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FRACTURED SPACES, SHATTERED IMAGES

A Written Accompaniment to the Thesis Exhibition

By

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ABSTRACT

This paper accompanies the exhibition entitled "'Fractured Spaces, Shattered Images'" and is divided into three parts concerning the progression of art from subject, to object, to experience. Chapter one provides a general introduction. Chapter Two discusses historical precedents. "Subject" encompasses the development of Renaissance space through the use of perspective. My account then moves from the stationary view of the Renaissance to Cézanne's subtly shifting viewpoints, which in turn became the Cubists radical re-invention of pictorial space. "Object" examines the Cubist fusion of the subject with the object of the painting itself. "Experience" notes the way later artists attempted to control the involvement of the viewer, drawing from Micheal Fried's criticism of literalist art. Chapter Three presents in both general and specific terms work within the actual thesis show in a co-responding relationship to this history.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate my thesis show and accompanying support paper to my loving partner Doug without whose encouragement, understanding and love I could never have pushed myself as hard, been as dedicated or had nearly as much fun.

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Chapter One

Introduction

"Fractured Spaces, Shattered Images" is the culmination of a number of developments in my art: specifically the use of paint and imagery to create the semblance of space on a two dimensional surface, the build up of the physical surface of the canvas and the manipulation of the shape of the underlying structure. The artificial world created in the work has its roots in the perspectival spatial illusion of the Renaissance grid and this became the primary "subject" of my art. The surface treatment of the canvas and the construction of the support established the canvas as an "object". As the work progressed an additional interest developed into the involvement of the viewer with the work. Thus were born the ideas of "subject", "object" and "experience."

Chapter Two of this paper establishes the historical precedents for "subject", "object" and "experience" beginning with the development of the homogenous space of the Renaissance under the topic of "subject". Because Renaissance art was based largely on a mathematical formula that attempted to replicate the process of vision it is important initially to discuss the relevance of "vision" and "perception" to the rendering of that space.

Human beings throughout history, regardless of culture, society or time period, have shared basically the same awareness of the *physical* existence of the body and its relationship to the space surrounding it. There is always up, down, left, right, forward and backward. Ellen Dissanzyake suggests that our innate awareness of spatial properties in relation to the human body established through walking upright, using hands and fingers, and the visual ability to estimate and determine our position within that space is so universal that it has

become part of the cognitive process and is passed on genetically (Dissanayake p 159). She further claims that our:

spatial awareness is so unconscious and pervasive a part of our being-in-the-world that we may not realize the degree to which we perceive and act in our everyday lives on the basis of concepts of objects, persons, and events that are in a large part constructed out of spatial features and relations". (pp. 157-158).

Human perception of space is primarily visual. Physically, the human eye continues to see in the same fashion it has since the evolution of the species as upright beings. Binocularity, the fact that we possess two eyes which focus differently on things in the distance and things close at hand, plays a major role in our determination of depth, but there are other cues and these lend themselves more readily to translation onto the two-dimensional surface of a wall or canvas. However, representation becomes mired between the physical nature of vision and the more esoteric nature of perception. "Vision" and "perception" are slippery terms, often used in an interchangeable fashion. Vision is defined in its simplest terms as "the act or fact of seeing" (Canadian Intermediate Dictionary p.1298). Perception has as its root "to perceive" to "take in with the mind; observe" (Canadian Intermediate Dictionary p.844). One is linked with the physical act of seeing and the other connects with interpretive psychological processes.

David Abram in his book The Spell of the Sensuous also addresses the duality of vision and perception and introduces the notion that prior knowledge of

an object as a whole is necessary for any meaningful perception of it to occur.

He writes:

From the perspective of my bodily senses, there is no thing that appears as a completely determinate or finished object. Each thing, each entity that my body sees, presents some face or facet of itself to my gaze while withholding other aspects from view. The clay bowl resting on the table in front of me meets my eyes with its curved and grainy surface. Yet I can see only one side of that surface - the other side of the bowl is invisible, hidden by the side that faces me. In order to view that other side, I must pick up the bowl and turn it around in my hands, or else walk around the wooden table. Yet I myself am simply unable to see the whole of this bowl all at once. " (pp.50-51)

Abram goes on to say that in turning the bowl he becomes aware of the inside, but when he shifts his attention to the inside it precludes his seeing the outside. He says there is no way of ever knowing the complete object in one glance or even successive glances, but the perception of the object is contingent on awareness or "knowing" of all the facets of the bowl (Abram pp.50-51). Suzi Gablik substantiates this claim when she says that our experience of the world is not the product of our perception but the cause of it (Gablik p.169).

As a Renaissance artist, Masaccio physically saw the same space as Monet, the Impressionist, or Picasso in his Cubist phase. What intrinsically changed for the artist was the perception of that space and the subsequent recording of it. The differences in historical representation of space do not lie in the human body's awareness of space or its physical vision of such space and subsequent representation, or even in the knowledge of an object in space, but

rather in cultural and societal notions of what the artist ought to perceive. In other words the purpose of the image and its representation rule the perception of the artist. Any fundamental shift in the perception of space had to be preceded by a corresponding shift in the prevailing cultural, religious and ideological processes without which it would have been impossible. The creation of art is intricately connected with the culture by which it is produced. Wylie Sypher claims that any genuine style is dependent on the view of the world it is contained by, thus the artist of the Middle Ages could not have conceived of representing space in the manner of the Renaissance artist any more than a baroque artist could have remained baroque in the world of Einstein and Freud (p.15).

Suzi Gablik summarizes Gombrich's premises in Art and Illusion as the artist perceives according to the "grip of conventions and the power of traditions." (p.169). She elaborates: " the artist 's reaction to what he sees is not merely a response to an outside stimulus: it is never a simple copy of what exists in the outside world, but is always the response of an underlying structure within the individual." (pp.168 -169). My own interpretation is that changes in art arise from both external and internal pressures, the internal depending on the nature of the art and the nature of the artist. It is important to keep in mind that the two pressures at various times in history would not necessarily be equal, especially when the art object gained its autonomy from the image.

