

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

OIL ON WATER

BY

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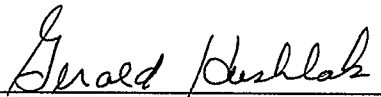
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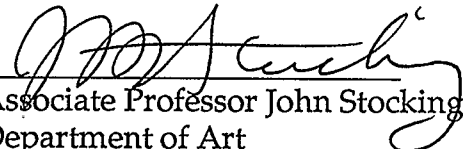
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THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY  
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## ABSTRACT

This paper, as a document in support of my graduate painting exhibition of the same name, Oil on Water, describes the ideas and approaches that have fostered this work. These are summarily noted by way of introduction in Chapter I. Historical precedents which provide a frame of reference for my painting, are discussed in Chapter II in terms of a model--a broad dichotomy--that parallels my artistic concerns. In Chapter III these precedents are further narrowed to primary sources of influence. Chapter IV, with the inclusion of graphic support material, chronicles the creative processes that have generated this exhibition. Slides illustrate both work in progress and the finished paintings.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND DEDICATION

I would like to thank my supervisor Jed Irwin for his steadfast support and encouragement, and for the generous availability of his time during this period of studies. My thanks as well to committee member Gerald Hushlak for the time and energies that he has given on my behalf particularly in relation to the exhibited work, and to John Stocking for his guidance and contribution especially in the preparation of this support paper.

My acknowledgements to other faculty members who have extended their assistance, to Clyde McConnell for his consideration and advice in the photographic documentation of my work, and to Joanne Oakes for facilitating my progress within the graduate program during the past two years.

To my husband Bill, and sons Scott and Sean, I take this opportunity to express my devotion for their many and varied expressions of love, support, and particularly patience.

This paper is dedicated to the memory of Frank Vervoort.

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...whoever looks into the mirror of the water will see first of all his own face. Whoever goes to himself risks a confrontation with himself. The mirror does not flatter, it faithfully shows whatever looks into it; namely, the face we never show to the world because we cover it with the persona, the mask of the actor. But the mirror lies behind the mask and shows the true face. (C. G. Jung)

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

As an artist, I can closely identify with Francis Bacon's contention that, "It is easier for me to say what I want to say about behaviour with the methods of art than it is for me to say them in conversation."<sup>1</sup> These "methods of art," as my preferential mode of communication, are image-based rather than purely abstract. Indeed the figure as metaphor bonds my work to that tradition of artists who use the image of man primarily as a vehicle to convey the "human predicament, as they experience it within and outside themselves."<sup>2</sup> My figurative imagery is representational for I consider the human form synonymous with human dignity.

The diving figures in my exhibited work are intended to be self-referential, physically and psychologically. In their ascent toward the surface and the light they manifest the transient nature of human existence--the great cycle of birth, death and regeneration. In their solitary activity they further address the isolated passage of life toward death as a journey common to all, but existentially singular.

Certain words which have long retained a personal significance and



which recur in Chapter IV, are: "cocoon" or "chrysalis," "tunnel," "surfacing," and "rites of passage." They collectively bespeak states of transition and address the relevance that I attribute to light. Both of these concerns are fundamental to my work.

Rites of passage mark man's biological and social transformations. Graduation as an initiation, is one such rite of passage and consequently a transitional state, a steppingstone to an altered level of being. This graduation exhibition, therefore, should be viewed not as a culmination but rather as one phase in the continuum of my art.

Oil paint on canvas provides the physical means by which I approach these concepts and, in conjunction with the writing of this paper, raises certain questions relative to my creative process. Is my painting primarily image-oriented or object-oriented? In other words, is the depicted illusion or the assertion of the two-dimensional, painted surface my primary consideration? As I attempt to place my work within this image/object dichotomy, a further distinction is relevant. Is the image self-reflective, springing from what I would term "introvision," or is it the product of outwardly looking at my surroundings? Does it convey a psychic reality or physical reality?

This paper in support of my M. F. A. exhibition of paintings,

examines both the means and the ends of the exhibited work. In consideration of the evolutionary process of art-making, these paintings may suggest those artists to whom I have looked as a student both at undergraduate and graduate levels. And although I cannot consider myself a disciple of any artist cited--with the exception of Vervoort, for a time--each has contributed to my artistic development.

Neither can my art be divorced from its greater social context; circumstantial and academic factors impinge as well. An undergraduate degree in psychology and other formative experiences are superimposed on these art historical factors. Collectively they conjure an image of concentric ripples on water which radiate and interlace to produce a progressively intricate moire pattern. This moire, as a synthesis of sources, forms the tapestry of my art.

## CHAPTER II

### HISTORICAL SOURCES

My artistic concerns reflect the duality of my nature: a tendency toward self-reflection on one hand, balanced against an embracing of the external world on the other. Both have exerted a pressure of sorts, a kind of internal tug-of-war. As a painter seeking to place my work within a historical context, I find that European art in the late nineteenth century provides a conceptual parallel. An artistic dichotomy between a Nordic psychological orientation and an Impressionist retinal sensibility can be recognized at that time.

General anxiety and despair easily beset traditionally romantic and emotionally inclined artists in northern Europe. This was in high contrast to the clear light-filled, joyous Impressionism of the South, a style which did not attempt to penetrate the inner being of man and his explanations of life.<sup>1</sup>

In terms of historical precedents the psychological north parallels the contemplation of my inner reality while the Impressionist south is equivalent to my celebration of the outer reality of the visual world.

Within this chapter I discuss each historical pole separately with regard to several key artists. The frame of reference I have chosen is relative to my personal experience as a developing artist. In section A, Francis Bacon is compared with Edvard Munch and Egon Schiele, all

being representative of the northern psychologically-oriented tradition. In Section B, the contrasting southern, visual, affirmative sensibility is embodied in the work and words of Claude Monet and Auguste Renoir.

In aspiring to a mediation of extremes, my art betrays neither the analytical Angst of the north, nor the sunny affirmation of the south. By employing this north/south analogy, however, I am able to clarify my own artistic philosophy and method. Section C addresses the individual contribution of these five artists in terms of my on-going process of assimilation.

## A. PSYCHOLOGICAL ORIENTATION

For Edvard Munch, Egon Schiele and Francis Bacon, each somewhat aloof from their immediate context, the human figure has provided the vehicle upon which to project their pessimistic view of the human condition. British artist Francis Bacon (b. 1909) thinks "art is an obsession with life and after all, as we are human beings, our greatest obsession is with ourselves."<sup>2</sup> Bacon contends that "man now realizes that he is an accident, that he is a completely futile being, that he has to play out the game without reason." Every artist today is "outside a tradition" and in Bacon's estimation, "Greek mythology is even further from us than Christianity."<sup>3</sup> Similarly for Egon Schiele (1890-1918) and his generation of young Austrian Expressionists, introspection and Freud's theoretical "psyche" had replaced the soul with its religious overtones, as the motivator and core of modern man. For Schiele, Autumn was

much more beautiful than every other season...not only as a season but also as a condition of man and things...It fills the heart with grief and reminds us that we are but pilgrims on this earth.<sup>4</sup>

For Schiele, who wrote, "I love to sink into the depths of all living beings,"<sup>5</sup> imprisonment tangibly affirmed his role as social outcast. The silent scream of Self-Portrait as Prisoner is echoed in the neurotic stare

and the clutching, clawing fingers that mirror the agitated soul.

Whoever saw the thin, young man with his narrow lined face, his bushy black hair and his penetrating eyes, formed the impression that Schiele was forced to consume himself from within.<sup>6</sup>

Indeed contortion and spasm are eloquently betrayed by way of the hands, which must be considered the aspect of Schiele's oeuvre most neglected by critics. As a vehicle to convey psychic and spiritual discomfort, the hands for Schiele are analogous to the mouth for Bacon. The unnatural extension or contortion that each is forced to assume conveys the trauma of emotional collapse.

Bacon, however, contends of the screaming mouth that colour was his motivation and that "the scream was not...expressionistic, I've nothing to express."<sup>7</sup> This paradoxically contradicts other remarks, notably his struggle "to bring the figurative thing up onto the nervous system more violently and poignantly."<sup>8</sup> It also contradicts the spasmodic writhing, both physical and psychic, portrayed in his art.

For Norwegian symbolist Edvard Munch (1863-1944), the scream was highly expressionistic, as evidenced in his recollection of the circumstances precipitating his famous motif, The Scream:

I was walking along a road one evening, the town and fjord below me on one side. I was tired and ill--I stood looking out across the fjord--the sun set--the clouds grew red--like blood--I felt as though all nature was screaming--I thought I heard a

scream.--I painted this picture--painted the clouds like real blood. The colours screamed--.<sup>9</sup>

Bacon's fascination with the screaming mouth, he maintains, relates to colour, "the beautiful red and purple of the interior of the mouth rather like Monet was obsessed by haystacks and the light falling on them from hour to hour." He continues to note that he once bought a book on diseases of the mouth "with beautiful color illustrations and they have always had a tremendous effect on me."<sup>10</sup>

This reference to "illustrations" providing image and inspiration for Bacon is characteristic of his use of photographs as "a sort of compost out of which images emerge."<sup>11</sup>

I [Bacon] think it's the slight remove from fact, which returns me onto the fact more violently. Through the photographic image I find myself beginning to wander into the image and unlock what I think of as its reality more than I can by looking at it.<sup>12</sup>

In reference to making an image "as strongly...as I possibly can," Bacon maintains that he "must cut away its naturalistic surroundings."<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Munch noted in his Saint-Cloud diary of 1889, "no more interiors should be painted, no people reading and women knitting..."<sup>14</sup> Instead he "painted only memories...Hence the simplicity of the paintings, their apparent emptiness. I painted...the blurred colours of past time."<sup>15</sup>

Indeed the sources of their imagery are indicative of the diverse

range that Munch, Schiele and Bacon encompass: Bacon's preference for photographic images, Munch's mnemonic sources and Schiele's method of working directly from life, particularly from the female model. Although drawing from diverse points of departure, they reach similar ends.

The pertinence to me of these northern artists relates primarily to their expression of human psychology. The following observation is indicative of both my interest in this dimension and the relevance of the colour psychology of Bacon's mentor Roy de Maistre on his protege. De Maistre, an Australian expatriot painter, provided technical advice for Bacon, fifteen years his junior, who had no art instruction nor education. De Maistre's fascination with colour and the effects of coloured walls on institutionalized World War I Australians--the shell-shocked, for instance--must be considered formative to Bacon's development. Of his biographers, Davies, alone, attests to de Maistre's role as an "invaluable mentor" but hesitates to correlate the coloured walls of institutional wards with Bacon's subsequent strongly coloured "cells" that contain his tormented, screaming figures. Of Wound for Crucifixion, an early work which Bacon subsequently destroyed, he recalls a large section of human flesh on a sculptor's armature set in a "hospital ward, or corridor, with the wall painted dark green to waist height and cream above, with a long,



narrow, horizontal black line in between."<sup>16</sup> Bacon's recollection of the bi-coloured wall of the "hospital ward or corridor" would support the hypothesis that de Maistre's colour theory had significantly influenced his protege's figurative settings and colour psychology. Bacon further notes that he starts a painting with the foreground--the figure--which in turn determines the "raw color of the background."<sup>17</sup>

A sense of figurative displacement or isolation relative to formal structure is evident in the work of each of the three northern painters. Characteristically Schiele chose for his paintings the square format and habitually centered his sitter against a blank background--an unusual figure/ground format considering the asymmetrical placement and decorative backgrounds favored by his contemporary Secessionists. This stark background conveys the threat of a limitless void and thereby imbues the subject with a powerful sense of isolation reflecting Schiele's own loneliness:

The feeling of loneliness, for him a loneliness that was totally chilling, was in him from childhood onwards--in spite of his family, in spite of his gaiety when he was among friends.<sup>18</sup>

Even in his coupled configurations, one individual frequently assumes a doll-like, wooden quality. This non-participating "puppet" figure disrupts the interaction and causes a most profound and disturbing, psychological isolation.

