

approach to abstract art

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my painting is made for the eye and in order to derive anything from it there is no substitute for seeing the work. no amount of written matter about painting can take the place of the painting itself. writing and painting are different languages dealing with different aspects of our living and the world as necessitated by their nature. an article on painting has achieved its goal when it has rid the reader of the effect of previous writings and has brought him to the state where he will be willing to let the work speak for itself.

science deals primarily with knowledge and enables the prediction of future events; technology with the processes by which certain ends or purposes are achieved; art with the presentation of values.

to ask of art an intellectual statement only, or to examine its techniques without regard for anything else, will therefore be fruitless tasks. emotions, feelings, and experiencing have to come into play. the spectator of art experiences values, the scientist endeavors to know those values and the technologist helps us to satisfy our interests which bring about those values.

man and his products are part of nature but no scientific definition of an apple can take the place of it. the method by which paper, let us say, is made, is a different thing than paper itself; and so with art, the painting of a tree is never an actual tree, it remains a flat surface on which colored pigments have been laid and its value to us is not the amount of fruit or shade it gives but the nature and quality of the emotion the painting gives off. It can only be compared to another painted tree for its excellence.

art is not entertainment. it is a high form of love of a different nature than the love of a man for a woman. they both include an aspiration toward the beautiful. the difference between a beautiful and a common "looking" object lies in the different proportions, relations, positions of its component parts just as in painting the difference between a masterpiece and a pot-boiler, having identical subject matter, will be found in the relation between colors, the proportion of the different elements and a comprehension of their effects on us, etc. in other words, it will be found to be within the language of painting.

this visual language, painting, relies mainly on the following means for communication: an original flat surface, made to become active by incorporating into it a concept of space and time, through the medium of light, in the forms understood at the period in which the painting is made. space in painting is an illusion, not actual space, and it varies according to the ideas we hold as to the nature of space in ordinary life. these primary means are made subjective by lines, planes, volumes, movements, shapes, forms, textures, colors, rhythm, harmony, chaos, proportions, size, position, emphasis, subduction, etc. these are the means particular to painting and through which it speaks. they are the structural parts.

it should now be easy to situate abstract painting within the whole of painting. This is a fairly meaningless name, by the way, as the paintings can be materialistic or mystical according to the point of view of the painter; in all cases it refers to the works which do not include easily recognizable objects or even do not make use of naturalistic objects.

abstract painting emphasizes the structure of painting and like all schools of painting, is an experiment, having in view conveying values, moods, emotions, ways of life, etc. with the use of elements which, if taken away from painting, do not allow it to exist as painting there are different directions within abstract painting, but as a whole it is an investigation and a

presentation of the very foundations of painting; it seeks to discover laws presiding over this making of a pictorial statement in accordance with the contemporary concept of the world. in comparison with other schools of painting, it holds the same position as fine art in relation to applied art, physics to engineering. it is at one with the efforts of the rest of contemporary creation, as shown by the golden gate bridge, in which only the structure remains where, before, this structure was covered with remnants of the past without consideration for the original function of these elements or their worthiness.

our age will be known as the machine age and art, which always deals with the present (even when referring to the past), within its eternal features must reflect the spirit of the age if it pretends to be an expression of it. geometry is what made the machine possible and back of geometry, logic. it is therefore not surprising to find geometrical elements and shapes appearing in the open in modern painting whereas they had been disguised, although present, in the arts of the past. plato saw the eternal quality of those geometrical means when he said:

“what i am saying is not indeed directly obvious. i must therefore try to make it clear. i will try to speak of the beauty of shapes, and i do not mean, as most people would think, the shapes of living figures, or their imitations in paintings, but i mean straight lines and curves and the shapes made from them, flat or solid, by the lathe, ruler and square, if you see what i mean. these are not beautiful for any reason or purpose, as other things are, but are always by their nature beautiful, and give pleasure of their own quite free from the itch of desire; and colors of this kind are beautiful, too, and give a similar pleasure.” from the “philebus” of plato, section 51c.

it is significant to find that the art of all civilizations at their beginning was abstract, geometrical, structural. as the civilizations grow, the structure of their art is given less emphasis and is submerged by other elements. this is true of the egyptians, greeks, africans and american indians, who to this day are working in the abstract form their mode of life not allowing a type of growth similar to the one found in western civilization. the indian sand painters are still producing abstract, ritualistic pictures, destroyed the day of their production, emphasizing the value of doing the

work in the present. this should make any talk about the difficulty of understanding abstract art ridiculous as we are fond of thinking that we have progressed in knowledge beyond these civilizations.

america, more perhaps than any other country, has been instrumental in bringing to life the industrial and mechanistic age, and the arts of this country, to be valid, must indicate that fact. abstract art was evolved simultaneously by painters of french, spanish, russian, german, Italian, english and american origins. it is not the property of any one nation nor is it an importation. similarly, it cannot be attached to any single individual as it grew from unrelated sources and has captivated the imagination of an ever increasing number of young painters.
