

THE EVOLUTION OF AN
ARTIST'S LIFE AND WORK BEING A
PERSONAL AND REFLECTIVE JOURNAL
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ABSTRACT

This personal and reflective journal concerns itself with the evolution of an artist's life and work specifically as it relates to those forces that determine the individual's philosophic perspective, as well as shape the form and content of his art. Three distinct yet related aspects of the artist's life were analyzed by using slides of the artist's paintings that were produced in the relevant periods.

Christian conversion and its subsequent effect on the artist's life and philosophy were the first consideration. An analysis is done of the work leading to the conversion showing the effect on the artist of influential local and international artists. As well, the role of literary ideas as a stimulus for visual expression is touched upon. The nature of form and content, as it manifests itself in the paintings done during the conversion period and afterward, is examined in an attempt to show a resolution of style in the artist's work.

The second area of reflective inquiry was the role of the artist as a teacher of art at the secondary level. Teaching and working in different mediums in

the classroom situation were looked at to see what influence, if any, they had on the artist's attitude to form and content in his own work. The general demands of teaching, apart from the discipline of art, are considered as they relate to the pressures of time and their importance in the production of the artist's work.

The third area relates to the first as it parallels and evolves out of the philosophic perceptions of the artist and their relationships to his public. Throughout the journal and in the analysis of the slides, close attention is paid to style, that is, the form the content takes and whether or not the artist's intent has been realized, in making his art visually accessible.

The text is an exegetical account of the slides and it is recommended that it be read in conjunction with the projected slide images of the author's work.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Tolstoy said that in order to define any human activity it is necessary to understand its sense and importance; and in order to do this it is primarily necessary to examine that activity in itself, in its dependence on its causes and in connection with its effects.¹

Heeding this advice, I shall begin this reflective journal with a short preamble that deals with some salient experiences that helped make my personality and character. Though these experiences happened before the period I intend to consider, I believe they are among the prime reasons for the manifestation in my conscious and unconscious mind of powerful death images that haunted my dreams. Those past experiences started out as extraordinary events and continued to shape my personality and character as I matured. Formative as they were, they are integral to the understanding of my early work.

Growing Up

I was born in Quesnel, at that time a tiny sawmill town in the interior of B.C. My parents were what I

considered to be in the broadest sense, middle class and I was raised with the sensibilities usually associated with that group. I had a relatively happy childhood, and I retain fond memories of the landscape and its seasonal transformations. A traumatic experience marred this otherwise undisturbed pre-adolescence. My father was an alcoholic at that time, and he fell into disreputable relationships that nearly broke up our family. I still carry deep within me that fear of unreconciled separation and alienation. It lies at the door of every relationship. Evidence of this can be seen in the painting Blue Lady (Slides 1 & 2) which demonstrates a preoccupation with that specific psychological condition. I will come back to an analysis of this work further on in the paper.

My schooling had a dubious start, as I failed grade two, and it did not improve when I became a teenager, failing again (along with one seventh of my school mates) in grade ten. I think that I was passed out of high school when there remained no more art classes for me to take.

As a teenager, my peer group consisted of those who were as athletically involved as I. My art involvement at that time consisted of painting signs, building displays in my father's grocery, and painting

the names on the sides of hot rods.

It was this preoccupation with cars that would lead me to the most cataclysmic experience of my life. My peer group drank excessively, and I was no exception. Many weekends could be counted as lost in that small interior town, but none more than that fateful one that altered my life in the Fall of 1962. I was involved in a spectacular car crash that claimed the life of a girlfriend; and, as I was responsible, the guilt of this act rested heavily upon my shoulders, even though I was forgiven by the girl's family.

For years afterwards I dreamed of the screeching tires and the destruction of the car. I can still see the bodies, doll-like, spread down the ditch where the crushed car came to rest. Before me I saw my life, transformed. In that instant I saw finality and silent awesome death. The zest for life I once had paled and, as the experience continued to affect me, my laugh became crimped, tainted with another knowledge. It was a knowledge that held in sharp focus the reality of death. It was because of these potent experiences that I would later become preoccupied with dreams as a source of imagery in my art.

Formative Years at Art School

In reviewing my life in tracing its course, I fill my cell with the pleasure of being...so that I may hurl myself into them as into dark pits, those moments when I strayed through trap-ridden compartments of a subterranean sky.²

In 1963 I enrolled at the Vancouver School of Art with the intention of becoming a commercial artist, perhaps encouraged by the small success I experienced in my father's grocery store. It was at art school that I began to search for a meaning to the questions so brutally posed by my earlier experiences. In the writings of existentialists such as Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, in the perverted philosophy of Marquis de Sade, and the sexual liberation of Henry Miller and Jean Genet, I started to form a thoughtful structure, hoping to understand, and cope with, the past. Genet's writing was especially formative. He seemed to express from his real prison the desperate trapped feeling I had experienced in my self imposed one. Comparing the painting Blue Lady (Slide 2) with the preceding quote from Genet's Our Lady of Flowers makes this point as the man in the painting stares into the trap-ridden compartments of a subterranean sky."³

The existential and Libertine philosophy I was

developing by reading this type of literature gave me a perspective that helped make some sense of the pain and guilt I was bearing. Furthermore, the heavy nightmares that generated the desperate figures peopling the landscapes of my canvases were confirmed by these writers' vision of an absurd universe. Nevertheless, the passion and commitment I found in the work of these writers and the correlation to the evolution of my art education convinced me that I must paint. There was nothing else as important. I felt called to that particular form of art.

Mentors

From my studies I was inspired by the artists who could manipulate paint and give to that colored mud expressions of deep human feelings. Chaim Soutine (1894-1943), Willem de Kooning (1904-), and Francis Bacon (1909-) were among the master painters I identified with in a psychological and plastic way. They transformed their angst into a tangible and often terrible reality as they rendered in paint the human condition in a manner that had never been attempted before. These artists bore witness to the darker side of man in an absurd world floating in a silent

universe. This bleak view of humanity was a shared attitude of Bacon and de Kooning at that time, and I identified with it completely, though perhaps a little naively. Their philosophy on painting dovetailed beautifully into my interpretation of the existential thought of Camus, the liberalism of Miller, and seemed, to me at least, vividly to recall de Sade.

Like many of the artists and poets of the time de Kooning and Bacon perceive chance as a muse. Reason is left behind as they curse the flesh that houses their humanity.

Francis Bacon states, "...real painting is a mysterious and continuous struggle with chance."⁴

Bacon appears to have perceived the universe as a chaotic grouping of antagonistic relationships where man struggles with chance much as Sisyphus pushed the boulder up the hill. There are no absolute answers for Bacon who was "obsessed by the cruelty shown by humans to their fellows, and to animals."⁵ Bacon's philosophy is carried over into his painting, where the "...subject is subordinate to the paint, and painting is an accident."⁶ de Kooning echoes this same attitude. In discussion with Thomas Hess about the way he paints, Hess reflects that, "...part of his idea is to keep everything up in the air at the same time, to make

himself open, to let any idea that happens to be floating around have its chance."⁷ It is in the philosophy manifested in Bacon's and de Kooning's painting methods that I found purpose and justification for the universal silence of Camus. There was no Absolute, not even a reason to answer to -- only myself, swept up by the persuasive philosophies of Camus and Sartre, and the expressive paintings of de Kooning and Bacon, and abandoned to the winds of chance.

Soutine portrayed "flesh" as the "primary element, the primordial material."⁸ Like de Kooning, Soutine imbued his expressively energetic brush strokes with an emotional quality: as much of the content rested in the actual brush strokes as in the figure. In his self-portraits and paintings of carcasses he expressed in painterly terms what I felt: a sort of choked scream. Soutine, within the expressive meaning of his brush strokes, communicated his passion with an almost screaming silence.

I fully endorsed these artists' perception of mankind. Their philosophic and metaphysical attitude to painting became my attitude as well. I incorporated their methods of composition as I felt they best described the idea of alienation. With a few

exceptions, their figurative work is structured in a totemic manner. This is, the ground in which the figure acts, is subordinate to the figure. The focus is on a singular dominant image that either floats alone or is entangled on an almost empty ground, as in Bacon's work, or is filled to its extremities as in de Kooning's Women. This compositional device attracted me because it seemed to emphasize the importance of the figure in all its expressions; as well, it reinforced the concept of alienation in the singularity of the image as it related to the individual.

Except for slides and productions of their work, these artists were far removed from me, either dead, as in the case of Soutine, or geographically, as in the case of Bacon in England, and de Kooning in New York.

It was two Vancouver artists, David Mayrs (1935-), and Claude Breeze (1938-), who touched my life most intensely, and influenced my work most directly. David Mayrs, who was to become a close friend, was himself significantly influenced in his early work by de Kooning, an example being the large figurative work, American Tragedy, of 1964.⁹

Claude Breeze tended more to the sensibilities of Francis Bacon. Breeze's influence is quite evident in

my work of that period, and I believe that this is due in part to similar perceptions we had of the world around us. Breeze's concern for flat color fields with loose expressionistic brush work defining the figurative form, as in the painting, Sunday Afternoon, (from an American photograph) of 1968¹⁰ also influenced me. Psychologically, I was still connected to my own sources, and the pain and alienation I was expressing were no less real.

It is noteworthy, comparing the work of Breeze to mine, that during this time he seemed to have solved most of his figure/ground problems, whereas I was still wrestling with the contradictions implicit in juxtaposing color field and expressionistic figurative painting styles. In attempting to maintain the visual unity of the free gestural brush strokes in that flat pure color field a tension was set up within me that inhibited the free brushwork. This caused the figures that should have been rendered in an expressive manner to float stiffly on the surface of the canvas. This can be seen clearly in Tomb 2 (Slide 4). In retrospect it seems that a resolution could have come about if I had broken the surface of my ground with some intermediate rendering; that would soften up the edge defining the figure and the ground. This is the device

that Breeze used to unify figure and ground. This problem was to concern me from approximately 1967 to 1969 (Slides 1-15).