In Munch's art the frequency of the frontal, truncated figure is unsettling, doubly so in the swift spacial recession from foreground to background as exemplified in The Scream. Characteristically the figure's lower body is cut off at the bottom of the painting, thereby disorienting its placement relative to the ground plane. In addition the exaggerated diagonal of the bridge which shoots back into the picture plane thrusts the figure forward. Munch's undulating figures, often isolated in a physical (and psychological) nocturnal landscape, are essentially apparitions.

Bacon generally isolates single figures or single heads as he contends that multiple figures imply narrative, story-telling, and then "the story talks louder than the paint."<sup>19</sup> The triptych format has become synonymous with Bacon who is attracted to the formalist connotations of the raised and isolated central figure common to European crucifixion triptychs. Formal isolating components which function as vehicles of display, further "concentrate"<sup>20</sup> Bacon's image: the cage-like, transparent cube, the raised dais, and structural railings.

Like Munch, Bacon strives to dislocate the figure from the home interior preferring instead a stark, windowless, airless space against which the subject is thrust up for closer inspection--like a specimen in a jar. The cubicle-like space brings to mind the isolation and apprehension linked to a medical waiting room. Evidently my analogy is not unique for Forge

observes that Bacon's figures, isolated pictorially, never signal to each other. "They are as alone as dying men in a row of hospital cots."<sup>21</sup> Similarly Kuspit likens Bacon's isolated figure in its stage-like setting to a coffin displaying an embalmed corpse.<sup>22</sup> In Bacon's words, "you can feel the shadow of life passing all the time."<sup>23</sup>

An obsession with death and decay found a common voice in the statements and oeuvre of all three. The captions Munch composed for his more important motifs reveal his conceptual intent. The text that accompanied Madonna, for instance, reads:

The pause when the entire world halted in its orbit. Your face embodies all the world's beauty. Your lips, crimson red like the coming fruit, glide apart as in pain. The smile of a corpse. Now life and death join hands. The chain is joined that ties the thousands of past generations to the thousands of generations to come."<sup>24</sup>

This is indicative of Munch's oft-cited reference to "crimson" or "red," generally in relation to blood. (See his caption for The Scream.) I note a parallel between the prevalence of red and black in his oeuvre and their frequency<sup>25</sup> in much recent figure painting. Red and black, as the predominant colours in the work of life-threatened children,<sup>26</sup> can be further related to Munch's own childhood experiences of death--the death of his mother and sister. For Munch who contended, "Sickness [consumption] and madness and death were the black angels standing by

my cradle,"<sup>27</sup> death became the fundamental theme of his art.

Similarly Schiele wrote, "Why do I paint graves and many similar things?--because this [my father's death] continues to live on in me."<sup>28</sup>

Schiele's remorseless critic A. F. Seligmann wrote of

the dreadful and fantastic caricatures by E. Schiele, the ghostly wraiths with their bloody, spider's fingers and their mutilated, wasted corpses seem to have been resurrected from thousand-year-old graves.<sup>29</sup>

Bacon, always conscious of "the shortness of the moment of existence between birth and death," supposes that it comes through in his paintings.<sup>30</sup> The following statement would indicate that Bacon considers his art to be autobiographical:

The everyday wash of life flows into one's whole imagery, and that mingled with instinct and chance brings up images. I use the whole of my experience and I know that this all goes into the work, not consciously, but it goes into all the imagery.<sup>31</sup>

Bacon's three "black" triptychs all postdate the death of George Dyer, his dearest friend. The final and culminating Triptych May-June 1973 depicts Dyer's actual death sequence and as a statement of profound Angst remains unequalled in Bacon's oeuvre. A naked man vomits into a washroom sink, then lunges across the room and dies on the toilet. Taken in a general context, as well, Bacon's art is invested with the threat and shock of coughing up blood.

Thus we see a pervasive pessimism with the theme of death and

displacement permeating the work of these three northern artists. Indeed the exploration of human psychology as reflected in their art is that factor which links Munch, Schiele and Bacon. In treating their subject--the figure--as a metaphor for man's inner turmoil they share an inward contemplation of the dark, impassioned side of human nature.

In summary, I have examined these three artists because they represent an attraction or magnetic pole which is embodied in one aspect of my art. This direction is indicative of the pull I experience as a painter, a pull consistent with my tendency toward "introvision" and subsequent education in the field of psychology. This northern, introspective direction, however, symbolizes one--but only one--of my affinities for it is opposed and counterbalanced, in the historical context, by a force to the south.

## B. IMPRESSIONIST SENSIBILITIES

Art critic Georges Riviere commented that the distinguishing feature of Impressionism was the treatment of the subject "for the tones and not for the subject itself."<sup>32</sup> This approach, in conjunction with the sunny scenes depicted, is seen to be in diametrical contrast to that of Munch, Schiele and Bacon, for as Riviere noted of the 1877 Impressionist exhibition, it

only shows us lively scenes which sadden neither the eye nor the spirit; luminous, joyous or grandiose landscapes; never any of those lugubrious notes which bring gloom to the eye of the beholder.<sup>33</sup>

From our distant vantage point, it is easy to forget that the Impressionist technique struck the public as revolutionary. In order to comprehend the Impressionist philosophy and method, it should be useful to briefly consider the cultural milieu of France in the middle of the nineteenth century.

In the wake of the Revolution of 1848 which led to the overthrow of King Louis Philippe and the formation of the Second Empire, there followed a period of dramatic industrialization. The social upheavals of accelerated urban development prompted a vogue for simple, rural pleasures; picnics and boating parties on the river Seine are typical

examples. These popular pastimes were portrayed in the literature of the day, as evidenced on the writings of the Goncourt brothers and Maupassant.

By mid-century the French art scene was permeated with disquiet. Neoclassicism and its off-shoots, genre painting and state portraiture, had become the "official" art form sanctioned by European academies and salons. Originating in eighteenth century Italy, Neoclassicism proclaimed political and moral issues in the "grand manner" of Greek and Roman historical themes. Dogmatic allegories which enjoyed a wide-spread popularity by mid-century, emulated the classicism of Jaques Louis David (1748-1825), the leader of the Neoclassical movement in France. Consequently in 1853, poet and critic Theophile Gautier wrote, "Today art has at its disposal only dead ideas and formulas..."<sup>34</sup>

Neoclassicism demanded not only compliance with "heroic" subject matter, precluding natural themes--except as a supplement to the figure--but stylistic orthodoxy as well. Sharply delineated contours and chiaroscuro produced the illusion of clearly articulated, substantial, three dimensional form. Further hallmarks included composition based on stable horizontal/vertical design elements, somber earth-toned palette, smooth unobtrusive paint application and attention to detail. Of the 1869 Paris Salon, Jules Champfleury observed, "universal cleverness of hand

makes two thousand pictures look as if they had come from the same hand."<sup>35</sup>

For progressive French artists the 1860's were formative years in their search for a new visual language. In rallying against Neoclassical dogma, they rejected the Classical and Renaissance art of the past--taking their cue instead from the physical world of the senses, the mundane here and now. These artists, who we've come to know as the Impressionists, moved their easels and paints from the studio to the forests of Fontainebleau. This decisive action renounced not only Neoclassicism but also a long continuum of studio painting in favor of landscape painting, which was scorned in their day as a minor art form.

Through their perceptual approach to natural phenomena, the Impressionists celebrated an almost religious love of contemporary life. The official salons, recalled Claude Monet (1840-1926), "which used to be brown, have become blue, green, red..."<sup>36</sup> Affirmation of life through art is exuded in this bright, high-toned palette and the pastoral or leisure scenes depicted. As critic Rene Gimpel commented, the Impressionists "attain the summit of their art when they paint our French Sundays...kisses in the sun, picnics...unashamed relaxation."<sup>37</sup>

This joie de vivre which permeates the collective Impressionist sensibility was not necessarily a reflection of the circumstances of its



individual exponents. Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919), for instance, who has become synonymous with "sun-day" excursions, was dogged by financial woes, as was Monet. Critical derision which had initially forced them to band together against the censorship wielded by the "R" (Refused) stamp of the Paris Salon, continued to plague their autonomous exhibitions and the sale of their work. The noteworthy aspect remains the exuberance manifest in their art despite circumstantial difficulties. In many respects my work, also, celebrates the sensuous world. I can therefore share and identify with this affirmative outlook, not to the exclusion, however, of the northern philosophy previously discussed.

Whereas the cross (crucifixion) provided Bacon with a formal "armature" upon which to "hang all types of feeling and sensation"<sup>38</sup> indicative of "man's behaviour,"<sup>39</sup> Impressionist subject matter provided a formal armature upon which to render the fugitive and ephemeral play of light. This latter approach was the antithesis of de Maistre's advice to his protege Francis Bacon:

In one's life one ought to be gentle and forbearing but in one's art one should conduct oneself quite differently. It's often necessary, for instance, to give the spectator an ugly left uppercut.<sup>40</sup>

In striking contrast to this impassioned, didactic philosophy the visual approach of the Impressionists stressed the surface treatment of the

painting. The direction of the brush stroke that had traditionally followed and thereby delineated the form, was fractured into daubs of pigment that eroded conventional linear contours. Impressionism in abolishing line,<sup>41</sup> dematerialized form. The impasto rendition of light, in particular, imbued it with a material presence. The crusty accretion of pigment due to multiple painting sessions--evident in certain of Monet's Rouen Cathedral series--is exemplary. The tactile quality of these visibly immediate paint strokes stressed not the convention of recession into illusionistic space, but rather the two-dimensional physicality of the painted surface. In this iconoclastic departure from tradition, painting--by engaging the tactile response of the beholder--began to assert an "object" quality. Its conventional role as conveyer of "image" was thereby called to task as the artist re-examined the nature of his relationship to his materials and to the painterly process. As it attracted and directed my own artistic development, I consider this the central legacy of Impressionism.

As a means to conceptual ends, painting for Munch, Schiele and Bacon retained its "image" function (viz. the human figure). Renoir, also, concentrated on images of the figure. In the Impressionistic manner, if not the Impressionistic subject, he confined his attention to the surface qualities of his sitter--never penetrating the membrane of the

flesh to probe the psychological dimension or personality. He spoke simply of seeking tints to make "the flesh on my canvas live and quiver."<sup>42</sup> Of these sun-dappled figures which exude contentment and well-being, one is astonished to read criticism paralleling that directed at Schiele and reminiscent of Bacon. Renoir's Nude in Sunlight, wrote A. Wolff in Le Figaro April 3, 1876, had "masses of decomposed flesh covered with green and violet spots which denote a state of advanced putrefaction in a corpse."<sup>43</sup> Similarly Renoir's Dancing at the Moulin de la Galette of 1867, included in the Third Impressionist Exhibition, was attacked for its "cadaver-like effects."<sup>44</sup> Such attitudes clearly illustrate the difficulty encountered by academic critics of the day in attempting to understand Impressionism.

