

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

M. F. A. Graduating Paper

An Accompaniment to the Thesis Exhibition:

Apologia: For My Painting

BY

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF MASTER OF FINE ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ART

CALGARY, ALBERTA

NOVEMBER, 1988

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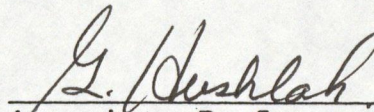
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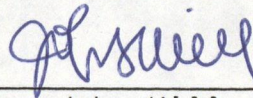
ISBN 0-315-50410-2

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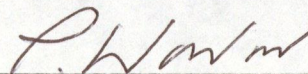
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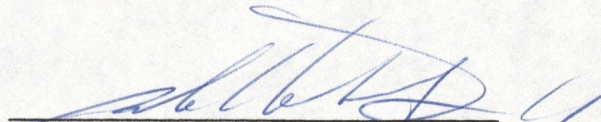
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this support paper is to clarify the essential nature of my art work. As a painter, I have received influence from a variety of sources. These influences result from living in an age that offers a vast and eclectic mixture of information, education and experience. In spite of this fact, the evolution of art has been a long and enduring process. In order to discuss my painting, a place must be found for it within the context of cultural progression. The more singular aspects of the thesis exhibition can be examined once this matter has been settled.

The first three chapters are concerned with the evolutionary process that takes art from period to period. Chapter one presents a relationship between this process and the contemporary art world. As the art of today owes much of its infrastructure to the modernist epoch, chapter two appraises this issue. Chapter three moves into the post modern present. As my painting has been influenced by various post modern attitudes, recent theoretical and aesthetic developments that have contributed to the state of contemporary art are discussed. This chapter establishes a relationship between my art and that of the mainstream.

Chapters four and five are primarily concerned with

the thesis exhibition. Chapter four accounts for the nature and purpose of my choice in subject-matter. As the exhibition functions in a narrative cycle, each painting is dealt with for its sequential value within the whole circle of events. Chapter five reasserts the fundamental sensibility that I intend the exhibition to convey to the viewer.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my Supervisor, Gerald Hushlak, and the members of my committee, John Will and Paul Woodrow, for the advice and assistance they have given me throughout the course of this program.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

To discuss my painting, an appropriate context must be established in order to draw parallels that will make it relevant in terms of the nature of contemporary art. Since I live and work within an isolated and provincial environment, these parallels have largely been drawn through the process of vicarious learning. The influences that have contributed to what it is that I do as a painter have come from such secondary sources as books, periodicals, television and film. As a provincial student of art, I am dependent upon these means of communication for the conveyance of the primary sources which are generally accepted as significant objects in influencing art production. Through the academic channels of formal education and the process of practical application, I have acquired a particular point of view regarding the tradition of Western art.

The development of Western art has followed that of Western culture. Although it is difficult to arrive at a precise beginning, the germination period has been approximated near the cusp that separated Archaic from Classical Greece. It had most definitely arrived by the time of Praxiteles, the late-classical sculptor. An example of his sculptural style, now existing in the form of a Roman copy in the Vatican, is the 'Aphrodite of the Cnidians' (Figure

1), originally hailing from around 330 B.C.. Such work was unprecedented in its realism, style and execution. It is still used as a bench-mark from which students of art can measure their skills when dealing with the aesthetic problems of depicting the human figure in a satisfactory manner.

The art of our era represents the point in time to which Western art has evolved. Art that is presently being produced, as the current attitude of this evolutionary process, has a definite relationship with the past because it is a result of the rejection or acceptance of previously held views in regard to the matters of art theory, aesthetic philosophy, art historical signification, religious and political overviews - in short - it encompasses anything that has contributed to the dogmatic nature of today's 'High' art. Art, as an aspect of culture, is the result of ongoing intellectual and social development. It is also a by-product of this process. As time passes, the significant art from our period will affect the future in much the same way as art from the past has shaped the present. As long as we are alive, we maintain that elusive moment in time where the future meets the present and in turn, califies the past. This is where we contribute to the whole process as the development of art, like any other human endeavor, takes place within that flexible moment.

As art loses its current significance it becomes a static point on a developing chronological line. Then it

joins the irrevocable past to become evaluated and categorized for posterity. When art is ascertained as being culturally significant, it serves as a coordinate from which one can plot out and theoretically evaluate future developments. At this point, art becomes influential. In our fast moving age a process such as this can happen within the space of time taken to prepare the next issue of any critical art journal.

Ultimately, significant works of art become the serious objects of study in the field of art history. The published records compiled by the academics in this field are an important coordinate when determining the richness or sterility of a culture. We live in an age that is unprecedented in the sheer volume of information available as a result of this study. It can be found in both popular and scholarly form.

Today, through the available hot and cold mediums of mass-communication we have a natural awareness and involvement with global events, despite the fact that our provincial environment is spatially and temporally isolated. The cultural homogeneity we experience through the powers of mass-communication allows for a global awareness that was not possible prior to this time. As Marshall McLuhan predicted two and a half decades ago, we are approaching:

. . . the final stage of the extensions of man - the technological simulation of consciousness, when the creative process of knowing will be collectively and corporately extended to the whole of human society,

much as we have already extended our nerves by the various media. Whether the extension of consciousness, so long sought by advertisers for specific products, will be "a good thing" is a question that admits of a wide solution. There is little possibility of answering the questions about the extensions of man without considering all of them together. Any extension, whether of skin, hand, or foot, affects the whole psychic and social complex.¹

The sharing of a common global awareness with the rest of the Western world naturally overflows into a reciprocating process involving the exchange and integration of ideas into cultures that had previously been different.

As a culture becomes more homogeneous similar models can be applied to art. In the case of art, the vast background or foundation provided by such available resource materials facilitates a more complex structure of knowledge which subsequently provides the capability of a highly eclectic sampling in the creative process. As the population becomes more sophisticated, so does its art. This process becomes more highly complex as time passes on. As the art from our time becomes preserved for posterity, it will serve as it has been served by the art from the past. Certain examples will inevitably become influential points of departure for the artists that follow us. As the generations come and go, the pool of available resources deepens. Here, the work of Praxiteles can again be cited. Not only was the 'Aphrodite of the Cnidians' copied by the Romans as a revered classical antique, similar models have served as a basis for visual points of departure among other generations of artists.

To clarify this point one can refer to the neo-Platonic painting of the Italian high renaissance as presented by Botticelli, the Nineteenth Century neo-classicism of Ingre and the Twentieth Century master, Pablo Picasso. These artists have all been known to appropriate ideas from classical Greek sources. Despite the increased backlog of information in our age, classical sources are still viable and contribute to the work of the present, irregardless of the ever-changing historical context.

In the following chapters, the intention is to provide a context for the discussion of my painting concerns. Due to the homogeneity of our background and culture, this discourse intentionally bears an eclectic frame of reference. The appropriate place to begin is with the Greenbergian tautology of American high modernism because my consciousness of 'high' art developed during the waning of this era.

CHAPTER TWO

THE RECENT PAST

American High Modernism:

When discussing the progression of art as a cultural or a cultured activity, address must be given to the individual periods as they are significant within their own time. Art can provide people of the future with a certain amount of insight into the time-scape from which it emerged. Through the comparison of period definitions, we can understand the contextual changes in art-historical terms. As an example the abstract expressionist movement, also known abroad as the American school of painting, was significant for the following reasons. Clement Greenberg noted:

The abstract expressionists started out in the 40's with a diffidence they could not help feeling as American artists. They were very much aware of the provincial fate around them. This country had had good painters in the past, but none with enough sustained originality or power to enter the mainstream of Western art. The aims of the abstract expressionists were diverse within a certain range, and they did not feel, and still do not feel that they constitute a school or movement with enough unity to be covered by a single term - like 'abstract expressionist', for instance. But aside from their culture as painters and the fact that their art was more or less abstract, what they had in common from the first was an ambition - or rather the will to it - to break out of provinciality.²

Perhaps the most important notion that Greenberg mentions here is the ambitious nature of the movement. These painters were trying to break from a European tradition into a course that was wholly American. Their realized goal was the first

unprecedented American art movement that received serious critical attention in Europe, which up to this time was the world art centre.³

The abstract expressionist period is best exemplified through the work of Jackson Pollock. One of the best examples of Pollock's painting is 'Number 1' (Figure 2), dating from 1948, that is presently in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Meyer Schapiro considered Pollock's work as representative of:

. . . the first complex style in history which proceeds from elements that are not pre-ordered as closed articulated shapes. The artist today creates an order out of unordered variable elements to a greater degree than the artist of the past.⁴

Schapiro felt that one of the objectives of this art-form, determined through the conscious negation of traditional respects paid to the natural shape, was that an artist such as Pollock could provoke " . . . within himself, in his spontaneous motions and play, an automatic production of chance."⁵ He also felt that at the time, no other art exhibited " . . . to that degree in the final result the presence of the individual, his spontaneity and the concreteness of his procedure."⁶ Through chance and so-called accident, artists such as Pollock - were in the immediate sense - deliberately drawing from the void. They submitted the results of their work to their personal critical faculties in order to decide whether to accept or reject the completed work. The culmination of this process was an art format that although

representative of nothing within the empirical world, did indeed become part of tangible reality, as abstract expressionist painting.

