Abstract Expressionism: An Adventure in Ambiguous Painting

Ellen Saunders
Fort Hays Kansas State College

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholars.fhsu.edu/theses

Part of the Art and Design Commons

Recommended Citation
https://scholars.fhsu.edu/theses/724

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at FHSU Scholars Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of FHSU Scholars Repository.
ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM

AN ADVENTURE IN AMBIGUOUS PAINTING

The purpose of the study was to explore the evolution of abstract art with a focus on the works of Kandinsky, Pollock, and Albers. The study also examined the role of abstraction in modern art, with a special emphasis on the impact of surrealism on the development of abstract expressionism.

An Abstract of a Creative Thesis
Presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the Fort Hays Kansas State College
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Science

by

Ellen Saunders, B.S.

Fort Hays Kansas State College

Date Aug. 1, 1961
Approved

Major Professor

Approved

Chairman, Graduate Council
A CREATIVE THESIS IN ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM

AN ADVENTURE IN AMBIGUOUS PAINTING

The purpose of the study was twofold. It began with the hope of painting "more freely" and also the hope of gaining an understanding into the nature of the excitement for this writer attendant on viewing works of modern art. What was it, about these ways of handling new symbols, that was so stimulating emotionally?

It would seem that in a society which has not furnished any of the former sources of art support (such as church patronage) which tended to subsidize the work of artists, that self-realization has emerged as an increasingly strong motive for art expression, and if this is true, a "modern" art is, perhaps, the inevitable and natural outgrowth.

Balcomb Greene has said in *Time*, June 16, 1961: "I do not believe that art should be explicit. It should be suggestive and ambiguous, so that the viewer has to enter in. But the artist's freedom must again be defined in relationship to the world, which means visually for the visual artist. Some degree of representation is again demanded of him. Today's world has become dehumanized enough without the artist's making
it more so. If pure abstraction once meant freedom for the artist (to paint as he wishes) it is now a negative license without real meaning."

At one time during this adventure I was so engrossed with the ideas and emotions I was painting I was compelled to write verse to accompany some canvases. This is, of course, amusing, because it is unthinkable that a graphic art would need the crutch of words. So whatever the weaknesses of the pieces, they must stand on the merits of their own medium.

I believe that the theories about emotion-tension, as set forth by Allen Leera in *The Challenge of Modern Art*, have been helpful in answering many of my questions. I have been interested in noting how his analysis related to my own painting, particularly in the larger canvases, where larger body movements were involved. The satisfactions of the expression seemed irrevocably tied to the body movement. The significance of such relationship to elementary school painting will be helpful to me in my teaching.

My whole concept of painting has changed, so that my future painting and viewing will be enriched
with new understanding and satisfaction. I had not anticipated one of the most exciting outcomes of the study. That was the discovery that for me, painting could be an entirely spontaneous process, with no planning, no intellectual factor, which is so apt to be the death of anything like a true emotional statement. This was a most revealing and satisfying experience.

Another idea gained from the study was the conviction, long felt, that we cannot afford to neglect art in the elementary school, as we are presently doing. The integration of personality is, after all, even more important than Johnny's reading rate per minute. A good art program at elementary and secondary level would more than pay its cost in the reduced institutional load (mental and correctional) on the state.