Landscape, the characteristic Impressionist genre, was portrayed from the vantage point of a casual observer. Effecting a break from the convention of composing around a center of interest, Impressionist composition appeared random or casually photographic. Consequently the role of the viewer seemed almost arbitrary or inconsequential. As Monet articulated:

I have no other wish than a close fusion with nature, and...to have worked and lived in harmony with her laws. Beside her grandeur, her power, and her immortality, the human creature seems but a miserable atom.<sup>45</sup>

He spoke from his own experience as he himself was dwarfed by these forces. On November mornings, "when the spray flew thicker than torrential rain," recalled an observer, Monet would be down on the beach. "With water streaming under his cape, he painted the storm amidst the swirl of the salt water."<sup>46</sup> As evidenced in both his words and working methods, therefore, Monet painted while nature composed. The artist, he believed, played a predominantly observational rather than manipulative role in terms of his motif.

Georges Clemenceau similarly recalled finding his friend Monet in a poppy field "with four easels on which he painted furiously, one after the other, depending on the way the light of the sun changed."<sup>47</sup> The transition to serial painting was consequently a logical progression as Monet embarked on his now-famous series of haystacks, poplars, cathedrals and later, waterlilies. As Kelder observes, the object of his attention came to lose its meaning by virtue of repetition and was rendered increasingly abstract.<sup>48</sup> To Monet, for whom nature provided the visual means to "experiment with the effects of light and colour,"<sup>49</sup> the subject matter was gradually effaced--a mere pretext to "convey what I am seeking: 'instantaneity,' above all, the envelopment, the same light spread over everywhere..."<sup>50</sup>

The fluid, ephemeral, refracting/reflecting nature of water, for

Monet, was akin to the transient play of light and atmospheric conditions. Wavering, instable reflections of colour and form on water--of particular relevance to my own aquatic series--were fundamental to the development of the Impressionist technique of fracturing local colour and dematerializing contours. Even prior to 1870, Monet and Renoir, who painted together on the banks of the Seine, fractured their colours to approximate the reflections on water yet their skies remained completely blue.<sup>51</sup> This decomposition of local colour into choppy multi-coloured strokes of pure pigment progressively transcended the boundaries of water to permeate all aspects of the canvas, inclusive of the sky.

By fracturing brilliant white light into its prismatic constituents and juxtaposing dabs of pure pigment, colour and light--for the Impressionists--became synonymous. And although they were keenly aware of contemporary optical advances, notably Chevreul's theory of the optical mixture of proximate colours, they approached colour in an intuitive rather than a formulated fashion. In the words of Renoir who is known primarily as a colourist:

I want a red to be sonorous, to sound, like a bell; if it doesn't turn out that way, I put more reds and other colors till I get it...I have no rules and no methods.<sup>52</sup>

Monet refers to colour as "my day-long obsession, joy and torment."<sup>53</sup> Colour for the Impressionists, although fractured into high-toned

primaries, approached local colour by optical blending.

Thus Impressionist colour was not subjective or symbolic in the manner of Munch, Schiele or Bacon. In their quest to render the ephemeral qualities of light and colour by means of a predominantly retinal philosophy to art-making, Monet and Renoir project a collective celebration of life. In their sunny affirmative outlook I encounter no hint of the psychological shadows that darken the work of their northern counterparts. The Impressionists, through the window of their eyes--and by extension their art, rejoiced in both nature and life.

In the preceeding brief presentation I have outlined the southern forces that counteract the northern historical forces within my own art education. Impressionism, as I perceived it, formed the opposite magnetic pole in the history of painting. My attraction to it exerted a pull which opposed and balanced the force exerted by the north.

### C. CONCLUSION

In the following section the contribution of each of those artists previously cited is assessed in terms of the development of my own work. The individual relevance I attribute to the northern introspective artists is my initial consideration. Subsequently, the roles played by the southern perceptual painters within my continual cycle of artistic assimilation and rejection will conclude this chapter.

As an artist respectful of the human figure I am repelled by the "injury"--as Bacon phrases it<sup>54</sup>--that he practices upon it, for in crippling the image of man Bacon psychologically disables him. His physically twisted forms parade an emotional twisting that is equally disturbing to me in its heavy-handedness. This horrific imagery, however, I consider to be compensated by his sensuous colour and painterliness. That Bacon doesn't find this interface between beauty and butchery discordant can be inferred from his description of a painting bearing a "very beautiful wound."<sup>55</sup> The discord that I experience, however, is related to this simultaneous repulsion-attraction and springs not from the horrific imagery alone.

My own work, at its best, is slightly discordant. The subtle edge that certain of my paintings betray can be likened to a shadow passing in front

of the work. As an allusive enigma or paradox, it resists conscious intervention and articulation and may best be described in the terminology of a recent studio visitor who was not fluent in the English language. After searching for the definitive word in relation to my "Divers," he noted an underlying "disequilibrium."

Contrary to Bacon's shocking imagery, Munch's images seem to retain an archetypal memory trace which I strive for, as well. Perhaps in his exclusion of all but the imperative detail etched in his own memory, Munch transcends the individual and addresses the collective. I consider Munch's The Scream, therefore, as opposed to Bacon's multiple versions, the quintessential cry of anguish. Indeed Munch's images tend to linger in my mind where they have grafted themselves onto my memories. Upon seeing a number of his original paintings a year ago I was struck by the relatively small scale of the work and disappointed by the dry, flat, almost brittle surface quality. The strength of this work, however, is not diminished for it is sustained by mnemonic association. This memory-related dimension I incorporate in my own approach, particularly in terms of the exhibited paintings.

Schiele's figures in their blatant sexuality and unabashed viewer confrontation, hold an eerie attraction for me. Their riveting eyes seem to taunt me for they know--and exhibit the knowledge--that they are



objects of scrutiny. No voyeurism here. The frequency of the central configuration, as noted, further isolates and "features" the subject implying a static--almost telescopic--frame of reference. In this manner they are the antithesis of my own figures who, in turning away, retain the veil. Thus I note a reverse influence.

I relate to Schiele primarily in terms of his incisive draftsmanship and his elongation of the figure. In gesture and body type I see something of myself in a physical sense. This personal association transcends the physical, for Schiele, in his fluent linear expression has so ably captured the tension of the pose that I, as a viewer, can conceptually assume that pose. Schiele's subjects speak the "body language" of gesture, tension and consequent inference.

My own figures communicate solely in this vocabulary for, contrary to the figurative Angst common to the northern artists cited, my insular nature compels me to understate and to keep the mystery in. Consequently my work "betrays but does not parade."<sup>56</sup> Like the vestige of an archetypal memory it alludes, but hesitates to divulge.

The cool blue cast of the water in my exhibited work, can be likened to the glass which covers Bacon's oil paintings, in that both serve to emphasize the separation of image and viewer. This sense of separation or isolation--common to the work of Schiele, Munch and Bacon--is that

factor to which I most closely subscribe.

Isolation is manifest not only in the formal structure of their art but in a transcendent psychological aspect as well. Schiele's coupled configurations, as noted, often betray a psychic isolation despite their physical interaction, while Munch's figures exude an aura of pensive self-absorption that renders them emotionally inviolate. My own figures may be aligned with Munch's in their esoteric activity of diving.

In my recollection of Munch's art, his beings who stare out to sea appear inaccessible in every sense and consequently relate to the persistence in my imagery of the woman and the window [Slide #2]. The window, however--as a plane of passage separating experienced from perceived reality--was consistently an opaque, "frosted" pane. In obscuring rather than revealing an external reality, it functioned more as a barrier than a passageway. Although these figures were apparently looking out, they were, in effect, looking in for the opaque window had become a mirror of sorts.

Munch wrote:

In my art I have tried to arrive at an explanation of life and endeavoured to achieve clarity in my way of life. I thought, too, that this might also help others clarify their lives.<sup>57</sup>

This self-reflective bent is indicative of the "introvision" common to the northern artists cited for whom painting functions to mirror the inner

being of man and his explanations of life. In a more literal sense, as well, this tendency toward self-reflection is manifest in the persistence of incisive self-portraiture in the oeuvre of each.

These northern visionaries share a deep-seated pessimism essentially foreign to me, although I keenly sense and can associate with the isolation or detachment that commonly cloaks their image of man. The essential point remains that the northern artists in their explorations of the psyche turn inward toward the dark, impassioned side of their being. Consequently their art, in its self-searching, functions as a mirror.

In both their philosophy and method the Impressionists can be considered the antithesis of the analytical Angst of Munch, Shiele and Bacon. The Impressionist affirmation of life is conveyed by means of light and colour in a perceptual approach to art-making wherein painting functions, not as a mirror to the self, but as a window to the natural world. Monet acknowledged this retinal orientation in his advice to a young painter:

When you go out to paint, try to forget what objects you have before you--a tree, a house, a field, or whatever. Merely think, here is a little square of blue, here an oblong of pink, here a streak of yellow, and paint it just as it looks to you, the exact color and shape, until it gives your own naive impression of the scene before you.<sup>58</sup>

Monet further contended that the first real look at the motif was the

truest and least prejudiced. He therefore wished that he had been born blind and had subsequently had his sight restored--so that he might paint without knowing what those objects were that he saw before him. He believed that one must paint what is really seen, "not what you think you ought to see; not the object isolated as in a test tube, but the object enveloped in sunlight and atmosphere..."<sup>59</sup> Monet's words are of particular import for they anticipate the teachings of Frank Vervoort nearly a century later, as discussed in Chapter III.

The Nymphs (Waterlilies) series, Monet's culminating tour de force, I consider to be the quintessence of Impressionism, particularly his circular frieze that surrounds the Orangery Museum visitor with eighty running yards<sup>60</sup> of painted canvas. This circular presentation, as the architects of the Baroque discovered, tends to disorient the viewer.<sup>61</sup> Deprived of the familiar (viz. frontal) frame of reference, the viewer is literally enveloped in a continuous "impression" of light and water--at once fleeting and dream-like yet infinitely enduring.

This fleeting, ephemeral quality, particularly evident in Monet's late serial paintings, bespeaks impermanence. In the fluctuations of light and atmosphere he addresses the transient nature of material reality, as exemplified in his cathedral series. The facade of Rouen Cathedral appears to erode--like sugar--at various times of day and under certain

atmospheric conditions. Changing appearances within the passage of hours alludes to the transient nature of all existence--our own human existence as well as that of the natural world around us.

This transformative passage of time, in conjunction with the effects of natural light, is fundamental to my own philosophy. Although both transience and light are of primary significance to my own work, at this juncture I merely note their relevance in terms of Monet's influence. Both are further addressed in relation to my exhibition in Chapter IV.

