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An abstract of the thesis of Charlien Dee Fitzpatrick for the Master of Fine Arts in Painting presented April 25, 1989.

Title: Things Seen and Remembered.

Approved by members of the thesis committee:

Craig Cheshire, Chairman

Byron Gardner

Michihiro Kosuge

Jane Kristof

Jae Num Lee

This thesis project consists of twenty oil paintings and watercolors. It is a series of visual problems based on work from direct

observation as opposed to work from imagination. The concern is to show how the works from observed nature affect the imaginary pieces and how the imaginary works lend unexpected elements to the observed works. With a particular interest in color, visual energy, and painterly form, the project shows how these two avenues of exploration start out separately and eventually blend.

THINGS SEEN AND REMEMBERED

by
CHARLIEN DEE FITZPATRICK

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

MASTER OF FINE ARTS
in
PAINTING

Portland State University
1989

TO THE OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES:

The members of the committee approve the thesis of Charlien Dee Fitzpatrick presented April 25, 1989.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

My approach to painting before entering the MFA program had always been very intuitive. I felt limited in my use of color and often relied on the same color palette. The result was a feeling of dissatisfaction about my work. From this premise I decided to set up my thesis project around a series of visual problems for myself based on work from direct observation on the one hand and imagination on the other. I wanted to discover where these two avenues would lead me and how they would affect one another. How could the works from observed nature affect the imaginary pieces and how could the imaginary works lend some excitement to the observed works? I set about my task like a scientist in a laboratory with only a short time to experiment.

CHAPTER II

DEVELOPMENT

I felt I needed a broader and more conscious understanding of color if I were to fully achieve my goal. I had used a red, yellow, blue palette for so long that my paintings were becoming predictable. After casting about for most of my first year trying several limited palettes, I finally settled on an exciting group of colors; a blue/orange palette with a purple/yellow flavoring. The use of several limited palettes had changed my thinking about color radically. By altering selected groups of colors that I painted with, I was forced to mix and simulate colors I saw in real life. I had to find color equivalents for, say, a blue sky, or a red shirt if the particular palette I was using did not have red or blue in it.

Upon selecting the blue/orange, purple/yellow palette, I experimented first on very classic, still-life arrangements. I used the still-lives as my control to attempt to go back to a better understanding of Cezanne and to tune into his attitude about painting. I had admired Matisse for years, as well as Picasso and others, reading repeatedly that they all had looked long and hard at Cezanne. So I decided to investigate him as well. What did they all get from him? And how could each have developed something so different? By trying to adopt his sense of observation rather than emulate his style I learned to understand something of the nature of light. I found myself slowing down

the painting process itself as I learned to mix a more complex range of values and colors.

During this time two things had happened which proved to be powerful effects on my work and my attitude toward it. One day during the spring term of my first year, I stood dumbly moving brush on canvas in my studio, looking at tulips in a vase and asking the eternal question "why am I doing this?" Byron Gardner knocked on the door, came in, looked around in his hawk-like kind of way and said

"Char, have you thought about making paintings up?"

My eyes got big. "Yes, Byron."

"Well, it seems to me you like high energy painting and color."

"Yes, Byron." I started to laugh.

"And with your personality, humor wants to be a part of what you're doing as well?"

"Yes, Byron!!"

"Well then, paint what you want to paint, Char! If you like the waiters and palm trees, do that. If you want a pineapple in there, paint a pineapple in there. Do what you want to do!"

I was still laughing as he went out of the room. That was a big light under the door for me, and in its illumination I saw lizards and donkeys, palm trees, Greek statues, rocky cliffs, water, fish, cafes, fig trees, cactus plants, squid fishermen, waiters and all the things I seemed to have been waiting for someone to tell me I could do. I had spent some time traveling in Greece, France and Yugoslavia previous to starting my thesis work. All those images were clamoring to be painted. I went to a canvas and started painting like a

three-year old. Waiters, cafes, wine bottles, palm trees; they were bad paintings in many ways; good and exciting in others.

I did about four of them realizing each time, as the canvas was covered over with paint, that I was stuck. I knew these were the things I wanted to paint, but I didn't know enough about the importance of the corners of paintings, the color of light, the ranges of values our eyes need to see or how to make color say what I'd felt. But I knew I was on to something. Craig Cheshire looked at the paintings then and helped me to see where I was going and how to try to get there by better understanding the causes and effects of color, drawing and composition. Then the idea developed of playing the observed works off the made-up images.

