn, it cannot be completely erased. When the charcoal is rubbed out, it leaves a warm gray-brown film or patina that builds a kind of atmosphere. As the drawing developed, the line doubled in width, second and third sheets of foam were added to the first, and Three Panel Drawing 1 (Figure 17) became mural size.

Figure 17. Three Panel Drawing 1, 96" x 144" x 2".

The scale of the rectangle made with the three panels was impressive, and I no longer wanted to cut it into a new silhouette shape. The question then was how to modify the interior shapes to make a stronger connection between them and the rectangle, and the obvious answer was to make the interior shapes rectilinear. The way the shapes divided the space and met the edges of the drawing became very important. Despite its size, the rectangular format felt restrictive with edges and corners pressing in upon the enclosed space. I tried to emphasize this feeling by making the shapes along the edges large, overlapping and dominating most of the shapes in the center. The right side of the right panel had remained relatively untouched and began to represent a kind of breathing space within the drawing. As the drawing simply ended in the middle of this panel, it suggested a cut edge. Although the shapes are not actually cut out of the material as planned, the original intention is fulfilled conceptually by that drawn edge.

Figure 18. Blue Foam Cutout, 58" x 92" x 1½".

Unlike the containment and compression of Three Panel Drawing 1, Blue Foam Cutout (Figure 18) is erratic and unrestrained in its movement, unpredictable in its linear network. The patina of its surface is similar to the three panel drawing, but it does not have the same density of atmosphere. It is exuberant and almost figurative as it is easily associated with movements of head, arms, and hands.

Figure 19. Three Panel Drawing 2, 96" x 144" x 2".

Three Panel Drawing 1 generated ideas for other large drawings such as making the center panel different from the side panels but strongly related to them. This could be done with a change of scale, the addition of cutout shapes, or a difference in line, shape, or color. In Three Panel Drawing 2 (Figure 19), the two side panels were joined at first as their linear structure began to take form. The line increased in width to two inches and the dark values of fairly neutral colors promoted the strong contrast between line and field. Unlike Three Panel Drawing 1, the size of the shapes varies from quite small to very large. When a

white panel was inserted between the first two, the separation it caused was easily overcome visually because its white surface was a minor distraction. When the heavy black lines were added, the contrast became so great that the disruption of the center panel made itself intensely felt. It was very difficult to look at all three panels at once. While the two end panels tried to pull together, the center panel insisted on drawing attention away from them. To help the side panels compete with the center panel, large areas of color were blocked in behind the lines, contrasting with them in both hue and value. The glowing colors seem to expand as they enhance the scale of the shapes and make the side panels appear to be wider, effectively challenging the graphic strength of the center panel. The intrusion of the center panel is still felt, but it does not overwhelm the brightly colored side panels. The deeper values and stronger hues of the colors in the lower sections give the bottom of the drawing greater weight and suggest the pull of gravity, a vertical movement designed to counteract the horizontal movement promoted by the relationship of the two side panels.

The same light range of primary and secondary colors in the three panel drawing appears in Dimensional Foam Construction (Figure 20) which was in progress at the same time. The color seems appropriate for the lightweight foam and for the positive, energetic character of the work. This construction is an attempt to extend a painting into three-dimensional terms; different types and varied thicknesses of foam are combined in the building of shapes that extend fourteen inches out from the wall. When the foam is placed on edge, it reads as line. The underlying foundation of lines and shapes fits tightly together while shapes across the surface

Figure 20. Dimensional Foam Construction,
87" x 82" x 14".

are more freely placed. Unlike Painted Foam Cutout (Figure 14) with its subtle shifts from plane to plane, Dimensional Foam Construction has very definite breaks between shapes as they tilt into space in opposite directions. Painting across physical boundaries to join two cut shapes into one did not result in a convincing illusion. The painted shape looked contrived and self-conscious as its two different components insisted on their separate identities. So the shapes were each given a solid color and were layered and aligned into a three-dimensional collage. Their clear separation suggests mobility, as though each cut shape could easily be removed and placed in another position. The loosely constructed

feeling of this collage approach is very different from the unalterable interlocking puzzle pieces of Painted Foam Cutout.

In all of the work discussed here, line, shape and color are used to build a structure in which I have attempted to balance stability with unpredictability and logic with playful invention. My main objective has been to learn how to manipulate these formal elements to give visual form to ideas and feelings. The work is a record of my responses to this world, both intellectual and emotional. Some of the work is expansive and exuberant, some more contained and controlled, some is almost claustrophobic. Instead of relying on symbols and illustrations to create a link between our visual and verbal traditions of communicating, I have been using a language of form. Although it is not meant to be translated into a narrative, it can convey the essence of a good story: idea and feeling. Nonobjective art simply uses a different vocabulary. In the process of learning how to use this vocabulary, I have discovered its versatility. The possibilities seem endless as I begin to see the complex effects of color and space--both illusionistic and physical space--on the shapes that I have learned to make.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Man is his own invention; every artist's problem is to invent himself. . . . Cubism invented Picasso as much as he invented cubism; it revealed himself to himself, as painting does to every true painter . . .

-Robert Motherwell

When I was about to begin my first series of "open start" drawings, I wondered to myself, "Without specific reference to the outside world, what will my shapes become?" When I walked into the gallery to make readjustments in the hanging of the thesis exhibition, I happened to remember that question I had asked myself so long ago. Although the shapes do not represent specific objects around us, the work is meant to relate to our world and to imply in the relationship of its parts the structure of our environment and the process of analytical thought.

Each drawing and painting evolved as the structure of shape, line, and color was refined. Because the approach was not an attempt to illustrate a preplanned narrative, it allowed me to make many changes as the form began to suggest what the theme was to be. The work is not an explanation of some past event, as so many of my earlier paintings were, but is a manifestation of the present. It reveals to me qualities of my own character which become clarified as they find expression. I have

⁹Motherwell, p. vii.

tried to make art that draws from both inside and outside sources, represents universal rather than strictly personal themes, and allows the form and the content to evolve in the process of discovering their relationship. Working this way, I have learned more about myself and about how to build a vocabulary of form.

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