The waterlilies series, which occupied Monet for the final decade of his life, was indicative of his long-term fascination with water. In the formative years of Impressionism he was known to have painted from a floating studio, a flat-bottomed boat on the river Seine. Late in life he visited Venice and, enchanted by the unusual light of the city suspended between water and sky, he stayed for months recording his impressions in paint.<sup>62</sup>

The aquatic theme and encompassing presentation of this M. F. A. exhibition recalls, indirectly, Monet's encircling Nymphéas which left me with a vertiginous, instable sensation and a lingering doubt that there could be anything more permanent in life than his ethereal waterlilies. Indeed it is important to note that Monet had intended each of his extensive series--beginning with the haystacks--to be viewed collectively

rather than individually.<sup>63</sup>

In the joie de vivre that permeates the work of both Monet and Renoir, my own celebration of looking and of life is confirmed. Renoir's figures radiate his appreciation of the human form in and of itself--as reflected both in the pleasant countenances and naturalistic proportions of his subjects. My figures exist between, and therefore mediate, the stylistic surface orientation of Renoir and the psychological dimension of Munch. Indeed I share the need of both to "people" my paintings.

Essentially this southern celebration of life is confirmed in the following aspects of my art: a respect--even reverence--for the human form, an attraction to light as a physical/psychological life-generating force, and an ease or "facility" with paint that belies my struggle.

While Impressionist art rejoices in a love of looking, it also rejoices in the calligraphy of painting. Much of the derision which greeted their exhibitions resulted from the rough, rapidly executed application of paint that lacked a smooth finish and attention to detail. Hence the Impressionists were scorned for the public exhibition of their "sketches." Monet's work, in particular, displays the gestural, almost abstract paint notation produced by his large, flat brushes and rapid application that often permitted the grey sizing of the canvas to show. These qualities, which address the activity of painting at least as much as the depiction of

the image, parallel my own artistic considerations. By means of the visible paint notation and the sensual massing of pigment, the planar surface of the work is actively asserted, at once drawing the viewer into the artist's process and reminding him that he is contemplating a two-dimensional "object" as well as an illusion. Impressionist painting, therefore, functions as both window and object.

As to the "object" quality of my work, it is my contention that one of the most generous concessions an artist can leave for the viewer is a trace of his process. In drawing with a loaded brush and allowing the mark to live and breathe of its own volition the artist allows his trail (and trial) to show. In blending and polishing the notation and homogenizing the surface the artist denies this access and covers his tracks.

Consequently, the north/south analogy that I have employed allows me to understand my work as a resolution of opposite poles, each significantly contributing to the evolution of my artistic philosophy and method. My art, in seeking its location, fluctuates between the magnetism of these two personal directions which the historical models suggest. No fixed position can or should be established.

### CHAPTER III

#### PRIMARY SOURCES

Chapter III discusses the formative impact on my painting of instructor Frank Vervoort, whose "perceptual method" of painting and drawing I consider fundamental to my later artistic development. His role was decisive from the outset, so decisive in fact as to be considered singular during his latter years of instruction (1981-1983). Within this Vervoort context my search for an alternate vantage point led me to Degas, who facilitated a re-evaluation of the Vervoort impact from a similar yet removed perspective.

Vervoort, of course, was a direct influence while Degas was indirect in the manner of the five artists previously cited. I consider both, nevertheless, primary sources in the privileged and cross-referencing roles they have played. In their differing approaches to art as communicator of primarily perceptual experience, they have significantly contributed to the formation of my own artistic vision. Both Vervoort and Degas can further be understood to intervene in the north/south dichotomy discussed in Chapter II; they certainly gravitate, however, toward an Impressionist sensibility, particularly in terms of the relevance of vantage point and light.



#### A. FRANK VERVOORT

The teaching of the late Alberta College of Art instructor Frank Vervoort (1930-1983) was based on the philosophy that art-making and visual experience were synonymous. He postulated that because nothing is seen in isolation, but always in relation to other things in the environment, it was necessary to paint a wide visual field which encompassed peripheral vision. He contended that a dynamic interrelationship existed between all elements of this visual field. By focalizing upon a feature of the visual field--still-life or landscape--that feature came into sharper focus while peripheral elements encroached only as shapes and values increasingly devoid of specific detail. The individual point of vision which could be likened to "a beam from a lighthouse--only instead of light travelling outwards, appearances travel in,"<sup>1</sup> made no provision for selectivity except the choice of specific vantage point. All that was seen was drawn or painted. Nothing that was perceived within the range of vision of the observer could be altered or omitted and conversely, no element not perceived could be incorporated.

Vervoort's philosophy demanded an intense visual encounter with the subject. He repeatedly urged his students to "turn off your internal dialogue" (or "incessant mental chatter") because that which

stands between you and the world is your description of the world. Language, he believed, was a sophisticated symbol system that blocked the ability to look with an innocent eye. "Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak."<sup>2</sup> Vervoort maintained that as adults we take the use of symbols (words) too far, and thereby lose the freshness of direct perception in word-bound thought, or in the words of John Berger, "that narrative which, at one level or another of your consciousness, you are continually retelling and developing to yourself...displaces awareness of your own lived time."<sup>3</sup>

The crux of Vervoort's philosophy, consequently, was centred around this intense visual encounter which required prolonged nonverbal concentration prior to painting or drawing. In this manner the complex elements of a wide visual field shed their qualitative identities and flattened into an abstract pattern of interrelating light and dark values. Indeed, he projected slides of paintings by Old Masters, notably Vermeer, which were purposely blurred beyond recognition to identify the didactic light/dark compositional qualities. Vervoort offered that intuitive feeling for the interrelationship of these two principle tones, likened to "a light and a dark dancer," must supersede conscious reference (labelling) of specific elements.

This teacher advocated such direct translation from

three-dimensional visual phenomena to the two-dimensional working surface that one should neither label nor, ideally, even know what he was painting/drawing. Indeed he maintained that no acceptable parallel to visual experience could be found. He postulated that even the seemingly transparent intervention of a pane of glass between artist and landscape "showed itself."

His working method required a medium-grey ground. Graphite uniformly applied to white paper, or a neutral tone of oil paint applied to primed canvas, provided this workable ground. Light values could then be "lifted" from the graphite ground with an eraser and from the prepared canvas with a cloth in a subtractive process. Darks were blocked in additively. [Refer to slides #4-#10]

In a nonverbal transfer from external reality to the prepared working surface, the abstract "pattern" of dominant light and dark elements was blocked in. The major compositional thrusts were thus established, as well as the value range. As shapes and values (local colours) were progressively refined, the images and illusion of space increasingly emerged in a process simulating the focusing of a lens. Although local colour was applied as the painting progressed, the effect remained more tonal than colourist. The paint mark was ideally ambient, reaffirming the lack of hierarchy of the elements within the

expansive visual field. Essentially flesh was painted with the same notation as sky, hair, or the grey cement floor of the studio--yielding a homogeneous surface quality.

Vervoort was enamoured of the illumination of forms in natural light, by the work of Vermeer, and by the following quote which Vervoort attributed to Leonardo da Vinci:

Observe the light and consider its beauty  
Blink your eye and look at it.  
That what you see was not there at first,  
and that which was, is no more.

Vervoort's philosophical readings were largely Zen-based, generally advocating looking into one's own being.

Do not seek outwardly. When you do you are simply carried away by unessential externalities and will find yourselves altogether unable to discriminate right from wrong."<sup>4</sup>

This Zen directive would appear to contradict Vervoort's philosophy and method. Taken in context, however, it chastises outward seeking in relation to seeking the opinion of others and is, therefore, not incompatible with Vervoort's method of nonverbal outward gazing. Both are essentially centred in the self.

His sudden death in late 1983 forced me to a thorough self-reflection in terms of loss of a mentor, essentially a catharsis. The intervening years have allowed a distanced evaluation of the impact of his perceptual

method, of what was rejected and of that which continues to shape my vision and nourish my art. His use of a wide visual field was the initial aspect of this philosophy that I ultimately rejected. Contrary to Monet's advice to paint an object in sunlight and atmosphere--not isolated as in a test tube--and Vervoort's advocacy of a wide field of vision, I have come to narrow the range of vision and edit superfluous detail. In this respect my affinities gravitate toward Munch.

The illusion of deep space which "opened" as the painting progressed according to the working methods described, although convincing, also remained discomfiting. Indeed frequently I caught myself looking intensely with one eye closed in an attempt, I later realized, to flatten the space by eliminating stereoscopic vision. The space in my recent work has continued to flatten into shallow, ambiguous environs for my figures. Intimate, closet-like spaces that close upon these figures, and recently the tactile milieu of water--the closest of spaces--remain more conceptually akin to me than Vervoort's illusionistic space.

The imprint of his love of light, in addition to his philosophy of painting as perceptual experience was his primary legacy. Light and the resultant illumination and definition of forms are intrinsically interwoven and central to my work from direct observation. Indeed light

is of paramount importance to any discussion of the development of my work. It is, therefore, essential to note that after my initial class with Vervoort I invariably gravitated to the corner of the studio/classroom adjacent to the window, or alternately chose a vantage point across the room that permitted a juxtaposition of the subject (figure or still-life) and the window. As emanator of light and metaphoric passageway/barrier to an alternate reality, the window became crucial to both my working methods and my psychological outlook. Light further provides a parallel between the Vervoort approach and that of Edgar Degas (1834-1917).

## B. EDGAR DEGAS

Degas' rendition of the optical effects of illumination is an aspect of his oeuvre relevant to my own philosophy. He contended that "a difficulty is a light. An insurmountable difficulty is a sun."<sup>5</sup> His weak, afflicted eyesight was strained by harsh sunlight which precluded out-door painting. He worked, instead, in the studio from preliminary studies drawn on-location.

As to his preference for artificial illumination, Degas noted: "Work at evening effects, lamps, candles, etc. The point of the thing is not so much to show the source of light, but the effect of light."<sup>6</sup> Consistent with his preference for artifice and the unconventional angle, Degas favoured the startling and hallucinatory effects of stage footlights and the glare they cast upon the under-surfaces of the performers' features. Through bold light/dark contrasts and disconcerting juxtapositions of foreground/background elements, Degas composed and patterned his drawings and paintings. More subtle effects of lighting played upon the nuances of the body and illuminated the surrounding surfaces:

every object, every piece of material,...affords him a pretext for playing with lights and shadows...and the woman, seen against the light amidst this cunning disarray,...looks like some antique statue facing the light...<sup>7</sup>

Degas' attention to light owes much to his Impressionist contemporaries with whom he exhibited between 1874-1886, although his working methods and reluctance to be numbered among them precluded his admission to the Impressionist fold. These contemporaries painted on-location in an attempt to capture the nuances of atmospheric conditions and the play of sunlight on form. Prismatic light for the Impressionists not only superseded but tended to dissolve form. Degas, however, composing in the studio from sketches, manipulated artificial light to further define form. In this regard, his approach is of particular relevance to my exhibited paintings.

His early ballet paintings which reflect the reserved distance of a casual observer, present a fairly wide field of vision in which to include numerous figures engaged in multiple facets of the dance or rehearsal. The overall effect of Dance Class at the Opera and The Class, for example, is indicative of this sense of distancing, of documenting numerous poses in groupings slightly off-center and then synthesizing them. His colleague Puvis de Chavannes noted, "No one else has so well found the exact place for each figure in his pictures, so that it is impossible to move them without spoiling the whole."<sup>8</sup> Although the paintings and drawings were carefully composed--often as a photographer might compose, by framing--the essential point remains that for all the artifice,



they retain an uncanny residue of spontaneity, a slice of life.