The non-representational nature of this kind of painting was another significant aspect. It had nothing to do with rendering naturalistic perceptions from the real world. We can see this in the painting 'Adam' (Figure 3), by Barnett Newman dating from 1952. What the artist was trying to achieve in his work was " . . . an art that would suggest the mysterious sublime rather than the beautiful."⁷ This connotes an attempt to apprehend the ineffable rather than to represent mere natural beauty. While working towards such an end:

. . . . Newman reduced his pictorial language to two basic elements, the large unbroken area of unmodulated colour, or colour field, and the column or caesura of another colour interrupting the field or breaking through it. He spoke of mankind's earliest expression, "a poetic outcry . . . of awe and anger at his tragic state, at his own self awareness and at his own helplessness before the void" . . .⁸

Rather than pursuing the definition of natural realities, Newman was trying to evoke the raw emotion of a primordial state of being. He set about this through the arrangement of abstract relationships between the compositional structure and the use of colour within his paintings. The inherent purpose of his style was to elicit a response from the viewer that was in keeping with the primordial chord he was attempting to strike. His painting strove to make tangible the intangible, purely through its

abstract expressionistic properties.

In reproduced form, this kind of painting has little to offer the viewer other than documented proof of its existence. It has to be seen first hand in order to be appreciated. The paint, the surface and the scale of such paintings are important factors that have to be understood by the viewer in order to appreciate the artists intended purpose and involvement with such work. These paintings were made to be viewed within a controlled architectural environment and do not readily lend themselves to reproduction. This does not in any way imply that such painting is bad. Rather, it illustrates the problem of learning about such work through secondary sources, if one does not actually have the opportunity to experience the work in its particular environment. In this regard, geographical isolation can be detrimental to the process of learning about such painting.

The most significant aspect of abstract expressionism was in its acceptance as a major art movement in the international arena. Even though it began as a reaction against the prevailing trends in European art, the movement firmly established an American sensibility within the circles that it was deviating from. This result brought about the period of American high modernism, and subsequently a new geographical and conceptual capital of artistic endeavor.

The Decline of American High Modernism:

Once American high modernism had arrived through the sweat, labour and originality of the early practitioners and their apologists, the following generation for the most part merely maintained the prescribed ideals. Barbara Rose has noted that through:

. . . the arduous route that transformed late Abstract Expressionism into simplified styles subsuming elements from earlier modern movements into a synthesis, what lay behind Abstract Expressionism was forgotten ancient history in the art schools, where recipes for instant styles (two tablespoons Reinhardt, one half-cup Newman, a dash of Rothko with Jasper Johns frosting was a favorite) pressed immature artists into claiming superficial trademarks.⁹

What Rose has described here is something of a cultural cul-de-sac. Art work from the historical past has been forsaken for the sake of a new sensibility. A major difficulty in this sort of situation is that through the repudiation of the past, the new painting is forced to feed off itself. As the process went on from abstract expressionism through post-painterly abstraction into minimalism, the ongoing trend became severely reductive.

In his article "Farewell to Modernism", Kim Levin noted of the modernist trend that:

. . . in practise it was elitist: the public never understood abstract art. It was as specialized as modern science. And emphasis on structure rather than substance was what we came to see in it. Like science, modern art has come to seem dogmatic and brutal.¹⁰

A similar revelation came to me while attending a lecture by the French-Canadian artist, Yves Gaucher in conjunction with a retrospective exhibition of his work at the Glenbow Museum in 1979. In discussing his 'colour band' paintings that were made during the mid-seventies, he said that essentially he intended these paintings as " . . . 'fields' for contemplation. (He chose to) . . . eliminate gesture, inflection and often even colour, in favor of neat edges, anonymous surfaces and greyed down tones."¹¹ When viewing the exhibition, it became apparent to me that such art had become self-serving. This brings to mind Levin who also said:

Modernism, towards the end of its reign, came to be seen as reductive and austere. Its purity came to seem puritanical. It was in the terminology - in a word, formalism - which implied not only the structures of modernist invention but also the strictures of rigid adherence to established forms.¹²

Questioning the integrity of this kind of art is not the point. Rather, I could not subscribe to it as a practitioner and it became more sensible to pursue a subjective course involving the use of the figure along with recognizable imagery. This was primarily because of a compulsion to deal with a subject-matter that was humanistic and comprehensible to a greater audience than the people who prescribed the dogmas. It became important to draw with paint, despite the fact that the high modernist school considered drawing as " . . . a remnant of the dead European past to be purged . . ."¹³ The mainstream seemed a cyclic

visual regurgitation, subsequently, it came time to go against the grain in order to seek if not more fertile ground, then at least a conceptual climate that I could grow in.

Although this scenario briefly describes a rejection of certain aspects of high modernist art, it doesn't necessarily have to be treated as a reactionary or a subversive decision. I did not feel that my sensibilities could or should contribute anything more to modernism's slumbering state. Furthermore, its ongoing reductive process and associated theory shut the door to further development. The small space that remained was claustrophobic.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PRESENT

Post Modernism:

Post modernism began, not just with a disillusionment in the art object, but with a distrust of the whole man-made world, the consumer culture, and the scientific pretense of objectivity. It began with a return to nature. The mood was no longer optimistic. Logic no longer sufficed. Technology has undesirable side-effects and in a world threatened by defoliated land, polluted air and water, and depleted resources, by chemical additives, radioactive wastes, and space-debris, progress is no longer the issue. The future has become a question of survival.

. . . .

Post modernism is impure. It knows about shortages. It knows about inflation and devaluation. It is aware of the increased cost of objects. And so it quotes, scavenges, ransacks, recycles the past. Its method is synthesis rather than analysis. It is style-free and free style. Playful and full of doubt, it denies nothing. Tolerant of ambiguity, contradiction, complexity, incoherence, it is eccentrically inclusive. It mimics life, accepts awkwardness and crudity, takes an amateur stance. Structures by time rather than form, concerned with context rather than style, it uses memory, research, confession, fiction - with irony, whimsy, and disbelief. Subjective and intimate, it blurs the boundaries between the world and the self. It is about identity and behavior.¹⁴

Here, Kim Levin offers a simple but apt definition of post modernism. One of the most important factors in this description is the apparent increase in a collective sense of human insecurity. To quote Mark Nichols from Macleans, a popular news magazine:

Increasingly, environmentalists and scientists are voicing concern over the massive damage that is being inflicted on the Earth's ecology as an exploding human population mines and farms the planet's land into ex-

haustion. Land-clearing is destroying the world's remaining forests - which play a vital role in the Earth's respiratory system by absorbing carbon dioxide - and industrialization spews polluting substances into the envelope of air that supports life on earth. Already, the spectacle of slum-ridden megacities in the Third World, the accumulation of mounds of garbage and festering dumps of chemical waste and the pollution of oceans have made the planet a less habitable place.¹⁵

It is becoming increasingly clear in our age that a complacent attitude is an unhealthy one. If we allow our planet to dissolve into waste, the same possibility can perhaps happen to the human population. Unfortunately, the mechanisms that push toward global annihilation are the products of a higher technology that in many respects started off with the intention of making the world a better place to live on. Now, nature is being given the opportunity to lash back with a vengeance.

The technological developments that are now giving us so much trouble have been a product of the modernist age. The industrialists followed the same form of logic as the artists. Their wish was to build a new world that was superior to the old one. Consequently, nature has been treated in a manner not unlike the way that the abstract expressionists treated 'old' art forms. In the case of art, the self-serving aspects wrapped within the pure formalist approach proved to be detrimental in the end. This is not to imply that it failed or was bad. The significance of such work is justifiable because the period that it served believed and trusted in technological development. Now, contemporary

artists are acutely aware of the dark side of such progress. The modernist world seemed relatively stable. As the general deterioration of this point of view has taken on catastrophic proportions, it has become increasingly difficult to maintain an optimistic view of our collective future. Perhaps the time has come to abandon the ivory tower of modernism and seek out a new approach in the making of art that will run parallel to the changes that we shall inevitably be forced to make in other sectors of our life. This could basically be considered as a survival tactic.

