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INTEGRATION

by

JUDY LEE VOGLAND

A Thesis Report Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in

PAINTING

Portland State University, 1980

TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ART AND ARCHITECTURE:

The Members of the Thesis Committee Approve
the Thesis and Report of Judy Lee Vogland pre-
sented April 3, 1980.

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Dr. Leonard Kimbrell, Head, Department of Art and
Architecture

INTRODUCTION

My work over the past eleven years has developed through the exploration of certain color relationships and many different materials. Paint, wool and flat glass have been the dominant materials used to define multicolored relationships as seen in various organically based forms. Considering wool and glass to be painting materials, I approached them from a painter's point of view and explored color, composition, form and surface. Function in a work of art has always been of minimal interest to me whereas a visual and intuitive spiritual whole is crucial.

For a year or so before starting my MFA project I had been searching for a then undefined change in my painting that had evolved through visual energies and intuitive forces which came from my fiber works. I had become very preoccupied with three-dimensional work, especially in the preliminary drawing stage. It seemed timely and irresistible to pursue painting and attempt to evoke the same sense of strength I felt in the fiber.

I began to explore several painting concepts, both familiar and new to me, suggested by painter Fred Kline. However, upon Kline's sudden death I realized that my format and context should have a more personal focus.

Fortunately, the influence of Kline remains but the body of my work is my own.

THE FOUNDATION

I have always thought of myself as an integrator. I am always gathering materials and ordering my living and working spaces. I am continually aware of the visual relationships between objects. I make unified systems out of unique parts that result in a harmonious whole that pleases me.

This recognition of my obsessive behavior is a vital part of this thesis project. The fabric of my personal nature finally surfaced in this study, i.e., that I am obsessive about my personal environment. From places I have travelled, I have always hauled home junk such as roof vents from Jasper, Alberta, abandoned neon signs from Moscow, Idaho and hunks of steel from Trondheim, Norway. The contents from old barns and abandoned storefronts full of rusted tools are brought home to be sorted and integrated into my surroundings. From the N.W. Portland industrial area to secret regions of Mt. Chehalem I have hauled home reclaimed parts for future use. I seem to have a Dadaist attitude, i.e., change, chance and freedom from conventionality seem important values to me and I reflect often on the work of the German Dadaist Kurt Schwitters who said "I am a painter and I nail my pictures together." I also admire the gathering habits of Robert

Rauschenberg, Joan Snyder and Raymond Saunders.

I like being productive. Lately, I seem to be obsessed to produce profuse amounts of work. Endless ideas and attention to detail within the whole are just two areas that cause profusion to be a critical issue. Recognizing a certain level of nervous energy in myself, it is important for me to order my day just so I can clear my head of routine tasks so I can get to work.

My thesis project reflects myself, the integrator and orderer of parts. My painting now seems the realization of myself, my disorderly collections brought to order. The work ethic, perhaps best represented by a visible grid in the painting, funnels and fuses the multifaceted frame of my character.

The idea of a grid structure fascinates me because it is a very formal means of dividing up the space and within that formality I feel a freedom to play around as much as I can. Two things are always juxtaposed in my work 1) a kind of random organic feeling and 2) a formal structure of some sort. (See Red, Fig. 5)

Since I felt my early painting exhibited unstructured growth, I thought an ordering of space or platform such as a grid boundary was necessary to give meaning. Certain discoveries about grid patterns emerged and I made significant discoveries about the altered, controlled spaces on the painting surface.

THE GRID

My concern with the grid as a structural element and with the fragmented patterns resulting from dislocation and rearrangement of it slowly developed from the beginning of work in this thesis. I realized that an enormous amount of the world's artistic production has been made in the process of discovering possibilities within rigid frameworks like the requirements for crafts or the structure of the grid. Historically, there have been times when pattern was not an aesthetic issue for American painters since its association with the decoration and the machine put it outside of artistic concern. Pattern sometimes carries the aura of contrivance although many individual aspects of pattern, i.e., its affinities with numbers, rationality, mechanical production and depersonalized imagery, have been recently reclaimed for art. Flat pattern in Early Colonial American painting provided formula methods for production. Unlike painting, it generally had no mystery, no beginning, middle or end and its boundaries were vague.