Noteworthy also in this context is the fact that the traditional white tutus, almost exclusively portrayed by Degas from the outset, had been introduced in the neoclassical era but were seldom worn in the dance of his day. Indeed Degas always insisted that art was a convention and that the word Art implied the notion of artifice.<sup>9</sup> He is quoted as saying:

No art was ever less spontaneous than mine. What I do is the result of reflection and study of the great masters; of inspiration, spontaneity, temperament...I know nothing."<sup>10</sup>

As Degas acknowledged in a letter to Tissot regarding his struggle for a "more spontaneous, better art," he had "come so close to so many methods of seeing."<sup>11</sup> These methods of seeing focused primarily on the role of vantage point, as noted in a sketchbook that Degas used between 1877 and 1883:

Having done portraits seen from above, I will make some seen from beneath--seated close to a woman and looking at her from below, I will see her head in the chandelier, surrounded by crystals.<sup>12</sup>

This radical departure from the eye-level norm of the day stressed the role of the artist's individual vision<sup>13</sup> which was consequently assumed by the viewer who stands in for the artist. This visual confrontation, no longer comfortable as the conventional vantage point had become, seemed more direct and truthful, an advancement in

realism. The viewer assuming the active role of participant, felt that the narrow slice of life Degas had presented could be altered by moving a little in any direction--that cropped forms, for instance, could be visually completed by a mere shift in position relative to the painting. The visible portion implied an imaginary whole that the viewer was called upon to complete. The novelty and disruptive character of Degas' vantage point, of the resultant cropping of forms along the periphery of the work, of his decentralized compositions and his use of empty space were all departures from artistic conventions of the day and concerns that I, too, share.

The perspective wedges into which he had scattered his many, delicate, small-scale figures were transformed, in his late work, into atmospheric curtains that closed against the subject rendering the space shallow and ambiguous. In his flattening of illusionistic space, as well as his dissolution of contour line, Degas' late pastels are of particular relevance to my own exhibited paintings.

Also worthy of note in its impact on my art was the serial production of Degas' late pastels. Thus we have for instance, a series of dancers adjusting a shoulder strap, or a series of women entering their bath or combing their hair. The individual work as well as the individual subject had become universal. Faces, for example, if visible

are summarily defined<sup>14</sup> and the features generalized. One stood for all. The same poses were repeated endlessly, drawn from Degas' enormous store of past sketches and drawings. "One must do the same subject ten times, a hundred times," he contended.<sup>15</sup>

Of particular relevance to me is his last major theme depicting a series of women bathing and grooming themselves, oblivious of all else. Stripped physically and psychologically of all pretense, isolated, these women contort to perform the mundane yet intimately female gestures that Degas could approach only voyeuristically through his art. "I show them deprived of their airs and affections reduced to the level of animals and cleaning themselves...like a cat licking itself."<sup>16</sup>

His comments to George Moore revealed his intentions, "Hitherto the nude has always been represented in poses that presuppose an audience."<sup>17</sup> Degas believed these nudes, however, were approached from an original point of view, as though seen through a "keyhole."<sup>18</sup> The women, viewed from a proximate vantage point often from the rear, are preoccupied with the ritual of grooming and appear oblivious to any presence save their own.

A noteworthy parallel exists here in terms of the bath which in much recent figurative painting symbolizes solitude and "freedom from the constraints of self-consciousness."<sup>19</sup> This ritualistic aspect of a private

activity finds visual parallel in my exhibited work, this series of divers. Each diver, as she twists and levitates, avoids a confrontation with the viewer who is forced to assume the subtly voyeuristic role of one who peers--not through a "keyhole," but rather through goggles. Indeed the low vantage point presupposes a submerged viewer.

Vantage point and proximity, it must be noted, were the only variables in the Vervoort methodological formula. As such they had become the tandem elements that I was endeavoring to thoroughly probe in order to comprehend and evaluate the singular Vervoort impact which was still very recent and quite profound in 1984--at the time I saw the Degas originals. No doubt this at least partially accounts for the significant, yet unexpected, impact of Degas' work--particularly his late pastels. A parallel certainly exists between Degas and Vervoort as each emphasized the role of individual vision in the creative process. Degas' artistic concerns were, therefore, familiar to me through the intervention of Vervoort's teachings (although not specifically cited by the latter).

The imprint of these concerns, notably vantage point, is accordingly manifest in my own art. Deviations from the eye level norm which I commonly associate with most social interaction, reveal unexpected foreshortenings and other implications of interest to me. When drawn from beneath--near the model's feet, for instance--the

figure assumes a certain monumentality, in addition to the unexpected compositional juxtapositions which interested Degas. My preference for this low vantage point is evident in the "Sisters" series of paintings. This series was based on the drawing of a model seen from below, an image that I subsequently "mirrored" to produce a Siamese twinning of the forms [Slide #3].

Noteworthy also in this context is my preference for studio painting from studies. This method has displaced the direct on-location approach to painting that I had exclusively adopted as a result of Vervoort's teachings. My current work, therefore, is more consistent with Degas' notion of art as artifice than Vervoort's philosophy that one should ideally not even know what one was painting. Degas not only knew but engineered this knowledge to more convincingly portray life.

His mature work, notably this late suite or serial production, has become increasingly indicative of my own tendency to generate multiple versions of a compelling motif in an attempt to more thoroughly explore and convincingly express that particular concept or image. Little Dancer [Slide #2], a painting paraphrasing Degas' sculpture Little Dancer of Fourteen Years, was my initial work upon which I based a second version--one derived from a model drawing, the other painted directly from life. The "Divers," which will be further addressed in the following

chapter as indicative of my creative processes, remains my most intense and conclusive series to date and as such, allows me to relate to Degas' on-going struggle to assimilate the pulse of life of the dancer and the dance. These swimmers strive to convey that alien, yet ultimately familiar, sensation of submersion--the essence of the diver and the dive--perhaps also a dance.

### C. CONCLUSION

Both Vervoort and Degas, from whom I received a perceptual legacy, could be aligned in some respects to Impressionism; the discrepancies, however, are fundamental and worthy of note. Monet's previously-noted directive to a young painter, for instance, anticipated Vervoort's teachings. But whereas Monet verbalized in terms of colour and shape, "merely think here is a little square of blue, here an oblong of pink, here a streak of yellow,"<sup>20</sup> Vervoort--in respect to producing a painting--discouraged such verbal articulation, even as a thought pattern. After the fact, however, his enthusiasm for interrelationships of value and shape was evident.

Vervoort shared the Impressionist love of light which is fundamental to my own philosophy. Noteworthy also is the procedural parallel that I have retained--of lifting light forms out of a murky ground--relative to the concept of my divers "surfacing" or attaining the light. This reductive method of wiping shapes from a neutral ground, as noted, rather than additively drawing/painting them onto the canvas, renders my work more tonal than colourist. Indeed the blocking in of these rudimentary light/dark forms precedes the application of colour. As to colour, therefore, Vervoort and the Impressionists were at variance.

Degas actively asserted both artificial light and vantage point in his compositional rationale, whereas in their direct renditions of visual phenomena, vantage point for both Vervoort and the Impressionists appeared passively assumed by comparison. More draftsman than Impressionist, Degas' approach parallels my own affinity for the precedence of drawing over colour, and for light as articulator of form. Indeed Degas' notion of art as artifice distanced him philosophically from the Impressionist quest for (in the words of Monet) "a true impression of a certain aspect of nature and not a composite picture."<sup>21</sup>

What, then, allowed me to understand Vervoort and Degas relative to one another, though they differed in many respects?

Both Vervoort and Degas can be seen to modify the Impressionist orientation and to approach a common ground between the inward-looking northern artists previously cited and their southern, outward-looking counterparts. The art of both Vervoort and Degas was decidedly more outward-looking than inward-looking and consequently more window than mirror. A window--as a transparency--however, not only reveals external phenomena but exhibits certain reflective qualities as well. One can visually penetrate it, yet see something of oneself as observer reflected back. Vervoort and Degas can, therefore, be understood relative to this notion. Indeed the imagery of the nocturnal window,



with its surreal juxtaposition of external and internal reality, provided Vervoort with a recurrent motif.

Why, in the final analysis, did this teacher exert so strong an influence on my art? Three causal factors, I believe, are responsible: conviction, affinity, and timing. The single-minded conviction with which Vervoort espoused his philosophy certainly conditioned its impact. This impact, however, could not have been so singular had I not been conceptually akin to his philosophy, an affinity that was evident from the outset. According to the adage, "When the student is ready the teacher appears," the temporal frame of reference is crucial to learning. Consequently the "when" of the Vervoort experience, in conjunction with the the "how" and "why," interfused to deeply ingrain his perceptual method. Despite those aspects which I have subsequently rejected, I still regard my visual environment through "Vervoort glasses," for his teachings have continued to shape my vision and nourish my art.

## CHAPTER IV

### CREATING THE EXHIBITION

The whole process, the visualization, recognition, and the act of painting, are about discovering the unknown. The skills involved in painting and drawing allow me to go deep into the well. They are like a cup for bringing into the light things that are not yet conscious. And allow me to step out of my old skin into new ways of expressing and being.<sup>1</sup>

Chapter IV chronicles the generation of my current work in terms of technique, form, and content. Slides #4-#10 document the development of a painting and, taken in conjunction with the text, are intended to graphically illustrate my technical methods. My working processes pertaining to the concurrent activities of painting and self-criticism are addressed at the outset.

## A. TECHNIQUE

Imagery, or the iconography of the figure, is my initial consideration in the realization of a painting. Figurative reference material--drawn or photographed--provides an essential point of departure. Compositional concerns of scale and placement are intuitively considered and evolve concurrently, remaining flexible as the work proceeds and subsequent painterly concerns dictate.

As I paint, notations like tide marks [Slides #14-#15], tend to amass in rapid succession, one in turn suggesting the next. This "active" mode of painting which dominates the early phase progressively charges the blank surface of the canvas with an accumulation of pigment, and triggers my reactive or "editorial" mode. This dialectical process of action/reaction alternates phases of largely subjective colour mixing and application with phases of critical distancing and deliberation. At the outset the brief periods of critical discourse that I hold with my works-in-progress may merely mean laying down the brush and stepping back momentarily. Prolonged critical looking ensues, in contemplation of evolving aspects and passages.

In this phase I employ a mirror as a tool with which to see the image

in reverse. This reversed, and therefore unaccustomed, reading provides a novel perspective much like viewing the work after a prolonged absence. Consequently, problem areas are more obvious in relation to the whole.

The surface of my paintings--never texturally thick as compared with Nathan Oliveira, for example--became increasingly thin and monochromatic during my initial semester in graduate studies [Slide #1], perhaps relating to a period of adjustment to my new working environment. My current painting, although still essentially thin, is selectively textured. Impasto and areas of richer colour [Slides #14-#15] are generally confined to focus onto specific areas and result from a brush selectively and deliberately loaded with pigment, not from the accretion of repeated applications of paint. This spareness of surface is a consequence of the preparatory method of scumbling a semiopaque stain or "ground" onto the canvas and subsequently wiping back luminous light areas, as noted in reference to Vervoort. [Refer to slides #4-#10] It relates as well to my on-going, additive-subtractive process of painting with a brush in one hand and a cloth in the other. The cloth is employed to manipulate the pigment--to draw with or obliterate.

My characteristic brush mark or painterly "handwriting" may be

described as loose and expressionistic. At its best, the spontaneous, linear quality of gesture drawing with charcoal or conte is retained. The loaded brush becomes the drawing instrument which trails across the canvas retaining a tactile sensibility--the ineffable "touch" of brush to canvas. Integral with such painterly concerns, the intensity of my working pace combined with the large scale of these canvases results in a physical engagement, not unlike fencing with a "charged" brush. That I relish this match may be evident in the surface energy of the paint [Slides #14-#15].