Arthur Kroker has asked:

. . . what then of the place of art and theory in the post-modern scene? Signs of detritus, wreckage and refuse, which moving at the edge of fascination and despair, signal that this is the age of the death of the social culture and the triumph of excremental culture.¹⁶

This notion is interesting as it lends to post modernism the attribute of being a point in time where the linear development of history has been radically interrupted. It insinuates a change in emphasis from what people do in anticipation of the future, to what they do through taking stock of the present as an accumulation of what has taken place in the past. Rather than looking for the inherent traditional values of things and building onto the tradition, we are now treating them as by-products of our social development and are diffusing into them.

Although this implies something of a reversal in historical development, it does not have to be taken as being

a reactive or a retrogressive move. Rather than carrying on with the modernist fashion of rejecting the past in favor of progressive invention, post modernists take stock of the historiographic accumulation, reassess its implications and assert meaning to it in a different way. As the linear development has left art in a rather precarious position of reducing itself to nothing, it seems foolish to follow such a set course. History cannot be changed, but the way in which it is viewed can be. By changing our point of view, perhaps we can gain some new insight through the study of old art.

Kroker's notion of the 'excremental' is a little extreme due to the obviously scatological connotations. There is, though, a relationship that can be drawn between 'dung' and 'compost'. Both are fertilizing agents in that they can provide a bed of decay from which things grow. When used metaphorically in regard to the future development of our culture, both can provide such a fertile breeding ground. The implication here, when applied to the making of art, is a reassessment of the contextual nature of the history of art. Rather than plotting it stage by stage and development by development as a progression of events through linear time, it can be seen for what it is as a cumulative body. After all, the relationship that one has with anything depends primarily on a personal state of mind in the immediate present, despite the fact that the present is pro-

duced through processes that have unfolded in the past. When looking at an art-object, it is seen in the present from a contemporary point of view, no matter what period it may have come from. The intrinsic value of such an object lies in the fact that it can still be appreciated in the present. Historical art has been brought into, or preserved for this time as it has constantly contributed to the human experience. In this respect, such art can provide an example through which contemporary artists can increase their creative potential. This notion of a contextual shift in art appreciation illustrates a deconstructive tendency in post modern art.

Deconstruction:

To quote Jacques Derrida:

The movements of deconstruction do not destroy (solicitent) structures from the outside. They are not possible and effective, nor can they take accurate aim, except by inhabiting those structures. Inhabiting them 'in a certain way', because one always inhabits, and all the more when one does not suspect it. Operating necessarily from the inside, borrowing all the strategies and economic resources of subversion from the old structure, borrowing them structurally, that is to say without being able to isolate their elements and atoms, the enterprise of deconstruction always in a certain way falls prey to its own work.¹⁷

If one were to look at it this way, the 'structure' that is discussed in this passage could be considered as representative of art history. An example of post modern art that illustrates the principle of deconstruction is Ludger Gerdes' diptych of 1982, 'Two Curtain Walls, Allegory

of Friendship - Artist and Architect and Three Girls' (Figure 4). It consists of two draped canvases, painted in oil, measuring cm. 500 x 250 each. The panels are simply composed. They are identical in that they both share a common architectural motif that hearkens back to such structural predecessors as the facade of the Treasury of the Athenians from the Sanctuary of Apollo on the site of Delphi (Figure 5), which was built in the fifth century B.C.. Although Gerdes' approximation of this motif has been simplified, stylized and flattened, it has obviously been appropriated from another source. He has placed on either side of these facades what appear to be nineteenth century gas lamps. This is a peculiar combination of art historical and cultural elements. On the right-hand panel, within the facade, we see the artist and architect. They are painted white, and bring to mind classical marble statuary. On the left-hand panel he has positioned three girls, rendered in a similar fashion. Despite their white stony appearance, the figures are wearing clothing that is contemporary. The three women evoke the theme of the three graces, which also takes us back to classical antiquity. Gerdes has said of his work:

I'm interested in the rediscovery of traditional means and methods in the arts. I believe that many of the old traditions are still relevant to shaping our lives and molding our ways of seeing things. Doubts concerning the absolute validity of modern methods abound. The rediscovery of older and alternative traditions stretches from farming to medicine. I am convinced of the arrogance and falseness of modern art's absolutist

claim that all older art is obsolete and passé.

I'm interested in the capacity for integration that exists in much older art: integration of the various genres of art with one another and integration of art with nature. These examples of integration compose a magnificent metaphor for communication, a communication that almost makes us forget the monologues of the modern purists.¹⁸

Gerdes allows us a new way of looking at the making of art, as well as giving new purpose to the function of historical art. New life has been given to and brought out of the classical archetype. It has been transported into a new context. It has also been transformed into another static coordinate in time that can be utilized for its own merits in the future. In this sense, it falls prey to its own process. This brings to mind Derrida again. He added that:

Deconstruction cannot be restricted or immediately pass to a neutralization: it must, through a double gesture, a double science, a double writing - put into practice a 'reversal' of the classical opposition and a general 'displacement' of the system. It is on that condition alone that deconstruction will provide the means of 'intervening' in the field of oppositions it criticizes and that is also a field of non-discursive forces.¹⁹

Although Derrida is discussing deconstruction in relation to written communication, the model relates to Gerdes' visual communication. He has displaced modern art by using primarily classical Greek elements and making them relevant in a contemporary cultural activity. Derrida further adds that:

. . . deconstruction does not consist in moving from one concept to another, but in reversing and displacing a conceptual order as well as the non-conceptual order

with which it is articulated. . . . to leave to this new concept the old name of writing is tantamount to maintaining the structure of the 'graft', the transition and indispensable adherence to an effective 'intervention' in the constituted historical field. It is to give to everything at stake in the operations of deconstruction the chance and the force, the power of communication.²⁰

This statement parallels what Gerdes' intentions seem to be through integrating various styles of art with each other - and with nature - in order to deal with or present 'communication' in a metaphorical sense. This aspect of Derrida's deconstructive theory can be seen in Gerdes' art. Art history, rather than being the linear measurement of what has developed into and out of what is or has been culturally significant, can be reassessed and recycled. Although in a superficial sense this could merely be treated as a game, it does not have to be this way. The intrinsic sensibilities offered in specific periods of art retain for posterity a certain order, which does not have to be compromised. Rather than trivializing the past, this process can allow historical art to contribute to the present in a different way than it previously has.

This process was not employed during the modernist period. As an example of the modernist attitude towards such matters, Barnett Newman said, in 1948:

We do not need the obsolete props of an outmoded and antiquated legend. We are creating images whose reality is self-evident and which are devoid of the props and crutches that evoke associations with outmoded images, both sublime and beautiful. We are freeing ourselves from the impediments of memory, association, nostalgia, legend, myth, or what have you,

that have been the devices of western European painting. Instead of making 'cathedrals' out of Christ, man, or 'life', we are making it out of ourselves, out of our own feelings. The image we produce is the self-evident one of revelation, real and concrete, that can be understood by anyone who will look at it without the nostalgic glasses of history.²¹

One of the inherent problems in this attitude is that as time progressed, the work that was formulated also became 'outmoded', 'antiquated' and therefore self-negating.

Through acceptance of post modernist theory, art expression has the capability to become part of the greater body of art history. Modernist art is now part of the past that it reviled. Such art was valuable to its time and is still valuable to us as we learn of that time through it, despite the attitude towards history and the fact that work from that period is now a matter of art history. Barnett Newman's work has become part of the collective vocabulary of the language of art because of its significance. In the post modern context, he can now hold hands with the past and contribute to the future.

Despite the rifts between various periods of art, we have one living body of art history, modernism and post modernism included. As artists, we inhabit this body. We borrow from and contribute towards it. We can neither ignore nor refute this body, for in the process we would be doing the same thing to ourselves. We can learn from and utilize the past, so there is no point in distancing ourselves from it. Any period of art is a composite part of the same whole

to which we also subscribe membership.