At that time I did not fully understand the philosophic intent of the almost ascetic positivism of formalism, of which hardedge and colorfield painting were representative. Hardedge and colorfield painting were just becoming popular in my final year of art school, and this popularity coupled with the advance of plastic paint technology and marketing, became an unavoidable influence.

The seduction of the new materials played an important role in my image development in this sense. With a growing budget, the Art School was buying bulk orders of canvas and paint. No longer did students have to purchase at retail prices. The plastics market was becoming vigorous in winning over "oil painters" to this better non-toxic smell-free way of painting. Many recent graduates and influential young artists were returning from abroad with what seemed revolutionary attitudes to paint usage. At that time, Bodo Pfeiffer, another Vancouver artist was completing a major hardedge mural complementing Guido Molinari's green and orange stripes at the Vancouver Airport. Michael Morris had returned from London, and his stainless steel/

mirrored/stripe paintings were becoming influential. Furthermore, the Los Angeles Six; Larry Bell, Irwin, et al. exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery¹¹ showed everyone just how slick and sensuous a surface could be achieved with the appropriate technology.

The new found acceptability of masking tape, rollers, and spray guns expanded my possibilities of painterly discovery. These new tools and techniques also exerted some influence on the direction that content and meaning were to take in my painting. As an awareness of the importance of surface was a predominant concern for many painters at this time, the move to plastic paint from oil paint was inevitable. The major problem I had getting large fields of color to be completely even and without dry spots now no longer existed. Rolled on glazes, airbrushed blends, sprayed tonal modulations were now possible. One did not have to use a brush and make a thousand strokes to accomplish the same effect. Not only was the surface as a sensuous and tactile component important at this time, but the edge of the form, the delineation of space where that sensuous surface existed, became clearer, finer and harder with the use of masking tape. Everything was being cleaned except my state of mind.

A Dark Foreshadowing

It is now necessary to return to a personal anecdote in order to understand the next development.

One evening, while in second year at art school, three art student friends and I played the Ouija board. It seemed to work in whatever manner those boards do, and as the evening progressed we asked the board more specific and penetrating questions, the most memorable being at what age each of us would die. The prediction for the three other art students' deaths all ranged in the 69-72 age bracket. However, the prediction for my death was 27 years of age. We all laughed, nervously ended the game, drank the rest of our wine and went our separate ways. The prediction of the evening haunted me; however, I tried to put it out of my mind.

I not only had a dark heart condition, but also a bleak outlook on life. As well I had a mind full of loose ends that were being compounded by the influence of Formalism on this inherently expressive painter. As mentioned before, I was attracted to those artists who with expressionistic brush strokes visualized dramatically the inner state of man. I felt that, if I could achieve a ground that gave one the feeling of

empty space and visually unite it with the expressionistic brush work and painterly figure, I would achieve a suitable existential statement that visually expressed my views that man exists in a vacant and silent space, where every and any decision is really absurd, and only death is absolute.

Aside from surface considerations, the composition in my early work, though being totemic, involved the use of ambiguous figure/ground relationships, such as Blue Lady (Slide 1). This has been a recurring convention in my work, finding its roots in the work of Picasso and Cubism (see his women of the 1963 period). This convention, I believe, allowed me to attempt the simultaneous visualizing of opposite ideas or feelings, such as love and hate. It was a perfect vehicle to convey the horror of deceit behind the mask of love and compassion, giving the viewer an unsettling feeling that perhaps things are not what they appear.

A constant theme in these early works (Slides 1-7) is that of alienation: a theme sympathetic with existential philosophy and compatible with this artist's psychological state of mind. The decapitated figures' heads are not only separated from their body but, as in Tomb 1 (Slide 3), those same heads, being representative of the psyche, float above the opposite body.

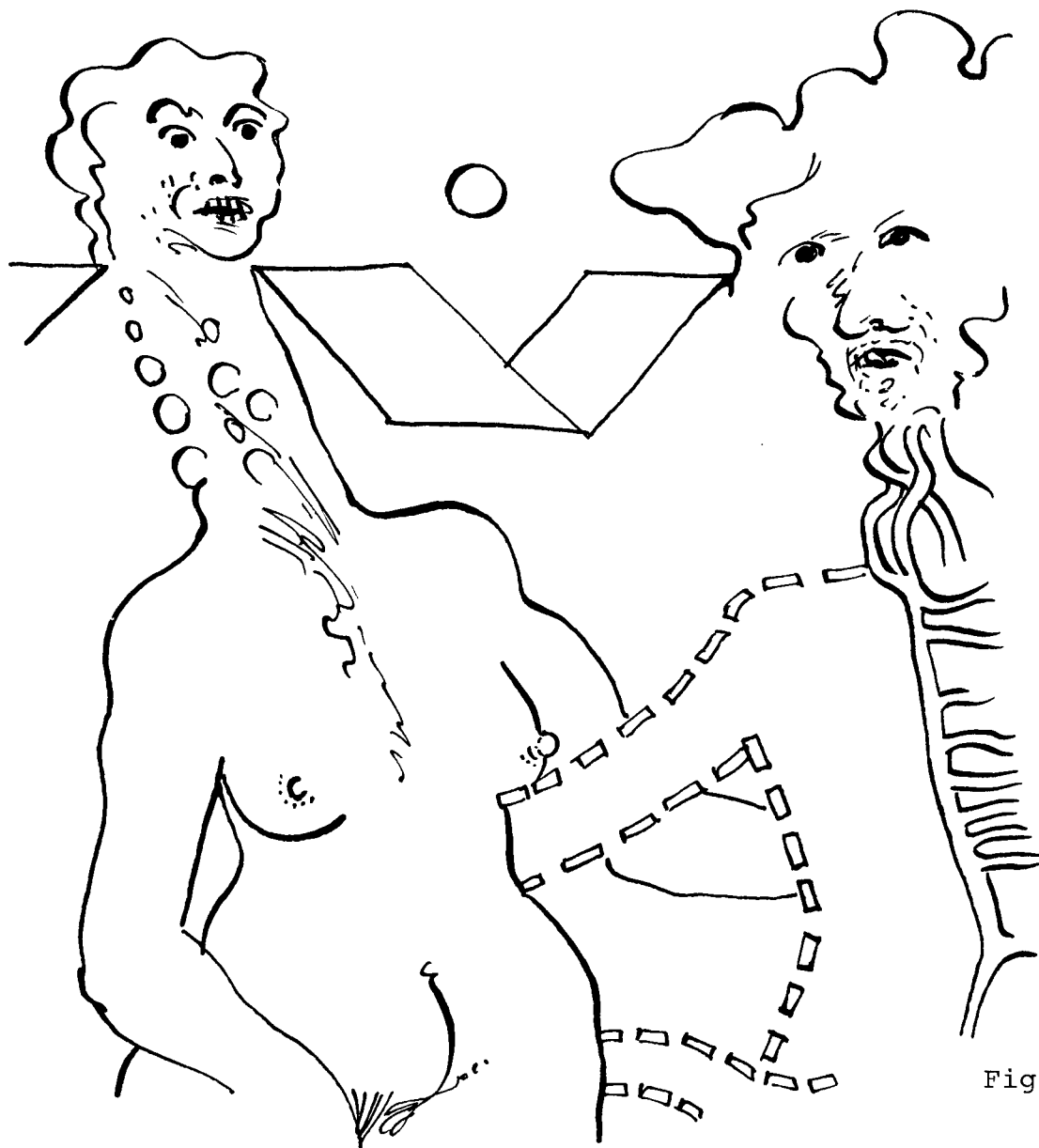


Fig. 1

The male head is above a disintegrating female form and the female head is above a neuro-sexual cut out diagram of the male. This was how I perceived myself at the time in relation to those closest to me. Connected yet not wholly there, an observer, sensing and feeling but

in the same situation estranged. This sense of alienation is heightened by four parallelograms that suggest the end of two phallic shaped coffins. In the attempted embrace of these two strange figures that hold each other as objects, an awkward balance is achieved, with the ends of the coffins pinching the two heads and holding them like a trap.

Tomb 2 (Slide 4) shows a floating or ascending female form, again decapitated, with silhouettes in bubbles moving off in perspective to what appears to be a rectangular mirror shape or open coffin, reflecting or containing a transparent mask receding into the darkness.

This preoccupation with decapitation and reflected life/death masks began to subside shortly after I left art school and reached a partial conclusion in the paintings Ash Box and Prison (Slides 6 & 7). In these later works such as Sense Box (Slide 5), freer brush work in the landforms can be seen asserting itself on the hardedges and clean monochromatic surfaces. This signified a change.

Post Art School

The works following this period show a distinct evolution towards the unification of figure and ground. It is here that an open space appears in the picture plane. The rectangle or box shape that once held only ominous death masks or grim reflections, has now become a window. Within this window a landscape can be seen, intimating a sense of freedom, as in the transitional painting Dream Room 1 (Slide 8); nevertheless it still retains a sense of helpless alienation. The two figures in Dream Room 1 have become one and seem to be observing, from a manikin-like head, (the male figure has no head) a transparent screen on which the ambiguous forms of male/female genitals are the foci.