The bravura of spontaneity and ease that I struggle to attain--or conversely, the effort that I struggle to belie--elicits highly polarized, positive/negative criticism from studio visitors. Contemporary American Realist Andrew Wyeth addresses this issue: "I happen to be very clever with 'paint quality,' a kind of hieroglyphics of paint, but I regard this as a danger rather than an asset."<sup>2</sup> Francis Bacon similarly acknowledges that "half my painting activity is disrupting what I can do with ease."<sup>3</sup> Bacon consequently paints random marks, throws paint at the canvas or smears the image with a rag. This latter activity results in an essentially thin, although evocative surface not unlike my own--yet contrary to surface-oriented, contemporary painting.

The sparseness of my painted surface is more indicative of an

economy of means than materials--an attempt to say more with less. I believe that succinctness, not verbosity, communicates most directly; gesture circumvents conversation, so to speak. My affinity for the Haiku--an unrhymed, Japanese 3-line poem--reaffirms this intuitive inclination toward essential brevity. The following anonymous Haiku is cited by way of example:

Look, the stream of life  
My face is in the water  
While my life flows by<sup>4</sup>

I consider my work, therefore, to be more reductive than additive, in that I tend to edit superfluous material but cannot additively invest or "charge" a hollow image with personal relevance.

In the ensuing discussions on form and content I will confine my comments to the exhibited works, sub-surface swimmers, although previous paintings generally support and anticipate this current direction both formally and iconographically.

## B. FORM

Preoccupation with the figure and its placement on the canvas are concerns central to my work. The persistence of the human form as that irreducible constant in my art relates primarily to the psychological dimension of man.

Man in his physical reality is never as important as the fact that, because of his spiritual and physical facets, he is the strongest stimulant among all existing objects and cannot be replaced by anything else.<sup>5</sup>

Essentially I celebrate these spiritual facets and revere the sanctity of the human form for, as Wittgenstein said, the human body is the "best picture of the soul."<sup>6</sup> Consequently I strive to project a pure, undistorted image of the figure.

The figurative reference material from which this current work has evolved, although photographic, is self-referential. As the diver in these paintings I have been the subject and choreographer of this imagery, and for this reason the source material retains the flavor of memory, of lived experience. It is this subconscious resonance of aquatic space: part memory, part dream--that I strive to convey in these works.

It is worth noting that the four classical elements--earth, air, fire and water are amplified in their impact in the context of the dream.<sup>7</sup> To

thereby retain the immediacy of the dream "surround," these paintings had to increase in scale relative to my previous "easel" paintings. The physically engulfing format of the exhibited work approximates a dimension that a diver could physically enter into and experience. Even prior to painting, each pair of 8 ft. high by 6 ft. wide canvases that I had stretched onto my studio wall, assumed an urgency to be realized in paint. This urgency, which no previous scale had asserted, relates to both my own physical stature and to the life sized figurative imagery that could potentially evolve.

The figurative scale relative to this format is governed by my artistic intent as I strive to convey the aesthetic experience of diving into a boundless expanse of water. The dominant sensation may vary from the close tactility of water as it folds against the body to the awe-inspiring experience of total immersion in a vast volume of water. A dynamic figure/ground interplay [Slide #13], for instance, is required to project the tactile sensation of a watery surround, a garment- or bed sheet-like encasing of the form. The following passage illustrates this concept poetically:

Fish, swimmers, boats  
Transform water.  
Water is soft and moves  
Only for what touches it.



The fish proceeds  
Like a finger into a glove.<sup>8</sup>

If, on the other hand, the immensity of this watery "surround" is the dominant sensation I wish to convey, the formal figure/ground relationship must alter accordingly. In my smallest aquatic painting, Surfacing IV [Slide #12], the diver is dwarfed by the sheer volume of water, suggesting mortal inconsequence within this limitless milieu.

Although much of my compositional rationale would seem to be intuitive, the placement of my figures within the format reflects the influence of Degas and the visual framing that has come to be synonymous with photography. Degas' off-center placement, in particular, and the cropping of forms along the periphery of the work strikes a responsive chord that implies random activity--the transient ephemeral quality that I attribute to water. Noteworthy also in this context is my tendency to place the figure largely or wholly in one hemisphere: upper or lower, left or right, with this recent work favoring a notably left, rather than right, orientation.

In seeking an explanation that elaborates on this intuitive left/right placement, the I Ching or Book of Changes, a Chinese Taoist work, furnishes a reference. Within the duality of Yin and Yang, the symbolism of Yin is particularly pertinent to my exhibited work: feminine, left side,

emotion, darkness, yielding, unconscious, etc. while Yang lists the opposite qualities.<sup>9</sup> The left side further equates, in cross-over fashion, to the right brain according to recent brain hemisphere research. This right hemisphere specializes in nonverbal/global functions as opposed to the verbal/analytical left brain.<sup>10</sup> From this I conclude that my tendency to favor the left (prior to this writing), as in Surfacing IV [Slide #12], reflects a feminine, non-analytical approach. And although I cannot understand my art relative to the following notion it, nonetheless, pertains to this discourse. Tucker notes the frequency of compositions that "lean" to the left in current figurative painting.<sup>11</sup> This left-orientation she associates with the past instead of the future and the end rather than the beginning.

In contrast to my left/right tendency which would seem to be intuitive, my up-down placement relative to this "Divers" series is readily accessible to me, both formally and symbolically. Down can be equated with the depths and consequently darkness, while up refers to the surface and the light [Slide #12]. Down and dark further suggest to me the past and the unconscious; up and light allude to consciousness and the future.

My work, therefore, can be seen as an amalgam of these two iconological systems--right/left and up/down, one superimposed on the

other. Each contributes meaning. My work is consequently enriched by this dichotomy of meaning as the viewer can read it in either direction, up/down or left/right. At this juncture, however, formal issues yield to considerations of content.

### C. CONTENT

Panofsky refers to intrinsic meaning or content as that which is apprehended by ascertaining those underlying principles which reveal the basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophical persuasion--qualified by one personality and condensed into one work.<sup>12</sup>

Although this definition is most akin to the categorical breakdown upon which the following discussion on content is structured, my affinity for restraint and understatement leads me to note Pierce's reference as well. Content is "that which a work betrays but does not parade."<sup>13</sup>

In my art the affinity for and association with the female model is more than mimetic. The female form constitutes the leitmotif of my painting. Indeed insular female perspective has thoroughly permeated and shaped my conception of interpersonal relationships and social interaction. This may have been due to the departure of the male (father) figure early in my childhood and the shift in balance to an exclusively female nuclear family. Female, then, became the norm. Lacking were the dynamics and complementarity of male perspective and role models.

In addition, I recall a sense of protective huddling stemming from my father's departure, which was intensified by geographical displacement. (New Zealand was a hemisphere from my mother's

homeland.) Consequently a pervasive atmosphere steeped in susceptibility prevailed. This curtailed the development of trust in others and consequently functioned as the insulation from a broader social context.

Much of my art reflects, in retrospect, this sense of vulnerability. The persistence of the insular female in my work mirrors that formative feeling of isolation and restricted contact while the sense of huddling finds visual translation in the close, ambiguous spaces and corporal containment that envelop the figure. This huddling, although not a force in the diver series, is evident in previous paintings [Slide #1].

Although the figures in many of my past paintings were derived from the studio model [Slides #1-#3], they became increasingly auto-pictorial in body-type and gesture. These model-based paintings investigated my concern for a "personal" space that surrounds the figure. During the final year in graduate studies, however, I have grown to reject the congealed gestures of the posed model in search of a more personal and dynamic subject.

That subject, in a cross-over between my art and lifelong involvement with swimming, has recently evolved. In this exhibition I strive to convey the sensation of submersion that, as a diver, I have

experienced. I emphasize "underwater" versus "aquatic" in that these figures were intuitively conceived as submerged rather than surface swimmers.

Consequently, water as one of the four classical elements of mortal existence constitutes a major source of content in this work. And although we tend to take it for granted, water is by no means symbolically inert. A synopsis, therefore, of the associative significance of water is necessitated. I will, then, explore the cultural connotations and metaphorical implications of water.

Because the associations exist on a number of levels, the development of a formal model may prove useful. My concept of a triadic frame of reference for water can be constructed according to cultural, archetypal and personal content. (1) Cultural content presupposes a general familiarity with contemporary Western culture, notably Greek mythology as well as the fundamental canons of Christianity. (2) Archetypal content is founded upon the philosophy of C. G. Jung. Contingent upon his belief that we are not of today or yesterday but of an "immense" age, he postulated the existence of a "collective unconscious" common to all mankind. The contents of this collective unconscious he called "archetypes." (3) The final category represented is

personal content and is necessarily fashioned from my own esoteric reality.

Cultural associations with water involve washing, in that water traditionally symbolizes "purification or reclaimed innocence."<sup>14</sup> The cleansing of man's external being by means of washing, is commonly aligned to the purification of his inner being by means of ritual cleansing. Rites of passage which are "ceremonial events, existing in all historically known societies, that mark the passage from one social or religious status to another"<sup>15</sup> include "purification rites" which involve water and symbolic washing.

This conviction is deep-seated for although the manifestations vary widely, purification rites are common to all cultures, both ancient and modern.<sup>16</sup> The Christian system of belief equates water with redemption, salvation, and grace. The sacrament of Baptism accords the suppliant religious rites of passage or transition to an elevated state of being through symbolic reimmersion. The bath, too, is invested with "ritual overtones and religious implications."<sup>17</sup>

Familiarity with Greek mythology, in addition to Christian dogma, is a prerequisite to cultural interpretation. Water as mirror recalls the legend whereby Narcissus became enamored of his own reflection in the

waters of a stream but, unable to embrace the image, he pined away. The role of water in our mythologies, therefore, affords it an emotive resonance that permeates our collective perception.

This collective dimension has been addressed by C. G. Jung whose philosophical writings, particularly his subjective autobiography Memories, Dreams, Reflections, have increasingly fostered a holistic approach to my self-awareness. Analogous to a rhizome which remains after the ephemeral flower withers away,<sup>18</sup> there exists in every human being a predisposition toward certain visual forms. These visual forms or archetypes are common to all mankind. The archetype, according to Jung:

is essentially an unconscious content that is altered by becoming conscious and by being perceived, and it takes its colour from the individual consciousness in which it happens to appear.<sup>19</sup>

Great art, he contends, arises from the unconscious animation of the archetypes and, therefore, communicates universally.

As an archetypal, remembered space underwater necessitates the suspension of reality. Indeed Bachelard contends that in deep water "we do not change place, we change our nature."<sup>20</sup> This suspension of reality alludes to a deeper, more psychologically complex, sensual space than our familiar terrestrial environment. This psychological dimension of water relates to rich metaphoric/symbolic associations.