Chapter Two moves from the development of Renaissance space to its subsequent undermining by the visual perceptions of Cézanne and its

destruction by the Cubist's revolutionary space. Intertwined with these two topics is the notion of art moving from "subject" to "object". Cézanne's shifting viewpoints in effect offered permission to future generation to tamper with the principles of Renaissance perspective and allowed the Cubists to reconcile the "subject" of the painting with its "object" nature. The final section of this chapter uses Michael Fried's Art and Objecthood as its foundation to discuss the art object as "experience".

~ Chapter Two ~

Subject, Object, Experience

Subject

The Window of Renaissance Space

The artists of the Italian Renaissance introduced the idea of a painting as an "open window." This was to evolve from the earliest representations of space accomplished by using figures and objects to indicate depth into the mathematical construct of perspective, which could establish in advance the systematic structure of the space within which objects could be located. Although the view the Renaissance window was to open onto was an ideal world of predominantly religious themes expressed in classical terms, perspective enabled the artist to present this world to the viewer with an unprecedented sense of its palpable reality.

The base out of which these new developments emerged was the Italo-Byzantine art of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Byzantine painting in its final phase, from the end of the 12th century, employed flattened forms, defined by heavy outline, that were repeated with little variation across the surface of wall or panel; they revealed little interest in creating spatial illusion (Batterberry p.12). Depiction on the surface took precedence over the depiction in depth (Dunning p. 12). Such indications of recession as there were resulted from the overlapping of figures, the more important being placed on top and, hence, in front (Dunning p.15). The flat mosaic was the ultimate Byzantine medium (DeWald p.18). Byzantine art, through the use of forms reduced to symbols, taught the laity about important events and the feast days of the Church (DeWald pp.10-12). The Orthodox Christian Church dominated the Byzantine Middle Ages and froze

composition and subject matter in its dogma (DeWald p.13). It needed a shift in this situation to allow for any possibility of greater flexibility in art, or individual interpretation on the part of the artist (DeWald pp.12-13). With that shift came the possibility of a re-interpretation of space.

Art historians William Dunning and John White both refer to the period in which the work of Duccio and Giotto appeared as the Proto-Renaissance. It was marked by a gradual shift in outlook and ideology resulting from the growth of trade and the rise of a new middle class in the emerging independent cities of Italy, their more worldly outlook resulting in an analogous change in the method of spatial representation. In the late Middle Ages dogma and tradition had held sway over empirical observation. Questions of pictorial representation were determined on the basis of the pronouncements of approved sources, including the Bible, the works of the church fathers, technical hand books and some of the philosophical writings of ancient Greece and Rome (Dunning pp.4-5). These texts set man firmly in the center of a universe created by God specifically for his benefit (Dunning p.10). The teachings of Aristotle placed man on a fixed earth encircled by an enclosed globe, which excluded the concept of an infinite space (Dunning p.10). This inability to assimilate the concept of infinity may have been a factor in delaying the development of perspective, whose converging lines open up unlimited recession in space (Panofsky pp.44-45). However, as Aristotelian doctrine was slowly replaced by a more Platonic interest in a quantifiable world, painters slowly veered from the spiritual towards a more materialistic depiction of reality (Dunning p.22). Another important philosophic

shift, related to the emergence of a free middle class, was the replacement of the concept of an integrated hieratic order with the novel idea of individualism (Eco p.16). This major shift in the positioning of man in his world required a new method of natural illustration to reflect it.

From inside the church, the new mendicant orders, the Dominicans and the Franciscans, brought religion out of the confines of the monastery and into the daily life of the new trading cities. As patrons of art, they contributed directly to the emergence of a more accessible, worldly and humane interpretation of religious themes that rapidly transformed the remote hieratic symbols of the Italo-Byzantine period (Dunning p.22). However, the church was to relinquish its dominant position of artistic patronage in the 14th century and the emerging Italian middle class required a different depiction of the divine image (Dunning p.23-25). Paintings were to become rational, tranquil and closely linked with the reality of nature (Dunning p.25). Achieving an illusion of volume was the first step toward fidelity to nature, and the depiction of volume led to an illusion of depth and space (Dunning p.25). The primary focus of painters at the beginning of this period was the imitation of nature and the beginning of the consistent creation of an illusion of the third dimension on the flat surface of a painting (Dunning p.21).

Both Giotto and Duccio were instrumental in laying the foundations of a perspectival view of space (Panofsky p.54). Their styles synthesized a Gothic feeling for space derived from architecture and sculpture with the remnants of architectural and landscape forms preserved in Byzantine painting (Panofsky

p. 54). Duccio contributed to the development of "vanishing axis" perspective and brought a profoundly human sensitivity to the treatment of narrative subjects and landscape. But his achievement pales beside that of Giotto, whose solidly modeled figures and obliquely viewed architectural settings convey an awareness of mass and volume hardly to be bettered in the Renaissance proper. Both must be credited with paving the way for the upcoming spatial revolution, but the greater credit belongs to Giotto (Bomford p.129). Panofsky claims entering the pictorial world of Giotto feels "as if we were stepping off a boat and setting foot on firm land " and he insists this is the birth of modern space (Dunning p.27). Panofsky also holds that Giotto's work contained the potential to evolve into the illusion of limitless space (Dunning p.27). Giotto created paintings in which people are represented as living, breathing, three-dimensional human beings who occupied a palpably real space, not exquisite patterns or divine symbols (Batterberry p.20). Vasari was later to claim that Giotto actually painted from life and used a model (Dunning p.31). The imitation of nature was to become one of the measures of success in Renaissance sculpture and painting (Dunning p.26). Giotto's revolutionary naturalism brought an end to the tradition of painting as a kind of pictorial writing (Batterberry p.20). His more weighty forms and more persuasive suggestion of space enabled him to present sacred narratives in more human terms, fully in the Franciscan spirit (Kemp 1990, p.10).