Although the logic of modernism may not have survived as a practical tool in the post modern idiom, its product is still valid. The primary change that has taken us from one period to the next is contextual in nature. Values and attitudes have changed. What remains constant in the passage through time is the spirit, or the will to make art. This factor adapts to the various conditions that prevail in the present tense. In a sense, this spirit contains the wealth of the past. It embodies the whole. We do not have to feel responsible for maintaining the cutting edge of art-historical progress. Instead, we can turn history into a garden full of information. We can wander through this garden picking and choosing, taking things back into the studio for redefinition and reintegration into the post modern sensibility.

CHAPTER FOUR

MY WORK

An Introduction:

My work is representative of a post modern attitude and shares a definite affinity with such artists as Gerdes, who also have moved out of the modernist idiom. To put it simply, as an artist I appropriate whatever is available to facilitate a point where the image conveys the intended message. As my work communicates in a literal fashion, I use recognizable imagery. The sources of the images are quite diverse. A good part of the time researching for the thesis exhibition was spent reading psychoanalytical literature, particularly that of Carl Jung and Esther Harding. Because of a need for narrative communication, a special interest was directed towards the development of symbols.

In regard to the Western religions, Jung stated that:

. . . the standpoint of the creeds is archaic; they are full of impressive mythological symbolism which, if taken literally, comes into insufferable conflict with knowledge. But if, for instance, the statement that Christ rose from the dead is to be understood not literally but symbolically, then it is capable of various interpretations that do not collide with knowledge and do not impair the meaning of the statement. The objection that understanding it symbolically puts an end to the Christian hope of immortality is invalid, because long before the coming of Christianity mankind believed in a life after death and therefore had no need of the Easter event as a guarantee of immortality.²²

This attitude towards literal and symbolic interpretation

opens up many possibilities. It is reminiscent of Derrida's simple definition of deconstruction wherein what one has to do is " . . . look at things in a different way."²³ Throughout the exhibition, I have made use of certain alchemical, mythical and religious symbols that were discovered during this research, notably the alembic and the snake.

My work is about being human. In this respect, despite the modernist / post modernist rift, I agree with Barnett Newman who said, "The self, terrible and constant, is for me the subject-matter of painting."²⁴ This particular body of work represents the past eleven months of my life. It is autobiographical, but not in a truly narrative sense. The images pertain to certain problematic junctures that took place and irrevocably changed my personal circumstances, and the paintings represent an attempt to analyze and understand these problems.

As a painter, I prefer to work on six foot squares of canvas with oil paint. The canvases are stapled directly on to the wall as I do not like dealing with the perfect edge that accompanies the use of stretcher bars. I use this format as it relates directly to the human scale. The life-sized figure fits comfortably into the six foot square. The ragged edge of the canvas allows the image to integrate with the wall. This does not happen with the use of stretcher bars, as they turn paintings into objects that sit on top of the wall. If it were possible, I would

prefer to paint directly on to the wall itself, as fresco painting has always interested me. As my paintings have to remain portable, this approach is out of the question.

I prefer to draw with the paint, and consistently use a number six hog's-hair brush. This ensures a uniform treatment throughout the expanse of canvas in regard to the notation of the imagery. I do not make preparatory drawings before I start on the canvas. The evolution of the painting, from beginning to end takes place entirely on this surface. If certain elements develop in the wrong direction, or I am unhappy with them, they get obliterated. When I feel satisfied with what I have done, I staple a fresh canvas onto the wall and begin a new painting.

The Exhibition:

The exhibition is comprised of nine paintings. Each painting is accompanied by a drawing, which was provided in order to expand upon information concerning its subject-matter. The drawings were made after all of the nine paintings were completed. As carriers of supplemental information, they are intended to broaden the scope through which the sensibilities put forth by the paintings may be assimilated by the viewer. The exhibition is interpretative, serving a similar function to Hieronymous Bosch's 'Seven Deadly Sins' that were derived from the medieval system

of virtues " . . . not by personifications of abstract concepts, but by apparently random scenes from daily life. People's thoughts and actions are directed against unsuitable goals."²⁵ Bosch's treatment of the sins operates in a purely narrative fashion. They are very easy to read and contain a humour which is comprehensible to most viewers.

My paintings, on the other hand, do not signify a literal unfolding of events. Rather, they address the psychological processes that underlie the events. The inherent meaning attributed to the paintings comes from my personal understanding and involvement with these processes. Making these paintings has been a catalyst to provide insight into the prevailing situation. Through exhibiting them, I am sharing this personal information with the viewer.

The emphasis of this exhibition is psychological and is indicative of circumstances that surround certain negative attitudes and emotions. The paintings attempt to articulate these circumstances, apprehend them and lead towards a more positive alternative. The points at issue that the individual works represent indulge themselves with the singular conceptual framework underwhich they operate. They are to be viewed in the following order: 'Ambivalence', 'Inertia', 'Arrest', 'Black Heart', 'White Heart', 'Eden', 'Disintegration', 'Glass Man' and 'Retribution'. The first

three paintings deal with various aspects of the melancholic condition, the second three are concerned with the immediate repercussions of this condition within certain parameters and the final three deal with possible solutions to the problem.

Melancholia:

The first of the three paintings dealing with melancholia is entitled 'Ambivalence' (Slide 1), which is a symptomatic quality or state that precedes the condition of inertia. The ambivalence this picture conveys alludes to the inability to decide what course should be taken concerning matters of the heart. Ambivalence can be a form of indecision bound between the polarities of love and hate.

To quote Freud:

. . . clinical observation shows not only that love is with unexpected regularity accompanied by hate (ambivalence), and not only that in human relationships hate is frequently a forerunner of love, but also that in many circumstances hate changes into love and love into hate. If this change is anything more than a succession in time, then clearly the ground is cut away from under a distinction so fundamental as that between erotic instincts and death instincts, one which presupposes the existence of physiological processes running counter to each other.²⁶

Freud equates ambivalence with hatred. He has also associated it with the death instinct. Love has been paired with the erotic instinct which can also presumably signify a survival instinct. Rather than equating ambivalence with hatred in this painting, it has been treated as the in-

ability to make a choice between love and hate, or rather. the situation that arises when, within any individual, love and hatred negate each other. because of the development of an inability to recognize the unique characteristics of each opposite. When the characteristics of one become muddled with those of the other, the result is an amorphous glob of non-directive emotion. This ambivalent state is the condition which the first painting attempts to depict. If a person were to be so emotionally indiscriminating as to be unaware of this state, it would be difficult to address actions to alter it. The business of life would become stagnant. The ambivalent condition would contribute to feelings of despair. Miguel de Unamuno has summed up this feeling in the short verse:

Come closer . . . closer . . . free me from myself,
for I am drowning in my nothingness;
give me soul, for, I have no soul,
Why do I want the world still to possess?²⁷

Unamuno is expressing a result that can be caused by such existential ennui.

In 'Ambivalence', this stalemate has been described through the juxtaposition of a life image with one of death. The afflicted person stands below. All three subsist in rather murky Gothic surroundings. Life has been rendered as a mask-face through an image borrowed from Picasso. This type of representation of the human face was a device that he developed around 1905 as a consequence of studying archaic Iberian statuary.²⁸ An important aspect of this treatment

of the human face, in the context of my painting, is the apparent meaning Picasso may have ascribed to it. Mark Rosenthal considered Picasso's interpretation of the face as a mask to provide a " . . . superstitious protective concealment of the individual and his / her soul."²⁹ He also felt that it was partly due to the artist's interests in Nietzschean philosophy:

To transcend the pain and suffering of existence, Nietzsche writes: "Every profound spirit needs a mask; nay, more, around every profound spirit there continually grows a mask, owing to the constantly false, that is to say, 'superficial' interpretation of every word he utters, every step he takes, every sign of life he manifests."³⁰

In 'Ambivalence', the mask serves a similar function.

Rather than being a disguise, it tears below the surface and the superficial exterior of human form. It represents the fundamental life essence that perpetuates survival.

The skeleton on the left-hand side of the painting represents death and the death instinct. Man, as a mortal being, is aware that the shadow of death is always beside him. The skeleton and the mask represent this shadow of death opposing the light of life in symbolic terms, regarding the mental state of the figure standing below. This is a similar situation to that presented by Hans Holbein the Younger in his Fifteenth Century wood-cut print, 'The Count', from the series entitled 'The Dance of Death'. The dancing skeleton has come to take the Count away. In earlier medieval times, as J. Huizinga has noted, the dancing corpse

that led away the living did ' . . . not represent death itself, but a corpse: the living man such as he will presently be. . . . It is a dance of the dead and not of death."³¹ This confrontation between the human and the knowledge of his inevitable demise is similar to the effect that I painted into 'Ambivalence'. The difference from death, in this case, is a form of mental suspension. The person is as the living dead. His life has been neutralized prematurely because of a weakened condition, ambivalence, that has rendered him inert.