An archetypal content expresses itself, first and foremost, in metaphors...it is neither the one thing nor the other, but the unknown third thing that finds more or less adequate expression in all these similies, yet--to the perpetual vexation of the intellect--remains unknown and not to be fitted into a formula.<sup>21</sup>

According to Jung water is the most common symbol for the unconscious<sup>22</sup>--which is generally understood to represent a segment of one's most personal being. Thus it is commonly thought that he who descends into the unconscious gets into a "suffocating atmosphere of egocentric subjectivity."<sup>23</sup>

Similarly water represents the emotions in dream symbolism. Swimming relates to self-understanding in the emotional waters of life, and because swimming is equated with "staying on top of the emotions,"<sup>24</sup> submersion must be understood to represent emotional envelopment.

Water, further, is synonymous with amniotic fluid and consequently with birthing and the life force. Indeed water and woman are particularly akin. L'eau, the French noun for water, provides a linguistic parallel as a contraction of la eau; it is consequently feminine in gender. Similarly a phonetic parallel links la mer (sea) with la mere (mother). Additionally every ship is a "she." In The Descent of Woman, Morgan advances the plausible premise of our evolution from an aquatic

ape--an intriguing alternative to the commonly held terrestrial theory of our origins.<sup>25</sup> The female prototype in particular, the author postulates, developed physical adaptations to the water. This response was conditioned by vulnerability--her own and that of her young--to landlocked predators. Her human counterpart too, has a natural affinity for water given her corporal composition which is proportionately higher in body fat than man, thus decreasing heat loss in cold water and facilitating flotation.<sup>26</sup> Hence the paintings in this exhibition depict the female form in a compatible milieu. Representing one woman, they are intended to represent all women. The archetypal content of water hereby yields to personal content, the final category.

The depictions of private places which symbolize private activities and states of mind have become increasingly common in much recent figurative painting.<sup>27</sup> Indeed I consider that water represents the most private of places. It facilitates a distancing, in every sense, from the intrusions and static of daily existence and, therefore, allows me to become more readily in touch with myself. For this reason I equate movement in water to freedom from constraint. This passage through an encompassing, yet yielding, milieu is both isolating and sensual, and--as the term "passage" suggests--a transient state. To conclude I refer to

memories which impinge upon, and thereby condition, these personal associations with water.

The first decade of my life was spent along the coastline of an island and consequently my strongest recollections involve the sea. These are both positive and negative, the latter involving the pull of rip tides and my fingers raking the sand. Adult experiences further colour the relevance I attribute to water. The strongest recollection, and that which underlies much of the exhibited work, involved diving into the South China Sea. That incredible experience of plunging into a boundless expanse of water and then slowly rising toward the light and the hovering shadow of the sampan remains a profound visual/tactile recollection.

Although personal associations with water will vary from individual to individual these associations tend to be emotive rather than neutral. Indeed, because submersion is commonly linked to the fear of drowning, water is necessarily charged with emotion. In concluding this discussion on water in terms of content, my next area of concern will focus on the role of the figure in these exhibited works.

Although the figures in my past paintings became increasingly self-referential in body type and characteristic gesture, these divers are

myself. They are, therefore, more personally compulsive yet more vulnerable and exposed. This sense of vulnerability finds visual reference in the long, exposed throat of the swimmer confronting her reflection in the painting entitled Voice Bubble III--referring to cartoon communication or in this case, self-communication. This specific image has generated several paintings each progressively focusing on the tete-a-tete confrontation of the diver and her distorted reflection [Slide #11]. As a personally compelling image, it strangely anticipates this previously-quoted passage from the writings of Jung that could belatedly, serve to fill this "Voice Bubble":

True, whoever looks into the mirror of the water will see first of all his own face. Whoever goes to himself risks a confrontation with himself. The mirror does not flatter, it faithfully shows whatever looks into it; namely, the face we never show to the world because we cover it with the persona, the mask of the actor. But the mirror lies behind the mask and shows the true face.<sup>28</sup>

Indeed the surface of the water when approached from beneath, as witnessed by a surfacing diver, for instance, forms Jung's mirror. The diver sees a reflection of himself mirrored on the water.

The mask for Jung is analogous to screens or veils for Bacon as both conceal the true self:

We nearly always live through screens--a screened existence. And I sometimes think, when people say my work looks

violent, that perhaps I have from time to time been able to clear away one or two of the veils or screens.<sup>29</sup>

In contrast to Bacon, who attempts to "strip away" this gauze and violently expose the inner beings, my figures remain "veiled." Seldom confronting the viewer, like Degas' women at their toilette, they seem oblivious to all but the esoteric ritual in which each is absorbed. Vulnerable yet self-contained and cocoon-like, they choose to withdraw from the external reality of the viewer and his world. These divers prefer instead to confront the internal reality of paint on canvas that I have created and gaze back into the picture plane to partake of more private pursuits. The viewer therefore, is left to assume the subtly disjunctive role of witness or voyeur--observer but non-participant.

A sense of isolation in spite of the presence of others, addresses my own psychological bias. But whereas Schiele's loneliness was "chilling"--a word that has lingered with me in this context, mine is mitigated and hence more "cool" than chilling. The frequency in my art of the isolated (female) form visually corroborates this philosophy and echoes those formative recollections of solitude. This inherent existential isolation is particularly manifested in the activity of swimming for, like "ships in the night," swimmers pass but seldom touch. Even the painting entitled Life Line [Slide #16], which depicts an active swimmer tethered

by an ankle cord to a faintly discernible secondary figure, appears to belie any interpersonal communication or psychological "proxemics." The two swimmers remain curiously disparate and self-absorbed--the referential title alone serving to connect them.

"Proxemics" or man's use of space as a specialized elaboration of culture is discussed in The Hidden Dimension. Personal distance, notes the author, is

the distance consistently separating the members of non-contact species. It might be thought of as a small protective sphere or bubble that an organism maintains between itself and others.<sup>30</sup>

This sphere or bubble, as an essentially inviolate space, at once isolates and contains. This isolation transcends the physical for, like Jung's "mask of the actor,"<sup>31</sup> it serves to dislocate meaningful contact, to psychologically distance or isolate and to contain.

To expand upon this, a digression must be made into the realm of verbal analogies or cues. Several key words have long retained an elusive personal significance although their relevance was at first obscure. These words: "cocoon" or "chrysalis," "tunnel," "surfacing" and "rites of passage"--as metaphors for states of being, notably transitional phases, correlate to my artistic concerns.

The cocoon or chrysalis and tunnel impute the notion of

encasement and restricted contact. My conceptual affinity for containment, as reflected in these definitive words, is visually acknowledged in the ambiguous spaces that close upon my figures. The small protective sphere or bubble that an organism maintains between itself and others may be likened to a membrane, a garment, a womb, or even an aura, as each effects a sense of physical/psychical encasement.

Chrysalis, tunnel and surfacing--impart not only this sense of restricted contact but, moreover, imply movement or gravitation from relative darkness toward light. John Berger observes that hope, like light, attracts and radiates as a point, prompting one to wish or imagine oneself there. "The attraction of the eye to light, the attraction of the organism to light as a source of energy, is basic."<sup>32</sup> The light to which I refer also transcends the physical. Berger continues, "The attraction of the imagination to light is more complex because it involves the mind as a whole and therefore it involves comparative experience."

The longing for light, according to Jung, is the longing for consciousness:

As bringers of light, that is, enlargers of consciousness, they overcome darkness, which is to say that they overcome the earlier unconscious state. Higher consciousness, or knowledge going beyond our present-day consciousness, is equivalent to being all alone in the world.<sup>33</sup>

Taken together these key words imply the solitary transition of metamorphosis, the transformation from one state to another. Rites of passage equate metamorphosis to the human condition. The most common and significant transformations are biological transformations--birth, puberty, reproduction and death--the cycle of life. Other forms of initiation commonly convey to the neophyte the myths and secret traditions of the community and in this way man's inner being is transformed.

Arnold van Gennep (1873-1957), the French anthropologist who coined the term "rites of passage," classified the rites into three consecutive and distinguishable stages: separation, transition and reincorporation. Initially acts of seclusion, avoidance or abstention sever the initiate from his former status, literally as in nuptial, birthing, or menstrual huts. "Seclusion or containment may also be symbolically effected by the use of veils or by drawing circles or other enclosures around the object in question."<sup>34</sup>

This literal or symbolic separation of the novice precedes his "retreat" into symbolic darkness representing the "beyond" or death. In this intermediate or transitory state, ritual death is universally prerequisite to rebirth of a higher order. Eliade likens it to a "blank page"



of existence, an "absolute commencement when nothing had yet been defiled, nothing as yet spoiled."<sup>35</sup> Commonly, in archaic tribes, symbolic death is analogous to internment in the dark bowels of an aquatic monster. Initiation into certain African sisterhoods involve penetrating the waters to enter a partially-submerged ritual hut. Water, here, symbolizes the chaos before Creation--a state of preconsciousness.<sup>36</sup>

Van Gennep's final stage, reincorporation, I consider misleading. Rebirth is preferable. Because wisdom (viz. sacred knowledge) is invariably revealed to the novice via myths and symbols, an elevated status results--a transformation to higher consciousness. Essentially a sanctified mode of being is attained at the expense of a profane mode. (Reincorporation, however, implies reunion at the original status.) This rebirth, through ritual death, is common to all initiatory rites of passage.

My paintings deal not with a fixed state of being, but rather with transformation--the ephemeral transformation of one's being. In a certain esoteric sense, Rites of Passage could provide the alternative title for this exhibition. Separation, the initial stage, is equivalent to the "cocoon/chrysalis" and finds visual parallel in the close, ambiguous spaces that lack a base or horizon line by which the viewer can orient himself in relation to the work. Transition, the interim stage, I consider

synonymous with the "tunnel" or, in the case of my divers, ascension. And finally, rebirth parallels the emergence from the darkness of the chrysalis in the "winged or perfect state,"<sup>37</sup> the proverbial "light at the end of the tunnel," and the diver "surfacing" or attaining the light. These divers in their passage from relative darkness to light bespeak the transience of the human condition, a philosophy I engender through the act of painting. In the process of changing places, they change their nature and enlarge their consciousness for in life, as in art, the journey supersedes the destination.

#### D. EXHIBITION

In approximating the physical dimensions and ambiance of a swimming pool, I intend the exhibition viewer to experience the sensation of a submerged environment [Slides #17-#20]. Underwater--as a silent zone that isolates and slightly disorients--symbolizes the unconscious mind or dream state in that it is a disjunctive world divorced from conventional experience. The exhibition, therefore, alludes to a rectangular, pool-like enclosure measuring 30' x 60'.

The vantage point from which these swimmers are depicted, frequently from beneath [Slides #12-#13], presupposes a close, submerged observer. The clarity of detail and scale of the swimmers as well, would support this notion. (Clarity as a function of distance degenerates rapidly underwater, whereas proximity magnifies.) The viewer, standing-in for this submerged "other," must thereby project upon the work his own esoteric associations with submersion--either positive or negative. For water, as an alien yet ultimately familiar milieu, carries its own "baggage" in the minds of each of us. Titles are suggestive but non-narrative for I share Bacon's aversion to narration. By refraining from directing viewer response, interaction is open-ended with no single "right" reading of the

work.

In this frieze-like presentation I anticipate a resonance strengthened by cross-reference. Munch addressed this rationale when he wrote:

I felt that my pictures in their contents were bound up with one another. When I placed them together, they acquired, all at once, a ring they had never possessed individually...And so I put them together in friezes.<sup>38</sup>

His Frieze of Life is exemplary. The presence it collectively projects exceeds the sum of its parts. Monet's viewer is similarly engulfed by Waterlilies and a vibration that differs markedly from Munch's psychological "surround." Monet's hypnotic play of the fluid, transient nuances of light on water evokes serene contemplation. My "installation" of paintings echoes both Munch and Monet--water as an emotive, psychological dimension, the aquatic figures perceptually conceived.