The way Giotto's figures were framed by equally convincing buildings increased the sense of reality conveyed by his paintings (Bomford p.64). Giotto's depiction of architecture is central to his construction of space and was to

become crucial to the coming revolution in perspective (Kemp 1997, p.88). His interior views are based on an increasingly perspectival mode (Kemp 1990, p.9). However, the lines of the walls fail to meet at a true "vanishing point," converging, rather, to a so-called "vanishing axis" (Dunning p.21). Moreover, Giotto was still using objects to generate the illusion of space, and had yet to make the next vital step of creating a self-sufficient spatial matrix in which figures, buildings and other objects themselves could find their place consistently (Dunning p.34).

These new developments in art were accompanied by a change in the status of the artist, partly as a spontaneous result of the prominence their achievements gave them but also as a result of conscious aspiration to a more elevated place in the social order. The Church had attached a great deal of importance to the role of paintings, but artists themselves were considered little more than craftspeople. The impetus behind the new genre of art theory that emerged in the Renaissance art was a conscious desire to establish a basis of erudite speculation that would set their activity on a par with liberal arts - logic, rhetoric and grammar (poetry), arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music (Kemp 1997, p.84). Their eventual success in doing so was to have enormous consequences with regard to status, working conditions, remuneration, and even artistic freedom (Kemp 1997, p.84).

Cennino Cennini in his Book of Art written in 1400 was one of the first to attempt to establish a more theoretical base for painting (Kemp 1997, p.85). Cennini's how-to techniques include the recommendation of copying from the

masters, a standard educational device, which he melds with his advice to copy from nature (Kemp 1997, p.87). The combination of the two would eventually lead to the development of an individual style, an important concept if the artist is to move past the label of artisan (Kemp 1997, pp.87-88). Cennini identifies himself as part of an elevated artistic lineage and actually claims to be the "artistic great grandson" of Giotto, who was credited with raising the status of painting above simple images for the illiterate and into the realm of the intellectual (Kemp 1997, p.86). Cennini attempts to advance this process with his claim that painting is distinguished by its combination of *scienza* (theory) with an expert hand and requires the exercise of imagination (*fantasia*)¹ (Kemp 1997, p. 86). In his opinion all of the most elevated pursuits pertained to *scienza* (Kemp 1997, p.86).

Cennini made this foray into art theory in an attempt to remove the art of painting from the realm of craft and establish it as a higher pursuit. Giotto had initiated a new era of representation with its roots in the imitation of nature. There were larger and more sweeping changes to come as the Renaissance unfolded. Art historians Hugh Honour and John Fleming claim that the period known as the Renaissance or "re-birth" was the first period in time to recognize and identify itself; "Gothic artists did not know they were Gothic, or even medieval, but the Renaissance artist was well aware that he was different " (p. 368).

¹ Kemp in *Behind the Picture* explains *fantasia* as "a Greek term [which] corresponds to 'vision' in Latin and refers to a way in which things can be imagined by the mind in such a vivid manner that they seem to be before our eyes." (237)

Renaissance artists began to look systematically and intensely into their surroundings in their quest to understand the physical world of nature (Beck p.4). The Platonic belief that nature was essentially mathematical rendered perspective, as a system of spatial representation, particularly attractive to the rational mind of Renaissance man (Dunning p.37). Perspective was to revolutionize formal composition by creating a pictorial space based on a geometric formula that harmonized space and the objects represented inside that space with the surface upon which it was represented (Sypher p.71). The developed Renaissance system of painting used the convergence of orthogonals, recession of planes, atmospheric perspective and colour perspective, all brought together with a unified light source, to generate pictorial space (Dunning p.35). Perspective provided the means for drawing the spectator's eye to the key figure or action in the painting (Kubovy p.2). The time had arrived when Renaissance painters stood outside the world they represented and observed, as though through a window, from one single viewpoint (Dunning p.13).

The introduction of scientific method, rationality and mathematics did not preclude the representation of the divine in Renaissance painting. Panofsky explains that "Perspective, in transforming *ousia* (reality) into the *phainomennon* (appearance) seems to reduce the divine to a mere subject matter for human consciousness; but for that very reason, conversely, it expands human consciousness into a vessel for the divine" (Panofsky p.72). The mathematical mode of representing posited a belief in the existence of a rational universe and

gave painters a means to elicit a new kind of spiritual and religious response from the viewer (Dunning p.37). The view from the Renaissance window may have been a novel one but the subject would remain, at least initially, stories from the Gospel.

The discovery of the principles of perspective was first proclaimed in two panels created by the architect Brunelleschi (White 1967, p.114). The first panel was a painting of S. Giovanni and the surrounding Piazza del Duomo in miniature, but with extreme detail (White 1967, p.114). The construction of the picture was dependant upon its being seen from a single viewpoint set at a particular distance from the picture surface, the viewing distance being about twice the width of the painting (White 1967, pp.116). A second panel had a similar painting of the Piazza della Signoria. The viewpoint of both panels depended on controlling the onlooker's position both in distance and direction in relation to the pictured scene (White 1967, p.116). One very obvious shortcoming in Brunelleschi's method was the fact that it took as its starting point a set of actual buildings and worked from those to a perspectival projection (Kemp 1990, p.14). Since his procedures relied upon existing buildings and inevitably resulted in the portrayal of those buildings the concept was slow to be used by artists (Kemp 1990, p.15). The next step was to be the adaptation of Brunelleschi's procedures to the creation of a constructed space (Kemp 1990, p.15).

The development of perspective was to make another leap forward from its conception by Brunelleschi within the work of Masaccio. Masaccio's new method of rendering space is exemplified in the Trinity painted for Sta Maria Novella in

Florence in approximately 1427. The painting portrays Christ on the cross with the Dove and the Father immediately above, Mary and John the Evangelist standing on either side of the cross. Just below the central figures are representations of the donor and his wife. All of these figures are contained within a clearly defined architectural space (Sypher p.70). At the base of the Trinity a human skeleton rests on a painted sarcophagus that has inscribed on it in Latin: "I was once as you are, and you shall be as I am " (Beck pp.101-102). The foreshortening of the Virgin and St. John and the visible undersides of both arms of the cross convey a powerful impression of reality to the spectator who would have been looking up at the divine figures within the scene from the nave of Santa Maria Novella (White 1967, pp.138-140). The kneeling donors are painted as though in the spectator's space outside the entrance to a chapel (DeWald p.205). The height of the spectator's viewpoint was directly related to the height of the skeletal man who lies in that space (Kemp 1990, p.25). The effect for the viewer is that the tomb is projected into the church and the chapel becomes a view through the wall (Honour and Fleming p.372). The result is, the lower half of the picture plane enters into the viewer's own reality.

