

A Dionysian Journey: Ted Godwin's Regina Paintings

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Why did Ted Godwin become an artist? He claimed that it was the only area in school where he could function, as a child with dyslexia and attention deficit disorder, at a time when neither was recognized by the education system. In art he could make his own rules, something impossible in other subjects. Interestingly Godwin is also part of the group of artists who have visual defects, in his case astigmatism on the horizontal plane, which may, he suggested, “explain why I have a penchant for *messing around* with the horizontal line.”¹ Another reason he explored art is that he was ‘signed’ to play out the unrealized dreams of his mother and sister, who were both denied the possibility of becoming artists. “For my part,” he wrote, “I can certainly attest that from the earliest time I could remember art was really all I ever wanted to do. That or music.”²

When Ted Godwin was 14 he heard the piano playing of the great jazz artist Art Tatum. Overwhelmed, he decided on the spot that he could not compete with that level of excellence, and gave up the idea of becoming a musician. As he related in his self-deprecating style, he was lucky not to see the paintings of Botticelli until he was seventy, or he would not have become a painter either, but might rather be digging ditches.³ Although Godwin never became a professional musician, he was always deeply involved with music as well as art. He has continued to play the piano and does so still. While painting the works in this exhibition, he regularly listened to the hot new jazz of his day, pieces that have now become classics. Entering the studio, his first activity was to turn on the record player. Does his love of music have anything to do with his practice of art? Can music help us to understand his painting?

The 1960s, when most of Godwin's Regina paintings were created, was a tumultuous, fascinating and sometimes contradictory period in the western world. One influential philosopher of the time was Friedrich Nietzsche, often quoted for declaring “God is dead” in his book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 1883-1885. Another salient feature of *Zarathustra* is the designation of human beings as a transition between apes and the *Übermensch*, translated in English as either “overman” or “superman.” Although the *Übermensch* is a self-mastered individual who has achieved full power, superman is not

the end but more a journey toward self-mastery. An earlier Nietzsche book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 1872, more directly tackles the links between art and music. Here Nietzsche argues that life always involves a struggle between the Apollonian and the Dionysian, between order and inspiration. For him, Apollo is the god of order, control and subjugation of the unruly instinct, represented by static, idealized plastic art in the form of sculpture. In contrast, Dionysus is the god of liberation, intoxication and unbridled license, represented by music.⁴ The combination of the two forms gave birth to tragedy. Neither side must prevail, for each must contain the other in an eternal, natural balance. In Jungian terms, the Apollonian state is one of introversion in which the creator contemplates the dream world of eternal ideas. The Dionysian state is one of extroversion, of physical participation in the external world of feeling and sensation. Creativity, then, is a combination of order and inspiration, Apollo and Dionysus, introversion and extroversion.

The need for both order and emotion is clear in music, perhaps clearer than in any other art form. As the great violinist Yehudi Menuhin remarked: “Music creates order out of chaos; for rhythm imposes unanimity upon the divergent; melody imposes continuity upon the disjointed, and harmony imposes compatibility upon the incongruous.”⁵ In his important book *Music and the Mind*, Anthony Storr favoured emotion, detailing that the particular type of sound a person produces indicates his emotional state at the time, and that humans use rhythm and melody to resolve emotional conflicts.⁶ Storr goes on to note that music, like most of the arts, is chiefly scanned and appreciated in the right hemisphere of the brain, the emotional side. When the two, order and emotion, are combined, wonderful things happen.

It was with the right side of his brain, the Dionysian, active, emotional side, that Godwin created what I am calling his Regina paintings, works in the first of the three periods of his oeuvre. The second period is dominated by his Tartan paintings, and the third by his landscapes. Speaking strictly the paintings done between 1957 and 1967, the Regina period, were not all executed in Regina, for he spent a seminal year in Greece in 1962-1963. Likewise, the designation of his first period as Regina paintings might be confusing because most of the Tartans, works in the second style, were produced while Godwin still lived in Regina. Yet in form and purpose, the Regina paintings are easily

distinguishable from both the Tartans and the Landscapes, for the Regina works are redolent of the energy and physical participation in the external world of sense and feeling that Nietzsche identified as Dionysian. The Tartans, on the other hand, are Apollonian in their search for order and their reductive, disciplined approach. The landscapes, the final phase, are the result of the two previous styles merging into a balance of Dionysian and Apollonian.

The Regina Five

Canadian artistic groups seem fixated on being identified by the number of their members. The Group of Seven started the trend, and Painters Eleven and the Regina Five continued it. This unimaginative titling appears to reflect the tenuous nature of their associations, since the numbers game was a rummy one, the numeral marker in the title seldom matched the actual participants. Each group really came together for practical purposes, usually for exhibition, there being few opportunities to show work prior to the creation and funding of artist-run centres by the Canada Council in the late 1960s. The painters – for they were all painters – also shared a general agreement about the importance of contemporary practice and a broad philosophic compatibility. They often, however, did not have a uniform style or aesthetic philosophy, and frequently they were not especially good friends, although small segments of the group typically did get together socially. The five from Regina were no exception to these general principles.