The surface in the following works (Slides 8-12) becomes more subtle. The colors become cooler and greyed. In the Dream Room paintings (Slides 8 & 9) the influence of airbrush spraying is evident. The spray effect is used to enhance the continued involvement with ambiguous space. It incorporates stylized references to male and female genitals. It is also significant, I think, that this developing convention was helping to resolve the figure/ground relationships, most notably in the painting In (Slide 10). With this

painting, as well as in Dream Room 2 and Hydra (Slides 9 & 12), the sprayed cut out female forms do not remain as an object of attention by the figures rendered in fleshlike brush strokes as they do in Dream Room 1 (Slide 8). Rather, they seem to activate the space around the figure. Furthermore, while maintaining the integrity of the female form, the shapes continue to render the surface of the picture plane in an ambiguous manner. The box, now become window, remains; however, it is unattainable, an idealized peaceful landscape.

As much of my inspiration has come from literary sources, as well as dreams, it is significant that there is a narrative quality to much of my work; my work can be read. For example, in Dream Room 2 (Slide 9), the dark blue part of the picture plane has become like the box/coffin, enclosing or framing the action. An arm reaches out and across towards the inviting, hopeful window. The owner of the arm is hidden, but by implication he is positioned facing a deep blue wall. His reach is intercepted by a breast rendered in flesh tones. All the forms, both positive and negative, are feminine, and they activate the space in which the owner of the arm resides. His hand does not grip the breast, it is tentative. This is not what

it is seeking. Perhaps this painting, more than any other, illustrates the inner need I felt for some meaning outside of, yet related to, myself. I had a need to go beyond the absurd. I wanted something meaningful, even as absolute as death. In an attempt to find some meaning in my existence I began reading Khalil Gibran, whose writing awoke within me a sense of the eternal that is in all men. At the same time I studied the Tao and experimented with the I Ching, an ancient Chinese book of wisdom that was popular at the time. The search for meaning seemed to be evolving towards spiritual and metaphysical aspects of existence.

Among my contemporaries in the late sixties, the positive and enlightening sensory and spiritual experiences obtained through the use of mind expanding drugs was being extolled. I enthusiastically endorsed these experiments in hope that they would lead to a more meaningful perception of who I was in the world. However, for me it only widened the gap between my perceived need for a meaningful absolute other than death, and the absurd existential attitude I tenuously maintained. In the paintings Recept and Hydra (Slides 11 & 12) there are indications that the box/window convention is losing its potency, unable to hold the

figure. For example, the figure appears to be throwing itself about the picture plane in Recept (Slide 11). This work foreshadows what is to come.

CHAPTER II

THE CONVERSION

"How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth. Unless a man is born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the spirit gives birth to spirit." John 3, V. 4,5,6.

In my twenty seventh year I painted Saved by Grace (Slide 13). This canvas was executed the day after I had an intense physical and spiritual experience while attending a small, crowded church in East Vancouver. At that time I experienced an unconditional release from guilt. It seemed an inexplicable thing that happened to me.

Metaphysically I had died, just as the ouija board had predicted. I felt psychologically and physically cleansed and whole. I had no way at that time of reasoning how or why it happened. Up to this time my career as an artist and my social and economic abilities had sustained me reasonably well. I had a good part-time job as a kitchen porter at a local hospital that enabled me to maintain a storefront studio, with living space, in the rear. I was receiving increasing recognition for my work. I had won the Purchase Award at the 40th International Northwest

Printmakers Exhibit in Seattle and this opened doors to exhibitions as far south as San Diego.

A two man show that included the paintings In and Recept (Slides 10 & 11) at the Bau-Xi Gallery was well received, though it was not a financial success. At that time a short-term Canada Council grant was enabling me to produce a series of silkscreen prints with master printer Bill (Terra) Bonnieman. My work seemed to be evolving towards a resolution of the figure/ground problems that had been plaguing me up to this date. It appeared to me that I was on the threshold of realizing a wholly personal style, of moving out from under the shadows of my mentors.

A counterpoint to this positive expectancy existed in my social attitude and in how it shaped my behavior towards others. I was given to excessive drinking, and living a libertine, and bohemian lifestyle. This type of existence did nothing to encourage a positive self-concept. On the contrary, it added to the already substantial guilt I was bearing.

I could run my life like water over the stone of my guilt, knowing that the water of life would eventually wear away the stone, but the ripple that stone caused in my life only grew larger. The spiritual concepts I held were a blend of eastern

mysticism, the Tao, existential ideas, and science-fiction imaginings. They did not seem to offer a reasonable way to expiate my guilt. Like the running stream, my life just seemed to keep on moving.

The answer came in that inexplicable numinous experience when the transcendent "Other" acted love and forgiveness upon me. I did not know what to name the experience or what to call the author. In my art I attempted a visualization of the experience and Saved by Grace (Slide 13) was the result. It is painted in a rough and regressive manner. It seems to have lost any figure/ground resolution that had been gained to this point. Nevertheless, it illustrates a turning point in my life, and subsequently in my work.

In an analysis of the work, it is interesting to note that the figure, rendered flesh-like and solid on the right side, is clutching a protruding phallic shape that emanates from the box containing the interlocked female/male form. This image recurs in much of the work, such as Dream Room 1 (Slide 8). The other side

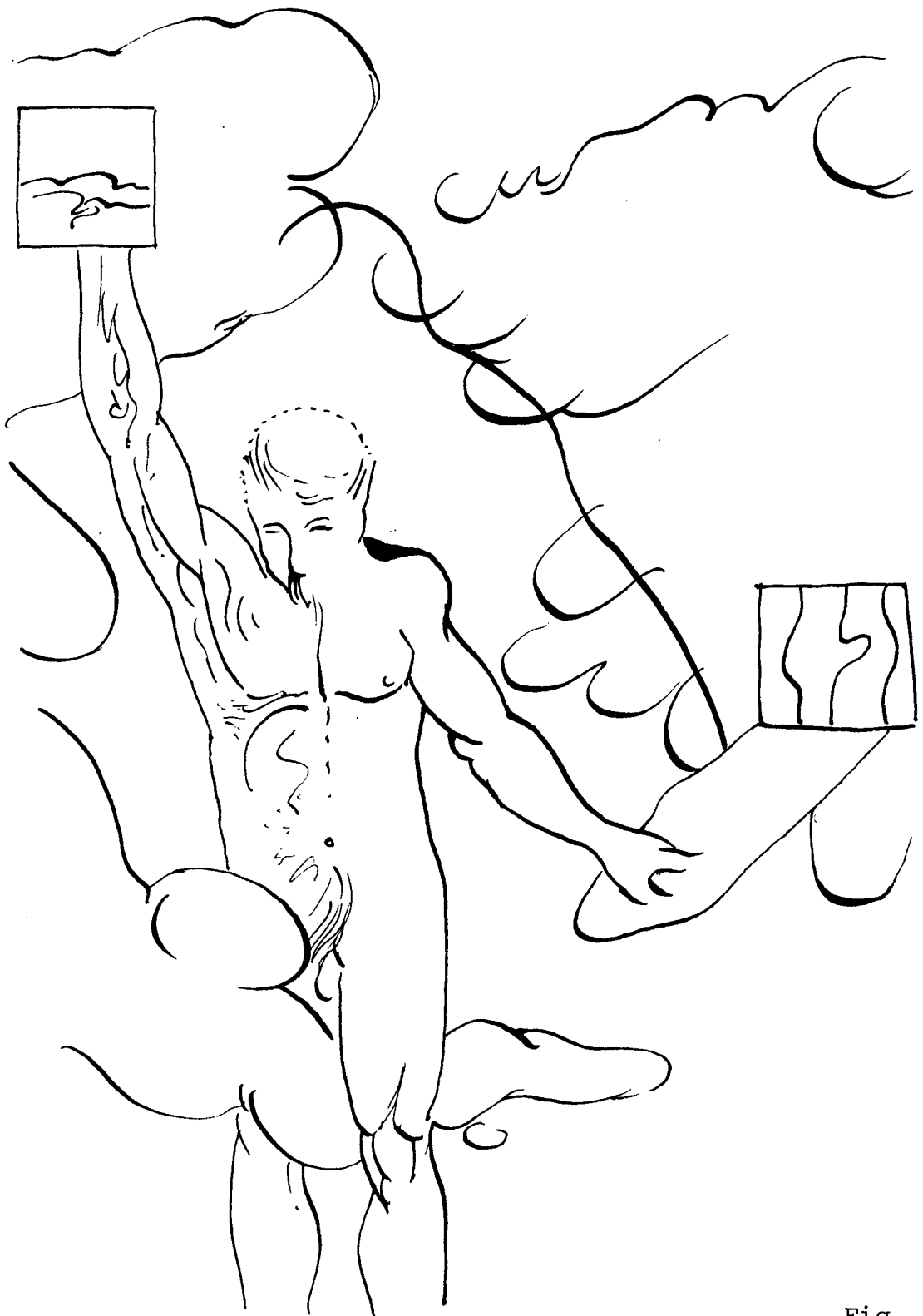


Fig. 2

of the figure, brushed in a more transparent manner, perhaps indicates that there has been a spiritual awakening. The transparent side of the figure has grasped the ephemeral, elusive box containing the peaceful, idealized landscape. Swirling white clouds caress the figure. A duality seems to be established between flesh and spirit. This painting was exhibited in a solo exhibition at the Bau-Xi Gallery in 1970, and as Joan Lowndes wrote, "It deserves mention as a point of departure."¹²

The Search for Meaning

"Reason's last step is the recognition that there are an infinite number of things which are beyond it. If natural things are beyond it, what are we to say about supernatural things?"¹³

I kept returning to that small church. Upon each visit I was continually moved by feelings which I can only call love. Between visits, I attempted to make some sense of the experiences I was having by reading the Bible, as well as other mystical and metaphysical writings. After about a month or so of enquiry, I could reasonably identify the author of those experiences. I concluded that it was the Holy Spirit who, theologically speaking, enables or activates faith

in such a way that Jesus is seen and related to as the incarnate God, the Christ.