The next painting describing this condition has been aptly titled 'Inertia'. (Slide 2). Esther Harding said of this condition:

. . . an individual sets himself a task that ordinarily would not seem too hard. But if it runs counter to his instinctive wishes, it may prove to be impossibly hard. The very idea of the task may become repugnant to him, and no sooner does he set about it when he is assailed by an intolerable heaviness and inertia. Only by the greatest effort can he keep his eyelids from closing, while naturally he is engulfed in a dark and heavy mood that weights his thoughts and chokes his desires. This is the old enemy of mankind, inertia, evidence of lack of psychological energy. The requisite energy has either never emerged from the hidden depths of the psyche, where it has its source, or else has fallen back into those same depths. In either case it is not available for life. The light of awareness has been extinguished temporarily or has never been kindled and the psyche remains dark and heavy, for sloth is equivalent to unawareness, unconsciousness, stupidity.³²

In 'Inertia', the human figure personifies this condition. He is in a zombie-like stupor. The dreary barren winter landscape outside the window enforces the notion of 'mental hibernation'. The side of the painting that he oc-

cupies is dark and colourless. He is suspended above an open pit. The right-hand side of the painting presents the other half of his house which exudes life and colour. If only he had the energy to turn his head around, he would see this and perhaps free himself from the torpor. Although this minor physical act would be easy, his inert condition prevents such a possibility. There is no will, there is no desire, or need to change anything. The man is physically alive, but psychologically dead. Ambivalence and inertia have brought the process of life to a halt.

The posture of this figure was in part derived from Francis Bacon's 'Pope II' (Figure 6). The Bacon painting was part of a series that revolved about a study of Velasquez's portrait of Pope Innocent, that is in the Palazzo Doria in Rome, which Bacon admired very much even though he had never seen it.³³ Although the original portrait is a very formal example of its kind, Bacon, with the aid of a reproduction used it as a point of departure more than anything else. The pose is similar but the face is grotesque. The 'Pope' is transfixed in his chair and appears to be emitting a ghastly cry which is both inner and outer. In this respect, it is similar to 'The Scream' by Eduard Munch. Psychologically speaking, Bacon's 'Pope' is quite disturbing. In 'Inertia', I borrowed the general presentation of the figure, but provided it with a psychological state that would suit my needs.

Our subject in the chair has been thoroughly immobilized by his psychological condition. The next painting, 'Arrest' (Slide 3), is a symbolic depiction of the consequences of melancholia. The significance of this image is accentuated by the choke-hold with which the serpent has enfeebled the two knobs of flesh. The serpent has been derived from early Christian iconography and represents sin.³⁵ In this painting, the sin is sloth, and all else that is a part of such a condition. Esther Harding has said that the renegade spirit of man is closely related in its nature to the slothful aspects of such a beast.³⁵ As sloth and inertia go hand in hand, the renegade spirit can be recognized as the result of such a condition. She further says of this that:

Sloth is indeed a deadly sin if we regard the question of bondage and freedom as a moral problem, perhaps as 'the' moral problem of mankind. But to regard sloth as the problem of inner freedom is very different from taking the moralizing attitude - one 'ought not' to be slothful - as if that were the end of the matter. For laziness is not overcome by a pious hope of virtue, nor is it exorcised by a statement that it ought not to be. Recognition of the shortcoming will result in the state of hopelessness and depression, . . . or it will lead to an attempt to release oneself from the lower and more unconscious, instinctive side of the psyche, which is amoral - perhaps premoral is the better term - by identifying oneself with the upper or moral side of the personality, in a futile attempt to pull oneself up by one's bootstraps. Such an attitude usually lends to a compulsive and useless activity that is the opposite of sloth, though just as unfree; or it produces a paralyzing sense of guilt and inferiority that results in an activity not far removed from the original condition.³⁶

Inertia can also be the effect of a " . . . regressive longing, the secret desire for death and oblivion that is latent in every human being."³⁷ This regressive element also

partially constitutes the renegade spirit.

It is this component of the psyche that always refuses to cooperate in the human effort to domesticate nature within and without, and to create a more civilized life for mankind. The renegade tendency represents the eternal outlaw, the being who wants what he wants and refuses to pay the price, always seeking to exploit the industry of others. It incorporates greed in all its many forms - greed for food, lust for sexual satisfaction or power, the demand for ease and pleasure, regardless of the cost to someone else. It is the negative aspect of the instinctual urges that keeps the world moving.³⁷

The definition of sin as a snake symbol in 'Arrest' is centered on the immobilizing force that prevails within the negative connotations of sloth.

Despite the fact that they have been neutralized, the knobs of flesh symbolize the more positive or creative aspects of human endeavor. Their abilities to be a positive motivating force have been checked. There is the possibility that they can again become active once the snake has been conquered or tamed. These fleshy knobs were derived from the bulbous heads that topped the double pelican flask, an alchemistic distillation vessel. This instrument is more clearly depicted in the accompanying drawing (Slide 12). It has been known by various names including " . . . the alembic, the vase of Hermes, the 'house of glass', and the 'prison of the king'."³⁸ It was:

. . . likened to the pelican because of the popular belief that the female bird wounds her own breast in order to nourish her young on her blood - a myth that had great significance to the alchemists.³⁹

This myth was also symbolic to the early Christians as it

represented the redemption of mankind through Christ.⁴⁰ This in part contributes to the 'good' purpose it plays in the painting.

The alembic functions in the following manner. When a liquid is heated in one body, its distillate will " . . . discharge into the belly of the other, and vice versa, so that the contents are intermingled again and again."⁴¹ The emphasis of such experimentation is on rotary movement. Harding has compared this to the mandala symbolism that teaches:

. . . when the fires of desirousness are checked or frustrated, the individual is thrown back upon himself, and his thoughts begin to go round and round. So long as this circulatory activity is concerned only with seeking a means for escape, like the movement of a squirrel in a cage, no transformation can take place. But when the thoughts are held by a conscious effort to exploring the meaning of the experience, the circular movement becomes a spiral leading down into the underlying and unconscious roots of the occurrence. The meditation with its inner concentration, like the light rotation of the mandala symbolism, prevents the energy from flowing outward and leads even deeper into the unconscious, where it activates the latent creative source at the centre.⁴²

The psychological function ascribed to the mandala is very similar to the physical process that takes place within the alembic. This is where its symbolism is rooted. As the mandala is generally sealed from what lies external to it, the vessel must also be sealed and made of strong material:

. . . otherwise, as soon as the individual gets into difficulties, and things begin to get hot and uncomfortable, a leak will develop in the vessel, or, to use a slang expression having an alchemistic flavour, he will

'Blow off the lid'. . . . Then the hot liquid will boil over in scalding reactions, and the heated vapours, the spirit, will escape. (Each of these terms has a double meaning; in the alchemistic usage the physical and the psychological meaning are amalgamated or perhaps not even differentiated.) The alchemists repeatedly warn against allowing this to happen. For the purpose is to transform the spirit: if that escapes the whole undertaking will be ruined. In the "Turba Philosophorum" it is said:

'The spirit being escaped from the body and hidden in the other spirit, both become volatile. Therefore the Wise have said that the gate of flight must not be opened for that which would flee, by whose flight death is occasioned.' "43

In this description of the distillation process, there can be seen a strong metaphorical allusion to the preservation of mental health. Losing one's mind could be equivalent to allowing the precious vapours to disperse into the atmosphere. Although anger is the most obvious parallel in relation to 'blowing the lid', any unresolved mental activity can be substituted.

Although inertia represents a passive state, it also displays a loss of control or a perversion in regards to self motivation. In this case, the inability to take action can be as bad for you as committing an obviously irrational act. This is what the painting 'Arrest' is meant to convey, in symbolic terms. The snake is impeding the function of the alembic. The purpose of this painting within the context of the exhibition is to illustrate the point in the cycle where a form of mental disintegration is beginning to affect others than just the individual concerned. The next three paintings deal with the consequences of such an occurrence.