Ted Godwin explained his perception of the organization and the varying roles of the individual members of the Regina Five:

I find it a great curiosity that, for better or worse, whether I like it or not, I have somehow been joined at the hips for eternity with four other artists of greatly varying temperament. In a strange way the names we were lumbered with are quite telling and, in most cases, quite perceptive. Ken Lochhead, the Administrator, is just that. Of all of us he is the one who has always paid attention to detail, photographing every painting he has made, and indexing them all.... [Ronald] Bloore was called the Old Man, and there is no doubt he was the Strategist, a role he feels most comfortable in. [Arthur] McKay the Guru certainly fits. Art has probably read more books on psychology than any of the shrinks he has seen over the years.... [Douglas] Morton was called the Fifth Member because no one understood him, and I was called Rising Star because of my age relative to the other old crocks.⁷

In 1961 when the Canadian Museums Association held its annual meeting in Regina, Gallery Director Ron Bloore organized an exhibition at the Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery, *The May Show*, to feature local activity. As well as the aforementioned five, the show included the sculptor Wolfram Niessen and the architect Clifford Wiens.⁸ Richard Simmins, the Regional Director of the National Gallery of Canada, saw the show and decided to mount a traveling exhibition entitled *Five Painters from Regina*. “In the beginning,” according to Godwin, “we were artists committed to the New York style of painting and the big attack.”⁹ The contents of the National Gallery show took some time to finalize, one of the problems being that Simmins was undecided as to whether or not Godwin would be included. Eventually it was agreed that he would be included, and the five took off to Ottawa on a cold November day in 1961, for what was the National Gallery’s first recent exhibition of living artists.¹⁰ Three years later, in 1964, the British High Commissioner, Sir Henry Lintott, came to Regina and asked to lunch with the Regina Five. This caused considerable consternation for, as Godwin remembered it, their local glory was so transitory that no one knew who they were. Moreover, the group was not recognized as such; Sir Henry had assumed “a ‘something’, a collegiality that we didn’t know was there.” Once identification was sorted out and lunch consumed, the five unusually well dressed artists cavorted in front of a borrowed cream Lincoln Continental for an historic photograph. This truly marked the end of their artistic association, for soon even propinquity would not suffice: Lochhead, Bloore and Morton all left Regina. Godwin followed suit years later.

Godwin’s Teachers

Godwin’s Regina paintings are characterized by a growing understanding of what he wanted to do and an increasing confidence about how he could do it. On the one hand he had to discard the stylistic and thematic influences of his art training for, as he explained, his teachers had been brought up in the period of the Group of Seven. On the other hand, he had to confront his own demons and chase a few dragons, some benevolent. In Nietzsche’s language, Godwin sought the balance that the German philosopher had so praised, and to find that he needed first to expunge the classical training he had received and liberate his unruly instincts. Like jazz rejecting the

conventions of Western music, Godwin sought to reject the conventions of post-Renaissance art. This difficult task Godwin called a “ferocious desire to confront new ideas all the way around.”¹¹ It was a time of wild excitement and never-ending experiments; it was thoroughly creative, though not necessarily always comfortable.

Originality, which we elevate to the pinnacle of creativity, is measured by comparison with the past. The art historian Bernard Berenson saw genius as “the capacity for productive reaction against one’s training.”¹² Godwin did that to a considerable extent, as Nietzsche demanded. In developing his painting, he railed against a system that used classical casts for instruction and never taught how to stretch a canvas or apply glazes. Yet he honoured and respected some of his art instructors. He particularly remembers the professionalism of Isabel Stadelbauer, his teacher at Rideau Junior High School, and Wes Irwin, his teacher at Western Canada High School.¹³ A precocious participator, he was inspired by many of the goings-on at the Coste House Allied Arts Centre in Calgary, a unique cultural organization that was part art gallery and part community hall. Here he was swept up by Lawren Harris’ arctic sketches and tutored by local art luminaries, including Maxwell Bates and John Snow.

Three painters have been particularly important as mentors for Ted Godwin. The first, Max Bates, always known as Mr. Bates to aspiring young artists, was a domineering presence, despite his small stature and quiet mien. Godwin well remembers being taken by Roy Kiyooka to visit Bates’ studio in 1954. Here he saw a half finished still life on the easel but no still life grouping. It turned out that Bates did not need an actual set up; rather he pulled objects from his memory, for the specific objects held no great meaning for him. They were simply repositories of colour. Bates’ prime concern was in abstract colour relationships, an important lesson for Godwin.¹⁴ Another lesson Godwin learned from Bates was the validity of intuition, the daring of “order of no order.” Bates liked to keep no logical agenda in his studio, preferring to “climb the stairway of surprise.”¹⁵ Rather than setting up a fixed chromatic palette, as was usual, Bates squeezed whatever colour he needed anywhere on his palette where there was space, the “order of no order.” Godwin adopted the same technique, although he hardly needed lessons in intuitive behavior.

Another mentor for Ted Godwin was the landscape painter Illingworth Holly

Kerr, affectionately called Buck Kerr. Kerr lived for painting and the outdoors, both loves fully embraced by Godwin, who especially appreciated Kerr's down-to-earth originality and lack of pretension. Godwin first met Kerr in 1948 when Buck, Head of the Art Department at the Provincial Institute of Technology and Arts, now called the Alberta College of Art and Design, created a special art class for three high school students, including Godwin, at the Coste House. Of an afternoon, the four would head off to Bucks' favorite sketching haunt, the Calgary Zoo.¹⁶ Here the teacher could indulge in his love of animals and sketching, while avoiding the usual academic bureaucracy. Buck was also a writer, publishing his reminiscences of his childhood in Lumsden, Saskatchewan, as *Gay Dogs and Dark Horses*.