Masaccio's interpretation of space is probably the most important aesthetic achievement of the early Renaissance and laid the groundwork for the later achievements of the High Renaissance (Sypher pp.70-71). With Masaccio the picture plane becomes

no more than a sheet of glass, behind which the real world could be found, subject to the same laws of foreshortening and even to the same fall of light as that ...on the spectator's side....[It] was possible to break

decisively with the Byzantine conception of a picture as a different world subject to different laws." (Hazan p.182).

Brunelleschi may have invented perspective and Masaccio's work had physically embodied it in a work of art, but Alberti's contribution in his book On Painting (1435) was a theoretical treatise that superseded such practical demonstrations (White 1967, p.121). Alberti formalized a mathematical procedure for constructing space to contain objects that did not depend on the objects themselves to create the illusion of space (White 1967, p.123).

Perspective is a practical technique, which allows the creation of an illusion of space on a two-dimensional surface. By using two dimensions it calculates the third and, as a result, permits three dimensions to be charted onto two (Descargues p.9). Linear perspective grew from the study of medieval optics, which had always been considered pure science and as such rational, objective, and orderly, concepts of great appeal to the Renaissance mind (Dunning p.39). Alberti's concept of the "visual pyramid" was drawn from medieval optical science, the "perspectiva " on which a number of Islamic and Christian authors had written (Kemp 1997, p.93). In his treatise vision operates by means of a triangle whose point is the eye and the base (in this case equated with the picture plane) is the quantity seen (Kemp 1990, p.22). The "extrinsic rays" form the boundaries of the pyramid and register the outline of the form (the edges of the picture plane) (Kemp 1990, p.22). The "intrinsic rays" locate the inside of the pyramid and are responsible for recording the surface qualities of color, light, shade, etc. (Kemp 1990, p.22). The very center or "centric ray" runs

perpendicularly from the eye to the picture plane and, according to Alberti, establishes the strongest distinction of detail and distance (Kemp 1990, p.22). Alberti uses the Euclidian law of proportional triangles: a straight line intersecting two sides of a triangle, if parallel to one of the sides, will create a smaller triangle that is proportional to the greater (Kemp 1990, p.22). By using the simple geometry of similar triangles Alberti makes the conceptual step establishing the imitation of nature on a scientific optical rule (Kemp 1997, p.93). Proportion lies at the heart of this system, which establishes the greater aesthetic importance of the relative scale of objects, rather than their actual size (Kemp 1990, p.22). The Renaissance system of perspective elicited strong approval from painters, the public and the Church as it appeared to be rational, scientific and objective (Dunning p.37). Given that the pursuit of reason, rationality and order were of the highest priority, the invention of perspective appeared to give art the autonomy of its own science (Dunning p.37).

Although Alberti's description of a mathematical system is crucial to spatial representation in the Renaissance, only the first of his three books deals with this topic. In his second book he attempts to define the *istoria*.² The Renaissance viewer had developed an interest in what was called *istoria* or the history or narrative picture, which offered an elevating theme for its own sake rather than in the service of religious instruction (Beck p.5).

Like Cennini, Alberti's intention with his treatise was not strictly education of the artist, but rather more an attempt to elevate the status of the artist to that of

² Spencer claims there is no precise modern translation for this term (Alberti p.23).

an educated man (Kemp 1997, p.96). The principles of perspective and the concept of *istoria* changed the understanding of the art of painting in a way that was to remain in place for centuries. Dunning in Changing Images of Pictorial Space goes so far as to claim that by substituting theory for practical information Alberti constructed the foundation for the 17th century separation of theory and practice which eventually resulted in modern theory and criticism (p.40).

We have arrived at the point in time at which the window of the Renaissance painting stands completely open. The illusion of reality created by the use of perspective within the picture plane had allowed painting to become more accessible and recognizable to the viewer in relation to his own world. The advances in theory had initiated the processes that would eventually provide for the artist a more intellectual forum. The use of symbols to represent the divine world had given way to the more human practice of narrative stories of the divine. It would be another four hundred years before this system gave way.

Subject to Object

Cézanne and the Diminishing of Renaissance Space

The perspective system offers the possibility of mathematically verifiable results but has its intrinsic limitations. It presupposes a fixed point of view, for all intents and purposes placing the artist's head in the proverbial vise to produce the painting and requiring the observer to do likewise to view works created by its use. Moreover, it reduces binocular vision to a monocular system; it helps if you

close one eye. The truth is, the three-dimensional nature of vision can not be precisely imitated on a two-dimensional surface, only represented. Each change of focus in painting unavoidably brings changes in what is seen and leaves the artist the choice of what is to be represented and what is to be disregarded (Dunning p.36). Thus, what seems a rational system for portraying a "realistic" scene is still dependent on the artist's interpretation. Nonetheless, the tradition of perspective was to remain virtually unchanged for more than four hundred years until it met the implicit challenge of Cézanne's perceptual insights.

Before the motif, Cézanne felt intuitively what David Abram was later to articulate verbally, that the sensation of the solid reality of the items before his eyes depended on more than the information immediately presented in physical vision and implicated, of necessity, a prior understanding of the things contained in his perception. The dilemma was insoluble, but if he could just lift the top of this basket a little higher or bring that jug a little closer to a pure profile, he might better be able to capture the most significant characteristics of both. The price he paid even for such comparatively small adjustments was a shattering of the unified viewpoint of the perspective system and with it the mathematical logic that had sustained it for almost half a millennium.