The Lost Spirit:

The Painting 'Black Heart' (Slide 4) illustrates a level of dissolution at which point the spirit leaves the man. In order to elucidate upon this point, the alembic can again serve as a metaphor. In regard to the distillate and the process through which it was procured, the:

. . . vapour was frequently derived from mercury, which as the 'spiritus mercurius' was considered to be a spiritual being, and was at times equated to the holy spirit. . . . Above all, it was the spirit personified as Mercurius, he who took wing and fled away when he was heated, which no other metal would do, and then miraculously recreated himself on the cooler parts of the condenser; he alighted upon or, as the alchemists said, he 'projected' himself upon the glass or upon the base metal, turning it to his own silver colour.⁴⁴

If the vessel was to form a leak, the vapour would be lost.

In 'Black Heart' there is a tornado-like image, a whirling vortex, rising from the head of the figure. This is a personification of the condenser blowing its top. The figure's melancholic state has caused the spirit to leave. In other words, as he is not sound of mind, he can be likened to a faulty vessel or a cracked pot. In the psychological idiom, Mercurius is a " . . . highly important unconscious content . . . " or a " . . . projection of the unconscious . . . "⁴⁵ The alchemists defined it as 'spirit' and 'soul'.⁴⁶ In 'Black Heart', the man is losing this essence.

The composition and the formative idea behind this painting was derived from a lithograph made by Jim Dine in 1984 entitled 'The Black Heart'. My interpretation of the image was in respect to heavy hearted emotional

values. In 'Black Heart', I buried the heart beneath the imagery that evolved after it was set down. Although the heart is still evident, it is not an important part of the final image. It served its purpose in the rudimentary stages of the painting as a visual stimulus from which to draw on.

'White Heart' (Slide 5) is a sister painting to 'Black Heart'. It was partially derived from another lithograph by Jim Dine entitled 'The Earth', the principal image being a white heart. The figure in 'White Heart' is hermaphroditic. There are vines growing out of this figure who also illustrates another side of Mercurius, that being the:

. . . division of the tree soul into a masculine and a feminine figure . . . (This) . . . corresponds to the alchemical Mercurius as the life principle of the tree, for as an hermaphrodite, he is duplex.⁴⁷

Although this may seem quite reticulated, it does make sense, as in 'White Heart', the figure opposes the man in 'Black Heart' in order to create a balance. As he has lost the spirit, the tree numen is containing it. As Mercurius is the life principle of the tree, the tree's identity with Mercurius, the 'spiritus vegetativus' confirms the view that it signifies the life process. It symbolizes the opus and the transformation process both physically and morally.⁴⁸

Since the opus is a life, death, and rebirth mystery, the tree as well acquires this significance and in addition the quality of wisdom, as we have seen from the view of the Barbeliots in Irenaeus: 'From man [=Anthropos] and gnosis is born the tree, which they also call gnosis.'⁴⁹

In this sense, while 'White Heart' dwells upon negative em-

otion and is psychologically unstable, 'White Heart' represents stability, self-containment and growth.

The element of the tree numen is carried into the painting entitled 'Eden' (Slide 6), which attempts to represent an earthly paradise. The central figurative arrangement revolving about the 'tulip' alludes to the tree of knowledge. In this painting, the tree is not personified. Its fruit has not yet been tasted by man, although the serpent is patiently anticipating the event.

Adam and Eve:

. . . tempted by the serpent - Christ's type of prudence - tasted of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and became subject to all diseases, and to death, which is their crown and consummation, and to labour and to progress. For progress, according to this legend, springs from original sin.⁵⁰

In this passage, Miguel de Unamuno equates disease with progress. He further adds, "May not disease itself be the essential condition of that which we call progress and progress itself a disease?"⁵¹ In the context of the exhibition, the 'tree' in 'Eden' is representative of such an idea. The disease we are discussing is melancholia, as it is a form of psychosis. Due to the inert state that it can render an individual, it impedes progress. As the melancholic does not have the faculties at his or her disposal to arise from this torpor, it can be considered as the disease of the living dead.

In The Garden:

In the painting 'Disintegration' (Slide 7) there is a man and a woman. It is a tragic situation wherein the woman is suffering from melancholia. The man understands the woman's plight but can do nothing for her. There is a flask suspended above the pair that is another representation of the alchemical vessel. It is uncorked and the spirit has evaporated. Where the spirit shall rematerialize is beyond speculation. The figures have been isolated in their own boxes. Although they are presented as a pair, much like Adam and Eve, their relationship is questionable.

The spirit that has left the bottle is once again Mercurius. He has also been recognized as Cupid, who's arrow, " . . . the dart of passion . . . " ⁵² is also an attribute. "He is an 'archer', and indeed one who 'shoots without a bow-string' and is 'nowhere to be found on earth'." ⁵³ In 'Disintegration', although his spirit has dissipated, certain results of his previous presence are painfully evident.

Unamuno has said in The Tragic Sense Of Life that:

The most tragic thing in the world and in life, readers and brothers of mine, is love. Love is the child of illusion and the parent of disillusion; love is consolation in desolation; it is the sole medicine against death, for it is death's brother. ⁵⁴

In 'Disintegration', love and death exist side by side. Death is inherent in the presentation of the melancholic condition and is also apparently responsible for the dissolution of the relationship between the man and the woman.

The man shows signs of caring but is unable to offer love due to the isolation that has come about through the alienating results of ambivalence. He cannot bridge this gap. What recourse can this man take? If the situation is not showing signs of improvement, there is the possibility that he could succumb to the same condition. If he were to fall into an interminable state of inertia, his soul would be lost. This situation must be circumvented. It must be transformed into a positive condition. In the painting 'The Glass Man' (Slide 8) such an event is being anticipated.

The melancholic feeds:

. . . on the metaphysical contradiction between finite and infinite, time and eternity, or whatever one may choose to call it. (He bears the characteristic) . . . of achieving at the same time pleasure and sorrow from the consciousness of this contradiction. The melancholic primarily suffers from the contradiction between time and infinity, while at the same time giving a positive value to his own sorrow "sub specie aeternitatis", since he feels that through his very melancholy, he has a share in eternity.⁵⁵

Finding a positive side to this affliction does not mean that one has to submit to it. Rather, through a process of creative introversion, the melancholic can turn the situation around. In a sense, this would be equivalent to luring back the spirit of Mercurius, and sealing him up. As has been described through the spirit of this character; if a:

. . . hot reaction is repressed or merely abreacted - as when we say 'we blow off steam' or 'give vent' to our feelings - something essential for the transformation will be lost. Consequently there comes a time in the individuation process when the individual must 'consume his own smoke' . . . for if the emotion is repressed the spirit it contains will once more be lost

in the unconscious and will inevitably be projected again and the whole process will have to be repeated.⁵⁶

In this sense, the introspective nature of creative introversion will allow for a second go around. If one were to despair in this situation, the smoke would simply dissipate. If the smoke can be contained and fractioned, it can contribute to the process of recovery. This will bring upon the coming of " . . . that radiant 'crystal body' whose name is self."⁵⁷

This process of individuation can be described in the following manner. The difficulties one encounters going through the ordinary business of life can be compared to stumbling blocks or stones. The melancholic condition can be seen in this way. Such difficulties or mental states can be likened to spirits that inhabit these stones. Once a stone is disturbed, the spirit awakens.⁵⁸

The stone concealing a spirit is encountered in real life in various forms. When a man comes across something that intrigues him, even though to others it may seem dull and inert, a mere stone, he should suspect that this stone contains for him a spirit. If that spirit calls to him he ought to go and rescue it from its stony prison and make for it a more worthy body, whether in his eyes it seems a precious stone, or whether it is that stone of stumbling - a point at issue - which also contains a spirit that will not let him rest in peace until he has redeemed it from its despised condition. . . . this is analogous to the rescue of the dark spirit from the gross matter, or, to use psychological terms, it would mean the rescue of the spirit, or energy, from the unconscious.

The spirit that emerges from the stone of stumbling is a spirit of heaviness, anger, egotism, will to power; if it is removed from the point at issue and introverted, it pierces the circle of the psyche and may come upon the Kundalini snake lying coiled about the centre, asleep in the instincts. If now this serpent is aroused and can be caught in the hermetic vessel and heated with a gentle warmth like that of the brooding hen, as in the

alchemical incubation - the tapas of the yogic meditation, or creative introversion, as the psychologists would say - it will begin to change, until at last it is transformed into the symbol of central value and wisdom. This is the final mystery of the opus. The Alchemistic texts frequently represent it in illustrations showing a winged serpent or fiery dragon within the hermetic vase. . . . when the dragon of warlike lust and anger is contained in the alchemical vessel, these human instincts, that are destructive when in a crude state, then are transformed into social forms leading to co-operative effort and friendship.⁵⁹

No-one should ever be promised that life will be easy, especially where matters of the heart are concerned. In regards to melancholia, Unamuno has said that spiritual love is born of sorrow:

Lovers never attain to a love of self-abandonment, of true fusion of soul and not merely of body, until the heavy pestle of sorrow has bruised their hearts and crushed them in the same mortar of suffering. . . . For to love is to pity; and if bodies are united by pleasure, souls are united by pain.⁶⁰

In this respect, it matters not the physical separation nor the demise of the relationship between the man and woman in 'Disintegration'. What is important is that the conditions that brought it all about have to be resolved. This is where the true problem lies.