Godwin's third mentor, another of his constant studio companions, if only in spirit, is Barnett Newman, who he first met at the 1959 Emma Lake workshop¹⁷, held just a year after Godwin moved to Regina. Like other artists he admired, Godwin especially related to Newman's great respect for the creative act, what Newman called the sanctity of the studio, and to his repeated assertion that "painting is a matter of high purpose,"¹⁸ as Bates had also contended. Godwin was particularly impressed by Newman's reverence for the created object itself. The Canadian reported that the American "was fond of saying that the work of art was like a king. One didn't stand in front of the work and question why it was. One stood and waited for the work to reveal its message, mission and nature to us."¹⁹ In a story about visiting the famous American painter Jackson Pollock, Newman gave Godwin a key to preventing writer's or painter's block, that paralyzing dread at facing the blank page or canvas. Pollock, in a deep depression, drinking heavily and not painting at all, was unable to get started on a painting. At his studio, Newman, grabbing a pot of blue paint and a big brush, made a series of marks down the length of the canvas. Pollock was forced to respond, and he did.²⁰ Godwin, learning from Newman's story, never had a problem with painter's block. For Godwin "The Newman workshop was an intense experience for many of us, reinforcing our natural inclination to abstraction, large surface big attack painting, as well as committing ourselves to professionalism about the business of art."²¹

The Paintings

Stopping before an Augustus Kenderdine sketch of the Qu'Appelle Valley, Clement Greenberg observed that "the history of Canada is written in landscape."²² Surely Ted Godwin both exemplified that assertion and fought it for significant parts of his career, eventually giving in to the inexorable pull of the land in his final phase. *River's Edge*, 1957, the earliest painting in this exhibition, originated at what is now Stanley Park in Calgary, then called Riverdale Avenue, where Ted paddled barefoot in the stream. He was fascinated by the layering of pebbles, water and sun, identifying the surface of the stream bed beneath the surface of the water, surfaces that pretend, as illusion. He explained "That is why I like fishing – a meeting of the underworld and the upper world."²³ Suddenly Ted read these surfaces, demarcated by the explosion of light passing through them, as his life. In *Islands in the Stream*, 1958, this interest in transparencies continued. Ron Bloore emphasized the daring nature of this very thinly painted piece by commenting to Godwin that "You might be able to get away with this in 50 years but not now."²⁴ In his basement at 305 Holland Avenue, Regina, Godwin was not even sure his new piece was a painting.²⁵

Simultaneously, demonstrating his thematic breadth, Godwin produced a figure-based work, *Mating Dance*, 1957 and an architectural piece, *Lethbridge at Night*, c 1959. These pieces, redolent with thin, spiky forms, read as distinct figures on a separate ground, although the demarcation is blurred. Further blurring occurs in *Painting*, 1959 (cat. no. 4), where the strong vertical directionality of the central activity still seems to suggest figures, but no distinct parts are identifiable. Another important feature of these three works is their medium, for they are all done in automotive enamel on masonite. At this stage, when the Godwins had just moved to Regina, Ted's studio was the basement or the kitchen table at home, as it was for most artists at the time. Money was tight and Ted could not afford paint, so he used the leftover automobile enamels from the neon shop where he worked as a designer.²⁶ Another painting based on the figure, but done a little later and now in oil, *Figure Study*, 1960 shows striking advances. While the marked verticality persists, the distinction between figure and ground has been dissolved, confirmed by the contrasting white and black bars on either side which block or prevent any reading of object in space.

There followed a very important quintet of works. The first is *Red Painting*, 1958.

While the piece was started in a regular vertical position, part way through Ted turned it 90 degrees, and continued turning it every so often until it was executed from every side. The finished piece has no directionality and no edges. It gives the suggestion of movement expanding beyond the picture frame, of not being contained within the limits of the masonite on which it is done. Godwin remembers that as a “very exciting time. We felt the whole world was opening up.”²⁷ *A Little Colour Rain*, 1959 followed, another all-over piece, now executed in oil, a more ordered and controlled work. Additionally, for the first time in paint we are introduced to Godwin’s squiggles, what he called bugs or beasties, which writhe and wriggle all over. They seem to first appear in the drawings, and reappear frequently. *Painting No. 2*, 1959, repeating shapes found in *Painting* (cat. no. 4) of the same year, exudes energy partly achieved through the high contrast of values, while the earlier *Painting* (cat. no. 4) seems static by comparison. *Dejeuner sur l’Herbe*, 1959, with the title borrowed from Manet’s famous painting, using cubist techniques, returns briefly to the suggestion of figures, depositing the action in the centre and blurring the edges. Yet we the viewers participate in the enlivened push and pull through the picture plane. The quintet ends with the groundbreaking, immense *Painting* of 1960.

Painting, 1960, reflects some of the enthusiasm and the power Barnett Newman had instilled the year before. It was the most completely all-over painting Godwin had produced, built of a series of like images, not one central image. The scale is revealing. Godwin had never stretched a canvas this large and, after getting it out of the building where he had built and primed it, he found he could not get it downstairs into his basement painting room. This provoked him to find a studio downtown, his first separate studio. Scale became part of how the work is apprehended. Newman, commenting on the role of scale in painting, remarked that he aimed to turn the viewer’s experience around so that “somehow one is looking out as if inside a picture rather than outside contemplating any specific nature.”²⁸ Godwin agreed, wanting the viewer to be able to “walk inside and become totally immersed.”²⁹ By increasing the scale dramatically and thus erasing architectural concerns and references, Godwin felt he could “mentally trip, stumble, and metaphysically fall in, surface, float, and swim around in the work.”³⁰ Once submitted and accepted to the *Forth Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Art*, the National

Gallery bought *Painting* for \$700, as well as spending \$400 for another piece, the first works Godwin had sold in over seven years. To put the windfall in perspective, this was while Godwin was earning a salary of \$275 a month.³¹ It was a coming-of-age event.