By breaking with the convention of one point perspective and adopting even minutely variable viewpoints Cézanne was constructing a single image of something with information gathered from a series of successive perceptions (Golding, pp.69-70). In some ways, Cézanne's method of depicting things as a multitude of minute shifts in vision is probably much closer to the way in which

the eye actually sees. Cézanne combined through his painting the selective deliberations of focus, and our understanding of the whole, through memory, which serves to unify the fragments of perception (Wechsler p. 85). Cézanne's implicit rejection of the theory of perspective moved the idea of the "objective" image into the more perceptual realm of the "subjective" experience (Merleau-Ponty p.325). In effect, he abandoned theory in favour of perception (Merleau-Ponty p.325).

Cézanne expressed "the wish to paint nature in complete naivete of sensation as if no one had painted it before" (Schapiro p.19). His warping of perspective by tilting strangely distorted forms brings to mind the work of more primitive artists who rely on memory and feeling, not a systematic representation of natural appearances (Schapiro p.19). By resorting to changes of perspective within the picture itself, Cézanne ultimately replaced what was considered the "visible order of nature" with a structure of his own invention (Cooper pp.19-20). According to Maurice Denis, this meant the subject of the work was no longer the primary focus of the viewer's attention; the painting itself, as a material object, became the vehicle for conveying Cézanne's sensation before the motif and evoking associated emotions in the observer (Wechsler p.21).

Although Cézanne's way of responding to particular things within his visual field brought about quite subtle - though highly conspicuous - shifts in the perspective of individual forms, his observation of the motif as a whole remained fundamentally true to the tradition of a single viewpoint (Kern p.141). It was left to the Cubists to take up the incipient multiplicity of viewpoints in his art, and its

compacted pictorial depth, and carry it to its next phase (Kern p.142). They, in turn, remained true to the understanding that painting should begin with perception not convention (Wechsler p.85), but they were prepared to depart from the initial visual stimulus in exploring the aesthetic potential of the dislocation of planes and fracturing of spatial unity he had always subordinated to the principle of truth to sensation. In the light of these developments, which would eventually lead art away from representation, there has been some discussion as to whether Cézanne represented the culmination of 19th century art or the initial steps into modern art. Cézanne described himself as "the primitive of a new way,"³ but there remains some doubt as to whether the way he foresaw was that of Cubism and Modern Art.

Object

The Advent of Cubist Space

Despite Cézanne's initial forays into an altered perception of the subject, the rational, mathematically based space of the Renaissance remained more or less intact until the emergence of Cubism in Paris in 1906. Its inception was to deny the homogenous space of the Renaissance, which distinguished between things and the space surrounding them and replaced it with the more heterogeneous space realized by a synthesis of mass and void (Rosenblum p.13). In dismissing

³ Professor Eric Cameron of the University of Calgary provided this specific phrase, but was unable to give me a source

the traditional use of perspective, Picasso and Braque were to found a new dialogue between the dual realities of image and surface (or the subject of the picture and the object of the painting itself). The Renaissance view through the window used the frame as a reference, through which was offered an unobstructed view into the world beyond. The Cubist view took into account the reality of the pane of glass as well as the subject viewed. Douglas Cooper describes this new conception of space as " a way of reconciling... knowledge of a given three dimensional order in nature with (the) determination that the equivalent pictorial order should not violate the two-dimensional structure of the canvas." (Cooper p.44).

Cubism replaced the mathematical formulae of perspective with an analysis of forms, combining different aspects of a single form, so that the eye would be led to take in its total mass (Cooper p.44). In a similar fashion to Cézanne's imagery Cubist space registered only what the eye sees of things (Cooper p.11). But, Cubism took Cézanne's multiplicity of viewpoints and reconciled them with the surface of the canvas. Instead of assuming the work of art to be an illusion of reality that lay beyond it, cubism proposed that the work of art itself was the reality (Rosenblum p.13). This increasing consciousness of the painting and its two dimensional surface as physical reality distinct from the representation within it could only be arrived at with the final shattering of Renaissance perspective (Rosenblum p.66).

With the painting of Les Femmes d'Alger Picasso introduced a revolutionary, compressed, shallow, sharply contoured, inconsistently lit space

(Cooper p.22). It was to be followed and refined by both Picasso and Braque over the next several years into an entirely new pictorial language (Cooper p. 22). In this new language each of the traditional elements of painting - form, space, color and technique was subjugated to a new interpretation of the visual world (Golding p.17). Form and space were re-interpreted by the use of facets, complex multilevel interpenetrating planes, which served to fuse objects with the space around them (Cooper p.46). Color, which has long been used to define form and space, was reduced to monochromatic shades of gray and ocher in order not to disturb the new spatial structure (Cooper p.46)

Shifting the focus away from depicted subject towards the painting as an object implied a new relationship to sculpture. Picasso was to learn from sculpture (his own and others) in developing his new rendering of pictorial space. Primarily his concern was the relationship between the function of light in three-dimensional sculptures and in two-dimensional paintings. Light in sculpture, from the point of view of the spectator, has an external, defining mode, but light in painting is internal (Cooper pp. 33-34). By defining the source of light as external, Picasso was able to "use local color and handle light like a display electrician, directing it wherever needed." (Cooper pp.33-34).

The technique of using collage elements, like the chair caning cloth he introduced in Still Life with Chair Caning, brought a "real" element into the pictorial reality of his paintings (Cooper p.58). This novel binary opposition of illusion and reality left viewers to determine their own reality (Cooper p.58). One more bastion of the dictatorial narrative tradition of the Renaissance had been

removed. The addition of letters in later Cubist work functioned in a similar fashion to emphasize the illusion/reality tension of the space portrayed within the paintings. The juxtaposition of the letters across the surface of the paintings challenged the viewer to differentiate between things situated in space and things which were not (Cooper p.56). In effect, Picasso further emphasized the play between the view through the window and the view of the window itself. Robert Rosenblum claims that Cubist paintings were "willfully ambiguous descriptions of phenomena... their language is multileveled, and conforms to the twentieth century 's refusal to accept a single, absolute interpretation of reality."(Rosenblum p.66)

According to Stephen Kern, Picasso rejected attempts to explain Cubism with "mathematics, trigonometry, chemistry, psychoanalysis, music and whatnot, [which] have been related to Cubism to give it an easier interpretation. All this has been pure literature, not to say nonsense, which has only succeeded in blinding people with theories." (Kern p.147). Kern presents the argument that Cubism arose from pressures and challenges within art itself (p.147). However, it is virtually impossible to create in a vacuum and despite Picasso's protest major shifts in the fabric of the century at the very least had to allow for an atmosphere conducive to major changes in the conception of artistic practice.