The function of viewing distance relative to surface-quality and image is a further consideration. Ideally, therefore, the viewer should establish both intimate and distanced contact with the work. At close range the "skin" of my painting bears abstract, gestural and apparently random calligraphy, thus asserting the surface energy and the consequent "art-as-object" orientation. The scale of the exhibition space further facilitates a distanced perspective allowing these strokes to coalesce and

the image to emerge. This transformation is no less important to me than the abstract notation of paint marks that describes it. Neither shorthand nor image is sufficient in and of itself, however, for as an artist I am mindful of both. In the final analysis I strive not only to fuse illusionistic image and material object in the mind of the viewer, but to effect a resonance that transcends both.

In these paintings I strive to convey, by means of the particular, a glimpse of the collective or universal--for the divers, all, are aspects of myself and of all mankind. Through the sensory-rich yet isolated experience of diving, each swimmer in her ascent is acutely in touch with herself. They are transcendent beings or pilgrims who silently gravitate toward the surface, toward the light--physically and metaphorically. In surfacing they cast off past encumbrances. They do not struggle; they levitate, for they partake of "the magical operation that, in deep water, allows the diver to loosen the ordinary ties of time and space and make life resemble an obscure, inner poem."<sup>39</sup>

## NOTES TO CHAPTER I

<sup>1</sup> John Russell, Francis Bacon, rev. ed. (Great Britain: Thames and Hudson, 1979), p. 98.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Selz, New Images of Man (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1959), p. 10.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER II

<sup>1</sup> James Ensor, Edvard Munch, Emile Nolde (Regina, Saskatchewan: Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery, University of Regina, March 7-April 13, 1980; Glenbow Alberta Institute, Calgary, Alberta, May 3-June 15, 1980; Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg, Manitoba, July 4-August 17, 1980), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> David Sylvester, Interviews with Francis Bacon 1962-1979 (Great Britain: Thames and Hudson, 1980), p. 63.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>4</sup> Frank Whitford, Egon Schiele (New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 104.

<sup>5</sup> Alessandra Comini, Schiele in Prison (Greenwich, Connecticut: New York Graphic Society, 1973), p. 95.

<sup>6</sup> Whitford, p. 196.

<sup>7</sup> Hugh Davies, Francis Bacon: The Early and Middle Years, 1928-1958 (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1978), p. 111.

<sup>8</sup> Sylvester, p. 12.

<sup>9</sup> Edvard Munch (Vancouver, British Columbia: Vancouver Art Gallery, May 31-August 4, 1986), p. 13.

<sup>10</sup> Davies, loc. cit.

<sup>11</sup> Russell, p. 71.

<sup>12</sup> Sylvester, p. 30.

<sup>13</sup> Joshua Gilder, "I Think About Death Every Day," Saturday Review, New York, (September 1981), pp. 38.

<sup>14</sup> The Masterworks of Edvard Munch (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, March 15-April 24, 1979), p. 7.

- <sup>15</sup> Edvard Munch, p. 11.
- <sup>16</sup> Russell, p. 17.
- <sup>17</sup> Gilder, p. 39.
- <sup>18</sup> Whitford, p. 89.
- <sup>19</sup> Sylvester, p. 22.
- <sup>20</sup> Gilder, p. 39.
- <sup>21</sup> Dawn Ades and Andrew Forge, Francis Bacon (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1985), p. 31.
- <sup>22</sup> Donald Kuspit, "Hysterical Painting," Artforum International (January 1986), p. 60.
- <sup>23</sup> Sylvester, p. 81.
- <sup>24</sup> The Masterworks of Edvard Munch, p. 40.
- <sup>25</sup> Marcia Tucker, "An Iconography of Recent Figurative Painting: Sex, Death, Violence and Apocalypse," Artforum (Summer 1982), p. 74.
- <sup>26</sup> Carol Perkins, "The Art of Life-Threatened Children," Creativity and The Art Therapist's Identity: The Proceedings of the 7th Annual Conference of the American Art Therapy Association (Baltimore, Maryland, Oct. 28-31, 1976).
- <sup>27</sup> Edvard Munch, p. 64.
- <sup>28</sup> Whitford, p. 29.
- <sup>29</sup> Whitford, p. 122.
- <sup>30</sup> Sylvester, p. 80.
- <sup>31</sup> Hugh Davies, "Bacon's 'Black' Triptychs," Art in America (March-April 1975), p. 62.
- <sup>32</sup> Barbara Ehrlich White, ed., Impressionism in Perspective, The Artists in Perspective Series, H. W. Janson, general ed. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey:



Prentice-Hall, 1978), p. 108.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>34</sup> Ian Dunlop, Degas (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), p. 26.

<sup>35</sup> Russell Ash, The Impressionists and Their Art (London: Orbis Publishing, 1980), p. 11.

<sup>36</sup> White, p. 18.

<sup>37</sup> Ash, p. 113.

<sup>38</sup> Sylvester, p. 44.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>40</sup> Davies, Francis Bacon, p. 18.

<sup>41</sup> Jacque Lassaigne, Impressionism, trans. Paul Eve (London: Heron Books, 1969), p. 106.

<sup>42</sup> White, p. 24.

<sup>43</sup> Helene Adhemar, Impressionism (Woodbury, New York: Baron's; London: Eyre Methuen, 1977), p. 44.

<sup>44</sup> Yann Le Pichon, The Real World of the Impressionists: Paintings and Photographs 1848-1918, trans. Dianne Cullinane (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1984), p. 155.

<sup>45</sup> White, p. 18.

<sup>46</sup> Ash, p. 88.

<sup>47</sup> Diane Kelder, The French Impressionists and Their Century (London: Pall Mall, 1970), p. 64.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ash, p. 88.

<sup>50</sup> White, p. 17.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>53</sup> Ash, p. 18.

<sup>54</sup> Sylvester, p. 41.

<sup>55</sup> Russell, p. 17.

<sup>56</sup> Erwin Panofsky, Meaning in the Visual Arts (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1955), p. 14.

<sup>57</sup> Edvard Munch, p. 64.

<sup>58</sup> White, p. 14.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Lassaigne, p. 93.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>62</sup> Kelder, p. 68.

<sup>63</sup> Ash, p. 99.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER III

<sup>1</sup> John Berger, Ways of Seeing (London: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 1973), p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> John Berger, About Looking (New York and Toronto: Random House, 1980), p. 197.

<sup>4</sup> D. T. Suzuki, Erich Fromm, and Richard De Martino, Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 36.

<sup>5</sup> Antoine Terrasse, Degas (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974), p. 68.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>7</sup> Jean Bouret, Degas, Trans. Daphne Woodward (London: Thames and Hudson, 1965), p. 186.

<sup>8</sup> Alfred Werner, Degas Pastels (New York: Watson-Guption, 1968), p. 26.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Valery, Degas Manet Morisot, trans. David Paul (New York: Pantheon Books, 1960), p. 69.

<sup>10</sup> Ash, p. 9.

<sup>11</sup> Marcel Guerin, ed., Edgar Germain Hilaire Degas Letters, trans. Marguerite Kay (Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1947) pp. 29-30.

<sup>12</sup> Theodore Reff, Degas: The Artist's Mind (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), p. 29.

<sup>13</sup> P. A. Lemoisne, Degas et Son Oeuvre, 4 vols. (Paris: Arts et Metiers Graphiques, 1946), vol. II, no. 522.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., vol. III, no. 1288.

<sup>15</sup> Bouret, p. 183.

<sup>16</sup> Dunlop, p. 190.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 188.

<sup>18</sup> Bouret, p. 187.

<sup>19</sup> Tucker, p. 74.

<sup>20</sup> White, p. 14.

<sup>21</sup> Ash, p. 99.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

<sup>1</sup> Marcia Tucker, "Bad" Painting (New York: The New Museum January 14-February 28, 1978), p. 20 (Judith Linhares).

<sup>2</sup> Sheldon Rodman, Conversations With Artists (New York: Capricorn Books, 1971), p. 219.

<sup>3</sup> Sylvester, p. 91.

<sup>4</sup> Hyemeyohosts Storm, Seven Arrows (New York: Ballantine Books, 1975), p. 340.

<sup>5</sup> Selz, p. 146.

<sup>6</sup> Virgil C. Aldrich, "Art and the Human Form," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, vol. 29, no. 3 (Spring 1971), p. 295.

<sup>7</sup> Gaston Bachelard, On Poetic Imagination and Reverie: Selections from the Works of Gaston Bachelard, trans. Colette Gaudin (Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1971), p. 36.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>9</sup> Betty Edwards, Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain (Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher, 1979), p. 34.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>11</sup> Tucker, "An Iconography of Recent Figurative Painting," p. 74.

<sup>12</sup> Panofsky, p. 30.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>14</sup> Tucker, loc. cit.

<sup>15</sup> "Passage Rites," The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, vol. 13 (Chicago; London; Toronto; Geneva; Sydney; Tokyo; Manila; Seoul; Johannesburg: Helen Hemingway Brenton, 1974), p. 1044.

<sup>16</sup> "Purification Rites and Customs," The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, vol. 15 (Chicago; London; Toronto; Geneva; Sydney; Tokyo; Manila; Seoul; Johannesburg: Helen Hemingway Brenton, 1974), p. 298.

<sup>17</sup> Tucker, loc. cit.

<sup>18</sup> Carl G. Jung, Memories, Dreams, Reflections, ed. Aniela Jaffe, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Pantheon Books, 1973), p. 4.

<sup>19</sup> Carl G. Jung, The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space, trans. Maria Jolas (New York: Orion Press, 1964), p. 206.

<sup>21</sup> Jung, Archetypes, p. 157.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>24</sup> Betty Bethards, The Dream Book: Symbols for Self-Understanding (Novato, California: Hillis, 1983), p. 115.

<sup>25</sup> Morgan, Elaine, The Descent of Woman (New York: Stein and Day, 1972).

<sup>26</sup> Herbert A. deVries, Physiology of Exercise for Physical Education and Athletics, 3rd ed. (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown, 1980), p. 546.

<sup>27</sup> Tucker, "An Iconography of Recent Figurative Painting," p. 74.

<sup>28</sup> Jung, Archetypes, p. 20.

<sup>29</sup> Sylvester, p. 82.

<sup>30</sup> Edward T. Hall, The Hidden Dimension (New York: Doubleday, 1966), p. 112.

<sup>31</sup> Jung, loc. cit.

<sup>32</sup> Berger, About Looking, pp. 132-133.

<sup>33</sup> Jung, Archetypes, p. 169.

<sup>34</sup> "Purification Rites and Customs," p. 301.

<sup>35</sup> Mircea Eliade, Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries: The Encounter Between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Realities, trans. Philip Mairet (New York; Hagerstown; San Francisco; London: Harper & Row, 1960), p. 224.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 216.

<sup>37</sup> "Chrysalis," The New Webster Encyclopedic Dictionary of The English Language, ed. Virginia S. Thatcher (Chicago: Consolidated Book Publishers, 1971), p. 146.

<sup>38</sup> Edvard Munch, p. 64.

<sup>39</sup> Bachelard, The Poetics of Space, p. 206.

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