In the final painting of the exhibition, 'Retribution' (Slide 9), there is a rather ghastly looking mixture of characters confronting the viewer. This has been, in part, derived from the disarray and mayhem taking place in Michelangelo's treatment of the descent into Hell, depicted in his fresco of 'The Last Judgement' that occupies the altar wall of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican. Hypothetically

speaking, succumbing to any kind of psychosis can be treated as a descent into hell, as the victim of an unhealthy mental state can do very little to alter it. The surrounding world becomes a private hell.

Michelangelo's depiction of Saint Bartholemew was of special interest to me when 'Retribution' was painted. The Saint is holding onto the flayed skin of Michelangelo. In fact, this brutal figure, holding onto the knife with which he has skinned the artist, " . . . shows a strange resemblance . . . to Pietro Aretino, who was a real castigator to the artist."⁶¹ The statement that Michelangelo makes by presenting himself in this manner insinuates that he is reacting to some form of abuse suffered under the hands of Aretino. Although this is probably correct, I have chosen to interpret in another way, albeit metaphorical. The artist has shed his skin. This can symbolize a rebirth process. In 'Retribution', the snake represents the core of evil within an individual. The figures surrounding the snake represent different manifestations of the individual's personality. Some are more unwholesome than others. As Michelangelo has 'shed his skin', the individual must charm the snake and pacify the repulsive aspects of the psyche, as these unhealthy elements can make the world a hellish place.

Psychological regression can be considered as a descent into the nether-world of primitive instincts. In some cases:

. . . the regression stops at the infantile level.
Childish responses and patterns of life are reactivated

and lived through; in favorable cases, this stage of the illness is followed by a recapitulation, in condensed form, of the psychological growth from infancy to adult life. In others, the regression goes to deeper levels, and much more archaic impulses are brought to the surface; unless the regressive process is reversed within certain limits, a deterioration of the psychic structure apparently takes place and full recovery cannot be expected. In the deteriorated dementia praecox patients who form a large part of the permanent population of our hospitals for the insane, the regression failed to come to a halt and the movement was never reversed.⁶²

This passage refers to a negative extreme that can be preceded by the melancholic state. As a neurotic conflict, it has the possibility of moving into a schizophrenic state, and that is where the real damage is done. The figures in 'Retribution' are to impart the horror of this situation.

In order to illustrate the more positive alternative of a full recovery, the drawing 'Retribution' (Slide 18) attempts to visualize a resolution. The principle subjects, a man and a woman, have been presented in a reconciliatory pose. Satan is reaching for them through the sky, but they remain oblivious to his presence. If a full recovery has taken place, they will remain invulnerable to his advances, because the conditions that provide for his play-ground have been exorcised. If there has only been a partial recovery, they will have to sharpen their wits in order to ward off the evil spirit. This sequence has been entitled 'Retribution', not to offer the flavour of revenge, but rather to partake in the receipt of 'just desserts'. In the case of close human relationships, melancholia can be contagious.

In such cases, the person who becomes initially afflicted can do little to remedy the situation due to an immersion into despondency. At this point, the other person has the sole responsibility of taking action against it. A failure to take appropriate measures could result in an insufferable and destructive set of circumstances. If one has the faculties required to perceive the development of such a situation and for some reason feels absolved from any empathetic involvement, one is then renouncing a fundamental responsibility to the other person and can expect retribution. It matters not whether this responsibility has been denied through ignorance or malice. Either way, the results are commensurable.

CHAPTER FIVE

A CONCLUSION

Post Modernism Revisited:

Throughout the body of this exhibition, it has been important for me to take part in the process of giving new life to old ideas. This is not meant to be taken as a trivialization of old paintings, alchemical philosophy, or an analysis of the psychoanalytical theories of Freud, Jung and Harding. Rather, I have combined these sources to come up with an imagery that suits my needs. The narrative content of my painting deals with a certain kind of subject-matter that has benefited from research into such sources.

As the basic premise for this exhibition was understanding and dealing with the condition of melancholia, the practical work involved provided a therapeutic effect. While researching art historical sources, I found that this effect had also been a concern worthy of expression by artists such as Barnett Newman. When artists attempt to achieve such an end or effect as this through the articulation of their chosen visual language, the viewer can also benefit from the therapeutic value inherent within the art-object. Despite the obvious cultural value of a work of art, it can also provide a sensibility that may aid the viewer in a fundamentally personal manner. The function of the Mandala is a good example, as are the paintings of Barnett Newman. I hope.

my work can also provide such a function.

While preparing this exhibition, it was important to investigate the various sources that could illuminate a path for the process of research to facilitate a sensitivity towards the emotional state, melancholia, that needed ordering and finally, articulation. Without the historical, aesthetic and psychological research, the art-work would have been less didactic and simply a reaction to the condition. Although reaction can be an impetus to make art, in itself it doesn't present or cure the problems inherent in the source of inspiration. In this sense, the paintings serve in an active rather than a passive mode.

One of the active ingredients in this body of work has been the assimilation of old ideas, particularly the alchemical symbolism. Through the process of reinterpretation, these ideas have been brought into the present without losing their original significance. This 'refreshing' of the past is something I wish to pursue in the future. As Derrida has said:

'rationality' . . . inaugurates the destruction, not the demolition but the desedimentation, the de-construction, of all the significations that have their source in that of the logos. Particularly the signification of 'truth'.⁶³

With this in mind, the artist today does not have to subscribe to the modernist necessity of refuting the past in favour of pursuing a thoroughly original course. As there is an absolute value in most preserved artifacts, the field

of art history can be mined for valuable insights and ideas. This can also be said for other bodies of information that might contribute to the making of art.

FIGURES



Fig. 1. 'Aphrodite of the Cnidians'

Roman copy after an original of
c. 330 B.C. by Praxiteles.
Marble, height 6'8". Vatican
Museums, Rome.



Fig. 2. 'Number 1 1948'. Oil on Canvas, 5'8"x8'8".