Cubism did influence, and was influenced by, other developments; photography, cinema, even x-rays (Kern p.147). With the introduction of the cinema the traditional stage in theatre, which was similar to perspective in its

single view, stationary concept, was replaced with the manipulation of space and multiplicity of viewpoints that the camera was capable of (Kern p.142).

Recognizing the complexity of understanding and the relativity of any particular perspective on the world, Nietzsche had introduced "perspectivism" in 1887 with the claim:

There is *only* a perspective seeing, there is *only* a perspective "knowing"; and the *more* affects we allow to speak about one thing, the *more* eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will be our "concept" of this thing, our "objectivity." (Kern p. 150)

Jose Ortega y Gasset in 1910 explained his theory of perspectivism as actually having as many spaces in reality as there were perspectives on it (Kern p.151). Both theories allowed for an expanded Cubist perception of space.

Kern refers to the implementation of a "positive negative space" which imparts a positive element to what was formerly regarded as negative (Kern p. 153). This was partially based on the new physics of Einstein who abandoned the theory of space as inert void and claimed space was full of energy, a substantial and active entity in its own right (Kern p.154). By granting an active role to a formerly passive and empty "void" the space between objects become as important as the objects themselves and was portrayed as such by the Cubists. A shift occurred concurrently in the conception of architectural spaces. Using the same "positive negative space" theory, architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright conceived of the "art of space" which de-emphasized the walls and

ceilings which enclosed rooms in favor of the space created by them (Kern p. 157).

The dissolution of the distinction between "matter" and "void" runs parallel with the breakdown of that between the "sacred and the profane" in religion and between classes in the social sphere (Kern p.153). Kern claims that giving the negative spaces an equal importance forced a re-evaluation of hereditary privileges and traditional hierarchies. He writes; "the old sanctuaries of privilege, power and holiness were assailed, if not entirely destroyed, by the affirmation of positive negative spaces." (Kern pp.179-180).

Experience

The better new work takes relationships out of the work and makes them a function of space, light and the viewer's field of vision... one is more aware that he himself is establishing relationships as he apprehends the object from various positions and under varying conditions of light and spatial context.

Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood*

In trying to define from a historical point of view my understanding of "experience" I chose to overlook the installation genre as not specifically corresponding with the my own explorations. Instead I was caught by what Michael Fried defines as "literalist" art.⁴ Fried names artists Donald Judd, Robert

⁴ Fried's definition of literalist art encompasses Minimalist art, ABC art, Primary Structures and Specific Objects. (p.148)

Morris and Tony Smith, as a few of the practitioners. What interested me was not the particular works by the artists he discusses in his 1967 seminal essay "Art and Objecthood", but rather in the theory behind them. Fried claims "actual space is intrinsically more powerful and specific than paint on a flat surface" (p.150). Fried also paraphrases sculptor Robert Morris and says "Where as in previous art what is to be had from the work is located strictly within [it] ... the experience of literalist art is of an object in a situation- one that, virtually by definition, includes the beholder" (p.153).

The impetus behind art that "includes the beholder" can be traced back to the Middle Ages, where work was frequently installed for just such a purpose. Masaccio's Trinity, in which the kneeling donors enter into the space of the spectator, is one such example. Fried further refers to literalist art as "art of the theatre" and states "something is said to have presence when it demands that the beholder take it into account, that he take it seriously...the experience of coming upon literalist objects unexpectedly - for example in somewhat darkened rooms - can be strongly, if momentarily, disquieting in just this way." (p.155) What could be more theatrical than a darkened Medieval church, spectator shuffling in to be confronted and enveloped by an expanse of space, dazzling colors, dully gleaming gold and silver leaf, and glittering gems, all visual effects deliberately designed to compel the viewer to establish a relationship with the depiction. Although Fried probably never intended a connection with Byzantine and Renaissance art, his concerns being of a more contemporary nature, his descriptions seem a better fit then the art of installation. Literalist art was still

concerned with the object, but added to it the intrigue of the experience.

Paradoxically, Fried in his essay does not support the tenets of literalist art but rather condemns it as "boring" or at best "merely interesting". "Art and Objecthood" was never intended to support the art it disparages, but the essay offers one of the best arguments for understanding it.

Fractured Spaces, Shattered Images

The work for the thesis exhibition entitled, "Fractured Spaces, Shattered Images" approximates the historical references and develops from "subject", to "object", to "experience".

Subject

The pieces combine the media of photocopies, acrylic paint, handmade paper, aluminum, gold, silver and copper leaf applied onto architecturally derived structures. The images contained in the pieces waffle between being architectural or organic based and are occasionally both. The original inspiration is the Renaissance device of using a grid on a two-dimensional surface to create the illusion of three-dimensional space. This illusion although founded on the grid is by no means enslaved to it and the space illustrated in the pieces is not a consistent one. Smaller elements juxtaposed in front of larger ones reverse the theory of aerial perspective, as do additional decorative elements. Both devices are used to return the viewer's attention to the surface. Consequently the space remains an instinctive one and is never completely mathematically based. The treatment of this space is in debt as much to John White's Proto-Renaissance⁵, the period in time in which Giotto was still using figures to create space and had not yet created a space which would contain figures.

The realistic imagery contained in the pieces is photocopies of my own photographs. The appropriation of imagery, although a valid artistic practice has no interest for me. There is an essence to the work if it is created beginning to end entirely by the artist. Walter Benjamin writes about the "aura" of the original

⁵ White uses this term throughout the text of *Birth and Re-Birth of Pictorial Space*

that separates it from copy. In my art making process being original means that I have complete ownership of the images.