Pascal in his *Pensées* expresses the paradox of the seeking pilgrim hoping for an answer from a silent universe when he states, "The eternal silence of those infinite spaces fills me with dread. Be comforted; it is not from yourself that you must expect it, but on the contrary, you must expect it by expecting nothing from yourself."¹⁴

In searching, I was found. The universe, though silent, had meaning, a meaning given by that which called it into being. For me, life now became as absolute as death. I was created "a new creature", I saw with new eyes, heard with new ears, and touched with new hands. It was with a great sense of freedom and joy that I went through the next month or so, and then the reality of 27 years of intensive behavioral conditioning made itself felt. Biblical truths now came to life in the real world for me. I was a new creature, loved and forgiven, but as well, I had the old, carnal, unspiritual man still living within me. This truth and the process of that truth became evident when I returned to my art.

A Purge

The black, sexually sinister airbrush paintings (Slide 15), painted during the period during which I analyzed and reflected on the spiritual experiences I was having seem now to be connected to two sources. First, I believe they were a final purging of that singular dark image of death and alienation that resided in me, and in that sense they seem now to have been therapeutic. Second, much of the "street teaching" of the young Christians I was associated with during that time was apocalyptic. With a negative and admittedly naive world view, such horrific images of the end times, such as those in the airbrush drawings, particularly the Phallic Locust on the extreme left side of slide 15, seem contrary to the spiritual direction I was going.

At the same time as I was producing the airbrush drawings, I was also working on a series of silkscreen prints (Slide 16). The black airbrush and silkscreen styles seemed diametrically opposed. It was evident that things had come apart. Whereas the airbrush works are almost completely concerned with superimposition of anatomical parts in a nightmarish black void, the screen prints seem given over to formal sensibilities

verging on pure design concerns. Furthermore, the prints illustrate an attitude to landscape that to this time had only been used as a compositional device to hold or activate the figures on the canvas; or to act as a symbolic reference to some meaning other than the landscape itself.

As a seasonal worker, I had occasion to work in the woods planting trees, before the execution of these prints in the Fall of 1969, and this exposed me to the sea and mountainous fjords of the coast of B.C. These prints are the result of a visit back to those areas, and reflect an influence and possible direction the land could give to my imagery. But this direction was not the one I was to take.

With the formative nature of my faith being apocalyptic, my motivation was not to be the hardedge, idealistic landscapes, pointed at in the prints, but rather the condition of man's soul and its need to be saved. All this was generated from the theology I was assimilating. My painting became not only a way of expressing myself, but also a didactic tool, incorporating as content, biblical concepts with a specifically Christian motif.

In late August, 1970 I had a solo exhibition at the Bau-Xi Gallery. By this time, I had quit my

part-time job and was now fully employed with a landscape maintenance firm. I also had moved out of my studio and was living in a basement suite. However, all the work in this exhibition had been completed in the studio amidst a transient group of young people who could fluctuate between four and 12 a night.

The work in this show was varied in both the media used, and the form the content took. As well as large acrylic paintings (Slides 13 & 14), there were small watercolors, and medium size airbrush drawings (Slide 18) that still seemed to contain sexual references despite the attempt at statements of Christian rebirth. The large acrylic Burden of Dhuma (Slide 17) illustrates a synthesis of figure/ground relationships, not achieved in the work Ask (Slide 14). There is no attempt to involve the surface of the canvas in an ambiguous way with airbrushed shapes. Rather, the picture plane has become clear, and though ambiguity exists in the band of yellow across the desolate horizon, it is peripheral to the focus of the painting. Unlike the earlier works, such as In (Slide 10), where the figure resides within the ambiguous space, the Burden of Dhuma's sunrise or sunset is de-emphasized and becomes a consideration only after the action of the figure/snake is experienced and understood.

The show was reviewed by Joan Lowndes and Richard Simmons, who both concluded that I was starting again in a new way. In Simmons' own words, Stanbridge was "at the beginning again because the old forms cannot express the new inquiry."¹⁵ This exhibition marked the final abandonment of my past concerns with figure/ground relationships, and with existential and sexually oriented content. I felt I now had to evolve a visual and plastic expression that was integral to my new Christian faith.

Airbrush Drawings

It was after the solo show at the Bau-Xi, and while living in the basement suite, that I started producing airbrush drawings on paper. At the same time, I continued working on smaller oil paintings, such as The Price (Slide 19). This particular painting demonstrates the tentative, frustrated type of plastic inquiry I was going through. I was working at a physically demanding job as a landscape gardener, and I had little time or energy left over for painting, especially painting that was in its formative stage. Consequently, I feel that nearly all of the oil paintings from this era (Slides 19, 26, 27), as well as

the following three years, were obvious failures, and they have all been destroyed.

The airbrush work, on the other hand, was a more successful inquiry into a form that matched my intentions. The restrictive spaces in which I was living and painting made the modular type of format practical. Moreover, Ken Priestley, a prominent picture framer and friend, was always amenable to unorthodox ways of displaying images. It was the pre-OPEC era, and the relative cheapness and availability of plastics were evoking from artists a wide variety of visual responses. Audrey Capel Doray's Falling Woman, of 1968,¹⁶ is a good example of this influence, and it was in this direction I started to move.

The three large airbrush works (Slides 20, 21, 22) were first exhibited in a group show called the Mythadromas at the Avelles Gallery in 1972. Joan Lowndes commented on the large 8' x 4' T-shaped work Out of My Belly (Slide 20) as being "the vision of a mystic, but with full artistic control",¹⁷ and much of the work in general as having "great religious intensity."¹⁸ It appeared then that I was fulfilling the two major criteria for a work of art in the secular world; that being a form and content that communicates

to all men. Form and content in these works appear integrated as the color, shape and the texture of the paintings works to both complement and expand the content: the image of Christ. Furthermore, the use of popular techniques such as air brush, the modular structure, and shaped format, work to separate the paintings from traditional and sacred methods of depicting the idea of Christ the Man/God. This new form, the airbrushed modular figure, seemed suitable to the new direction I should take. As well, I was receiving very positive reactions from my public. Indeed, it was on the strength of these three works in the Mythodromas show that Jytte Allen, an aggressive art dealer, persuaded me to become one of her growing stable of artists.

CHAPTER III

CHANGES

It was at this crucial period in the development of my painting that in a matter of a few months I married, enrolled at the University of British Columbia with the intention of becoming an art teacher, and secured a position as a house parent for transient youths.

The effect of my marriage on my outlook socially, spiritually, and aesthetically, can only be described as positive. My wife is an artist as well, and this made for not only a compatible relationship of shared interests but also kept me at that time persevering in art.

While studying to become an art teacher I was only able to take one studio and one art history course. Furthermore, I had to take numerous English courses as that was to be my second area. It seems conceivable on reflecting on this period that my attitude to literary concepts as translated into visual form went through considerable growth. This move left little time to pursue the fruitful looking direction that the large airbrush assemblages (Slides 21, 22, 23) indicated.

Spiritual, ethical and moral attitudes that were evolving in my Christian experience caused me to see my painting in a new perspective. Primarily, it ceased to be an end in itself as it had been in the past. The ultimate demand of my painting on my time and energy became secondary to my relationship with God and my new found love for mankind. As well, the demand allowed me to evaluate the self-centered, so-called creative ideals I had developed at art school. These concepts, such as "your work at all costs," "your art must come before family, friends," paled in the light of Christ's sayings. "Lest you love me more than Mother, Father and Brother, you are not worthy of me."

Jesus Christ and His teachings now replaced art as the ultimate goal, authority and experience, and definer of truth and relationships. From this I saw in myself the necessity for my character and personality to go through a long period of redemptive transformation. Part of the transformation I perceived, could be facilitated by working with those less fortunate than I. This desire was in part the impetus that led me to work in transient group homes, and to consider the teaching profession as a vocation.

Nevertheless, while attending university, I continued to paint. I resumed work with the airbrush

(Slides 23-25) and also attempted some large oil paintings (Slides 26-27). The oil paintings were heavy-handed attempts to illustrate my faith. Done in a variety of styles, sometimes using two or more painterly conventions in one canvas, these paintings show the frustrating struggle I was having in evolving an image and a format capable of expressing my new self. For example, No More (Slide 26), is overwrought with blatant symbolism, an unsuccessful attempt at an El Greco sky, and a little "pop art" thrown in with white outlines. It is a painting full of conventions that in their juxtapositioning, approach the bizarre; a silver sprayed cross stands glistening over a cross section view of an empty grave with blood soaked clothes. In reflecting on this work it seems that I was trying to incorporate as much Christian symbolism as I could into the canvas. Consequently, the narrative aspect of the painting is lessened because of the contrasting styles and this leads to an unintentional, almost gross, parody of the very concepts I was trying to communicate.

In sharp contrast to the large oils, the airbrushes, though not as successful as the earlier large works, seem to be working towards some form of resolution, indicating a kind of soft cubism

(Slides 23-25). They too suffer from an image and a message that is too easily read. The images, (especially the Christ figures) seem to have lost the mystical power they attained in the larger work. This, I believe, was due to the scale of the smaller works, and the framed-in image, whereas the larger pieces expand and move across the wall as in Forgive Them (Slide 22), implying a greater unseen drama. The smaller works, crimped in their frames, remain unthreatening and perhaps even a little too illustrative. Greater than Jonah (Slide 25) makes this point, as one is drawn into the work by the circle focus, rather than the obtrusive work in Forgive Them.