Although pattern is supposed to result from the repetition of a motif, I discovered the crucial determinant in pattern to be the consistency of the intervals between the motifs. I also realized that pattern can come into existence when there are several repetitions of the

space/interval.

I am interested in the mutation and fragmentation of pattern and I found in my painting that by taking the interval of the grid as a constant, a single pattern could be maintained although there were changes of color and density in the motif. Of course, the "feel" will be different as the motif passes through selected changes, yet the juxtaposition of the variants will usually support a sense of family resemblance. The mutations will appear internally. Violet Run (Fig. 3) and Red (Fig. 5) are good examples of this issue of mutated pattern and altered interval. If the interval is changed while any or all other variables remain constant the difference feels radical. The new pattern appears as a transformation, a system change.

The fragmentation of pattern, however, seems to deal with only parts of the whole. Pattern reveals itself only by repetition, whereas a fragment becomes isolated and transformable. Root (Fig. 7), Rack (Fig. 2) and Pink Run (Fig. 14) all isolate small blackened fragments of pattern which visually tie into the grid system but transform themselves here into a single unit.

It seems that some critics of art believe that the interdependence of ideas and form is that which gives art its intellectual dignity and that pattern often spoils the impact of form and turns thought into ritual. I can

see that repetition could be limiting. An example would be that any word repeated several times becomes pure sound. Pattern can change the power of any image by simply regulating the interval between the elements, making forms lose their individual meaning. They become merely motifs. My work has involved fragmenting and mutating pattern.

The fundamental structure of a pattern is a grid and any pattern can be reduced to that format. Its shapes are markers indicating the pace and rhythm by which we are to perceive the whole. Presenting visual order, a grid is an impersonal field and it did not surprise me that even though I started each work with a grid, I proceeded to destroy it to varying degrees and to make it become a shape and altered the unity of the composition.

Whereas compositions with variety invite involvement and intimacy, those with grids establish an emotional distance. In my opinion, the painter must keep his compositional elements together without overloading the entire space. Focal areas and intensities lead the viewer's eyes as they move over the painted surface and no matter how complex its execution may be, the total composition is easy to see between focusing and resting the eye.

The viewer's attention focuses and moves about a composition whereas one tends to scan over a grid noting the motif, but assuming the whole. Usually the viewer locates the boundaries of a grid since they provide orientation, and in my observation, the whole is assumed before there is an investigation of the detail.

I think grids themselves are boring, artificial and imposed but in my work they are a means of ordering of elements whose intervals are often obscure.

THE PAINTINGS

During the course of this thesis project, I limited myself to oil paint on unsized paper stock primarily used for etching. Additional materials were oil, pastel, ebony graphite, colored pencils and linen and silk threads. I also limited myself to the basic rectangle of the paper by altering only its edges or frontal surface by sewing, weaving or a buildup of pigment. The scale of the work is much smaller and more intimate than that of my previous work on canvas due to the size of the paper and delicacy of materials used. The work ranges from 22"x30" to 40"x50".

In general, it was my intent to begin with no limitations or preplanning other than that of a penciled grid with a 1" to 2" interval. This satisfied my urge to order space in my painting as I had in my environment. I looked at this interest in grids as an obsession, one that could free my sense of obligation and allow my work to grow without interruption.

In the first painting, Rake (Fig. 1), my ideas had not been formulated enough for me to follow any prescribed format. I was more interested in grouping configurations and commanding visual attention. I was fascinated with the pattern provided by an old farm plow/rake and the ordering

of the painting spaces began with the rake's configuration. I was anxious to puncture and paint the paper with the suggested visual rhythms of the tines of the rake. I began sewing tine-like pieces of paper on to the painting and puncturing the surface in order to weave in strips of partially painted paper. The painted, stitched and woven papers were integrated in fragmented and irregular intervals as suggested by the aging rake tines. The punctured surface and the paint itself seemed to have great authority and I realized that the pattern of tines served only as a starting point. I enjoyed the oil wash soaking into the rag as opposed to the oil pastel standing on the tooth of the paper. The surface of the work became important to me.