The long, narrow pieces link directly to architecture, through both content and format. Structurally, the use of thick edges allows additional space for paint and imagery. The images suggest landscape, both man-made and natural. Visually in places on the canvas, the edge disappears and the photographic image becomes an entrance *into* the canvas. The paintings then become glimpses of a reality separate from this existence. The canvas has always been a space for a divergent actuality, but these pieces produced an additional space within a space. Although this creation of a substitute world is considered a historical tradition in painting, the pieces were equally inspired by the corresponding literary tradition.

These works address the metaphors of time and history in a number of ways. The distressed surfaces cause the pieces to appear time worn. The contemporary voice of history is represented in the use of photography/photo copies as well as in the paradox of photographing historical places. Photography freezes a moment in time, which is deconstructed through the collage process into a substitute vision of the original image. The future is referenced in the use of materials, like gold, silver and copper leaf, which alter over time. A personal history is recorded by using photocopies from original photos of the places I have visited. It is, however, a place that is difficult to locate in a specific time. It is a theatrical space where apples fly, floors float over unimaginable spaces and doorways open into nothingness.

Object

One of my chief interests is the aesthetic surface of the canvas. Pivotal to my sensibilities as an artist is the layered, subtle surface of art objects linked to the disciplines of ceramics and jewelry. The glazed surface of ceramic art is an intriguing one - the layers, the transparency, the consistency and even the reaction of the viewer. In relating to a ceramic art object people pick it up, they examine it, they run their fingers over it. It is a sensory experience. The surface of metal used in jewelry has the same sensual attraction. Added to that is the almost primordial appeal in working with and shaping molten metal. Through those two different disciplines I developed an interest in surface, pattern and decoration - the fundamentals, which are embedded deep in the nature of object and craft based practices. Absorbing these elements into my practice increased the perception of the paintings as "objects".

In imitation of the process of jewelry making which shapes a liquid surface the paint in all of my pieces is poured allowing for an element of chance in the formation of the surface. The surface of the canvas is then sanded, manipulated and repainted. The surfaces become multi-layered, corporeal and decorative, the facets of an "object".

The final touches of these pieces are influenced by the art of the Byzantine in the use of materials; the gold, copper and silver leaf is medieval in its origin. However, my use of these materials is to create a lush, alternate surface and refers only obliquely to the divine.

Crucial to the creation of this work is the use of the sides as additional painting surfaces. Images wrap themselves around corners, patterns repeat down the edges, even where not readily accessible to the viewer's eye; it is the existence that is important, not the visibility. This use of all three surfaces encourages the perception of the work as object.

Experience

The use of the edge as painting surface produced the final piece of the puzzle. The original three-sided structure gave way to two angles, in essence leaving nothing but edge. The angles create a new set of issues, play with the original concept of perspective and more physically involve the viewer. The angular shape of these pieces provides a multiplicity of viewpoints. With each move an edge shifts either into or out of sight. It addresses the notion of how the placement and shape of the objects in the viewing space affect the viewer's relationship to, and perception of art objects.

Varying the scale of the pieces changes their relationship to the viewer. The smaller pieces inspire an intimacy that is crucial to the surface. Small pieces are viewed in a different capacity. We approach closely and scrutinize them from a distance of only a few inches away. Increasing the scale of the objects to a height related to the physical structure of the human body changes the way they are viewed. Leaning the pieces casually on constructed columns added to a multiplicity of viewpoints. The viewer was able to glimpse bits and pieces in a

very fragmented fashion, bringing the concept of space from the surface of the painting to involve the viewer.

The pieces work as "objects", containing the illusion of a space on a surface, but removing the paintings from the wall and onto the gallery floor added another dimension by relocating them into an actual space. The paintings occupy and create a three dimensional space within the gallery. That space contains the viewer who establishes their own unique perception of the space by moving around and between the pieces. This individual interpretation is established by a combination of the binocular nature of vision and the viewer's own eye level, which determines the angle or point of view seen. The images viewed are fractured, broken, and shattered elements of the original space.

The Renaissance vision was expressed by a grid, which logically led the eye into the illusion of a 3-dimensional space. But the physical nature of vision is more closely related to Cézanne's shifts of viewpoint than to the Renaissance one-eyed, head in a vise, view of paintings from a fixed point. By orchestrating the fractured viewpoint for the viewer I feel I have more closely imitated the nature of vision. In a similar fashion to Cubist paintings the breach between "void" and "matter" is also engaged as the gaps between the pieces begin to address the concept of space as much as the paintings themselves. The site of the gallery becomes a space for interaction. Instead of mere observation of a created space the viewer becomes part of that created space.

In establishing these paintings as experience I shift into the realm of the three-dimensional object. I decided to maintain the link to the tradition of painting

by preserving the integrity of structures that had a "front" and a "back". This decision did not indicate the inability to make the work either two-dimensional or three-dimensional, but a choice to allow them to occupy a point between the two. This position reflects a condition inherent in my work, which is the difficulty of placement within a specific model, time frame or media. To coin Robert Rosenblum's phrase they are "willfully ambiguous descriptions of phenomena".⁶

The Exhibition

The final portion of this paper contains more explicit descriptions of the actual pieces in the show. Some of the pieces refer to the divine, but it is a divinity the Church might object to, as it is strongly rooted in a personal history of Catholicism. The reference becomes apparent in the titles of three predominantly copper leaf 7' diptychs. The Three Wise Men at # 46 presents the three wise men, the kings present at the birth of the Christ child, vacationing at their summer home in Paris. The collage photographs in these pieces were taken in Paris. This blurring of the timelines, ancient contrasted with modern, is a frequent subtext in the work.