Bread, Thorns and Rocks

It is in part due to both my nature, and my art school training that I approached the act of painting in a relatively unsystematic way. Brought up as a neophyte on Picasso's dictum, "If you know exactly what you're going to do, what's the point of doing it?",¹⁹ the preplanning of an art work was never a primary consideration. Rather, the images, forms, and colors evolved from an experience in nature, perhaps related to an inspirational literary idea, such as, in my early

work, I found in Genet's Our Lady of the Flowers. More often, such images grew out of work already in progress. This method of realizing a cogent visual statement was fine when my work was evolving from an established base, and I was mature and confident enough with the tools and abilities I had. Starting from square one again did not allow such positive luxury. It was during the Fall of 1973 that I decided to hoard what little time I had. I made an intellectual decision to limit myself to only three images, and even then, limit them to certain formats. I wanted to represent in my work three fundamental aspects of my faith as I lived it. First, I would represent or symbolize the substance of my faith with Bread images. Second, I would use Rocks to symbolize the foundation of my faith. Third, I used Thorns to represent the passion of my faith. This was done in an attempt to clarify and direct me into visual images that would be worthy of the spiritual experience they represented. I did not intend the images to become sacred and in that sense iconographic. Rather I desired to express through the Bread, Rock and Thorn images my reaction as a twentieth century man to God and the World. Furthermore, I did not look to traditional Christian orthodoxy, whether dogma or sacred art, for a guide to my choice of imagery. Instead I

depended on a personal interpretation of the Bible and from that developed a perspective on what it means to be a Christian and an artist, and the subsequent responsibilities that arise from such a perspective.

In limiting the images to bread, rocks and thorns, I also gained control of my tendency towards a crowded and surrealistic picture plane. I intended the paintings to be focussed on a singular image, and that image rendered with significant detail. The ground in which the image existed was to be clear and unobtrusive. Manna from Heaven and Cosmic Bread (Slides 29 & 30) demonstrate this cutting away of the unnecessary, and focussing on the specific image. Manna from Heaven (Slide 29) was one of a series of small format oil-on-canvas paintings that I felt were integral steps leading to the later and larger acrylic paintings of which Cosmic Bread (Slide 30) is an example. The simplicity of the composition and paint handling, the lack of complex color and textural relationships, enabled me to achieve two important things that were significant in maintaining my motivation. First, I could approach the canvas with a minimum amount of problem solving ahead of me, allowing me to spend a generous proportion of the meager time I had for art, actually painting my ideas. As I

mentioned previously, much of my work is inspired from literary sources. For example, upon reading a particular Biblical passage the picture is formed in the mind; colors and relationships, images in harmony and conflict. A corollary is seen in everyday life. Bread is broken to be eaten so as to sustain us. The Son of Man is broken on the cross and becomes the bread, the Manna from Heaven. We who are like cold dead stones consume this and spring to life. To give this vision form, to flesh it in with paint and give it tangibility is most rewarding. Second, I was able to complete the paintings, and as the work evolved from idea to idea and canvas to canvas, a progress and evolution, however slow, could be observed. Designing the conceptual and plastic aspects of my work to suit the amount of time available for execution was absolutely necessary to maintain consistency and achieve significant depth or meaning. So it was, in the act of painting, and in the reward of that act, the finished art work, that I found reason and motivation to continue.

A noteworthy influence on my imagery arose from setting myself up in such a way. Because of the time demands and, in part, my gregarious nature, there was a tendency towards gesture and the quick sketch. This tendency manifested itself in the large pencil drawings

of thorns (Slides 31 & 32), as well as in the airbrush paintings that grew out of that graphic inquiry. These images, the thorns in pencil and airbrush (Slides 33-35), seem to foreshadow a direction that I was to take in the near future. It would not be the rigid, almost ascetic bread paintings that would lead me to resolution or discovery. This is due to a number of reasons, but the most important is that the method I had constructed in the long term was not compatible with my personality. Though I benefited from the discipline and control that I had to exert in the bread paintings, it was in the more expressive and gesticulating works (Slides 33-35) that I found freedom of expression. It was in these works, I believe, that the image became less surreal and more painterly, resurrecting the more positive influences of Bacon and de Kooning.

A Short Tangent

It was during the summer months of 1973 that I took a tangent that was generated from an experience I had while teaching Arts & Crafts workshops for the Vancouver Art Gallery's Satellite program. One day I noticed a pencil lying on a windowsill; sharpened at

both ends. It struck me as absurdly funny. What would an anthropologist from another world think of such a tool? From this experience I produced a series of small paintings (Slides 36-38). Furthermore; while our workshops were on different locations, I would create paintings of pencils of every size, shape and form, from a 20 foot yellow eagle painted on the pavement of a parking lot, to the pencil snake painted on paper (Slide 37). I mention this because I feel the idea shows an eclectic attitude in the gathering of visual ideas as well as in the manner of transforming them into paintings.

These tangents may or may not enhance the general evolution of my own work. One thing they do cause is a decrease in the amount of time I have to spend working on those pieces that I consider more important. On the positive side, these adventures could result in creative breakthroughs, liberating an artist who has become a slave to his own style. This idea will be further explained in a later chapter.

A Change of Place

Upon graduating from UBC, I obtained a position in Victoria at a community school teaching Art and English

at the grade 10, 11, and 12 level. It was during the period when I was just becoming involved in the gestural airbrush work that I moved my studio and my family to Vancouver Island. We had a child of two by this time.

Setting up house and preparing for my first full-time teaching job took up most of that summer, so it was not until midway through the year that I started to work in my studio. I decided then to pursue the rock and bread theme (Slides 39 & 40) in some small acrylics on paper. I continued to explore the expressive gestural thorn idea, only instead of employing an airbrush, I opted for charcoal. I gained a modicum of success with both, but neither took me a step closer to deciding which direction I should choose. A refining and tightening up of execution, as in the bread and rock images was taking place, and it seemed contrary to the direction I was taking with the thorn images. A synthesis was needed. How I was to achieve this synthesis proved a most unexpected, though pleasant surprise.

Synthesis by Serendipity

In the Spring of 1975 I exhibited the thorns

(Slides 31-35), and the rock and bread drawings and paintings (Slides 39 & 40) at the Gallerie Allen. It was a disappointing show: no reviews, and few sales.

Realizing the lack of consistency in my work, I struck out in another path to purge myself of what I thought were distracting elements in my art. I decided to eliminate the expressive, gestural work, and pursue the more surrealistic imagery found in my bread and rock paintings. I decided that perhaps I could enhance these paintings by incorporating the figure. However, with the figure came complex, compositional and content problems, as can be seen in the small acrylic, Take (Slide 41). I could sense the same type of situation evolving that had generated those early awkward symbolic works, of which, No More and Oh Jerusalem (Slides 26 & 27) are good examples. With Eunuch's Dream (Slide 43), this tightening up of technique can be observed, even though the slide shows the work in an unfinished state. I did finish this work, but it was later painted over. The work that followed was a large acrylic of two figures looking out of vegetation; an Adam and Eve (Slide 44). As I progressed through this painting I experienced a growing sense of frustration. I felt disconnected to the images of leaves and branches. The content itself seemed trite in this

form. Whereas the bread and rock paintings avoided the pitfall of being too illustrative, this work by employing the figures seemed destined to that end. I stood back, looked at the overworked leaves and stiff lifeless flesh I had been painting, walked over to my palette, mixed up large gobs of color, and attacked the canvas. My arm, instead of being merely a transmitter of impulses for small intricate movements to my fingers, was now the mover, as it gestured to and over the canvas. It had happened: "synthesis by serendipity."

It seemed pure therapy in the beginning, but as I continued, the form of the figures in the composition could still be seen, the structure was maintained. In fact, the figures now appeared integrated, with the picture plane, and not only emerged from the vegetation, implied by the brush work, but merged and re-emerged from the actual plastic surface of the painting. In an attempt to focus the figures, the brush strokes were defined with black outlining here and there. Another joy was discovered as gestures and brush strokes were re-experienced, as my brush delineated and emphasized those dribbles, haphazard shapes and colors that would not only enhance the form, but make the content subtler as well.

This painting, titled Come Forth, (Slide 44) was what I feel all the previous years' work had led to. It was a culmination of those many years of struggling to find myself, as well as to find the appropriate way of expressing that self. It was also a rebirth that arrived after years of hard, frustrating work, and of more failure than success. In one work it seemed as if everything had fallen into place, that I had found my style. I began painting intensely and through the summer of 1976 and the following years, produced a sufficient number of canvases and acrylics on paper (Slides 44-47) to have a large show of 40 works at Open Space Gallery in Victoria in the Spring of 1978.

I was confident at this time that the style I had acquired would evolve on its own accord, as one painting would grow out of the next, where concepts and images hinted at in one work would become a focus in the next. It seemed that my new found style was well suited to the amount of time left after the demands of teaching art full time had been met.

CHAPTER IV

THE ARTIST IN SCHOOL

In this chapter I will be reflecting on those forces and influences that most significantly affect the artist who teaches. These could best be described under two general categories: the teaching environment; and the nature, or character and personality, of the artist. It is not my intention to do either a sociological analysis of the school system, or a psychological portrait of the artist, but rather to reflect on how as one artist/teacher I maintain an active and productive life as an artist while teaching full time.

It is obvious that my teaching situation is unique, as indeed everyone's is; nevertheless, there are constants in the education system, whether in Victoria or Dawson Creek. This is also true of the individual artist/teacher, regardless of the school. As artists, teachers, and citizens working within the education system, we share many common concerns. Perhaps the most obvious is our belief that art, as a creative process, must be recognized as a worthwhile endeavor and enriching activity for every human being.

I believe this idea is universal among art teachers; yet, in the light of that statement, there remain only a few teachers who are able to continue to pursue the very philosophy they propose. The reflections that follow will illustrate how I see myself in the education system and what I am doing about my artistic survival in it.