First I experimented with the limited palettes. Then, I had a big breakthrough in drawing, the second event of the period. I played drawing games in which I'd scribble with charcoal or graphite for some minutes on a piece of drawing paper without looking at it. Then I'd look. After a time, I'd just begin to add mass and value where it seemed to ask for it. I'd add loose broken lines to mimic shapes, cross them or go away from them. By continually rotating the paper and working with the shapes, values and rhythms developing, I began to have a kind of visual dialogue with the drawing, trying to keep it as flowing and open as possible. Later I would allow some of these drawings to become things. Sometimes I'd see a waiter, a figure, whatever. Without consciously applying the lessons learned, I found my painting beginning to open up in the same way. I no longer closed off all lines and shapes in a static, colorbook way. The still-lives, though strong in form, were not closed off. Increasingly I began to open lines so that form and color merged, and my works seemed to move the eye around.

By confining myself to still-life objects initially, I developed a control. I tried to extend my use of the chosen blue/orange - lavender/yellow palette. I wanted to gain the knowledge and versatility of that palette as well as to learn something of the nature and color of light. To realize light had a color temperature of either warm light with cool shadows or cool light with warm shadows was a tremendous revelation to me. It not only helped me interpret what I was seeing in order to depict it realistically, it also gave me valuable information to later apply to imaginary paintings.

In Still-Life With Candy Box (Figure 1), I tried to slow down my rather habitual swashbuckling brushstrokes. Instead, I really tried to look, draw and push the colors toward a blue/orange range with lavender/yellow accents.

This showed me possibilities for Still-life With Glasgow Jug (Figure 2), in which I pushed the same group of colors into a purple/yellow feeling with a blue/orange accent, reversing the order in Still-life With Candy Box. I toyed with adding a new color, vermillion, near the end of the painting. The subtle addition of that color created an unexpected note in the painting and also forced many of the other colors to vibrate more intensely.

Still-life With Apples and Banana (Figure 3), led me to use the colors again in a very green/yellow range with lavender flavorings. All the while I'd been looking very closely at composition, observing what was happening at the corners of paintings as well as in the middle. I concentrated on working the paintings up very slowly and developing a large value range, something I had earlier neglected in my haste to hit the sharp color notes.

Portrait of Jodie (Figure 4), was done for a friend so I wanted to use a more tightly drawn approach while still pursuing my use of the blue/orange, lavender/yellow palette. This time the set-up employed a lot of greys,

Figure 1. Still life with Candy Box

Figure 2. Still life with Glasgow Jug

Figure 3. Still life with Apples and Banana

Figure 4. Portrait of Jodie

neutrals which challenged me to use my color in a different way. I decided my light source was basically cool with warm shadows and approached all color mixing with this attitude. I particularly wanted the grey drapery behind the model to be luminous. I learned to mix a variety of warm and cool greys, but greys of specific hues - green-greys, blue-greys, lavender-greys, pink-greys and so achieved a rich range within areas that at a glance would appear to be one color. It was also important to me to achieve a strong composition in this painting, a variety of shapes and tones within a setting that conveyed the personal mood of the sitter.

I had worked with this friend all through my thesis project. I had found myself on more than one occasion able to paint a sensation or memory of her after she was gone, which was closer to my interpretation of her than I could achieve when she was sitting before me. This was a very new and important discovery for me. How to paint from sensation or memory of the object and not to copy the memory but to re-interpret my feelings about what I had seen? The first of these paintings was *Lady in a White Dress* (Figure 5), in which I had a distinctly angular-cubist, Matisse-like memory of what I had seen when the model sat for me. In the painting I tried to convey the mood of the sitter, the plane-like cascading of the white dress over the knee. I wanted it to be recognizable, yet not totally realistic. I wanted the form to be solid but not immobile, blending with the shapes of the chair, the window, the red scarf, but not lost in them. Again I used the blue/orange palette and my knowledge of cool light/warm shadows to try to reinterpret the white dress. I wanted subtle color.

Odalisque With Fish Still Life (Figure 6), I feel, is one of the breakthrough pieces in my work during the fall of my second year. Sparked by *Portrait of Jodie*, it motivated a surprising re-interpretation even more semi-

Figure 5. Lady in a White Dress

cubist than *Lady in a White Dress*. I had continued to work on more still-lives of fish; a mackerel and rockfish, bottle of wine, continuing my formal investigations of light, color, and the blue/orange, lavender/yellow palette. I'd been working steadily trying to finish *Portrait of Jodie*. The same kind of transformation happened. From the observed painting came *Odalisque With Fish Still Life*, which was a re-interpretation of *Portrait of Jodie*. In re-interpreting the set-up, the fundamental concern with cool light, warm shadows was still adhered to. I added my subjective attitude and concern with open marks, rhythms in shapes and lines, flat areas and broken masses. I interjected bits of recognizable objects and put the still-life with fish in it. I liked the fish. Because I'd been painting them they seemed to work their way in. This was one of the first instances I'd had in successfully making-up a picture and adding something else from somewhere else to it. The entire surface of this painting became essential, the corners as much as the content and mood of the sitter.