At about this time Godwin was deeply impressed with the 1959 film *Black Orpheus*, destined to become a classic. An adaptation of the Greek legend of Orpheus and Eurydice, the film is set in the modern context of Rio de Janeiro during the Carnival. It is particularly renowned for its soundtrack by Antonio Carlos Jobim. Director Marcel Camus matched Jobim's rapturous explosion of sound with an equally riotous exuberance of movement. According to *Washington Post* reviewer Ann Hornaday, "teaming with movement and bursting with life" the film is:

... a study in rhythm and color. Accompanied by a mesmerizing, percussive score co-written by bossa nova legend Antonio Carlos Jobim, "Black Orpheus" weaves an intoxicating spell borne of dance, music and sensuality....³²

Jobim had developed his new style of samba the year before, incorporating it with jazz stylings and a 4 on 3 stammering rhythm. Godwin was mesmerized, for *Black Orpheus* was an example of the all-over colour, movement and sound that he sought to capture in paint, most recently in *Painting*, 1960.

In the early fall of 1960 Godwin participated in a hoax, an exhibition of readymades³³ put on at the Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery, to replace an exhibition cancelled at the last moment. From a provincial government garage that was being dismantled, and from various junkyards, Godwin, Bloore and Lochhead collected piles of interesting stuff, discarded bits of automobiles and spare construction parts. One evening the threesome entered the gallery, laden with a few cases of beer, their carefully collected junk and all the sculpture plinths Bloore could borrow. With much laughter, they constructed seventeen readymades and created the fictional artist responsible for the show. She was named Win Hedore, "Win" from Godwin, "Hed" from Lochhead, and "ore" from Bloore. They decided that she was from the North, raised in McIntosh Point, the closest pub to the Emma Lake campus. Convinced that "one could find art in anything," Win determined that her mission in life was to transform garbage into art.³⁴ A catalogue was even produced, detailing the works as "three-dimensional studies made from the debris of speed and built-in obsolescence" and "a revelation concerning the 20th

century.”³⁵ At the opening director Ron Bloore carried off the obligatory “sorry I can’t be with you” telegram and the local newspaper reviewed the exhibition without getting the joke. When requests started to come in to buy pieces from the show, the three owned up. *Time Magazine* liked the spoof enough to write it up under the title “Saskatchewan I Remember Dada” and the audience for the show was the largest in the gallery’s seven-year history.³⁶

Throughout, Godwin continued to paint seriously. Three large seminal canvases followed - *Red Grew*, *Blue Move* and *Amber Deep* - all produced during a heat of creativity in early 1961 and all eventually included in the *Five Painters from Regina* exhibition. They were inspired by articles in the *Scientific American* magazine, for the year before Godwin had bought himself a cheap microscope and begun observing all manner of things under magnification.³⁷ What was important was the change of scale from microscopic to very large. Additionally, Godwin’s system of production may have been influenced by Ananda Coomaraswamy’s book *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, which posited that “the function of art is to imitate Nature in her manner of operation.”³⁸ Here his painting method changed again, becoming freer and more open to accident. He started by pouring paint on a stretched canvas as it lay on the floor, then manipulated the still-wet paint by lifting an edge of the canvas. Next, when that layer of paint was dry, he raised the piece to the vertical and, teaching himself to use the glazes Titian so loved, for the first time applied layer upon layer of alternating glaze and paint of different colours to achieve the inner glow and organic power so characteristic of these three works.³⁹ Drawings produced at this time also emphasize the intuitive and organic, lastingly important. In the 1961 National Gallery catalogue Godwin explained that in his work “three elements appear frequently: a void, a volume and the resultant interaction between these two forces.” He strove to make “cohesive order out of organic accidents.”⁴⁰ Later he was to broaden this concept, eliminating the specificity of void and volume and asserting that often in his work a conversation occurred between two elements.⁴¹ The accident, the unexpected and unplanned puddling of paint, was increasingly important, but was always manipulated and subsequently reconsidered and reworked. Godwin was formalizing accidents, while emphasizing and legitimizing them.

After the opening of their exhibition at the National Gallery, four of the five

Regina artists traveled on to New York. Here Godwin visited the Newmans, experienced the magisterial Matisse show at the Museum of Modern Art and went to hear Sonny Rollins playing at the Village Vanguard. Godwin was overwhelmed by the dedication and focus he found in the Newman's apartment: "Their living room had four pieces of furniture: a full size Steinway grand piano, a large leather wingback chair, a small side table, and one of Barney's paintings.... It was absolutely amazing. Floor to ceiling, and about eighteen feet long, the painting virtually commanded that I enter, and become immersed in its luxurious bluish purple light."⁴² No less important were the Matisse exhibition and the Rollins' concert:

What knocked me out was how absolutely unrepentantly joyful the [Matisse] works were. They were the greatest spiritual message of sheer joy and being of humanness that I have ever seen. For me it was a truly magical experience.... The scale of the works was monumental, and the colour completely scrumptious.... What a privilege to have seen the show. It still ranks as one of the great moments of my life, just as Sonny Rollins' treatment of Ellington's *In a Sentimental Mood* was the night before.⁴³

After the *Five Painters from Regina* exhibition, Richard Simmins reviewed Godwin's work for *Canadian Art* magazine, concentrating in part on his recent lush, organic paintings. Of these, Simmins said that "anything hedonistic is to be mistrusted," a reference to the modernist contention that organic or decorative imagery is to be equated with self-indulgence.⁴⁴ This notion came from the work of the German art historian, Wilhelm Worringer, in his 1907 book *Abstraction and Empathy*. Worringer divided art into two categories, the empathetic and the abstract. In empathetic art, embodied in the Classical and Renaissance periods, the artist maximized our capacity for empathy by assuring that we can identify with an object depicted. Satisfaction in this mimetic quality springs from a confidence in the world as it is, a satisfaction in its forms. In contrast, in abstract art, exemplified variously by Egyptian, Byzantine, Gothic or primitive art, artists preferred highly stylized forms that did not aim to reproduce external reality accurately. This art expresses insecurities and seeks to answer transcendental or spiritual needs. Worringer denied any necessary connection between mimesis and art, his abstract category, suggesting that Egyptian art was highly stylized, not because Egyptian artists could not reproduce external reality accurately, but because Egyptian art answered a radically different psychological need. When people are confident, they can abandon

themselves in contemplation of the external world, but when people are anxious and uncertain, they seek abstract objects, transforming them into permanent, absolute, transcendental forms. This thesis offered new possibilities for a modernist, angst-ridden aesthetic based on the abstract.⁴⁵ It is in this climate that Godwin, having produced works based to a certain extent on a reflection of the real world as seen in the microscope, was accused by Simmins of being hedonistic, decorative, or empathetic in Worringer's term. Godwin did not like that.

His counter was *Red Attack*, 1962, a deliberate attempt to challenge Simmins' decorative, hedonistic label, for he was stung by the implication that his painting was not significant and serious enough. Now he slathered on the paint with a larger Teutonic brush, executing bigger, bold forms. The result was not universally praised, for when it was hung in the cafeteria of the Saskatchewan Power Corporation, the workers went on strike demanding the dreadful painting be removed, an action which greatly pleased its creator for at least it provoked considerable response.⁴⁶ This painting was followed in rapid succession by two other attack canvases, *Brains on the Bathroom Floor* and *The Cosmic Potato Bug Machine*, both also of 1962. The first of these, built on a rough circle form, started off as a teasing gesture to Godwin's studio mate, Ron Bloore, for Bloore was upset that Art McKay had pilfered both the medium Bloore had been using, blackboard paint, and the form, the circle. Just to goad Bloore further, Godwin also decided to use a circle, which he soon sheepishly determined was a problem since his canvas was a rectangle not a square. To deal with the leftover ends on either side of the head-like image, Godwin inserted bars of grids, in a manner reminiscent of the design in *Figure Study*, 1960, a technique to which he would return. The final piece passed Richard Simmins' muster, tipping to the abstract from the empathetic, for he offered to buy it for the Vancouver Art Gallery, where he was now the Director.⁴⁷ *The Cosmic Potato Bug Machine*, 1962, similar in composition, is also built of a dominating central image squeezed by two blocks at the right and left framing edges. Here, as with most of Godwin's work, the painting came first and the title last. The title refers to a running family joke: Godwin's father, plagued by potato bugs which were eating away at the leaves of his potato plants, wrote away to the United States for a guaranteed way to eradicate the pests. When he opened the parcel he found two one-inch square blocks of

wood, complete with instructions to place the bug on one of the blocks and hit it with the other. All the family got great pleasure from the joke. The two rectangles mid-way up the framing edges had the effect of revealing and exposing the corners, places that Godwin felt were especially challenging to activate.⁴⁸

A rather anomalous piece of that year was *Kiss*, 1962 (cat. no. 14). Here the idea preceded the painting, for the painter, feeling his works were getting too complicated, determined to produce something really simple, the idea of a kiss. His goal was to depict the passion of that act. Normally he let the work direct him, “normally the paint paints.”⁴⁹ The willfulness here resulted in a rather different work, where the composition was tipped from the erstwhile horizontal/vertical directionality to a new diagonal one, in which three corners assume a new importance, and the range of colours is much more restricted. But the big attack certainly shone through, with the dominant form pulsing in its survival.

The next works were done in Molyvos, Greece, that primitive and powerful place where Godwin had, for the first time in his life, complete freedom to create. With a Canada Council grant and the agreement of his patient wife, this year was to be a test as to whether he could make it as a full-time artist. Here the dyslectic, alcoholic Canadian artist got closer to Worringer’s abstraction than ever before or since. Under Ron Bloore’s tutelage, he was reading Morris Graves’ *The White Goddess*, Geraldine Pelles’ *Art. Artists and Society: Origins of a Modern Dilemma; Painting in England and France, 1750-1850*, and Ananda Coomaraswamy’s *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, as preparation for the place “where Western classical thought and Eastern mysticism met and intermingled...”⁵⁰ The three books delineated, to a certain extent, the Nietzschean debate between Apollo and Dionysus, with *Art*, *Artists and Society* representing the former, *The White Goddess* and *The Transformation of Nature in Art* representing the latter. In this last book, Coomaraswamy presents art as the contemplation of the Absolute, stressing that the forms and images the artist draws upon exist eternally “in God,” so that the complete identification with them by either artist or observer is a form of mystic experience, an idea the composer John Cage found compelling. Similarly in *The White Goddess*, Graves explores his belief that “the language of poetic myth ... was a magical language bound up with popular religious ceremonies in honour of the Moon-

goddess....”⁵¹

The works Godwin produced in Greece, where he used up the whole supply of paper in the village, were the freest, least ordered of his career. Here too he discovered acrylic, locally called Vinylite. A water based medium in which you suspend pigment, Vinylite suited Godwin well for it put him completely in charge of the painting process, its manufacture as well as its application. Process was important, even that of buying pigment:

...the “paint” store ... was just like being in a Disney cartoon. The owner and friends, all a trifle past portly, were sitting on small, rickety chairs, drinking their Turkish coffees while a couple of cats walked around stroking their tails on the seated pant legs.... Going through a narrow corridor with wooden bins of pigment lining either side, we followed the Greek youth up some very rickety stairs to emerge in a room with lots of bins and sack upon sack of absolutely gorgeous raw colour.... Standing in the centre of that room, letting the intense raw colour wash over me was an incredibly sensual experience. Using hand gestures to indicate a little, more, or a lot as he held out his hand over each offering, I gradually acquired a full range of pigment. (Some he wouldn’t let me buy. I still don’t know why.) A little kid in a candy store, I bought much more than I needed.⁵²

“In Greece I found the luxury of being able to think, act, talk and make art on a twenty four hour basis absolutely exhilarating.”⁵³

Both *Lotus*, 1962-3, and *The Interior of the Red Box*, 1963, demonstrate Godwin’s newfound confidence and fluidity. Each is in acrylic, his new medium, and each is huge, almost two metres high, demanding engagement. In *Lotus* the viewer is immersed in the conversation between the central beastie and the goings-on within the black strip; in *The Interior of the Red Box*, the work achieves a rare elimination, a further simplicity, perhaps as a follow-up to his efforts in that direction in *Kiss*, commanded by the lush reds.

The Greek trip was a magnificent experience. To Godwin

the most important gift of Greece was consciousness.... On the physical side of my art, I experimented a lot with the limitations, possibilities and quirks of the new media I have come in contact with. As for the spiritual and imaging side, there were a lot of ideas and theoretical stuff I needed to sort through. Greece did everything I had hoped it might do for me. I came back to Canada knowing that I could make it as an artist.⁵⁴

Next, he produced his first flag piece, also in acrylic, done in response to the

Lester Pearson government's challenge to artists to create a new Canadian flag. Ron Bloore produced a suggestion, as did Jack Shadbolt, who draped flags over a box, and Godwin, perversely waiting until the selection had been made, did two. *Canadian Flag No. 1* almost filled the large canvas, emphasizing the lost shape in the lower right hand corner, the French flag. A prairie boy, Godwin had no knowledge or love for French Canada, an attitude he subsequently changed completely.⁵⁵ The second flag was much more radical and displayed a lot of the good-humoured fun Godwin loved so much. Believing that flags are anachronisms left over from a pre-20th century mindset, he determined to make a flag that was contemporary, changeable, and on the cutting edge of communications technology. The result was a piece that drew on his neon skills, containing a maple leaf of red neon that flashed on and off in variable sequences, ten provincial bulbs flashing in a running pattern clockwise, and vertical blue neon bars expanding or contracting in waves. The rate of flashing would be governed by the state of the country at any one time. In times of great angst and upheaval everything would flash like crazy; in times of peace the flashing was very slow.⁵⁶

Back in Regina, Godwin continued to experiment. In *Said the Spider to the Fly*, 1965 (cat. no. 21), the vertical-horizontal grid has disappeared. As he had done from the beginning of this period, Godwin poured paint on a stretched canvas on the floor. Then, hanging the canvas on the wall, he added highlights and embellishments, for Godwin was never simple. Nietzsche's Dionysian instinctual liberation was in full force. "I say unto you", Nietzsche admonished, "one must still have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star."⁵⁷ *Night Bone*, 1964, with its vertical bars related compositionally to earlier works, contains new energy, literally speed, for the artist wanted his brush to enter the canvas with high energy so he tacked a piece of wood onto the canvas edge (which was subsequently removed) on which he could start his brush so that, when the loaded brush hit the canvas, it was going full tilt. The process was important.

Three somewhat anomalous works followed, demonstrating once again Godwin's persisting determination to follow his intuition and not any pre-set stylistic plan. *Proud Prancing Bull on Primrose Path Startled by a Jack in a Box*, 1966, *Lawrence of the Ukraine*, 1965, and *Beware the Jabberwock my Son*, 1969, all return, to some extent, to the concept of a central figure on a ground. Of jazz Godwin explained "My paintings of