Generally speaking, high schools are considered conservative institutions, and the one where I teach art is no exception, even though it has a district, if not province-wide reputation of being progressive. The stereotyped image of a secondary school is a place where students are expected to behave like adults and treated like children. Control is administered by P.A. systems and memos. Movement is controlled by large white-faced clocks and Pavlovian bells. Herd mentality and conformity are reinforced by "Pep Rallies" and "School Spirit Days". Nevertheless the High School philosophy written up in the staff handbook usually proclaims as its highest educational objective the rights of the individual as a learner and a prospective citizen.

In reality, our schools are nothing more than a mirror reflection of the society they serve. Though the reflected image is softened, at least for the

student, it is sharply focused on the teacher, who must answer to the demands of the idealistic and at times unreasonable expectations of a society that wants the school to solve problems that no one else can. The parent taxpayer asks: Isn't that why we are paying teachers so much? Like all teachers, the teacher of art is subject to this pressure both in the media, and in his community. It can wear one down.

Within the student body and in the faculty itself is reflected the diversity of philosophic political, social and religious values and perceptions found in the community the school serves. To this mosaic the artist/teacher adds his small bohemian tile. Indeed, the artist/teacher is expected to fill that role, in his actions and attitudes. With the exception of a few artists who have become established and successful, the artist/teacher is much like his counterpart in the larger society. Though tolerated, the artist is teased and chided that he will have to die before his work will be found worthwhile. Likewise the status of art remains a poor cousin in the curriculum, tolerated, but misunderstood. It is therefore a familiar niche the artist/teacher finds for himself whether in personal relationship to other staff members or in the relation of his discipline to the rest of the school's

curriculum.

Surviving the System

In my discussions with other art teachers, about what it is to be an artist and to teach, I found that many, at the time, did not consider themselves artists. Most expressed a desire to do art, but complained of teacher "burn-out", lack of time and sundry commitments that kept them from establishing their art-making in any sort of consistent manner. As I reflect on my own, as well as their professed reasons for being unable to sustain work habits and art output, I must concede that teaching is a consuming occupation.

Teaching is very stressful, and many teachers need the summer holidays to recoup energies that will allow them to be vital when they return to work in the Fall. The question is what is the most profitable way to regain vitality. Some artist/teachers find that travel, or working in a job that is specifically adult-oriented is helpful in renewing their energy. Others feel summer months are only for leisure and recreation. Few, it seems, have the attitude that the summer months are a time to establish momentum in the making of their art, and of these many require a summer school course to

get them going. I personally believe the rewards obtained by having completed a painting, and observed an evolution in the work I do, will motivate me to continue well into the school year. For me, summer offers that uninterrupted time for concentrated painting. It is a time for work that includes in its method a time of contemplation, a boon that is hard to come by when teaching full time. It then seems logical that if summer is the longest sustained non-contact time with the school system, and if one is serious about being an artist, that the designing of a self-motivating component into that particular time is paramount to both the evolution and existence of an artist.

In an effort to accomplish this momentum I have been developing over the years a style of painting that is able to be realized in a successful way, given the amount of time I have on hand for the task. From experience I have been learning, in many cases the hard way, to avoid large, complex projects. Concepts that need extensive inquiry, and sustained technical development to reach resolution, I avoid. A silk screen print I pulled last summer is a prime example. Not only did it eat into precious time for painting due largely to my lack of expertise with the medium, but

the rewards gained from the completed image were negligible. It did not really lead me anywhere and if anything it slowed the momentum I was building up in my painting.

Great Expectations

The job description of an art teacher goes far beyond that of the discipline, or body of knowledge, and technical skills needed in the studio situation. The art teacher, at least in my school, and I don't expect it is a unique situation, is expected to keep close liaison between the students in his Teacher Advisor group, the students' various subject teachers, and their parents. The artist/teacher is expected to work at first line counselling, developing each individual student's program, and ensuring that the proper courses are taken which will enable the student to graduate. As well as this counselling and clerical type of work the artist/teacher must act as a "Buyer and Merchant". With budgets in the area of thousands of dollars, the artist/teacher must yearly define specific materials and supplies for the curriculum. A knowledge of the quality of products for everything from kilns to paint brushes is expected as well as of

who the best and cheapest suppliers are. Another expectation of the artist/teacher is the participation in, and contribution to, school "tone". This includes, being subject to and participating in silly and outrageous activities; such as being the target in a pie throwing contest. This is all done in the name of better teacher/student relations and school spirit.

Most schools need funds for extracurricular activities. Artist/teachers are expected to do their share in events designed to raise money for the school. In an active school, an artist/teacher may also be expected to sponsor a club or coach a team. All these activities take time, and more often than not that time comes after the regular school day is finished. It is no wonder that with so many different expectations the teacher can feel himself spread very thinly and not very much like the concentrated sensitively intense and focused individual that an artist should be.

Temptations

Art teachers, generally speaking, have access to well equipped studios and though it is their place of employment, and the equipment and facility are meant primarily for student use, there still remain times,

such as spares, lunch hours and evenings when a photo/stencil can be made, a pot thrown, or a print developed. The studio I teach in is well equipped with a dark room, complete with color equipment, kilns, high quality wheels, vacuum tables, arc lamps, etching presses, airbrushes and Raku firing facilities. In my case it would be difficult to find such equipment to work with. I certainly could not afford to set up such a studio, and there are not the co-operative studios, such as the "Dunderave Print Workshop",²⁰ in Victoria. I feel the artist/teacher is lucky to have a place that enables ongoing creative inquiry relating to teaching as well as the production of art. But the artist/teacher is also subject to what I feel is a temptation to master every area. For example, in the instruction of ceramics I was considerably weak, but the more I taught the subject, the further I became fascinated by it. Clay work, in particular Raku, subsequently became my hobby. It was an art form I could involve myself in; it was both therapeutic and rewarding without having any critical or philosophical baggage attached to its making. The Raku process did not demand from me a meaningful intention that had its roots deep set in my psyche like my painting did. Nevertheless it is the nature of Raku that it is purposive, and I can see that

I am not going to be able to treat it as a mere hobby forever. Even now I can see it evolving into a more complex plastic enquiry that demands more critical awareness. What started out as a joyous activity done in classroom demonstrations is getting to the point where I am starting to demand of my clay work forms and skill commensurate with my growing knowledge of the craft. This necessitates the spending of more time doing what was once a therapeutic hobby with the result that achieving proficiency in either area is limited by the amount of available time for the work.

One can look at this phenomenon as a blessing or a curse, or both. If, for example, an artist is the type that gets in a rut, and ends up repeating his successes with no ongoing inquiry, it could be just the catalyst to push him out of his rut and onto a new track. On the other hand it could become a curse bouncing him around from one novel experience to another, giving lots of breadth but little depth, never letting him focus in and refine, expand, or exhaust a particular possibility.

Part of my teaching technique is to follow through from demonstration to completion many of the projects I propose. It was just such a response to one demonstration, (on the art of assemblage) that I was

inspired or perhaps even seduced by the visually exciting, and humorous, possibilities of things attached to, or floating on a two dimensional plane.

I find that when I research the literature, slides and examples on a subject such as Assemblage, I am invariably tempted to translate the media and method into my own visual expression. Though the temptation never usually goes beyond the demonstration example I produce, there have been occasions when the time was ripe, and the influence too strong to resist.

The assemblages I produced in 1979 are a perfect illustration of this point. After the solo show at Open Space in the Spring 1978 my images began to stiffen up again. I felt cramped and unable to achieve the spontaneity that my work was dependent on. One can observe sequentially, from the initial painting Come Forth (Slide 44) to Nathaniel's Tree (Slide 46) a definite refinement leading to less and less expressionistic paint handling. As well the composition becomes more formal and totemic, the figures end up centered on large fields of color with only a slight indication of brush work. The culmination of this movement can be seen in the painting Dove Son (Slide 48) where there is little or no indication of expressive brush work. The painterly expressive

gestures in this work have given way to dead and conventional squiggles. However, it was a transitional painting that led to the assemblage Son Rise (Slide 49). At a weak moment I was swayed by the stimulation of an exciting lesson in class. This, coupled with the aforementioned problems in my own work, and a mind that is subject to this type of inquiry, made the jump to assemblage both logical and attractive. As well, it was for me a time to do some lighthearted, humorous art, poking fun not only at myself and my own work as in Red Brush (Slide 50) but also at certain modern art conventions as found in Yellow, Red, Blue, (Slide 51). I had a productive and fulfilling time exploring the possibilities of surface and illusion, of breaking out from the conventions that had come to bind me. I became an enthusiastic advocate of assemblage as a method of visual articulation. This liberation enabled me to feed back into the classroom situation many of the new discoveries I had experienced.

CHAPTER V

RECLAMATION

The journal to this point has reflectively dwelt on two major concerns that lead up to and are relevant to the studio part of this thesis as represented by Slides 53-54, 56-57, 59-66. The primary concern dealt with my personal survival as an artist, intellectually, socially, spiritually, economically, but essentially as an artist. The second concern, related to the first, was the idea of evolution in my work: that is, how does the imagery change in accordance with physical, intellectual, or spiritual states of consciousness? These two concerns became acutely focused when, after two years of struggling academically, I found myself in the studio again. It was like standing on the edge of thin ice. The studio is a dangerous place, every blank canvas posing the same question: Where to start?

I was interested in inquiring further into some silk screen techniques I had been working on at school (Slide 53). I had prepared a number of medium size canvases. They made me feel even more intimidated and uptight. This, coupled with the prospect of a show at the end of a short few months of studio work, with the

expectation to produce mature resolved paintings, was almost enough to debilitate me. One thing I was sure of: I did not want to work in assemblage.