The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Jackson Pollock

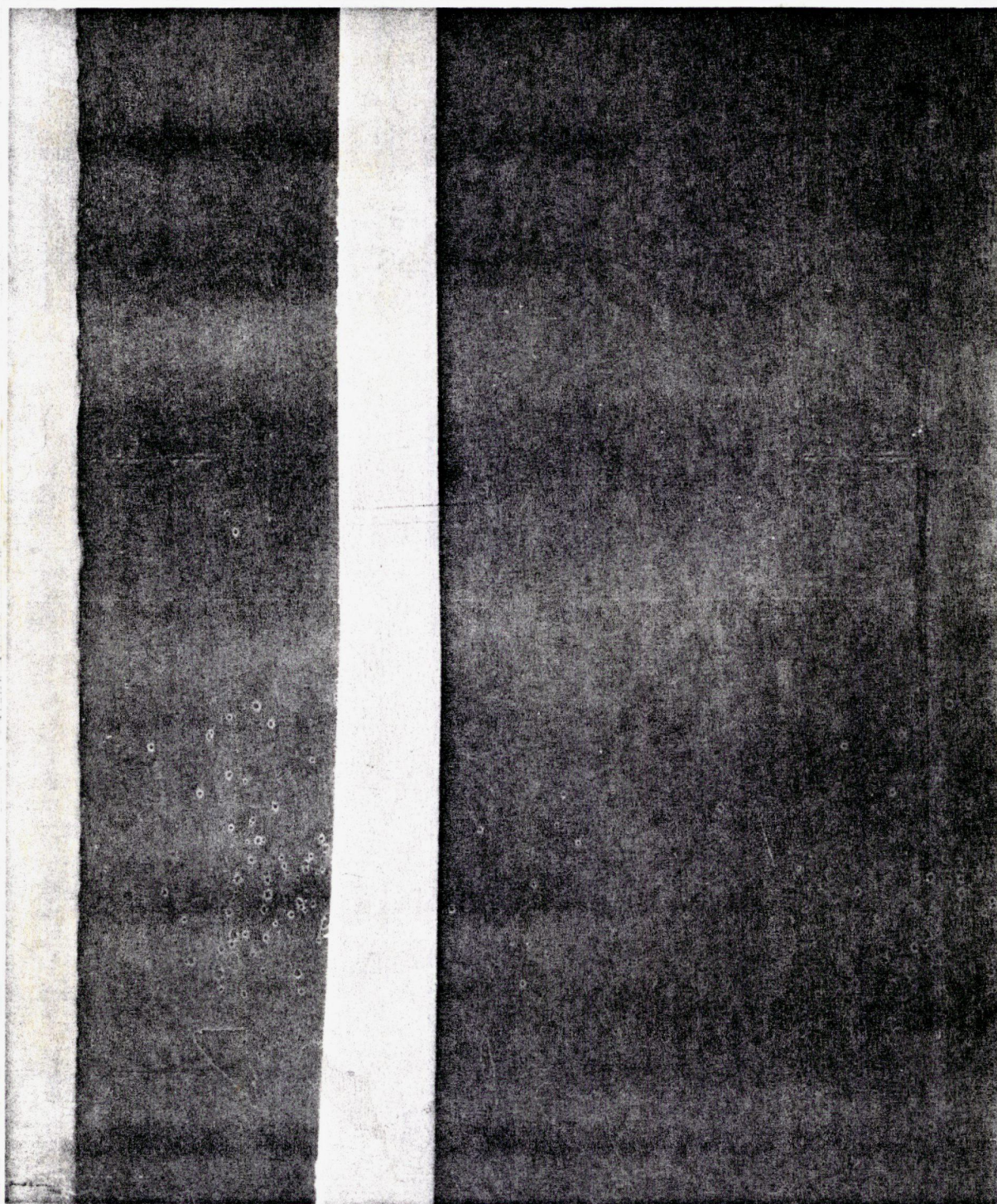


Fig. 3. 'Adam'. 1951, 1952. Oil on Canvas, 95 5/8"x79 5/8"

The Trustees of the Tate Gallery, London.

Barnett Newman

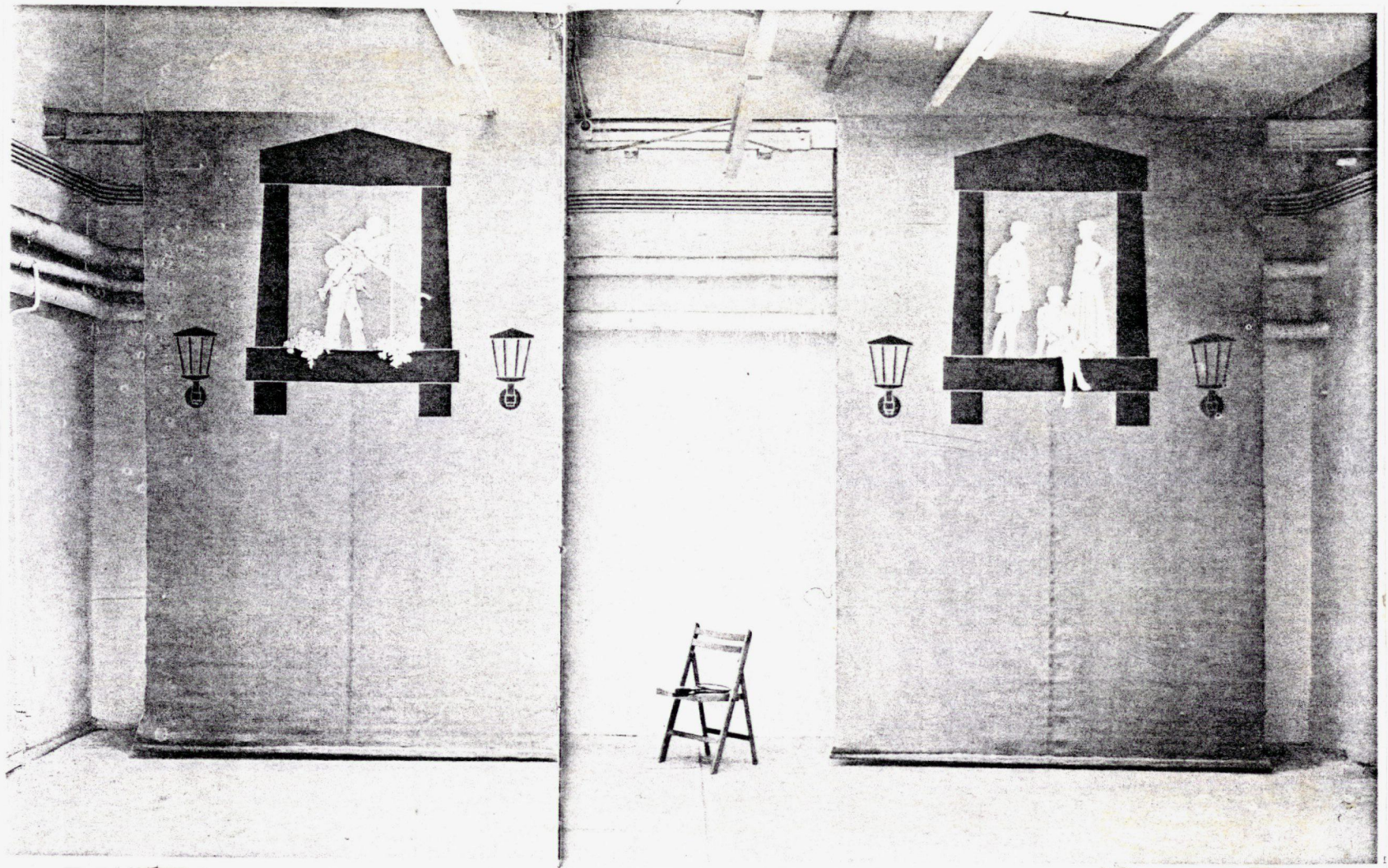


Fig. 4. 'Two Curtain Walls. Allegory of Friendship-Artist and Architect and Three Girls': 1982.
Oil on Canvas, cm. 500x250 each. Collection of Lutz Schirmer, Munich.
Ludger Gerdes



Fig. 5. 'Treasury of the Athenians from the Sanctuary of Apollo'
Fifth Century, B.C. On the Site of Delphi, Architect unknown.



Fig. 6. 'Pope II' Oil on Canvas, 78"x54". 1951
Francis Bacon.

SLIDES

LIST OF SLIDES

1. Tim Campbell, 'Ambivalence', Calgary, 1988. Oil on Canvas, 6' x 6'.
2. Tim Campbell, 'Inertia', Calgary, 1988. Oil on Canvas, 6' x 6'.
3. Tim Campbell, 'Arrest', Calgary, 1988. Oil on Canvas, 6' x 6'.
4. Tim Campbell, 'Black Heart', Calgary, 1988. Oil on Canvas, 6' x 6'.
5. Tim Campbell, 'White Heart', Calgary, 1988. Oil on Canvas, 6' x 6'.
6. Tim Campbell, 'Eden', Calgary, 1988. Oil on Canvas, 6' x 6'.
7. Tim Campbell, 'Disintegration', 1988. Oil on Canvas, 6' x 6'.
8. Tim Campbell, 'Glass Man', Calgary, 1988. Oil on Canvas, 6' x 6'.
9. Tim Campbell, 'Retribution', Calgary, 1988. Oil on Canvas, 6' x 6'.
10. Tim Campbell, 'Ambivalence', Calgary, 1988. Ink on Paper, 22" x 30".
11. Tim Campbell, 'Inertia', Calgary, 1988. Ink on Paper, 22" x 30".
12. Tim Campbell, 'Arrest', Calgary, 1988. Ink on Paper, 22" x 30".
13. Tim Campbell, 'Black Heart', Calgary, 1988. Ink on Paper, 22" x 30".
14. Tim Campbell, 'White Heart', Calgary, 1988. Ink on Paper, 22" x 30".

15. Tim Campbell, 'Eden', Calgary, 1988. Ink on Paper; 22" x 30".
16. Tim Campbell, 'Disintegration', Calgary, 1988. Ink on Paper, 22" x 30".
17. Tim Campbell, 'Glass Man', Calgary, 1988. Ink on Paper, 22" x 30".
18. Tim Campbell, 'Retribution', Calgary, 1988. Ink on Paper, 22" x 30".

NOTES

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