The diptych When Lucy Fell has as its source the novel Not Wanted on the Voyage written by Canadian author Timothy Findley. The novel proposes a substitute version of the Biblical tale of Noah and the Ark. In this

⁶ See the earlier discussion of the nature of Cubist paintings Chapter Two, Page 25

particular account Lucifer, after falling from the grace of Heaven, joins the patriarch and his family in the form of a woman, aptly named "Lucy". She marries one of Noah's sons and is taken aboard the ark to be saved. In an unlikely twist she becomes not the expected antagonist but a hapless observer as the occupants create their own torment. As my paintings are about portraying a changed reality the twist to the role of Lucifer appealed to me as both a woman and an artist.

The third diptych entitled The Four Horsemen Re-visited offers a view of the mythical horsemen of the Apocalypse thundering away from the destruction of civilization towards the viewer, having lost one of their own in the melee. The horsemen, represented by brightly colored carousel horses, have as their original photo source a ride for children. In all six of these pieces there is enough information to link the viewer with divine subject matter, a common Byzantine and Renaissance subject, but all are slanted to my personal vision.

Two of the diptychs, The Three Wise Men at # 46 and The Four Horsemen Re-visited make repetitive use of the image of the apple. A long history of mythology exists behind that image. There is the Christian mythology of Eve, the serpent and the apple, which leads to man's banishment from Paradise. But there is also a non-Christian mythology in the history of the apple. The ancient Greeks recount the legend of "the apple of discord." Three goddesses, Athena, Hera and Aphrodite ask Paris, a lowly Greek shepherd, to choose the fairest amongst them and award her with a golden apple. Each promises him a reward in return. Athena offers him war victories, Hera pledges him wealth and

Aphrodite promises him the most beautiful woman on earth. Paris chooses Aphrodite and subsequently asks for Helen of Troy, the wife of Menelaus, the King of Sparta. According to Greek legend this act starts the Trojan War, the first war among men⁷. There is a significant parallel with the Christian myth of an apple, a woman and the destruction of paradise. All of these pieces echo their own vertical structure with architectural imagery on their surfaces.

An installation of five paintings in the thesis exhibition is entitled Towards the End of the Future. The pieces contain chaotic architectural imagery tumbling and whirling against the stability of the Renaissance grid. Although frequently I have utilized photographs principally taken in Europe of aged and ancient architecture, in this series, the images are more current as well as local placed. The majority of the images were photographed within the city of Calgary and manipulated to appear aged and decomposed. The pieces are then installed leaning helter-skelter in the gallery to echo the turbulent surface imagery. Although the pieces incline in a seemingly haphazard fashion they have been mathematically constructed to fit into the angles at the top and bottom of the supporting columns. It is a strange juxtaposition of chaos and order. The title reflects this binary in its confusion of timelines, past and future.

As part of the thesis exhibition is a series of work being shown simultaneously with the MFA show in a venue in Germany. Although these pieces have individual titles they are entitled Child's Play as a series and were

⁷ This particular version came from an Internet site entitled The Columbia Encyclopedia: the Sixth Edition. "Paris". Alta Vista. June 19, 2000.

produced as a comment about the more sinister aspect of traditional children's games and stories. They allude to stories that according to today's politically correct approach to child rearing no well-intentioned adult should in good conscience relay to a small child.

The title Now I lay me down to Sleep is a child's bedtime prayer rooted in Catholicism. The traditional form, as remembered from my childhood, is as follows: "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to take, If I should Die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take." They need to take Seven and they might take yours is a hybrid of ancient fable and popular culture which refers to "the gentlemen", a group of foul creatures who visit cities collecting the hearts of men in order to expedite the end of the world. Rock, Paper, Scissors is an old-fashioned child's game which has two opponents smashing or defeating each other through the use of the aforementioned symbols shaped by the hands of the players. Tristram and Iseult offers the Arthurian legend of two lovers, promised in marriage to others, who accidentally consume a love potion, and are re-united only in death. All of the titles of the paintings are of similar nature.

Another association enters into the understanding of Child's Play when you include the way the collage pieces are constructed with paper, scissors and glue, an artistic practice which might be considered "child's play".

In discussing the specific works contained in the thesis show I have deliberately not reiterated a specific description of the surfaces which I have addressed in the initial stages of Chapter Three. The surfaces of all of the aforementioned pieces in combination with the structure serve to emphasize the

"object" status of the paintings as described in that section. Both series Child's Play and Towards the End of the Future are presented in an installation format to create an experience for the viewer as well as individual statements. They embody the three topics of this support paper and thesis show "subject", "object" and "experience".

Conclusion

Successful art possesses a binary nature without which the read becomes too shallow. It requires both a cerebral element and a passionate element that is tied into the physical act of making art.

A series of binaries exist within the work, or if you will an Apollonian or "objective" versus a Dionysian or "subjective" tension in the work. One of the binaries is order, represented by the mathematical structure of the paintings, in opposition to the chaos of the multiplicity of viewpoints offered through the installation of the pieces. Another exists when the architectural structure is contrasted with the organic treatment of the actual surface. A third emerges in the realistic imagery when compared to the abstract paint application. The traditional use of paint versus the technological based photography/photocopies offers one more divergence within the work. Finally there exists a masculine Renaissance grid which confronts the more feminine pour of the paint. In trying to resolve these oppositions I came to realize the oppositions were what contributed to the success of the work.

In closing I feel my work is difficult to categorize because of its play with the above binaries and the manner in which I borrow from dissimilar backgrounds. Author Tom Robbins in his novel Skinny Legs and All writes as follows:

Mockingbirds are the true artists of the bird kingdom. Which is to say, although they're born with a song of their own, an innate riff that happens to be one of the most versatile of all ornithological expressions, mockingbirds aren't content to merely play the hand that is dealt them. Like all artists, they are out to rearrange reality. Innovative, willful, daring, not bound by the rules to which others may blindly adhere, the mockingbird collects snatches of birdsong from this tree and that field, appropriates them, places them in new and unexpected contexts, recreates the world from the world. For example, a mockingbird in South Carolina was heard to blend the songs of thirty-two different kinds of bird into a virtuoso display that served no practical purpose, falling therefore into the realm of pure art.

In true mockingbird fashion I have sifted through the history of art picked through the rubble and discarded what I could not use and kept what served my artistic purpose.

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