I decided to start on some graphite drawing and see where that would lead me. Notwithstanding the witness of living men, the idea of my faith's being founded on the testament of a few fragments of parchment from the past moved me to consider the Logos; the word became flesh.²¹ I began defining surface areas around prose I had written, and appropriate scripture from the Bible. The technique is not unlike that which I employed in the bread drawings of 1974. (Slide 55). Indeed, it was as if I had taken the crust from one of those drawings and stretched it flat with the two edges of the crust becoming the worn, ragged extremity of the ancient scroll.

From the idea of the word becoming flesh, and the success I was having in the drawings, I embarked on some large gestural word/letter paintings in the style I had used previous to the assemblage tangent. I felt unconnected to the imagery, going through technical motions that I had resolved in the previous work. Whereas my intention seemed fulfilled in the drawings, the forms and content reflected my intellectual and emotional conviction. The paintings, on the other

hand, seemed a travesty of just those things.

At the time I was reading Nikos Kazantzakis' novel The Last Temptation of Christ.²² His ideas, so sensually explicit, imaginatively conjured up the spiritual struggle among man, God and the Adversary. Kazantzakis defined the spiritual ability to transform the descriptive and the narrative into a powerful metaphor. I was inspired to generate my painting from a source other than my drawings. I decided to work from photographs that I had taken of body builders who were posed in wrestling positions. From this source I started doing sketches and working on ideas for paintings. As well, I destroyed all the word/letter paintings, except David's Scroll (Slide 57).

David's Scroll was saved because it represents, I feel, a transitional stage between the painting The Mocking (Slide 58), which was done just prior to the assemblages, and the inquiry into the word/letter paintings; and the work I am about to discuss.

The wrestler paintings were preceded by the screen print entitled Do Men Still Wrestle Angels?

(Slide 59). As mentioned before, in considering the economy of my time, this print set me back about a week and demonstrated to me the necessity of avoiding complex techniques with projects I have not mastered.

Jacob's Angel (Slide 60), the first wrestling painting I completed, did not indicate promise. It was too tightly painted and the figures appear stiff and lifeless. However, the emergence of the horizon in this painting proved interesting enough to warrant more work in that direction. It was in Jacob's Ladder's End (Slide 61) that a loosening of the brush work becomes evident, the figures, though appearing slightly stiff, do not contradict the compositional intent as does Jacob's Angel, where the leg of Jacob, held by the Angel (in blue), appears to be shrunk out of proportion. Instead of becoming the fulcrum of the action, it becomes merely a confusion of gestures. This painting will probably be reworked in an attempt to reclaim the original idea.

Jacob's Ladder's End (Slide 61) and Angel at Dawn (Slide 62) with their continuance of the horizon foreshadow the re-emergence of the landscape concerns that were evident in early works such as Come Forth and Lazarus (Slides 44 & 45). The first real landscape emerges near the end of my wrestler series. In fact, it is a figure painting without figures. Outside the Garden (Slide 64) is about Cain and Abel, the first conflict between men. Cain is jealous. His sacrifice to God has not been accepted, Abel's has. Cain kills

Abel and hides in the foliage. God inquires! I was going to title the painting The First Murder; however I thought better of it, as the effect of such a specific indicator of content would limit the emotional impact of the work. The red slash on brown at the lower center of the canvas highlighted by a ragged yellow/white gesture emphasizes the focus below the darkness in the middle of the canvas. Over the darkness are white gestures. Are they becoming words? Forming questions? Inquiring of and framed in the darkness? It was in this work that I sensed myself painting with confidence and authority.

It was also September and time to prepare for the return to school and the finishing up of my thesis proposal. However, I had some momentum now and the work was evolving at a significant pace. The painting Outside the Garden #2 (Slide 64) that followed Outside the Garden #1 (Slide 63) shows a column of red rising from greenish brown ground as light moves across the canvas from top left in a diagonal motion. The gestures over the red vertical that symbolizes blood, spell out the name Abel. As this name appears and merges never fully visible, except once, the idea of Abel's blood speaking from the earth is achieved. The word-forms I previously had disregarded as useless

were re-emerging held, it seems to me, in a landscape with potency and vigour. In this painting the dark area to the right implies the hidden Cain; the diagonal light indicates the approaching presence of God. This growing preoccupation with light is repeated in the last two paintings Flesh Box of My Body (Slide 65) and Outside the Garden #3 (Slide 66). In Flesh Box of My Body the light emanates from the center weaving together the two opposing images, whereas in Outside the Garden #3 the light is much cooler. Radiating from the left, it bounces around the canvas, highlighting the contours and gestures of the two figures.

The developing concern for light effect within these paintings can be traced to the development of the horizon in the Wrestler Series such as Angel at Dawn (Slide 62) and Jacob's Ladder's End (Slide 61). This appears to be an evolving aspect of my painting that will be further explored when I return to my work.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

It seems reasonable, after reflecting on the evolution of my art, to say that the causes of my particular image transformations fall into three categories: first, a change in my philosophic perspective; second, the constant influence of my teaching career; and third, the demands of the public.

Profound and obvious shifts have been effected by a radical change in my philosophic perspective. Here it would be beneficial to differentiate between radical transformation and evolving resolution. For example, this difference can be clearly understood if we compare the work that surrounds and includes the conversion experience, (Note slides 12, 13, 14), and the work that led up to, and proceeds from the painting Come Forth (Slide 44). The former differentiates itself by evolving solely from a non-art experience, whereas the latter developed as a result of struggling with the plastic and conceptual problems of making a painting. The problem of fitting the concept into the appropriate form was an intellectual one that grew from a stable philosophic base. It would be defined as an evolving

resolution. In viewing the two key paintings, Saved by Grace (Slide 13) and Come Forth (Slide 44) that illustrate this point, the more profound change would at first appear in the latter work where the paint application, surface considerations, and the whole style, changes from one painting, Eunuch's Dream (Slide 43) to the next; Come Forth. On the other hand Saved by Grace (Slide 13) and the following work Ask (Slide 14) show no sign of stylistic change, but rather the transformation has taken place within the artist. The development of forms that would express the new content in a meaningful way would take a long time to resolve. This is due to the philosophic intention of the artist being transformed, leaving the style of painting void of conviction.

To understand this aspect of transformation chronology must be considered; it affects both the evolution of the art and the maturing philosophical perspective of the artist. This period of transformation covers a seven year period from Saved by Grace (Slide 13) to Eunuch's Dream (Slide 43). This period included a number of formative happenings, but as the slides illustrate and the text describes, the resolution of philosophic intent and a compatible plastic expression is either never realized as in the

oil painting No More (Slide 26), or if it begins to show promise as in the large airbrush Forgive Them (Slide 22) it is thwarted by the temporal demands of life. It is no wonder, then, that the artist's post-conversion evolution appears to have taken many tentative directions without ever thoroughly following along one line of inquiry. Furthermore, it is important to note that the stylistic direction eventually taken in 1976, of which the painting Come Forth (Slide 44) is representative, is now after seven years being revisited. In a sense this validates the later works of the same style, demonstrating, as in Outside the Garden #3 (Slide 66) the worth of a further inquiry into both the plastic problems, inherent in the style (such as gestural paint handling) and evolved content concerns that are bound to the particular state of my philosophy.

The constant effect of life forces is the second category of image transformation. It manifests itself most notably in the form of the job by which I earn my living. I am a teacher of art and it is from within that context that I have been influenced to pursue at different times in my career a variety of modes of visual expression. The earliest example of this can be

seen in the Pencil Paintings (Slides 36,37 & 38) that were inspired from teaching in a workshop situation. A later example is the more sophisticated but none the less humorous work done in assemblage, of which Son Rise (Slide 49) is an example. These works have been discussed previously in the text but it would be pertinent to raise the question as to what effect they have on my reputation if I pursue this type of eclecticism in my art. It is conceivable that the work could be viewed as the unresolved inquiry of a rootless artist. Whatever the intrinsic value of the work, those are the formal qualities such as paint handling, scale and philosophic intent resolved within each canvas. Furthermore, a connection to the main body of work can be seen in such works as Red Brush (Slide 50) where the stylized brushstrokes, the scale of the works, and the surface treatment are similar. However, if one has such eclectic tendencies, one takes a chance at deferring or even missing a major breakthrough in one's work. As well, the art world, marketplace and even one's contemporaries may perceive one's intentions as superficial, and the artist would sense the impact of the subsequent reactions and perhaps respond in a manner that would not benefit either his reputation or production. Nevertheless, these creative tangents are,

to me, worth the risk. They are justified in that they allow me to be free from conventions that are atrophying, and to regain a vigorous approach to the creative process. So it is that when the need arises I will continue to respond to those creative influences I am subject to each day that I teach art.

It would be beneficial to look at the role the artist's public plays in the phenomenon of image transformation. The artist's public can be defined as those groups or individuals who participate in the artist's work by criticizing, extolling, denying, encouraging, reviewing, viewing, rejecting or purchasing the artist's work. How much influence the public exerts on the artist depends on a number of complex social and economic variables that are beyond the scope of this paper, and I will only reflect on how the artist perceives and responds to his public in his work and how that may possibly effect transformation.

I have certain assumptions about the nature of man, and thus the public, that are rooted in a philosophy based on Christian principles. I perceive man in the Biblical sense as being fallen yet redeemed and loved. From this position man can be seen as being in need of encouragement and exhortation. Therefore, my

intention is the expression of biblical precepts that deal with the nature of man both in conflict and in harmony with God. A good example of this is seen in the recently completed Wrestler Series (Slides 60-62) where the ancient prototype of the aggressive and enterprising man is seen in Jacob (whose name means Usurper), wrestling with the Angel of the Lord. In this sense my work is didactic as it evolves from a given precept, is synthesized into a contemporary and theological philosophy, and finally is expressed in visual form -- as in the painting Angel at Dawn (Slide 62).