that time all owe a debt of great gratitude to those individuals [Jazz players] and the tunes of that day.”⁵⁸ Worringer’s empathy, the mimetic, is evident in *Proud Prancing Bull on Primrose Path Startled by a Jack in a Box* executed the way Hans Hoffman used to do, by applying the paint straight from the tube onto the canvas. Confident joy, tinged with a bit of the devilish, is the dominant emotion. The same kind of get dangerous attitude pervades *Lawrence of the Ukraine*, 1965, in which the central figure is holding his nose, wearing a burnoose and riding a strange camel. Provocatively, after 1964 when he started teaching, Godwin used to ask his students if they were producing art, craft, sport pastime or hobby. Unless the answer was art, the teacher admonished a Zen-like daring: to climb a tree, go out on a limb, cut off that branch and stay up there.⁵⁹ *Beware the Jabberwock*, with its repeated framing and emphasis on the flatness of the canvas, a further effort to simplify, is part of his experiment to remove the Renaissance cursive line from the surface. “P. J. Perry,” Godwin explains, “the jazz saxophonist, in [an] interview has stated that extemporaneous playing has three components: an intimate knowledge of the structure of the work, a familiarity with progressive chord structure, and the ‘don’t give a shit’ factor. Ultimately it is the last element that is the most important.”⁶⁰

The celebration of accident is evident in all aspects of *Exploded Sherbert*, 1965-1966. Godwin painted the ground from a can of acrylic, the can of which had rusted to stain the paint a burnt orange. When the ground was still wet, he stirred up more of the rust and with active strokes worked it into the base. He also splattered on more rust. Then, when dry, he went back as he typically did, and added details, including the rainbow and the teeth in the upper part.⁶¹ Still influenced by Newman, at this point Godwin was interested in the relationship of the viewer to the work and the way the work was read. In the Newman living room in New York Godwin had found himself lost in a huge painting, noting that the work “wasn’t simply a window, it was a bona fide full scale mystical opening to another world.”⁶² He remembers that he was consumed by futile attempts to create a work that could only be viewed in the manner that he as the creator decreed it to be viewed. These were experiments in control. He did a series of pieces that were very tall, up to nine feet, and another that flanked either side of an entrance so the viewer would be forced to walk through the painting.⁶³ *Exploded Sherbert* is part of this series and should be so considered.

Colour Pool, 1966, over two and a half metres square, is another enormous canvas in which the viewer is engulfed in writhing worms and drawn into the central vortex to swim in the silvery blue swirl of colour. Done with wet acrylic on wet canvas and exhibited at Expo 1967, in Montreal, it links to Nietzsche's requirement for both order and inspiration, and relates to both painting and music. Again Godwin emphasizes the importance of jazz for him, acknowledging that "with loaded brush and fevered mind I listened to Art Tatum, Bud Powell, Dizzy Gillespie, Coltrane, Thelonius Monk, Charlie Parker, and so many more.... Their flights of fancy and excursions into unexplored territory guided my brush and informed my mind."⁶⁴ Godwin found John Coltrane particularly inspirational. Contemporaneously, Coltrane was feeling the need "for more time, more rhythm all around me.... I want to be more plastic."⁶⁵ In a 1966 interview Coltrane explained: "I think that music, being an expression of the human heart, or of the human being itself, does express just what *is* happening. I feel it expresses the whole thing – the whole of human experience at the particular time that it is being expressed."⁶⁶

There followed a series of paintings that focused on a slice or section of action. Typically these were horizontal segments of dense matter, made up of many smaller particles, usually glazed and scumbled. Only the sides of the canvas were framed; the tops and bottoms were left open, as if a scene was constantly moving, unrolling in front of our eyes. He was "going on the premise [that] the image displayed in the canvas was only part of a larger infinite river of organic continuum of energy that was the real reality seething, swirling, and going on behind the walls ad infinitum."⁶⁷ The effect Godwin wanted was "as if I had inserted a razor blade in the wall and once having made a vertical cut, then pushed the two sides apart to expose the reality of what was underneath."⁶⁸ This is surely very close to Worringer's abstraction, that interest in the transcendent, and to Cage's indeterminacy that Godwin had discovered both through John Cage's 1965 Emma Lake workshop and through Coomaraswamy's writing. Of importance too is the contrapuntal nature of these works, the concept of two or more independent melodic lines, for as Godwin explained in listening to the jazz greats, "they would weave intricate alternate lines contrapuntal to the musical passages written and in so doing prompt me to explore alternate visual solutions."⁶⁹ *River of Time*, 1965, and *Green Mansion*, 1965, predict *The 5/4 Freight*, 1967, a work so large that Godwin understood that there was

now virtually no limit as to the size of painting he could produce. In *The 5/4 Freight* the upper portion was moving faster than the lower, which provoked the musical name. After this enormous piece, he wanted to see how small he could work, and so did a tiny piece. Examining these side by side, he accepted the conclusion that the “image room” had become too comfortable and that it was time to move on.⁷⁰

The Regina paintings were Godwin’s discovery of intuitive form, a vital part of his journey toward self-mastery. He, like Nietzsche and Plato, viewed art as something that could reconcile us with life rather than detach us from it.⁷¹ To Plato music is “a heaven-sent ally in reducing to order and harmony any disharmony in the revolutions within us.”⁷² But to be reconciled Godwin had to identify fierce Dionysian emotional attachment and find forms for that difficult expression. The translation of emotion into structure, then, is Dionysian art. Contemporary jazz musicians, liberating their unruly instincts, exploded tired structures and improvised new forms that gave them extended impact and emotional range. The composer Igor Stravinsky concluded that “music is not a direct communication of the composer’s feeling to his audience, but rather a communication about how he makes sense of his feelings, gives them structure, transforms them from raw emotion into art.”⁷³ In the Regina paintings Ted Godwin gave structure to his emotions for, like Nietzsche, with chaos in himself, he gave birth to the dancing star.