Flying Out (Figure 7), seemed to be a culmination piece which developed from *Portrait of Jodie* and *Odalisque With Fish Still Life*. With the painting, I attempted to go one step farther out on the limb of non-objectivity. Again based on the knowledge of the model in *Portrait of Jodie*, I attempted to do a much higher key, even more energetic, flying-out version of the image - a face, a hand, a wine glass, a bit of wicker chair, the lamp still there at left, but the fish moved to the lower right. I wanted the movement, line, color, and masses to be as energetic, open and high-key as I could get them and still have the painting hold together. Within the painting, which seems to be primarily grey, I placed four saturated spots of color, one yellow, one red, one orange, one lime-green. With them I attempted to create the same kind of effect generated by adding the foreign spot of vermillion to *Still-life With Glasgow*

Figure 6. Odalisque with Fish Still life

Jug. I wanted the colors to work into the painting, yet be just noticeable enough to force the greys to vibrate and unite.

During the second year of my thesis work I took up watercolors. With them I tried to loosen my manual and visual handling. I started much the same way as I'd done with the drawings using a limited palette and exploring various ways of making marks. I stumbled onto some exciting visual effects. One was the use of wet-on-wet blotches of color with linear drawings in India ink. I allowed the wet-on-wet to be free. Then I applied black or white linear drawings of themes I'd been painting in oil, or I'd use combinations of these themes. Because of the naturally discordant effects of wet-on-wet with the dry lines on top, a very weird spatial relationship developed in many of the watercolors. They gave me insights into how to pull imaginary images together in my oil paintings and how to keep my oil paintings open, looser, freer.

I began to realize that the idea of camouflaging the images I used was very important to me. *The Old Bathers* (Figure 8), was an extension of the visual ambiguity that fascinated me in many of the earlier paintings. The visual ambiguity of spatial depth and objects - first you don't see them, then you do - was a major interest to me though I didn't consciously realize it until very late in my thesis work. I would achieve it by focusing the attention to the center of a canvas away from the shadow areas that hid images. Or I'd fracture images within the entire space of the canvas. I'd also paint images within images like the couple in the rock in *The Old Bathers*.

In *The Old Bathers*, I wanted to paint a predominantly yellow painting, blending the nudes in with the rocks about them, subtly changing values and colors so that all is not immediately seen. While the viewers attention is

Figure 7. Flying Out

focused on the bright area in the middle, it is some time before objects appear in the shadow areas that frame the couple.

One of the last pieces I painted was a type of culmination piece called Studio Two-eleven (Figure 9). I wanted to do many things with the piece. As stated earlier, I had come to realize humor figured very prominently in my attitude as a painter. I needed to have fun conveying the things, places and people I had loved. But again, how to do humor in painting, subtly, teasingly or raucously as the occasion may call for? In Studio Two-eleven, I wanted to express an attitude of light-heartedness toward myself in my working environment. I also wanted, again, to create ambiguous space by use of an overall intense color ground. The orange field is given depth by the drawing which suggests overlapping objects, a window and a corner which seem to go back into space. I made the picture up, pulling in many of the motifs I had been painting for two years; the lizard, the fish and still-life, the models, my realization of my placement here and now in Portland. I tipped up the table, and the carpet, and painted myself in a semi-archaic manner to emphasize the push-pull of two dimensional to three dimensional reality.

Figure 8. Old Bathers

Figure 9. Studio Two-eleven

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION

By formally studying color, light, composition and handling of paint I was able to intellectually understand my toolbox of painting. The classic still-lives, the free drawings, the experimental watercolors, all opened doors to my understanding of how to paint my various experiences. I wanted to learn to tune into my source material, whether it was the rocks, fish, and cafes, of another time in my life or a model I had just seen in my studio. By setting up various problems and controls for myself, I was able to learn to rechannel things I had actually seen into re-created imaginary images. In the process I became thoroughly engaged in the visual energy expressed by my paintings. I felt as if I was only scratching "the tip of the iceberg" of ideas. Thus, at the end of my thesis work I find myself happily confronted with several exciting directions I can follow. I feel I have only stopped briefly at a resting place long enough to clean off my brushes and gear up for the next group of paintings. This was just a beginning.

APPENDIX

Still life with Donkey

Adriatic Cafe

Still life with Fish #1

Still life with Fish #2

The Jungle

Cafe Bert

Jelsa Bay

Moonlit Beach Rocks

Cafe Hugo

Water and Cactus

Odalisque with Fish