Going through this experience that I call "pattern, then play", I began to consider limiting myself to the organizational possibilities of a grid and altering the scale, numerical quantity and placement of the complementary motif. In Rack (Fig. 2) and Violet Run (Fig. 3), I used a penciled grid for the first time. Measuring the grid with a piece of framing wood, I accepted the irregularities and errors in spacial judgements which are due to the imprecision of such an unsophisticated tool. In Rack and Grey Rest (Fig. 4), though occupying a large area of the composition, the grid retreats into the background and is integrated with large land-shaped sections which

give the painting a sense of order. In the Violet Run, the grid dominates the composition and explores the mutation of motif interval in sections of long colored stripes. This painting represents my first essay in the fragmentation and mutation of the interval. The coloration and active surface treatment in each rectangle of the grid is a painting in miniature which is part of the larger rectangular picture plane. The color and surface break up these rectangles and sometimes eliminate them altogether.

The idea of altering intervals or spaces between motifs was further developed in Red (Fig. 5) and Pink Dust (Fig. 6). Having worked with a penciled grid with common motif, a shift to larger intervals intrigued me. Separating the motif and expanding the interval seemed to allow the motif family to be held together by common location and scale. I used an organic drawing quality juxtaposed to the formal compositional structure by arranging, reordering, combing and edging space.

In the paintings Root (Fig. 7), Rouge (Fig. 8), Pink Run (Fig. 14) and Slow Rise (Fig. 10) I worked toward a strong compositional unity but wanted a feeling of open-endedness. It was important to see certain areas closed off within the total composition and yet provide avenues of penetration to prevent total isolation. In Root, the section of blue into blue woven paper projects this feel-

ing. I became intrigued with the quality of surface that resulted when graphite spread in liquid wax or oil then hardened flat and dark. I watched the penetration of the layers of color and their later reappearance as the handle of the brush or the point of the graphite dug into the surface. Certain elements I explored involved small rectangles of raw paper or rich heavy application of graphite. In Slow Rise, limited color and simple shapes are played against rich, shiny, slick graphite shapes.

In the paintings Ridge (Fig. 11), Give Me 1" of Purple (Fig. 12), and Red Push (Fig. 9), like Raymond Saunders' work, the concentration on surface gives particular emphasis to the physical qualities of the paint, i.e., stressing the material of which the painting was made. I love old painted walls, surfaces of rock and graffiti and I like to build up layers of color in order to rub and scratch into them. As I worked on these paintings, ideas of expansion, swelling, profusion and budding came as I spread pigment and scratched into the surfaces. There seemed an overflowing of a multiplicity of colors and gestures as the work looked heavy with turbulent matter and almost a brutal, expressionistic assault on the paper.

Technique is important to me. Surface is extremely

important and I appreciate the sensual "feel" of it. I am excited by a thin surface of paint such as that in Rush (Fig. 13) and Pink Tuck (Fig. 15), i.e., one that has transparency which shows underlying colors and internal shapes. I think sometimes that a surface needs to look cut and gouged in a brutal way to show its layering and vulnerability, as reflected in the Pink Tuck with a thicker paper stock and thick over thin paint. The paint itself, both in terms of color and density applied in smears, drips and squeezes is important to each piece.

I feel that my ability to integrate, conceptualize and pursue intuitive energies have been enhanced by this involvement with this thesis.

Rake (Fig.1)

Rack (Fig.2)

Violet Run (Fig.3)

Grey Rest (Fig.4)

Red (Fig.5)

Pink Dust (Fig.6)

Root (Fig.7)

Rouge (Fig.8)

Red Push (Fig.9)

Slow Rise (Fig.10)

Ridge (Fig.11)

Give Me 1" of Purple (Fig.12)

Rush (Fig.13)

Pink Run (Fig.14)

Pink Tuck (Fig.15)