Notes

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- ¹ Unpublished Memoirs, p. 41.
 - ² *Ibid.*
 - ³ Ann Davis, interview with Ted Godwin, 2 January, 2008.
 - ⁴ *The Birth of Tragedy*, as explored by Anthony Storr, *Music and the Mind*, (New York, Macmillan, Inc., 1992), p. 156.
 - ⁵ *Theme and Variations*, (New York: Stein and Day, 1972), p. 9.
 - ⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 4 – 7.
 - ⁷ Memoirs, p. 52.
 - ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 51.
 - ⁹ Ted Godwin in conversation with Ann Davis, 20 January, 2008.
 - ¹⁰ Memoirs, pp. 173-?
 - ¹¹ Davis, interview with Godwin, 8 June, 2007.
 - ¹² *The Italian Painters of the Renaissance*, (London, Phaidon Press, 1959), p. 201.
 - ¹³ Memoirs, p. 13.
 - ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 372-373.
 - ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 375. Godwin claims this quotation came to him from Jules Olitski, who attributed it to Ruskin, in correspondence with Ann Davis, 2 January, 2008.

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- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 380-387.
- ¹⁷ These workshops were among the most important artistic events in the province of Saskatchewan. For details see *The Flat Side of the Landscape: The Emma Lake Artists' Workshops*, exhibition catalogue, Mendel Art Gallery, (Saskatoon, 1989).
- ¹⁸ Requested by Paul Arthur of *Canadian Art* magazine; reprinted in John P. O'Neill, ed, *Barnett Newman: Selected Writings and Interviews*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), p. 185.
- ¹⁹ *Memoirs*, p. 370.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 370-371.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 143.
- ²² *Ibid.*, p. 124.
- ²³ Davis, interview with Godwin, 8 June, 2007.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*
- ²⁵ *Memoirs*, p. 8.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 92.
- ²⁷ Davis, interview with Godwin, 8 June, 2007.
- ²⁸ John Philip O'Neill, *Barnett Newman: selected writings and interviews*, (New York, Knopf, 1990), p. 174.
- ²⁹ *Memoirs*, p. 144.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 150.
- ³² *Washington Post*, accessed 16 January, 2008.
- ³³ Readymades are art works created from ordinary manufactures objects selected and modified by the artist. Marcel Duchamp was one of the first important makers of readymades.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 166- 172.
- ³⁵ *Time Magazine*, 7 November, 1960.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*
- ³⁷ As related to Andrew Oko by Ted Godwin, via telephone on 30 December, 1998, and detailed in Andrew Oko, "The Paintings of Ted Godwin," in *Ted Godwin: The Tartan Years 1967-1976*, exhibition catalogue, The Nickle Arts Museum, (Calgary, 1999), p. 34.
- ³⁸ Ananda Coomaraswamy, *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1934).
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.
- ⁴⁰ Richard B. Simmins, *Five Painters from Regina*, (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1961), np.
- ⁴¹ Davis, interview with Godwin , 16 June, 2007.
- ⁴² *Memoirs*, p. 145.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 185.
- ⁴⁴ Richard B. Simmins, "Godwin," *Canadian Art*, XIX, no 2, (March/April 1962), p. 125.
- ⁴⁵ *Grove Art Online*, accessed 22 December, 2007.
- ⁴⁶ Davis, interview with Godwin, 8 June, 2007.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 16 June, 2007. Simmins did not end up with this work, for Bloore had also offered to buy it for his gallery, the Normal Mackenzie Art Galley, and did so when Simmins expressed his interest.
- ⁴⁸ *Memoirs*, p. 110.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 242.
- ⁵² Morris Graves, *The White Goddess*, (London: Farber and Farber, 1948), p. x.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 255.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 279; Later Godwin wrote "...the year spent in Greece had a profound effect in unleashing my creative juices. I wrote a book of poetry, painted full time, drew, played many games of arcane chess: Burmese Chess, Tamerlane Chess with its three orders of knights and Grand Vizier. The nightly round of tavernas discussing philosophy wee a wonderful part of the creative mix." Addendum to autobiography, unpaginated, 20 June, 2007.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 320.
- ⁵⁶ Interview, 16 June, 2007.
- ⁵⁷ *Memoirs*, pp. 365-368.

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- ⁵⁷ *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, Walter Kaufmann translation, (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), p. 5.
- ⁵⁸ CD notes
- ⁵⁹ Davis, interview with Godwin 16 June, 2007.
- ⁶⁰ Memoirs, p. 146.
- ⁶¹ Interview, 16 June, 2007.
- ⁶² Memoirs, p. 145.
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 319-320.
- ⁶⁴ Ted Godwin, notes for CD, 21 October, 2007.
- ⁶⁵ Quoted in Frank Kolsky, *John Coltrane and the Jazz Revolution of the 1960s*, (New York, Pathfinder, 1998), p. 376.
- ⁶⁶ Kolsky, p. 433.
- ⁶⁷ Davis, interview with Godwin, 16 June, 2007.
- ⁶⁸ Memoirs, p. 320.
- ⁶⁹ CD notes
- ⁷⁰ Davis, interview with Godwin, 16 June, 2007.
- ⁷¹ Storr, p. 157.
- ⁷² *Timaeus and Critias*, translated by Desmond Lee, (London: Penguin, 1977), p65.
- ⁷³ Storr, p. 100.

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