The problem of being too illustrative, which is inherent in didactic art, is evident in much of the work from 1969 to 1976 (Slides 8-43). An example is the airbrush painting For the World (Slide 23) where the viewer has little time reflectively to interpret the content. It is all clearly stated so that the visual dialogue is minimal, causing the viewer's role to be more of an endorser than that of a participant. This problem has now been resolved. In the works Outside Garden #1 and #2 (Slides 63 & 64), the paintings are first experienced on an emotional level as the viewer responds to the color, texture, and gestures of the brush strokes. The subject matter and

the style have been synthesized to such a degree that they are emotionally experienced before they are intellectually considered, allowing the viewer to fully participate in a visual dialogue. The intentions of the artist, structured into the painting, are allowed slowly to unfold before the viewer.

The public is considered an influence in the transformation of an artist's imagery only inasmuch as the artist is concerned that what he is painting is worth consideration and that with honesty and integrity the artist will do all that is needed to enable the public to enter into a dialogue with his work.

Neither man, nor the world he lives in are constant; both are ever changing as they act upon and transform one another. As do all men, I live day by day; in one instance being the subject of change and transformation, and in another the author. My philosophical perspective based on faith in an absolute does not remain static as it evolves and expands; assimilated and sometimes rejected are my personal experiences, ideologies, values and perspectives. My creative process is thus explained not as an end in itself, but rather as a means to an end. The slides that illustrate this reflective journal are a visual

record that indicate this process. Though the quality, meaning and intrinsic value in the individual paintings are by nature debatable, they attest to those forces in which we participate, forces that transform and shape our lives.

Endnotes

¹Leo Tolstoy, What is Art, "Trans.", A. Maude.
London: Oxford University Press, 1955. P. 116.

²Jean Genet, Our Lady of the Flowers, "Trans.",
Bernard Fiechtman. New York: Grove Press Inc.,
1963. P. 70.

³Ibid., P. 70.

⁴John R. MacDonald, Modern English Painters: Wood
to Hockney. London: 1974. P. 172.

⁵Ibid., P. 169.

⁶Ibid., P. 169.

⁷Thomas B. Hess, de Kooning - Recent Paintings.
New York: Walter and Company, 1967. P. 31.

⁸Maurice Truchman, Chaim Soutine, 1893-1943,
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1968. P. 16.

⁹Doris Shadbolt, "B.C.'s New Talent Show to Tour
Canada", Canadian Art, 21, Sept./Oct., 1964.

¹⁰Barry Lord, "Sunday Afternoon", Arts Canada, 24,
Jan., 1967. Pp. 14, 15.

¹¹John Coplans, Los Angeles Six, The Vancouver Art
Gallery, March 31 - May 5, 1968.

¹²Joan Lowndes, "Vision Changes His Art",
Vancouver Sun, 11 Oct., 1970.

¹³Blaise Pascal, Pensées, "Trans.", H.J.
Krailsheimer. London: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1966.
P. 85.

¹⁴Ibid., P. 95

¹⁵Richard Simmons, "Artist Cries Out Profoundly But Message Unconvincing", The Province, 12 Aug., 1970.

¹⁶Michael Rhodes, "Audrey Capel Doray", Arts Canada, 25, Dec., 1968. P. 51.

¹⁷Joan Lowndes, "An Oddly Assorted Company", Vancouver Sun, 22 Feb., 1972.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Helen Parmelin, Picasso: Women, Cannes, and Mougins, 1954-1963, "Trans.", Humphrey Hare. Paris: Editions Cercle D'Art, S.A., and Amsterdam: Harry N. Abrams, 1964. P. 55.

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The Dunderave Print Workshop is one of Vancouver's older, co-operative print studios run by and for artists. It provides a broad selection of large presses. It is presently located on Granville Island.

²¹Logos - the word became flesh taken from the Greek: **λόγος** or **λογος**, is clearly the expression of the incarnation of Christ as described in John's Gospel (Ch 1, v.1, v.14). For the artist in this case it also alludes to the idea of the artist, becoming tangible in the created work (the drawing or painting).

²²Nikos Kazantzakis, The Last Temptation of Christ, "Trans.", P.A. Bien. New York: Bantam Books, 1971.

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Slides are in Special Collections

Appendix A

SLIDE NO.	TITLE	SIZE IN CM	MEDIUM	DATE
1	Blue Lady	121.9x152.4	Acrylic/Canvas	1968
2	Blue Lady (Close up)			1968
3	Tomb #1	121.9x152.4	Acrylic/Canvas	1968
4	Tomb #2	121.9x152.4	Acrylic/Canvas	1968
5	Sense Box	152.4x152.4	Acrylic/Canvas	1969
6	Ash Box	121.9x152.4	Acrylic/Canvas	1969
7	Prison	121.9x152.4	Acrylic/Canvas	1969
8	Dream Room #1	121.9x152.4	Acrylic/Canvas	1969
9	Dream Room #2	121.9x152.4	Acrylic/Canvas	1969
10	In	121.9x152.4	Acrylic/Canvas	1969
11	Recept	121.9x152.4	Acrylic/Canvas	1969
12	Hydra	121.9x152.4	Acrylic/Canvas	1969
13	Saved by Grace	121.9x152.4	Acrylic/Canvas	1969
14	Ask	121.9x152.4	Acrylic/Canvas	1969
15	Installation		Airbrush	1970
16	Installation		Silkscreen Print	1970
17	Burden of Dhuma	121.9x182.88	Acrylic/Canvas	1970
18	Airbrush Drawing	25.4x30.48	Ink/Paper	1970
19	The Price	121.9x121.9	Oil/Canvas	1971
20	Out of My Belly	121.9x293.84	Ink/Paper/ Plexiglass	1971
21	Four Faces	60.96x293.84	Ink/Paper/ Plexiglass	1971
22	Forgive Them	60.96x293.84	Ink/Paper/ Plexiglass	1971
23	For the World	45.72x60.96	Ink/Paper	1972
24	Thiefs Choice	45.72x 60.96	Ink/Paper	1972
25	Greater than Jonah	45.72x60.96	Ink/Paper	1972
26	No More	152.4x182.8	Oil/Canvas	1972
27	Oh Jerusalem	152.4x182.2	Oil/Canvas	1972
28	Bread Drawing	25.4x35.56	Graphite/Paper	1974
29	Manna from Heaven	81.28x81.28	Oil/Canvas	1973
30	Cosmic Bread	121.92x152.4	Acrylic/Canvas	1974
31	Thorn Drawing	45.72x60.96	Graphite/Paper	1974
32	Thorn Drawing	45.72x60.96	Graphite/Paper	1974
33	Night Thorn	71.12x106.68	Ink/Showcard	1974
34	Birth	71.12x106.68	Ink/Showcard	1974
35	White Vertical	71.12x106.68	Ink/Showcard	1974
36	Pencil	25.4x30.48	Acrylic/Paper	1973

SLIDE NO.	TITLE	SIZE IN CM	MEDIUM	DATE
37	Snake Pencil	60.96x182.88	Poster Paint/ Drug Bond	1973
38	Culvert Pencil	25.4x30.48	Acrylic/Paper	1973
39	Floating Bread	45.72x60.96	Acrylic/Paper	1974
40	Rocks	45.72x60.96	Acrylic/Paper	1974
41	Take	45.72x60.96	Acrylic/Paper	1975
42	Break	121.92x129.9	Acrylic/Canvas	1975
43	Eunich's Dream	152.4x152.4	Acrylic/Canvas	1976
44	Come Forth	127.0x165.1	Acrylic/Canvas	1976
45	Lazarus	91.44x182.8	Acrylic/Canvas	1976
46	Nathaniel's Tree	91.44x152.4	Acrylic/Canvas	1977
47	Jonah's Prayer	91.44x152.4	Acrylic/Canvas	1977
48	Dove Son	132.08x165.1	Acrylic/Canvas	1978
49	Son Rise	132.08x165.1	Mixed Media	1979
50	Red Brush	71.12x106.68	Acrylic/Paper	1979
51	Yellow, Red, Blue	132.08x165.1	Acrylic/Canvas	1979
52	Point No Point	132.08x165.1	Mixed Media	1979
53	Wild Horse	45.72x60.96	Silkscreen Print	1981
54	Fragment Drawing	45.72x60.96	Graphite/Paper	1981
55	Bread Drawing	25.4x35.56	Graphite/Paper	1973
56	Fragment Drawing	45.72x60.96	Graphite/Paper	1981
57	David's Scroll	71.12x152.4	Acrylic/Canvas	1981
58	The Mocking	96.52x121.92	Acrylic/Canvas	1981
59	Do Men Still Wrestle Angels?	45.72x60.96	Silkscreen Print	1981
60	Jacob's Angel	132.08x165.1	Acrylic/Canvas	1981
61	Jacob's Ladder's End	132.08x165.1	Acrylic/Canvas	1981
62	Angel at Dawn	96.52x121.92	Acrylic/Canvas	1981
63	Outside the Garden #1	96.52x121.92	Acrylic/Canvas	1981
64	Outside the Garden #2	121.9x121.9	Acrylic/Canvas	1981
65	Flesh Box of My Body	132.08x165.1	Acrylic/Canvas	1981
66	Outside the Garden #3	121.9x152.4	Acrylic/Canvas	1981

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Solo Exhibitions

Simon Fraser University, Gallery West, 1968.
Preistlay Gallery, Vancouver, 1969.
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City of Vancouver
Provincial Collection, Government of British Columbia
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Seattle Art Museum